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When I was asked by the *Journal of Linguistics* to review this book, which I had not yet seen, I responded with pleasure, partly because the questions discussed in it fall within one of my longstanding areas of interest, partly because I had reviewed, long ago, three volumes devoted by Konrad Koerner in the early 1970s to Ferdinand de Saussure, and I had kept up with his successive work of the following decades. Koerner, who taught for many years at the University of Ottawa before returning recently to Germany, is a prodigiously energetic and productive scholar, particularly well known for his activity in the field of the history of linguistics – as a researcher, editor of more than 350 volumes (published since 1973 under the imprint of John Benjamins, in several series of 'Amsterdam Studies in the Theory and History of Linguistic Science'), founding editor of the important periodical *Historiographia Linguistica* as well as of *Diachronica*, and

organizer of the triennial International Conferences on the History of the Language Sciences, first held in 1978.

Keeping in mind the vastness of the works mentioned above, I wondered whether my unexpected sense of disappointment with the present volume came from a feeling of anticlimax: *parturiunt montes*. But I do not think so, and in the following pages I shall try to explain how my reaction was caused not by excessively high expectations but by some intrinsic limitations of this collection.

The book consists of ten essays, followed by a conclusion coyly titled 'In lieu of a conclusion'. Some of the essays are published here for the first time: the first, 'The historiography of American linguistics', the sixth, 'On the rise and fall of generative linguistics', the ninth, 'On the origin of morphophonemics in American linguistics', and the concluding one, 'On the importance of the history of linguistics'.

The others have been previously published, and the 'references to early locations where the subjects treated in the present volume … have been dealt with in some fashion, in all circumstances in much less developed form' (v), are listed in the acknowledgements (v–vi). The chapters, with the date of the first printed version in parentheses (in some cases there are also later editions), deal with the following topics: chapter 2, 'Towards a history of Americanist linguistics' (1988); chapter 3, 'On the sources of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis' (1992); chapter 4, 'Leonard Bloomfield and the *Cours de linguistique générale*' (1989); chapter 5, 'American structural linguistics and the problem of meaning' (1970); chapter 7, 'Noam Chomsky's reading of Saussure after 1961' (1994); chapter 8, 'The "Chomskyan revolution" and its historiography' (1983). In a sort of *excusatio non petita*, the author states that he has

> always taken the attitude that one's intellectual property cannot be copyrighted by others, unless it was written for an encyclopedia or a collective work for which one has received payment and thus traded one's rights to a publisher. Cannibalizing one's own writings … is fair game. (v)

This statement may contribute to explaining (but does not justify) the repetitiveness of many of the comments which reappear again and again in the course of the volume. Cannibalizing one's own writings may be all right for an author, but is less appetizing for readers who find themselves partaking of the same entrées in different forms and degrees of preparation. To this, one should also add that the style is wooden and sometimes unidiomatic, and that, to judge from the number of typos, the sub-editor must have been less than careful.

There are two questions that seem to be the main preoccupations throughout this volume, to which the author keeps returning in different guises and from different perspectives. One, of a general kind, is an attempt

to characterize the nature of the history of linguistics and to define the notion of 'historiography'. The other, more specific point, concerns the notion of 'revolution' in science and, more particularly, the question of whether Chomskyan linguistics should be considered a development (however original and innovative) from structural linguistics, or a radical break (in fact a revolution) against it. To the nature of historiography the author devotes the concluding chapter of his book. For someone like myself, who was educated in Italy around the middle of the last century, the distinction between history and historiography is obvious. Our culture was based on works such as those of the great historian and philosopher Benedetto Croce, one of whose books we used to read in secondary school, entitled *Teoria e storia della storiografia*. The terminological distinction between history (*res gestae*) and historiography (*historia rerum gestarum*) is clear enough, and so are the theoretical implications, suggesting that if you want to understand a historical problem it is desirable – indeed unavoidable – to study the HISTORY of the question, i.e., its historiography. A principled, theoretically aware consideration of a historical issue includes its historiography. If this is natural for cultural history but presents peculiar difficulties for the history of science, linguistics (which, for some aspects, seems to belong to the sciences, for others, to the humanities) is, from the viewpoint of its history, particularly problematic. A theoretically sophisticated consideration of these questions has been current since the end of the nineteenth century. Koerner, however, writes that

> since the late 1970s, the History of Linguistics has become a recognized subject of serious scholarly endeavour, notably in Europe but also elsewhere, and it appears to many in the field that discussion of the subject's *raison d'être* is no longer required. (286)

Readers might agree, were they not tempted to put the date back by about a century and replace 1980 with 1870. The effect of the comment, which the author adds in a parenthesis, is therefore rather weakened:

> Perhaps given my long-standing North American exposure in matters historical, I may be permitted to differ, for my intention had never been to convince people in Germany, Italy, or Spain for instance that a historical perspective to our work in linguistics or language philosophy would be desirable. It would have meant carrying coals to Newcastle, since in these and many other countries there has been a long-standing tradition of seeing subjects in a historical mode. (286)

Well, yes, this may indeed be true. But then one wonders whether it was worth writing a book about the historiography of linguistics, concentrating on questions which ignore such perspective or treat it as marginal. Besides, Koerner states that he is dealing with a NEW perspective, but unfortunately

does not explain in what way the notions he is using differ from the traditional ones, and what exactly he means by 'linguistic past' in this context:

> In my view, what I prefer to call (extending the traditional meaning of the term) the Historiography of Linguistics, by which I mean a principled manner of dealing with our linguistic past, or Linguistic Historiography for short, furnishes the practising linguist with the material for acquiring a knowledge of the development of their own field. (289f.)

The second issue mentioned above concerns the relation between structural linguistics and generative grammar. The author comes back to this topic again and again, stressing that he sees it in terms of continuity rather than revolution (11f.): 'Chomskyan "autonomous linguistics" has much more in common with Bloomfield's linguistic theory and practice than with Sapir's' (63). Koerner stresses that one of Chomsky's doctoral students, Ray C. Dougherty, who wrote about a Bloomfieldian counter-revolution, mistakenly insisted that *Syntactic structures* had 'initiated a revolution in linguistics' (108). About the 'Chomskyan Revolution' Koerner comments:

> In may be a 'psychological fact' for those who want to believe that there was one, but from the point of view of philosophy of science, there is little evidence that a 'scientific revolution' occurred following the publication of *Syntactic Structures* in 1957. (113)

And again:

> It has become common-place to talk about a 'Chomskyan Revolution' in the study of language, with the result that few, if any, would pause to think about what the term 'revolution' implies or is taken to imply. It is interesting to note that it is non-linguists in particular … who referred to 'Chomsky's revolution in linguistics'. (157)

And further:

> Despite many disclaimers, TGG [transformational generative grammar] is basically post-Saussurean structuralism … However, it cannot be denied that many young men and women in linguistics during the 1960s and 1970s *believed* they were witnessing a revolution in the field, and it appears that this widespread belief (and the associated enthusiasm that young people tend to generate) has been, I submit, at the bottom of the 'Chomskyan revolution'. (163)

One could continue with more and more passages of a similar tenor:

> there has been much more continuity and cumulative advance in American linguistics than we have been made to believe both by the active participants in the 'revolution', the followers, and the court historians (210);

and 'there was more evolution than revolution occurring in American linguistics during the 1940s and 1950s' (224); the 'practitioners' rhetorical claims of revolutionary turns and paradigmatic incommensurabilities' must be reconciled 'with evidence that, in hindsight, suggests more continuity and cumulative advance (or in some cases even regression)' (245).

Making the same point over and over again inevitably causes a sense of tedium. But this is not just due to the repetitiveness of the individual essays. The difficulty is more serious since it seems to me that it is pointless to discuss whether a theory represents a revolution or an evolution. The question itself is not capable of a sensible definition or a meaningful answer. The etymology and cultural history of the term 'revolution' is of course an interesting topic, and the study of various uses and implications of the term, in different areas and periods, may be instructive and rewarding. Designations such as 'French revolution', 'October revolution', 'Industrial revolution', 'Copernican revolution', etc. are well established and their use is fairly standardized (although initials may be lower case or capitalized), and it is perfectly reasonable to try to clarify the phenomena in question, or to look at them in a new light. For instance, as I was writing this review, I went to see at the National Theatre in London David Hare's new play *The permanent way*. The programme notes print an interesting piece by Ian Jack in which the history of railways is traced, and it is stated that 'the Industrial Revolution, contrary to its name, arrived by increments'. This is a good point to make, in the relevant context, and it clarifies the argument. Of course it is legitimate to point to elements of 'continuity' which link the present to the past, but it would be frivolous to insist that one should therefore not talk of an industrial 'revolution'. In any case, the nearer in time a cultural change is to us, the more difficult it may be to decide whether its designation has in fact become established or whether it is a question of a controversial usage, adopted by some and rejected by others. The fascist regime in Italy, while it was in power, used to talk of the 'Fascist Revolution', but since it fell from power the designation has become obsolete. The situation is even more problematic in the case of titles such as Kuhn's 'structure of scientific revolutions'. Here too, notwithstanding the attempts to define the replacement of one paradigm by another, it seems fruitless and unrewarding to argue whether a hypothesis belongs to this or that trend, rather than discussing the relevant questions of substance. Trying to prove that a work fits into one or another paradigm (assuming that this notion makes sense), for instance, whether Saussure's *Cours* or Chomsky's *Syntactic structures* belong to structural linguistics, or different paradigms altogether, seems to me to have become a pointless exercise, particularly when one is left with the impression that an empty terminological game is being played, and few substantive questions are being clarified.

Concerning the relative positions of Saussure, of different structuralist trends, European and American, and of the various developments of Chomskyan linguistics, the situation was controversial from the start, and was clearly presented in the relevant works written in the sixties (see, for instance, Lepschy 1966: 37–39, 180–183 and the bibliography quoted there; also Lepschy 1992: 57f.), and in the best of the more modern accounts (such as Matthews 1993, 2001). My impression is that Koerner's discussions add little of substance and, if anything, leave the situation more confused than it was, distracting readers from the intellectual issues involved and diverting their attention towards topics which are alleged to be culturally, ideologically and politically important but in fact turn out to concern petty questions of personal rivalry and self-seeking careerism, attributed mainly to linguists of a generative persuasion. This kind of documentary research, masquerading as sociological history, is frequently based on gossip, mean interpretation of private correspondence, malevolent imputing of base motivations. I feel that readers may react with irritation, as I did, at the manner in which criticisms are presented or reported in these essays. As above, I think that, rather than offering a detailed analysis, the point can best be proved by offering a series of quotations which illustrate the temper of this book's attitude. For instance:

> … one cannot help noticing that he [R. A. Harris] uncritically accepts at face value Chomsky's self-serving accounts of what American linguistics was like during his formative years. (113)
> … the picture that [R. A.] Harris draws of his [Chomsky's] character on a variety of occasions – the manner in which he fights his adversaries, his attitude toward the 'intellectual property' of others, and his human shortcomings generally … is anything but complimentary. (114)

Consider also the appeal to 'keen observers of Chomsky's technique of covering up his true sources of theoretical insight by referring to other, in fact quite unlikely candidates' (145, note 17).

As for Morris Halle, 'Chomsky's longtime supporter and ally' (166), he appears as the sinister organizer, administrator and academic politician behind the Chomskyan 'revolution'. A visitor at MIT in 1962, before the International Congress, watched 'Morris Halle plot as if he were Lenin in Zurich' (172). Koerner observes that

> If we take the Communist overthrow of the Tsarist regime in Russia in 1917 as an example, we may detect some similarities between this social and political revolution and what happened in American linguistics during the 1960s. I am thinking in particular of the manner in which representatives of the *ancien régime* were treated (they may not have

> lost their lives, but many academic careers of those who did not join the new faith were negatively affected, some were ruined) and, what is of special interest in the present context, of the manner in which history was rewritten, memory of the immediate past was obliterated and replaced by something else. (214)

The MIT Linguistics Department flourished

> on the strength of the tremendous sums of money that flowed into its coffers during the 1960s and early 1970s. While it would be unfair to say that money alone has made the success story of TGG possible – to maintain such a view would mean to deny the existence of human resourcefulness and creativity (not in the Chomskyan sense, *nota bene*!) – nevertheless every researcher knows the importance of funding for any project s/he might conceive. (168f.)

The overall effect of these comments seems to me depressing, particularly when one compares their pettiness with the unmistakable sense of intellectual vigour and originality, indeed of sheer genius, which one feels when one approaches an essay written by Chomsky – irrespective of the fact that one may disagree with any individual suggestion, and indeed with many of his hypotheses concerning the history of linguistics.

In order to end on a more upbeat note, I shall observe that in chapter 2, devoted to Americanist linguistics, readers will find many useful and informative comments to which no doubt they will wish to refer in future, if they deal with this interesting and insufficiently known area. Koerner makes good use here of modern studies, and makes helpful comments on the history of so-called 'missionary linguistics', and on many figures who still deserve to be studied in greater detail such as John Pickering, Jonathan Edwards, Albert Gallatin, Pierre Étienne Du Ponceau, and many others. He concludes that

> It is this long-standing tradition of work on Amerindian languages which explains that American linguists did not need to read Saussure's *Cours* in order to focus on the descriptive, 'synchronic' side of language structure. (30)

In what way exactly this can be linked to the main theme of this volume, however, is a question which would require a more complex discussion.

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