

Linguistic theory and metatheory for a science of texts

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Abstract

This article explores the typical reactions which occur when an established science confronts a new object of inquiry, as we find when linguistic theory encounters the text. The usual discussions are not productive as long as the old 'paradigm' is still accepted as the framework for achievement. The issues are therefore re-examined in terms of the metatheory of science (e.g. Sneed, Stegmüller, Lakatos, Feyerabend, Hempel), and some general solutions are expounded for the problems of validating theories on the basis of empirical content. A paradigmatic example is then presented in order to show a possible role for logical linguistics in future theories: a computer grammar that parses text sentences into a progressive network and back again via theorem-proving, with further capacities for applying schemas, answering questions, and generating summaries. This example serves as an application of general design values and criteria for preferring and comparing alternative theories.

1. Historical background

1.1. When a new object of inquiry¹ presents itself to an established scientific discipline, there is not likely to be any immediate consensus either about the nature of that object or about the most productive theories and methods for treating it. The scientists themselves typically fall into three groups of response. The first group denies admission to the new object of inquiry on the grounds that it is no proper concern of science, either because it lacks any systematic nature or because it falls under already established concepts of superior status. The second group is willing to admit the new object of inquiry under the