

LINGUISTIC HISTORIOGRAPHY: OBJECT, METHODOLOGY, MODELIZATION

Pierre Swiggers*

Abstract: The article discusses, briefly, the object of study and the methodological aspects of Linguistic Historiography as a scientific field of descriptive and analytical observation of the linguistic knowledge.

Keywords: linguistic historiography; description; explanation.

1

The purpose of this contribution is to offer, in a condensed way¹, a systematic frame of reflections on the object, the methodology, and modelization of linguistic historiography². The latter can be defined as the discipline³ (within the field of [general] linguistics)⁴ that aims at providing a scientifically

* Ph.D. em Linguística pela Universidade de Leuven (Bélgica). Professor do Departamento de Linguística da Universidade de Leuven (Bélgica). *E-mail:* pierre.swiggers@arts.kuleuven.be.

1 The reader is referred to my previous discussions of issues in (meta)historiography. See Swiggers (1981a, 1981b, 1983, 1984b, 1990, 1991a, 2004, 2006, 2009a, 2010) and Swiggers, Desmet e Jooken (1998a, 1998b).

2 The historiography of linguistics is by now a well-established academic discipline; its institutional recognition owes much to the efforts of E. F. K. Koerner (1978, 1989, 1995, 1999, 2004) in creating the first specialized journal (*Historiographia Linguistica*, 1974-) and in starting the series of (triannual) international conferences on the history of the language sciences (the first of these ICHoLS conferences was held in Ottawa, in 1978). Next to *Historiographia Linguistica*, four other journals for linguistic historiography must be mentioned: *Histoire, Épistémologie, Langage* (1979-), *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft* (1991-), *Boletín de la Sociedad Española de Historiografía Lingüística* (2002-) and *Language and History* (2009-). For comprehensive overviews of the history of linguistics, see Auroux (1989-2000), Auroux et al. (2000-2006), Lepschy (1994-1998), Schmitter (1987-2007), and Sebeok (1975); see also the readers edited by Hymes (1974) and Parret (1976). For a short bibliographical check-list, see Swiggers (1987a).

3 Elsewhere (cf. SWIGGERS, 2004, 2010) I have defined the domain of linguistic historiography in its close relationship with a collateral branch (viz. "epihistoriography": the study of the agents and material products in the historical development of linguistic knowledge, and the analysis of the documentation already constituted by historiographers) and a theoretical-foundational branch (viz. "metahistoriography": theoretical reflections on historiographical practice, products, principles, and claims). For the subdivision of metahistoriography into (a) constructive metahistoriography, (b) critical metahistoriography, and (c) contemplative metahistoriography, see Swiggers (2010). On metahistoriography, see Dutz (1990), Grottsch (1982), Schmitter (1982, 1990, 2003), and the contributions in Schmitter and Wal (1998).

4 Or: "language sciences/linguistic sciences"; however, I have chosen to stress the ties between linguistic historiography and general linguistics (or: the central core of language study). See also Swiggers (1998).

grounded descriptive and explanatory account of how *linguistic knowledge* (i.e. what was accepted at a given time as knowledge, information and documentation on language-related issues) was gained, and what has been the course of development of this linguistic knowledge, since its beginnings to the present time. We should perhaps speak of a “descriptive-explanatory” account, since historiographical description is intrinsically tied up with explanation⁵ in our reconstruction of the past, and in fact there is no principled ground on which one can draw a neat distinction between description and explanation when it comes to historiographical analysis.

2

The “description + explanation” of the history of linguistic thought is a reconstruction of “mental *contents*”, which at one time received a more or less explicit formulation in the form of “statements”, and which have to be considered within their proper social and cultural *context*. Content and context⁶ are correlative dimensions in linguistic historiography, and those involved in historiographical work cannot but approve the aptness of R. H. Robins’s (1997, p. 5) remarks on the symbiosis of scientific thinking and the intellectual and social context⁷ – in fact, we should enlarge the latter notion, including also the political and economic context⁸:

Changes in scientific thinking and in scientific attitudes may arise from outside or from inside the science whose history is being traced. The existing state of a science, the starting point for any change is the product both of external and internal factors. The general contemporary intellectual and social context, whether favouring stability or encouraging change, is largely external to the particular science itself, although each science and branch of learning is a part of the whole context along with all the others and along with the general cultural attitude towards learning [...] Throughout the history of linguistics all these factors can be seen at work in different ages and among different groups, as the science experienced changes in its objectives, its methods, and its theoretical positions.

Linguistic knowledge has taken various, and variegated forms throughout history, and over different geographical areas⁹. In general, the development of linguistic knowledge within the separate “geographical and cultural” areas (e.g., ancient Mesopotamia; the Chinese world; the Indian world; the Judeo-Arabic sphere; Greece and Rome ...) has been one of gradual explication and sophistication – not necessarily “progress”! –, always in connection with institutional and professional needs and opportunities, and with “technological” means and possibilities. Each of these geographical and cultural traditions¹⁰ has had its proper

5 The literature on “explanation” in science is abundant; for comprehensive overviews from the point of view of the philosophy of science, see, e.g., Essler (1979) and Stegmüller (1983). On the issue of historical explanation, see Dray (1954, 1957, 1959), Gardiner (1952) and Weingartner (1961).

6 On the issue of “contextualization”, see Law (1998). For a collection of studies illustrating a contextualized historiographical analysis of linguistic ideas in Antiquity, see Swiggers and Wouters (1996).

7 See also Hymes’s (1974a, p. 21) plea in favour of a “sociolinguistic” approach to the history of linguistics, as an integral part of the history of sociocultural changes.

8 One can speak here of the outer tissue (or “texture”) of linguistic production, viz. the “external” conditions that have a direct impact on language-oriented reflection and description.

9 For a wide-ranging overview, see Itkonen (1991).

10 As I have pointed out elsewhere (cf. SWIGGERS, 2010), the notion of “tradition” can be understood (and can be made operational) in a variety of ways:

rhythm of evolution¹¹, and each of these seems to be characterized by a proper “inner drift”. To study them as macro-cultural entities, it is necessary to undertake two types of analysis:

- an “immanent” type of analysis, focusing on the specific way in which a particular linguistic insight was arrived at and was formulated;
- a typological analysis, focusing on the types of models that carry linguistic knowledge.

3

In order to conduct the abovementioned immanent analysis, it will be necessary to go beyond a “statement-view” of theories¹², and to consider the underlying “onto-semantics”, i.e. the “living-floor of ideas”, of linguistic knowledge¹³. Here we enter the domain of the study of linguistic conceptualization¹⁴, as underlying the formulation of knowledge. For this study, we need to include in our descriptive-explanatory framework three basic parameters:

- the *categorization* (in its two aspects: as a process and as a result) imposed upon the phenomena and facts analysed (these can be phonetic, morphological, lexical or syntactic phenomena, or they can be “facts” concerning relationship, origin and classification of languages, etc.);
- the *terminology* used (in the source-texts) to express the effort and result of categorization;
- the process of *concept formation*, which is basically one of transfer or displacement of ideas¹⁵.

Concept formation, which is the crucial process between observation and description (or description + explanation), is an object of study for the historian of science who is interested in the psychology and logic of “scientific discovery” *in actu*. From an *a posteriori* point of view, the study of concept formation is not on-

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- 1) as a “national” tradition – e.g. Noordegraaf (1990), focusing on the Netherlands –, “ethnic” tradition (cf. WALDMAN, 1975) or “geographically defined” tradition (cf. MILLER, 1975);
 - 2) as a tradition linked with a scientific type of linguistic investigation (e.g., the tradition of historical-comparative grammar); this conception of tradition can of course be combined with a “national” focus (cf. GÖBELS, 1999);
 - 3) as a tradition of “linguistic investment” in function of a cultural, ideological and/or political aim; an interesting complex tradition of linguistic investment tied up with a religious and political agenda is “missionary linguistics”, a tradition that has become an intensively cultivated field of research in recent years (cf. ZWARTJES; ALTMAN, 2005; ZWARTJES; HOVDHAUGEN, 2004; ZWARTJES; JAMES; RIDRUEJO, 2007. See Ridruejo (2007) for a synthetic presentation of the field and methods of missionary linguistics;
 - 4) a tradition, understood in a very broad manner, which is defined by a focus on a subgenre of linguistic practice (e.g. the tradition of bilingual/multilingual lexicography), by a “topical” focus on a particular language (cf. HÜLLEN, 1999), or by the overall continuity of a general approach to language structure (cf. KAZANSKY et al., 2011).

11 An evolution which can be stratified into successive *epistémés*; cf. Foucault (1966, 1969).

12 On (the insufficiency of a) statement-view of theories, see Sneed (1971) and Stegmüller (1979, 1983).

13 For the insistence on the deeper “anthropological” dimension of scientific (including “ordinary-folk’s-science”) thinking, we are indebted to philosophers (of science) and logicians such as Nelson Goodman, Willard V. O. Quine, Donald Davidson and Hilary Putnam. Paul Feyerabend has, repeatedly, stressed the impossibility of drawing a line of demarcation between common sense knowledge and (so-called) scientific knowledge.

14 For a systematic treatment of the basic conceptual frame of linguistic thinking in the 17th and 18th century, see Hassler and Neis (2009).

15 This view has been forcefully stated by Schon (1963, p. 36). “Every theory of the formation of new concepts is also about discovering the way the world is. [...] Metaphors, in this sense, are the traces left by the displacement of concepts. They bear witness to complex processes of displacement of concepts over time just as present living species bear witness to biological evolutions. [...] But the displacement begins with the intimation of such a similarity and may be justified after the fact by pointing out the similarity in terms which are themselves results of displacement. Observation of analogies is the result and partial justification of the displacement of concepts”. On the role of images and metaphors in scientific thinking, see also Toulmin (1960).

ly a matter of model or theory description, but also an issue for the sociology of science¹⁶. The heuristic point of departure will be (the description of) the analytical techniques used to arrive at a particular categorization and the terminology used to express the categorization and the techniques in a specific metalanguage¹⁷.

4

In a typological analysis of the forms (or *formats*) of linguistic knowledge, the historiographer of linguistics should, on the one hand, point out the general evolution from reference-based formats or models to intension-based formats or models. A telling example is provided by the history of the definition of word classes and their *accidentia* (i.e. grammatical categories such as tense, mood, person...). Whereas in Antiquity these categories are defined with respect to psychological states of speakers (as in the case of moods), or with respect to reality-based data (e.g., in the definition of tense, gender) – and we observe an analogous “externally based” definition of the *word classes* –, medieval Modistic grammar reflects an orientation towards intensional definitions (word classes are seen from the perspective of the *modi intelligendi*, through which we apprehend the world, and these classes and their *accidentia* are correlated with *modi significandi*, “modes of signifying”, through which semantic aspects receive formal expression). A further step in the evolution is the polythetic approach of word classes found in the grammatical theory expounded in the 18th-century French *Encyclopédie*¹⁸. The essential criterion here is the “global signification” of the various clusters of word classes, defining their respective *valeur*¹⁹. A more explicit intensional definition of word classes can be found in Jespersen’s (1924) *The philosophy of grammar*, in which word classes are defined in terms of their meaning, their form, and – as a crucial parameter – their “rank”²⁰ (semantico-syntactic function).

5

In sum, the object of linguistic historiography can be defined, in a very general way, as (the study of) the long-run development of linguistic knowledge in its (changing) context, and of the complex interplay between continuity and discontinuity (cf. ROBINS, 1976), between tradition and change (cf. KUHN, 1977); in a more specific way, it can be defined as comprising the study of concept formation²¹, descriptive-explanatory categorization, terminological (“metalinguistic”) coverage, and (diagrammatic/figurative)²² representation in their relation to:

16 See, e.g., the theoretical frame proposed in Mullins and Mullins (1973); for applications of a “social network”/ “theory group” approach in the historiography of philosophy and the historiography of linguistics, see Collins (1998), Murray (1994) and Harris (1993).

17 On the issue of metalanguage from the historian’s point of view, see Swiggers (1987b); on the general problem of metalanguage/terminology in linguistics, see the studies in Colombat and Savelli (2001) and Lemaréchal (1997); on terminology and terminography, see Swiggers (2007, 2011).

18 In the definition of word classes in the grammatical articles of the *Encyclopédie* formal, semantic and pragmatic criteria are combined (cf. also the modern approach of SCHMID, 1986). For a study of the polythetic approach adopted by Nicolas Beauzée in the *Encyclopédie*, see Swiggers (1984a, p. 46-53; 1986, 2009b).

19 This is indeed the term used in the grammatical articles of the *Encyclopédie*; the term had already been used before by Gabriel Girard in his work on synonymy (cf. SWIGGERS, 2008). It may be that Saussure took his inspiration from the 18th-century lexicographical and grammatical tradition for his use of the term *valeur* (cf. SWIGGERS, 1982).

20 Jespersen’s theory foreshadows the generative theory of X-bar grammar.

21 Cf. Elffers-Van Ketel (1991) on the concepts of “subject” and “predicate”.

22 On this issue see Roggenbuck (2005).

- units and levels of language description;
- various types of relationships between languages;
- properties and functions attributed to language.

6

In order to discuss the issue of methodology with respect to the discipline of linguistic historiography, it is important to make the distinction between (a) matters of general methodology, and (b) matters of specific methodology. The former are relevant for any type of linguistic-historiographical work, the second are linked to, and dependent upon, 1. the historical period investigated (with its implications for the available documentation and for the kinds of linguistic problems dealt with), 2. the relative weight put on content and context; 3. the questions guiding the research agenda of the historiographer.

It is clear that discussions of particular descriptive-explanatory models (e.g., the use of the Kuhnian paradigm/revolution model²³; the use of a “pendulum swing” model; the use of a “layered” model²⁴) are basically a matter of specific methodology, since such models can only be applied if one deals with, e.g., established paradigms (and “exemplars”) of linguistic research or with explicitly defined research orientations in linguistics. In a rigorously “scientist” conception of our field, such models would be applicable – if one is convinced of their usefulness – for the history of linguistics only since the beginning of the 19th century, when linguistics received its name and when it obtained its autonomous status and its institutional recognition²⁵.

The general methodology of linguistic historiography follows from the fact that the linguistic historiographer is an “observer”, a (critical) “reader” and an “interpreter” of the evolutionary course of linguistic knowledge. At the outset this requires a basic attitude of empathy²⁶ with the past: the linguistic historiographer starts from the assumption that what he/she finds in his/her sources (= his/her documentation) at one time made sense and constituted a (set of) relevant statement(s) about language, in one or the other way: about the structure of (a) language, about the nature of language, about linguistic functions, about relationships between languages, about the unity or diversity of languages, etc. This means that our task is to describe and understand what we find in our sources.

Whether the evolutionary course of linguistic knowledge is important for present-day linguistic practice and thinking, is an issue open to debate, and is after all – like so many other things in linguistics (and in science as well as in life) – a matter of *conviction*²⁷. Historiographers of linguistics can adduce plenty of reasons

23 For critical reflections on the use of this model in linguistic historiography, see Percival (1976).

24 Elsewhere (cf. SWIGGERS, 2004, 2006), I have outlined a model (based on Galison's (1987, 1997) three-layer description of the evolution of research in micro-physics), in which four layers of linguistic thought and practice are distinguished: a theoretical layer, a technical layer, a documentary layer and a contextual-institutional layer.

25 This does not exclude, in my view, the applicability – in a loose sense, though with possible descriptive-explanatory relevance – of these models to earlier periods in the history of linguistics; a basic prerequisite for their application, though, seems to me the existence of a sufficient degree of “density” (in time and in geographical coverage) of the available documentation. As a matter of fact, each of the abovementioned models presupposes some kind of “social tissue” with relevant network-connections between participants interacting in the research endeavour.

26 This empathy entails (to a certain extent) the “principle of charity” in the hermeneutic stage; for an interesting discussion of this principle, see Sluiter (1998).

27 I have stated my personal conviction on various occasions; for a recent formulation: “[H]istoriographers of linguistics, in collaboration with historians of ideas and practitioners in the field of social history, should (not cease to) stress the scientific ‘standing’ of the history-writing of linguistics: as an interdisciplinary inquiry, based on solid methodological foundations, into the history of linguistics, it contributes to fundamental insights into the achievements (as well as missed opportunities), rewarding pathways (as well as loose ends), principles (and pseudo-principles), techniques (as well as *bricolages*), theorems (and assump-

why the history of linguistics should have its place in a linguistics curriculum (FERNÁNDEZ PÉREZ, 2001, 2007) which pretends to give an education in general linguistics (and not in the study of one or two languages, or in applied linguistics, or in some kind of “communication and translation” program), but one cannot dismiss the fact that solid linguistic work is not necessarily dependent upon previous achievements, a fact that may explain “allergic” attitudes to the history of linguistics. Discussing and arguing about this issue seems to me quite pointless²⁸ – “frankly (my dear), I don’t give a damn”, to use the famous Clark Gable quote.

The general methodology of linguistic historiography consists in complying with the requirements of the three indispensable steps in historiographical work²⁹:

- *Heuristic methodology*: this involves the constitution of the corpus of the source texts, of prosopographical and bibliographical documentation³⁰; the critical study of the “textual history” of the sources (including the establishing of critical editions, scientifically grounded translations and commentaries³¹, and a study of the reception of the source texts); the search for “marginal” sources³² that can throw more light on the more straightforward (and often “canonical”) sources used in historiographical work.
- *Hermeneutic³³ methodology*: this involves the contextualized interpretation of the contents of the source texts (including also the “marginal” sources), and the establishing of relationships between texts, authors, research groups, traditions, etc.
- *The methodology of history-writing*: the constitution of a historical account implies an effort at systematic reconstruction, by which the historiographer proposes to his/her reader a systematic “story” of the reconstructed linguistic past. This involves three aspects:
 - a) an exercise in “categorization”³⁴: the historiographer’s categorization concerns the more or less explicit views, conceptual approaches, descriptive strategies³⁵ as well as presuppositions that can be recovered from the source texts³⁶;

tions) that have marked the evolutionary course of man’s interest in the basic metaphor conveying sense (and non-sense) to life: language” (SWIGGERS, 2010).

- 28 Discussing about the usefulness of linguistic historiography with linguists who have no interest at all in the history of their discipline is pointless, just as it would be pointless to discuss the usefulness of phonetics (and phonology) with semanticists who prefer to investigate “the higher spheres” of meaning and who have no interest at all in phonetics. Life is too short to be lost on obstinate (and desperate) proselytizing.
- 29 Cf. Van Hal (2010, chap. I); see also, from the perspective of the philosophy of history, Veyne (1971).
- 30 For useful research tools, see Colombat and Lazcano (1998-2000) and Stammerjohann (2009).
- 31 Cf. the recommendations formulated in Gómez Asencio (2007).
- 32 Historiographers of linguistics – and likewise historiographers of other disciplines – have too often relied on the “great, classic texts” of the past. In order to revise the conventional(ized) history of a discipline’s past, it will be useful to take a look at “marginal” sources (diaries, notebooks, correspondence, etc.), which often throw light on the institutional, ideological and, especially, personal background of views and theories. On the use of such “marginal” sources for the historiography of linguistics, see De Clercq and Swiggers (1991).
- 33 There exists an abundant literature on hermeneutics and the presuppositions/principles/modalities of hermeneutic activity; a highly thought-provoking reflection on hermeneutics can be found in Stegmüller (1975).
- 34 On the need of categorization in any type of historical description, see Perelman (1969, p. 145): “Nous ne pouvons nous passer de catégories dans l’histoire, à la fois pour organiser les faits que nous connaissons, et pour compléter nos connaissances dans une direction que nos catégories nous présentent comme significative et importante; nous en avons besoin également pour exposer nos résultats de façon à montrer leur importance dans une perspective plus générale. Chaque fois il y aura lieu de confronter les éléments concrets avec les catégories dont ils sont la manifestation ou l’illustration. C’est ce va-et-vient entre les données et les catégories qui donne un sens au travail de l’historien”. See also Swiggers and Wouters (2004).
- 35 For a study of descriptive (and adaptive) strategies in terms of “bargaining” (i.e. negotiating between a well-established model and new descriptive realities), see Swiggers (1988, 1990, 1997, 2003b). On the notion of “bargaining” in economics and strategic theory, see Bacharach and Lawler (1981) and Young (1975).
- 36 Elsewhere (SWIGGERS, 1981a, 1991a) I have discussed the usefulness of an encompassing categorical concept, viz. (research) program. I have argued there for the use of a set of four research programs that can be traced in the long-run history of linguistics

- b) an “in-depth characterization”, dealing with the processes of displacement or metaphorization that underlie the abovementioned views and approaches (cf. SWIGGERS, 1991b);
- c) a well-structured exposition, making use of an organized metalanguage³⁷, by which the past is reconstructed in accordance with the historiographer’s categorization and his/her attempt at “deep characterization”.

7

Linguistic historiography is an activity which studies its object (= the historical course of linguistic thought) by applying a type of modelization. Modelization is inherent to scientific practice, since there is no science that simply reproduces (the structure/the characteristics/the form of) its object: science proceeds by “idealization” and “modelization”, and its internal object is a *modelized construct*³⁸.

The issue of modelization can be approached in various ways: in a typological-contentive way, from a descriptive-organizational point of view, and from a “pragmatic-directional” point of view.

- Within the first approach, a distinction into “types of contents” of historiographical descriptions can be proposed. Here we can make use of typologies such as the one presented by John Passmore (1967) for the history-writing of philosophy³⁹, or the one elaborated by Konrad Koerner (1999), for the historiography of linguistics. Koerner (1999, p. 12) distinguishes: (a) a retrospective, chronicling type of historiography; (b) a polemic type of historiography; (c) an “anthologizing” and “panoramic” type of historiography, whose objective is “to delineate the development of western linguistic thought [...] with a view to indicating not only that our discipline has come a long way to gain those insights we now cherish and the methods we have developed, but also that we have all built, knowingly or not, on the findings of previous generations of linguists”, and (d) a methodologically conscious historiography, the aim of which is to present “our linguistic past as an integral part of the discipline itself and, at the same time, as an activity founded on well-defined principles that can rival those of “normal science” (KUHN, 1977) itself with regard to soundness of method and rigour of application”⁴⁰.

- In the second approach the focus is on descriptive-organizational aspects of the historiographical account. Here we can discern three kinds of historiography: (a) a “narratively”⁴¹ conceived and executed history-writing; (b) a “structurally”⁴²

tics: the correspondence program; the descriptivist program; the socio-cultural program; the projection program. The reader will find there a description of each of these four programs in terms of their (a) scope, (b) angle of incidence, and (c) technique.

37 In fact, the historiographer has to construct a type of “meta-metalanguage” with regard to the various metalanguages he/she may find in the source texts. On the problem of construing an overarching standardizing (meta)language, see Lauwers (2004), Swiggers (2011) and Szoc (forthcoming).

38 This has been convincingly argued by Bunge (1974). For an adequate perception of the “idealizing” starting point of any type of linguistic model, see Šaumjan (1973).

39 Passmore’s typology makes a distinction between six types of history-writing in philosophy: (a) a polemical type; (b) a doxographical type; (c) a teleological type; (d) a classificatory type; (e) the “cultural history”-type; (f) the “history of problems”-type. For critical reflections on Passmore’s typology, see Swiggers (1992, v. I, p. 44-45; 2004, p. 119).

40 See also Simone (1995).

41 On “narrativity” in historiography, see Ankersmit (1981) and Schmitter (1994, 2003).

42 A structurally construed approach should start out from the principles of a structural description of phenomenological objects; cf. the foundation-laying work of Goodman (1951). For a solid argumentation in favour of a structuralist approach of scientific theories and of change in science, see Stegmüller (1979, 1986).

construed historiography, focusing on series of texts, on institutional frames, on structural aspects of theories, on cognitive, ideological or socioprofessional configurations in the history of linguistics⁴³. A specific aspect of the descriptive-organizational approach of modelization in (linguistic) historiography involves the *periodization* applied by the historiographer; this aspect has been dealt with repeatedly by historians and philosophers of history⁴⁴. Here it seems to me that, rather than focusing on the opposition between an external (minimalist) and an internal (maximalist) periodization, we should integrate into (models for) linguistic historiography the idea of a “multilayered” temporality, based on the interplay between (at least) three types of “duration” (cf. Fernand Braudel’s distinction of “*courte/moyenne/longue durée*”)⁴⁵.

• In the third approach the focus is on the “message” the historiographer wants to convey to his/her readership⁴⁶. Here we can distinguish between two or three options:

- a) the option that consists in presenting a historiographical account of the evolutionary course of linguistics, while abstaining from value judgements, and intending (or claiming) to offer a non-polemic, balanced view of (parts of) the linguistic past;
- b) an option by which the historiographer makes value judgements (or marks his/her adhesion to others’ value judgements) about past achievements, and intends (or supposes) his/her reader to adopt these judgements;
- c) a (possible) third option⁴⁷ that would consist in adopting an overall sceptical (and “agnostic”) attitude with regard to views, approaches and models developed along the history of the discipline.

8

A final word should be said about the “interdisciplinary matrix”⁴⁸ of linguistic historiography. By its object and by its approach, linguistic historiography implies an intertwining of various disciplines: not only linguistics and history (political history, socio-economic history, cultural history), but also – in degrees that vary according to the period and the topics studied – philosophy (philosophy of science⁴⁹, philosophy of language, logic, theory of knowledge, metaphysics, ethics), theology, rhetoric, anthropology, semiotics, sociology and psychology. It also seems to me that the historiographer of linguistics may profit from acquainting himself/herself with the *history of techniques*, an interdisciplinary approach⁵⁰

43 For a model study focusing on cognitive-theoretical configurations in the history of linguistics, see Verleyen (2008) on theories of language change; for a model study focusing on the intertwining of ideological and socioprofessional matrices within a specific theoretical frame (which did not attain the status of a dominant paradigm), viz. naturalist linguistics, see Desmet (1995). The latter study also illustrates the possibilities offered by “historiometry”.

44 For a survey study of the stands taken by historians with respect to the problem of periodization, see Van der Pot (1951).

45 For this threefold distinction within the course of time, see Braudel (1949, 1967-1970).

46 The possible options in conveying a specific “load” to the historiographer’s message show a significant correlation with the “types of contents” (cf. the first approach).

47 To my knowledge, this third option (attested in the history of philosophy from Antiquity on), is not represented, at least not in a straightforward way, in the historiography of linguistics.

48 This status has, of course, much bearing on the competence(s) required from the historiographer. On this issue, see the reflections and admonitions of Malkiel and Langdon (1969).

49 See, e.g., Fernández Pérez (1986).

50 This approach (Fr. “*histoire des techniques*”) initiated by Marcel Mauss has been brilliantly illustrated by his students André Leroi-Gourhan (see, e.g., LEROI-GOURHAN, 1943) and André-Georges Haudricourt (see, e.g., HAUDRICOURT; JEAN-BRUNHENS DELAMARRE, 1955).

to the “technocultural” achievements of mankind through time and space (cf. SWIGGERS, 2003b). Since the history of linguistics is, to a large extent, a history of analytical techniques developed in order to describe and “get hold” of a basic existential technique of mankind, viz. language, the view of linguistic historiography as an application of the history of techniques seems doubly justified.

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Resumo: *O artigo discute, de forma breve, o objeto de estudo e os aspectos metodológicos da historiografia da linguística, como campo científico de observação descritiva e analítica do conhecimento linguístico.*

Palavras-chave: *historiografia da linguística; descrição; explicação.*

Recebido em abril de 2012.

Aprovado em abril de 2012.