

## Linguistics

The Scope of American Linguistics. *Robert Austerlitz*, ed. The First Golden Anniversary Symposium of the Linguistic Society of America. Lisse, The Netherlands: Peter de Ridder, 1975. (Distributed in the U.S. by the Bloomington Distribution Group, Bloomington, In.) 209 pp. \$7.00/Dfl. 18.00 (paper).

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This book, like most books, springs from a desire to create a cultural monument, to devise a context common to readers and authors that is useful and gratifying to both groups. That is a goal very seldom reached, and then only after some time. This book, however, belongs in a special category, since it comes with the sponsorship of the LSA, thus possessing the official status of cultural monument, at least in the academic culture of scholars in linguistics (or Linguistics, as we are more likely to call it).

As the title suggests, it is an attempt to describe, if not define, linguistics by showing what linguists do, what they think of it, and what they think it ought to be like. As such, it is intended in general to be accessible to non-specialists and with occasional lapses, succeeds admirably. That is not to say there is uniformity in the styles; they vary considerably, as does the subject matter, significance, length, depth, and degree of seriousness of the papers. They are all good papers, however, and demonstrate (as much by their diversity as by their similarities) the scope of investigation and beliefs in the American linguistic tradition.

The authors represented are all giants in their fields: in some cases, notably Pike and Chomsky, they are their fields in the sense that most work in their respective areas consists of exegesis and extension of their ideas. That is an explanation for the typically synoptic style present in both their papers (Pike, "On Describing Languages"; Chomsky, "Questions of Form and Interpretation"); neither writes for the reader as such, but rather for the re-reader. Thus, Chom-

sky's paper, which ostensibly is a reinterpretation of Jespersen's *Philosophy of Grammar* (1924), devotes most attention and space to analyses of some phenomena in English syntax and semantics that bear on certain theoretical considerations in generative grammar. It contains a great deal of useful and provocative material but is "about" Jespersen only technically. As Pardee makes clear in her comments (pp. 198-209), the theoretical presumptions required by Chomsky in his analyses are controversial and are not addressed directly in the paper. Whether that is desirable is another question: the important thing to note is that it is typical not just of Chomsky's style but of a great deal of the work in the field of (generative) syntax and semantics. In that respect, the book represents the fields it surveys very well. Pike, likewise, makes implicit reference to theoretical assumptions that are not clearly addressed in his article; although much of the framework he uses can be inferred from it, the process is not an easy one for the nonspecialist. Again, however, the style is typical of much descriptive and analytic work done in a tagmemic framework and, hence, appropriate for inclusion here. Both papers give both overt consideration of theoretical problems and stylistic demonstration of some of their sources. That is a fair representation of part of the "scope" of American linguistics.

If we may categorize these papers as representative of the trends in linguistics, producing very complex studies from relatively simple and clear principles, then the other end of the scale is represented by Fillmore ("The Future of Semantics") and Ferguson ("Applications of Linguistics"). The latter, commendably short and eminently clear, is a survey of some areas where linguistic science may prove to be of value, although it is often the case, as Ferguson notes, that linguistic science has not gotten around to saying much useful on a number of topics. This is an article that can be recommended to anyone interested in an "applied linguistics" that does not begin and end in

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language teaching. Fillmore's paper is easily the most entertaining and accessible of any in the book, yet it deals with perhaps the most difficult area of linguistics, semantics. Its clarity masks a vast complexity, not only in the data and their analysis but also in the competing, often contradictory, analyses of semantic phenomena by various scholars. Fillmore faces up to this with a peroration that is worth quoting:

We have to face the reality that the scholars working with semantics are separated by country, language, university, discipline, subject matter, doctrine, and temperament. . . . Getting people to talk to each other may not help, because the set of people who are really doing semantics may not be identical with the set of people who claim to be doing semantics. You've heard the story about the blind men had his hands on the elephant's tail, one on his trunk, one on his belly, one on a tusk, one on a leg, and so on. They held a conference on the properties of the elephant, and they couldn't agree.

I don't believe that story. If these were really rational men talking seriously to each other about their experience, there's no reason why they couldn't have come up with a perfectly adequate and coherent, if incomplete, description of what that elephant was like.

What REALLY happened—and this, I think, DOES explain their inability to agree—was that, although many of the participants in this conference were holding on to parts of the elephant, one had his hands on a rose bush, one in a water fountain, and one on a wagon wheel, two were feeling each other, and several were examining their own heads. Of course there was no way of getting a unified account out of all their descriptions [pp. 156-157, emphasis in original].

*Mutatis mutandis*, the same account may be given for most areas of study in linguistics, or for that matter, for social science in general. This sense of chaos is typical of a great deal of recent research in linguistics, too; particularly in the areas of semantics, pragmatics, and their relations to phonology and syntax, most researchers are working in a theoretical vacuum as competing paradigms emerge from under every rock.

Midway between the poles of the style continuum lie the papers of Lehmann ("The Chal-

lenge of History") and Labov ("Empirical Foundations of Linguistic Theory"), both of which attempt a synthesis of differing linguistic traditions in an attempt to broaden the scope of linguistic theory. These papers have neither the density of style that comes from elaboration of long-held theories nor the discussiveness that bespeaks an atheoretical approach to understanding (although Labov's style approaches Chomsky's on occasion), but rather, the tone of a missionary come to aid the beleaguered. Lehmann's points—and he makes them well and thoroughly—are that a science of language that excludes or belittles historical change is close to bankrupt; that consideration of historical phenomena is necessary to solve synchronic problems, as well as challenging in itself; and that the methodology recently developed in syntax allows vast new realms to be explored in historical linguistics. This is a good didactic paper. Labov's purpose is more complex and ambitious, being nothing less than an attempt to integrate experimental traditions and methodology with the intuitively based theoretical superstructure of generative linguistics and its successor theories. Instead of restricting experimenters and experimentation to hyphenated ghettoes, he argues, linguists should learn to doubt their intuitions more and to place empirically based studies on a par with grammatical judgments and textual citations epistemologically. Although it is hard to argue with such a goal, such a synthesis is not as easy as it sounds, and my judgment is that it will not occur soon in epidemic form. Still, this paper is responsive to concerns that have been voiced and revoiced in linguistics, and fairly and strongly represents one of the more insistent voices.

In sum, this book is an excellent survey of much of current American linguistics. With articles like Chomsky's or Labov's in it, one cannot call it a primer or an introduction, but the overall impression I have is that it can serve as a splendid entrée to the field for the thoughtful adult, and even better as a brief refresher course. The ideas presented here, most not for the first time, have all survived a great deal of serious scrutiny and deserve to be presented as common linguistic context even when they are contradictory, for the contradiction is part of the culture. This is an important book, and I would recommend it to anyone who wants to see what linguists think they do, and what it can mean.