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Foundations of Linguistics

DIETER WUNDERLICH
translated by ROGER LASS

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FOUNDATIONS OF LINGUISTICS

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Foreword

This book is an attempt to outline the foundations of a science. But my chosen field – linguistics – is at present in a process of stormy development, and presents a picture of competing theories, opinions, principles and interests. Given the current state of the discipline, the goal I have set myself can be achieved only fragmentarily; its total achievement would transcend the personal ability and knowledge of an individual author – who, besides is in any case bound to be the prisoner of the very questions he has formulated about his subject. It follows from this that any particular attempt to carry out such a programme will soon be out of date; and, indeed, it is my hope that this will be the case.

It is not even clear exactly what we should understand by 'the foundations of linguistics'. One approach would be to try answering the following three questions, and unifying the separate answers into a coherent whole:

1. What are the various aspects of language? And what different (partly interdisciplinary) orientations for linguistics do they motivate? (E.g. toward psychology and physiology of speech and comprehension; the physics of the acoustic signal; the three classical disciplines of the *Trivium* – rhetoric, logic, and grammar; possible connections with act-theory, theory of institutions, and socialization-theory; the incorporation of the historical dimension; practical problems in areas like data-processing, media-analysis, language pedagogy and language planning.)
2. What presuppositions (in terms of philosophy/theory of science and methodology) do we need in order to argue for or against particular scientific positions in the field?
3. What are the fundamental categories, principles, and methods in linguistics?

The answer to any one of these will set the standards for answering the others.

I will try here mainly to answer the second question; and in the course of this attempt I will discuss some of the central problems involved in it.

especially that of the concept of meaning. In my view the usual conceptions of the theory of science cannot simply be transferred unreflectingly to linguistics. Rather we have to clarify anew the status of our linguistic knowledge, our reflection and argumentation about language in language – and thus the empirical status of linguistics itself. At least we must do this unless we want to run the risk of holding on to certain dogmatic preliminary decisions. All the essential methods of elucidation in science are modelled on procedures we use in our everyday lives; in science they are merely worked out more clearly and precisely, with a view toward more specific (and limited) goals. But our theoretical orientation basically determines the ultimate direction of our methodology; and therefore we also need some understanding of the status and function of theories.

All the above issues are problematical; and I readily admit that many sections of this book are rather like conversations with myself. What counts is not the definition of a firmly delimited universe of knowledge, concepts and procedures that can be confidently taken away by the reader, but rather the attempt to stimulate discussion and achieve an awareness of problems.

To this extent then this is not so much an introduction to particular linguistic theories and methods as a general introduction to linguistic inquiry and its characteristic modes of thought and argument. I assume as little as possible in the way of initial preparation; in particular, I do not assume much formal knowledge of linguistics. But of course a certain familiarity with linguistic problems (especially in semantics and syntactic analysis) is necessary: it is hard to see what the fundamental problems of a science are if you approach it as a stranger. Thus the best time for the student to read this book would be after the completion of at least an introductory course in linguistics. (The more difficult sections are marked with a preceding asterisk.)

I am grateful to my colleagues Renate Bartsch, Manfred Bierwisch, Walther Dieckmann, Konrad Ehlich, Jochen Rehbein, Helmut Schnelle, Christoph Schwarze, and Arnim von Stechow for their comments on early drafts of several chapters. I am also especially grateful to Karin Pols for her clerical assistance.

D.W.

Düsseldorf, Summer 1973

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Foreword to the English translation

I am delighted that the Cambridge University Press has decided to make this book available for the English-speaking reader, and that they have found, in Roger Lass, such an able translator. This version has been slightly altered in a number of ways: a few passages have been omitted, and – not least through the kind advice of the translator – I have corrected a number of errors. I have also, as far as possible, brought the bibliography up to date. No one linguist, of course, can completely survey the current state of research in the field, so I have retained some sections that do not do justice to the most recent developments. I also realize that in some areas – notably phonology, dialectology, and historical and comparative linguistics – the theoretical basis has been worked out in much more detail than my treatment here would suggest. In syntax and semantics as well I have discussed only the basics, not the most recent theories (e.g. Extended Standard Theory, Montague Grammar, Transition Network Grammar, Frame Theory). For some more recent and precise treatments of the theory of linguistic inquiry by myself and others, see my *Wissenschaftstheorie der Linguistik* (Kronberg 1976c).

Since 1973 my own work has been mainly in the fields of speech-act theory and discourse analysis; for this see my *Studien zur Sprechakttheorie* (Frankfurt 1976b), where the position adumbrated here in §9.29 is more fully worked out.

Readers of the German edition frequently criticized me for taking a neopositivist position, and obscuring the fundamental distinction between the natural and the human sciences (like linguistics). I do not believe, however, that there really is this kind of fundamental distinction; if there were it would make interdisciplinary discussion impossible, which would be disastrous for the further development of human society, to which every science has a contribution to make. But on the other hand I do think that every science has its own problems; and we have to investigate these in detail before we can establish its precise status (e.g. in the light of a general theory of science).

I hope that the reader will be prepared to follow me in my rather complex and multi-layered argument; and I would be grateful for any comment and criticism. I thank Roger Lass for his painstaking and distinguished work as translator.

D.W.

Düsseldorf, December 1976

Translator's note

The task of turning a German book into a reasonably English one – as anyone with some knowledge of both languages will realize – is not an easy one. I am not sure whether I have succeeded in producing a book that does not 'read like a translation'. I hope at any rate that whatever infelicities of style remain, I have been faithful to the author's intention. Any success I have achieved in this is due in no small part to the author himself, who painstakingly went over an early draft, and provided assistance far beyond the call of duty on problems of finding English equivalents for German terms, as well as patiently answering my innumerable (and mostly illegible) marginal queries. So at least part of whatever is good in this translation (even *qua* translation) is due to Dieter Wunderlich; the mistakes are mine alone. I am also grateful to the many native speakers of German who helped me on various points, especially Dr H.-H. Speitel; and to my wife Jaime for stylistic advice.

R.L.

Edinburgh, March 1977

Mathematical and logical symbols

$<$	less than
$\leqslant$	less than or equal to
$>$	greater than
$\geqslant$	greater than or equal to
a o b	concatenation of the elements a and b
a b	connection of the elements a and b
$\langle a, b\rangle$	ordered pair of the elements a and b
(a, b, ...)	ordered series of the elements a, b, etc.
{a, b, ...}	collection of the elements a, b, etc. into a set
$\{a_j : P(a_j)\}$	set of elements a_j with the property P
$a \in A$	a is a member of the set A
$[a\ b\ c]_A$	the string a b c is of the category A
$A \cap B$	intersection of the sets A and B
$A \cup B$	union of the sets A and B
$A \times B$	product of the sets A and B
$A \subset B$	the set A is included in the set B
$= df$	the same by definition
&	logical conjunction
$\vee$	logical disjunction
$\sim$	logical negation
$\supset$	material implication
$\equiv$	logical equivalence
$\vdash$	logical derivability
$\Vdash$	logical consequence
$\prec$	strict implication
$\rightarrow$	strong inference; or assignment of a value to a function
(x)...	For all x, it is the case that ...
(Ex) ...	there is (at least) one x, such that ...
$\Rightarrow$	transformational derivability
$a \rightarrow bc$	replace a by the string b c (production rule)

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One of the most fruitful means of discovery – compared to which the old *Quis, quid, ubi* is scarcely a rival – is to say to yourself, as soon as you hear anything: 'Is that so?' The rule that one should not speak or write before thinking shows a lot of good will on its author's part, but very little reflection; and the good man cannot have considered that – to speak judiciously but strongly – one cannot follow the rule without breaking it. For unless they avoided thinking, many men would never speak at all – wherefore I maintain the opposite opinion. How many men have finally, in desperation, said something wise, because they had to justify an unreflecting statement? And to assert is to philosophize. I except the few identical propositions that Euclid has pointed out for us, together with all others that derive from them through permissible deductions.

A leg of mutton is better than nothing,
Nothing is better than heaven,
Therefore a leg of mutton is better than heaven.

G. C. Lichtenberg

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Foundations of linguistics

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I *Introduction*

1.1 Matters of course and problem-cases

Speech and other forms of self-expression (like gestures, mimicry, writing) are part of everyone's daily life. Communication in general is a well-defined human activity, embedded in a series of other activities. For the most part we have no problems with communicative activities; we simply learn them as natural forms of human interaction in specific contexts. They are, however, complex; they require very complex capabilities, like observation, cognitive processing, memory, anticipation, interpretation of social situations and other people's capacities for understanding and action, control of socially recognized procedures. These capabilities are partly interdependent, and we learn them together.

Accordingly, there is something paradoxical about reconstructions of human communication that start from a view of man as a self-contained being, and take communicative competence as self-initiating. It is difficult to imagine how to treat the situation that would arise when two such solitaries met. This of course does not happen, so it is virtually meaningless to interpret human communication as a solitary and self-initiated activity: men are constantly engaged in manifold relations with one other. In the same way it is absurd to ask what language a child would speak if it were brought up in total isolation. Such a creature (if it survived at all) would simply die when it reached its purely biological maturity. The possibility of living as a grown human being is inextricably bound up with communication.

Every communicative act presupposes that the participants have a set of COMMON INTERESTS. If these are lacking, they must be created, i.e. the participants must enter into a common learning-process. It is by means of such consistently mutual and self-completing processes of learning and cooperation that we achieve both 'common knowledge' and common convictions, values and orientations ('common sense'). Each participant has these common possessions; and it is with reference to them that he

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