George J. Metcalf

On Language Diversity and Relationship from Bibliander to Adelung

Edited with an introduction by
Toon Van Hal
Raf Van Rooy

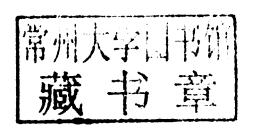JOHN BENJAMINS PUBLISHING COMPANY

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TOON VAN HAL AND RAF VAN ROOY
University of Leuven

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E.F.K. KOERNER
Zentrum für Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft,
Typologie und Universalienforschung, Berlin
efk.koerner@rz.hu-berlin.de

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Volume 120

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Foreword & acknowledgments

The idea of gathering the contributions to intellectual history of George J. Metcalf (1908–1994) in a collected volume dates back to the 1990s of the previous century. Through the patient insistence and the generous support of the series' Editor E. F. K. Koerner this project has finally been materialized. I feel much obliged to the Editor for having approached me a couple of years ago to fulfil this task. It was precisely after reading Metcalf's study "The Indo-European Hypothesis in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries" (published in Dell Hymes' 1974 *Studies in the History of Linguistics*) about ten years ago that I started thinking about writing a doctoral dissertation devoted to Early Modern 'precomparative linguistics' in the Low Countries. Without the efforts of my colleague Raf Van Rooy, who did at least half of the work, this volume would not have come to fruition. John Considine (University of Alberta, Edmonton) gave invaluable advice, as ever.

Special thanks are due to the late George J. Metcalf's son, Prof. Allan Metcalf (MacMurray College, Jacksonville, Illinois). He not only kindly proofread the present Introduction, but also supplied additional information and all documents needed to obtain the permissions of the original publishers of the papers here united. We are very grateful to these copyright holders most of whom gave their permissions free of charge. The original place of publication has been duly acknowledged at the outset of each chapter.

Leuven, April 2013   Toon Van Hal

George J. Metcalf

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Editors' introduction

This book pays tribute to the work and scholarship of George J. Metcalf in the field of the historiography of diachronic and comparative linguistics. Metcalf's contributions testify not only to his wide learning, but also to his close reading of the sources, and therefore have remained a standard until this day. This is reflected in their frequent citation in major publications of recent date.[1] Since many of his publications are rather hard to come by, we felt that Metcalf's scholarly legacy would benefit from a volume bringing all these papers together. In a 1972 paper about the Leiden scholar Philippus Cluverius (1580–1623), George J. Metcalf singled out, among other things, the following merits of Cluverius: "The clarity of his views and his obvious pedagogical talents (frequent repetition, summarizing, and cross-referencing) leave the reader in no doubt as to his stand on crucial issues" – see Chapter 7, p. 106. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same holds true for Metcalf himself. We hope that through this volume the author's vivid and lucid expositions of many complex issues in the history of linguistic ideas will reach a wider readership, and that his sensible methods of interpretation and thorough source-based analysis will inspire future scholars. After surveying Metcalf's life and works, this introduction aims at presenting both the field of the 'prehistory of comparative linguistics' in general and the different papers included in particular.

1. George J. Metcalf and the prehistory of comparative linguistics

Born on April 15th, 1908 in Kewanee, Illinois, George Joseph Metcalf studied Latin and Germanic Philology at Wabash College, Indiana (B.A., 1928) and Germanic Philology in Munich and at Harvard (M.A., 1931). After obtaining a Ph.D. at Harvard in 1935, he taught at the universities of Alabama (1935–1937) and Kansas (1937–1938), and at Washington University in St. Louis (1938–1942). In 1942, he joined the faculty of the University of Chicago as assistant professor in Germanic languages and literatures. Appointed full professor in 1954, he served as department chair between 1956 and 1969. In the summer of 1958, he was visiting

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1.   See, e.g., major and wide-ranging publications such as Bono (1999); Bryant (2001); Van Driem (2001); Aronoff & Rees-Miller (2003); Burke (2004); Campbell (2004); Woodard (2008); Neville (2009).

professor at the Linguistic Institute at the University of Michigan; in 1963–1964 he held the William H. Colvin research professorship. Two years later, the honorary degree *Litterarum humanarum doctor* (L.H.D.) was granted to him by MacMurray College, Illinois. In 1962 he earned the distinguished service cross from the Federal Republic of Germany (*Bundesverdienstkreuz*) for furthering international relations, and he served as president of the American Association of Teachers of German in 1968–1969. After his retirement in 1973, he continued publishing as Emeritus Professor at the University of Chicago. He died on November 21st, 1994 at the age of 86 in Sacramento, California.[2]

Although Prof. Metcalf also published in the field of German linguistics proper (a full bibliography is provided on pp. 17–18 below), all papers collected in this volume deal with Early Modern views on language change, linguistic kinship, and language diversity. As such, this field in intellectual history was not entirely new. The interest paid to the prehistory of comparative linguistics long predates the emergence of 19th-century academic linguistics. As early as 1688, the German polymath Daniel Georg Morhof (1639–1691) attempted to compile a survey of how his predecessors had theorized on the origin and history of languages (see Droixhe 2010; Van Hal 2012). Mid 19th-century linguists, such as Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900; Müller 1861) and especially Theodor Benfey (1809–1881; Benfey 1869), paid rich tribute to the insights of their predecessors. From the third quarter of the 19th century onwards, the Neogrammarians, dazzled by the spectacular progress they had themselves achieved, contributed to the oblivion of the (pre)history of their discipline rather than to its further study. This resulted in a striking neglect of the 16th through 18th centuries in early 20th-century surveys on the history of linguistics. As George J. Metcalf would put it himself:

> [A]greement was widespread among scholars in the field that what preceded 1800 was mere prelude. Whatever attention was directed toward a history of the field in older eras resulted normally in measuring the inadequacies of the early ages against the accomplishments of the new. Brief summaries tended to pluck quaint morsels of fantastic speculation from older works, ignoring the basic approach and methodology of these earlier studies. This attitude achieved its possibly classic formulation in Holger Pedersen's *Sprogvidenskaben i det Nittende Aarhundrede* [1924]. The title is indicative of the book's theme: a sober account of the genuinely remarkable achievements of 19th-century scholars. But the short 11 pages devoted to earlier epochs seem merely to emphasize the sudden emergence *de nihilo* of a new scholarly field. (Metcalf 1972: 90 [= Chapter 7, pp. 105–106]; see also Metcalf 1974: 251, 255n.7 [= Chapter 2, p. 52])

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2.   This paragraph draws on Anon. (1978: 229; 1995), and on a personal communication with Prof. Allan Metcalf.

After World War II, a more favorable climate for the history of sciences emerged. The constitutive importance of the Early Modern period for the development of synchronic linguistics was most famously (and most controversially) emphasized by Noam Chomsky (b. 1928) in his 1966 *Cartesian Linguistics*. In this work, Chomsky had attempted to demonstrate that the essence of his ideas on generative/transformational linguistics had already been expressed in the 17th-century grammatical tradition of Port Royal. As to the (pre)history of comparative linguistics, several scholars had already pointed out in the 1950s that diachronic and comparative linguistics had deeper roots than the much-quoted address of 1786 delivered by Sir William Jones (1746–1794). Besides Jan Agrell (1918–2005), Henry M. Hoenigswald (1915–2003), Giuliano Bonfante (1904–2005) and, from a more theological angle, Arno Borst (1925–2007),[3] George J. Metcalf proved to be a champion of the young, emerging subdiscipline (cf., e.g., Metcalf 1972:90; 1974:254 = Chapter 7, pp. 105–106 and Chapter 2, p. 54 respectively).

Unlike many of his predecessors, Metcalf did not judge the views of Early Modern authors by present-day standards (explicitly stated in Metcalf 1963b:149 = Chapter 5, p. 77). Instead, he charted the rules they explicitly formulated or implicitly applied and explored the extent to which they observed their own standards. In so doing, Metcalf succeeded in making unbiased appraisals of the source authors discussed. This is not to say that he overlooked post-1800 linguistic achievements in his discussions of older views. For the purpose of analysis, Metcalf occasionally draws comparisons between Early Modern and present-day approaches to linguistic issues. According to some historians, the very statement that – to give just one example – the Early Modern 'sound patterns' were not equal, and even not comparable, to our contemporary notion of 'sound laws' does still testify to an anachronistic perspective. In our view, however, it is fully justified to draw such parallels, since the use of such comparisons (entailing at the very most 'controlled anachronisms'; cf. Loraux 1993), enables us to come to a better understanding of the specific characteristics of the Early Modern period.

Metcalf was very much committed to study all texts within their own context by taking into account both the intellectual (and ideological) profile of the authors and the general *Zeitgeist*. Although he in particular focused on the linguistic methods applied by the source authors and on the toilsome search for linguistic rules, he was very well aware of the fact that their linguistic argumentation is inextricably allied with arguments from historical authorities, personal *a priori*

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3. See Bonfante (1953/1954, 1955, 1955/1956, 1956); Agrell (1955); Borst (1957–1963); Hoenigswald (1954, 1963, 1974, 1984, 1990). Whereas Metcalf does not refer to Bonfante's work and criticizes some aspects of that of Agrell (1955), he praises the achievements of Borst and Hoenigswald. See also Zeller (1967).

convictions (often of a 'patriotic' nature), and the infallible framework of the Bible. At the same time, it is noteworthy that Metcalf in general prefers not to dwell in great length upon these 'circumstantial' and contextual factors.[4] It is also in this light that Metcalf regularly refers to Borst (1957–1963), whose approach he seems to regard as complementary to his own. As we have already observed, each case study by Metcalf is in the first place based on a primary text, the inherent logic and argumentative strategies of which are thoroughly analyzed. In this connection, Metcalf has a special interest in the terminology adopted by the source authors (see, e.g., Chapters 1, 6, 7, and 11). The metalanguage he uses as a historiographer is well-chosen and justified (e.g., Metcalf 1980: 329n.7 = Chapter 3, p. 60). In this respect, Metcalf's method is a firm antidote to a deplorable present-day trend in historiography in general, in which scholars are talking about primary sources without actually having seen them.

2.   The contents of the present volume

We have decided to arrange Metcalf's papers in the chronological order of their coverage, not their dates of publication. Whereas Chapters 1 & 2 present general surveys covering the 16th through 18th centuries, specific case studies are offered in the rest of the volume. Chapters 3–5 focus on 16th-century Switzerland, Chapters 6–8 deal with the 17th-century Netherlands, while (Early) Enlightenment Germany comes to the fore in the final Chapters 9–11. Besides summarizing the contents of the various papers, we have also added references to relevant recent studies wherever we believed this was desirable.

The first two chapters of this volume offer a panoramic overview of how 16th-through 18th-century Swiss, Dutch, English, German, and Swedish scholars looked at linguistic change and classification of languages. Metcalf's focus is clearly on the scholarly community of Germanic-speaking countries, with Joachim Périon (1499–1559) being the only French author who is regularly mentioned. This special focus can be easily explained, if one takes into consideration that Romance-speaking scholars investigating the roots of their own language were almost involuntarily bound to concentrate on Latin as their common protolanguage (see also Metcalf's first footnote in Chapter 1). To scholars in the Germanic-speaking

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4.   Cf. "In the actual practice of their etymologizing and their setting up of linguistic inter-relationships, the scholars of the period interwove their linguistic evidence and their historical evidence so neatly that the two strands cannot be unraveled with impunity. Although our concern in this paper will be the linguistic strand, we must expect to find the other strand constantly appearing as well" (Metcalf 1974: 240–241 or Chapter 2, p. 40).

world, however, the situation was less clear-cut. The central theme of the opening chapter is the complex interaction between authority, presuppositions, theories, and facts in Early Modern learning. Metcalf discusses in a systematic way the different models of language classification put forward by the authors as well as their views on linguistic change, with due attention given to both their methodological strategies and the ancient authorities Early Modern scholars used to develop and articulate their views. He explains why the biblical story of Babel, although offering an explanation for the emergence of language diversity, did not infringe on the 'academic freedom' of Early Modern scholars, and discusses the authoritative influence which was also exerted by classical and Early Christian authors. Whereas the first paper has a synchronic approach, surveying the entire period as a whole, Chapter 2 rather proceeds in a diachronic vein. It shows how research results obtained by early authors were either criticized or elaborated upon by later scholars. By studying the development of the so-called 'Scythian hypothesis', Metcalf shows that such a dialectical process could lead to fruitful results. The best-known variant of the 'Scythian hypothesis', developed by the Leiden professors Claudius Salmasius (1588–1653) and Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn (1612–1653; Boxhorn is not discussed by Metcalf), assumes that an unattested language, conventionally termed 'Scythian', was a matrix language of, among other languages, Latin, Greek, Persian, and Germanic. Hence, this hypothesis somehow foreshadowed later Indo-European linguistics. By studying the emergence and transformations of the Scythian hypothesis, Metcalf corrects an earlier view of his, which was in Chapter 1 still formulated as follows: "What was particularly lacking in linguistic theory was the concept of a lost ancestral language from which the later languages had descended." Since the approach of Chapter 2 is thus largely complementary to the approach of the opening chapter, the combination of both lively papers is in our view an excellent entry-point to this complex domain of learning.[5]

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5.   In the 70s, John Francis Eros (1972, 1976) and Jack Fellman (1974, 1975, 1976) also contributed to the historiography of 'precomparative linguistics'. In the last decades of the 20th century, the early history of the discipline was in particular elaborated upon by Daniel Droixhe (see, e.g., Droixhe 1978, 1980, 1987, 2000, 2007), who also paid considerable attention to the Romance tradition. The French tradition took center stage in Demonet (1992). The Swiss/German tradition was further studied in Rössing-Hager (1985), Klein (1992), Gardt (1994, 1999), Sonderegger (1998–2004) and Jones (1999), whereas the contribution of Dutch scholars was focused upon in Dekker (1999) and Van Hal (2010a). Jankowsky (1995) and Jones (2001) offer general surveys of the 'Germanic' tradition. Collections of papers related to 'precomparativism' include Giraud (1982); Droixhe (1984); Jones-Davies (1991); Coudert (1999); Van Hal & Considine (2010). 'Precomparative linguistics' is also dealt with in monographs by Swiggers (1997), Simone (1998), Tavoni (1998), Law (2003), Trabant (2003), Burke (2004), Formigari (2004), Auroux (2007), Considine (2008a), Haßler & Neis (2009). – As to the authors touched upon in Chapters 1 and

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 focus on 16th-century Swiss linguistics. Thanks to the important printing houses established in Basel and Zürich (not to mention the intellectual agitation stirred by religious reformers such as Zwingli and Calvin), these Helvetian cities became lively centers of learning. While Chapter 4 and 5 are devoted to Konrad Gesner, Chapter 3 deals with Theodor Bibliander's (c. 1505–1564) views on the languages of Japheth's progeny. A lector of biblical Greek in his early career, Bibliander soon developed an interest in languages, most notably Hebrew, which he identified with the *sermo primogenitus*. On the basis of the biblical account in *Genesis*, 10–11, he interpreted the confusion of tongues as a sudden linguistic change, which had caused the original linguistic unity to fall into several distinct dialect groups. The languages of fairly restricted communities, such as Shem's descendants, still showed a very close affinity with each other (viz. the Semitic language group). At the same time, it was much more difficult to unravel the linguistic interrelationships between Japhet's descendants, scattered over a more extended area. By examining several 'Japhetic' languages, mostly Greek (from *Javan*), Germanic (from *Gomer*), and Slavic (from *Magog*), Bibliander was able to detect corresponding suffixes in these language groups. Metcalf argues that Bibliander owed his sensitivity to word structure as well as derivational and inflectional processes to his study of Hebrew. Bibliander's contemporary Konrad Gesner (1516–1565), one of the most important representatives of the Swiss humanist movement, had a special interest in the philosophical problem of diversity, which he addressed in his numerous monographs (see, e.g., his biological works, or his bibliographical *Bibliotheca universalis*, in which he attempted to overview the vast amount of published books). In 1555 he published

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2, Bibliander, Gesner, Mylius, Schottelius, and De Laet are dealt with in more detail in the following Chapters. For the relevant views expressed by the Early Christian authors, see Denecker et al. (2012) and Van Rooy (2013). For Becanus and Schrieckius, see Swiggers (1984, 1998), Naborn (1995), Van Hal (2010a: 77–139, 249–277). Lipsius' letter is translated and discussed in Deneire & Van Hal (2006). Scaliger is dealt with in Van Hal (2010c). Considine (2009) focuses on Skinner; Eros (1976) on Mericus Casaubon. For Stiernhielm and Rudbeckius, see Stipa (1974). As to the Scythian theory, see Villani (2003); Considine (2010); Van Hal (2010b). Metcalf seems to regard the (re)discovery of Sanskrit as a decisive step in the evolution from 'precomparative' towards truly comparative linguistics, highlighting that this "body of significant linguistic data" led to "such overwhelming evidence for the relationship of Greek, Germanic, Latin, and Slavic with Sanskrit that no honest observer could escape the conclusion" (Chapter 1, p. 30). The role played by Sanskrit in this connection is still disputed today; see for instance Grotsch (1989); Morpurgo Davies (1998); Rocher (2001); Karstens (2012). It is noteworthy to point out that Chapter 2 was originally published in a volume investigating to what extent Thomas Samuel Kuhn's (1922–1996) ideas on scientific changes and breakthroughs did apply to the history of linguistics (Hymes 1974). This discussion was later continued in works by, e.g., W. Keith Percival (1976), John E. Joseph (1995) and E. F. K. Koerner (1999).

a booklet entitled *Mithridates: De differentiis linguarum*. After a succinct general introduction, the author presented, in alphabetical order, about 100 languages known to him. Chapter 4 unravels the general design of this highly complex and composite text by analyzing its contents as well as its discursive scheme. Metcalf pays tribute to Gesner's general open-mindedness, and explains how Gesner secured the place of the three sacred languages on their pedestal. Whereas Latin and Greek were, just like all other languages, inevitably susceptible to changes, biblical Hebrew – unsurprisingly – is found to be the only exception. Metcalf also observes Gesner's reluctance to accord a privileged status to his mother tongue. This topic is elaborated upon in Chapter 5, which zooms in on the longest article included in Gesner's *Mithridates*, viz. the entry devoted to the 'Germanic language'. Metcalf starts with an interesting methodological observation, stating that "[i]n analyzing Gesner's views on the relationship of Germanic to other language families and also on the internal relationships within the field of Germanic itself, we need to beware of modernizing his views in an effort to paint a neater, clearer picture than he himself probably possessed" (Metcalf 1963b: 149 = Chapter 5, p. 77). Metcalf's paper chiefly aims at assessing Gesner's views on the relationship between older Celtic and older Germanic and at both dissecting and identifying the different layers of sources inserted in this entry.[6]

In the three following papers the focus shifts from Switzerland of the 16th century to the Low Countries during the first half of the 17th century. This period is known as the Golden Age of the Dutch Republic. Its most renowned intellectual center was the University of Leiden, which attracted, from its foundation in 1575 onwards, a large number of international protestant students. Most of the works discussed in these chapters were printed in the city, and many of its authors studied or worked there. In Chapters 6 and 7 Metcalf offers an investigation of the aims and methods of both Abraham Mylius (1563–1637) in his *Lingua Belgica* (1612) and Philippus Cluverius (1580–1623) in his *Germania antiqua* (1616). Surveying (the history of) the world's languages, Mylius pays special attention to the position held by the Dutch ('Belgian') language. Metcalf points out that Mylius succeeded in offering a methodical explanation for the striking resemblances between several languages by distinguishing chance, borrowing, common descent, and the conservation of the natural link between words and things. In addition, Mylius also theorized on the causes of language change. Metcalf does not fail to mention the remarkable similarities between Mylius' work and Cluverius' *Germania*

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6. See Colombat & Peters (2009) for a recent translation and an extensive list of the many recent studies devoted to Gesner's *Mithridates*. Amirav et al. (2011) offers a recent translation of Bibliander's *De ratione communi* (1548), accompanied by an introduction with further references. See also Moser (2009).

antiqua, which appeared four years later. Unlike in Mylius' work, language is not the central topic in Cluverius' book, whose main aim was to show the impressive historical and geographical extent of *Germania* (which he equated with the land of the Celts). For Cluverius the study of language therefore serves an ethnological interest in that it (together with culture in general) contributes to establishing ethnohistorical relationships. Drawing on proper names and nouns, Cluverius attempted to detect the *ratio* behind observable phonic alternations as well as to demonstrate the recurrence of common segments (*particula*) in names. In both papers, Metcalf pays special attention to the rich linguistic terminology of the authors. So, for instance, he demonstrates that Mylius' bewildering use of a wide range of technical terms was a well-considered functional strategy, and he shows how Cluverius stressed the importance of exact designations for languages. Chapter 7 focuses on a well-known academic quarrel between Johannes de Laet (1581–1649) and Hugo Grotius (1583–1645). The former attacked the latter's views on the allegedly Germanic origin of the American Indians. After showing the considerable differences between the various Amerindian languages, De Laet insisted on demonstrating linguistic kinship empirically. In doing so, De Laet successfully outlined some important methodological concepts still in use today (e.g., the concept of 'basic vocabulary').[7]

In the three final papers, Metcalf focuses on treatises published in Germany after the Peace of Münster (1648). We see that, starting from 1650, ideas on linguistic genealogy and change, first developed in 16th-century Switzerland and from 1570 onwards elaborated upon by scholars working in the Low Countries, gained firmer ground in Germany. Not only did scholars start to compile the knowledge so far obtained, there was also a trend to discuss language-related issues in academical dissertations. Chapter 9 discusses one of the most influential German linguistic scholars of the 17th century, Justus Georg Schottelius (1612–1672) and his 1663 *Ausführliche Arbeit*. Metcalf first discusses the theoretical linguistic principles developed by Schottelius (regarding language change and stability; etymologizing), and subsequently focuses on the linguistic genealogical schemes Schottelius had established. Metcalf explains how Schottelius attempted to underpin his biased views in favor of the supposed primordial status of German with rational arguments.

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7. The four scholars under discussion are extensively dealt with in Van Hal (2010a: 209–247, 281–333), where further references can be found. For Mylius, see also Jorink (2010) and Van Hal (2011); for Cluverius, see Krebs (2010: 121–125); for Grotius and De Laet, see Laes & Van Houdt (2013). It should be noted that in spite of his function as commercial director of the Company of the West-Indies, De Laet has never visited America (*pace* Metcalf in Chapter 2, p. 47).