

XL. History of Linguistics – The Field

Die Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaften: Umriss der Disziplin

Le domaine de l'histoire de la linguistique

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1. Introduction

In her study of Inuktitut Nowak (1996a, cf. 1996b) analyses early linguists' attempts to describe the language within a traditional Western framework. She explicitly criticizes these attempts because the model they use does not take into account the specificity of Inuktitut structure, and their analysis therefore remains inadequate. Her solution is to expand the traditional framework of linguistic analysis so as to include features from more 'exotic' languages such as Inuktitut. Presumably, this implies that because of their intimate familiarity with their own language Inuit grammarians would be in a better position to come up with an adequate analysis of Inuktitut, with what Nowak (2001: 598) calls an "indigenous grammar" of the language. Such a view runs counter to the universalist claim of most contemporary linguistic theories according to which all categories of grammatical analysis should be valid for the description of all human languages. From this universalist point of view, there is no need for alternative frameworks, whether indigenous or not.

In the present *Handbook*, the editors have taken a different view. Their aim has been to cover as fully as possible all linguistic traditions, including those that from the point of view of the mainstream Western tradition are

called the non-Western traditions. They believe that the insights and methods of these traditions deserve to be studied both for the valuable information they provide about the language, and for their contribution to a general historiography of the language sciences. This point of view is not entirely new, but it may be said to be a fairly recent development. Earlier histories of linguistics sometimes contained a few remarks about non-Western traditions, inserted for the sake of curiosity. Some recent histories have expanded this narrow scope and dedicated extensive sections to these traditions, such as Auroux (1989), Itkonen (1991), and Kniffka (2001).

To some extent, the Greek and even the Latin tradition, as well as the Medieval period may be included in the category of non-Western traditions, since in many respects there is no direct link between them and modern linguistics. It is only after the Renaissance that we can speak of a single tradition, which eventually supplanted all other linguistic traditions in the world. Although today linguists in the Arab world (→ art. 46), in India, in China, in Japan (→ art. 16) still use the materials collected by their predecessors, as soon as they publish their findings in one of the international linguistic journals, they have to bow to the conventions of the mainstream.

This global framework of modern linguistics is of course not homogeneous, nor has it ever been. Each period knew many schools, waves and fashions. Among them prevalent fashions may be distinguished but alongside those there were always undercurrents connecting them with the antecedent history of the discipline and announcing future devel-