



Reviews

LANGENDOEN, D. TERENCE. *The London School of Linguistics: A Study of the Linguistic Theories of B. Malinowski and J. R. Firth*. Research Monograph No. 46. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press, © 1968. Pp. xii, 123

Anyone who attended the Linguistic Institute in 1948 would find it difficult to forget the impact of John Rupert Firth. The growing affluence of American Universities had made it possible for the host university (Michigan) to invite a visiting professor from abroad. The choice was simple and clear: the ranking professor of linguistics in Britain. But the results were more complex than the hosts had anticipated. In contrast with the most articulate group of American linguists at the time, who had divided the domain of linguistics into a macro- and a micro-component, with neatly separated levels, F. propounded no theory of linguistics, no model for language. Moreover, his views of language, especially concerning phonology, baffled and annoyed the American theorists who (following G. L. Trager) had segmented suprasegmentals, struggled over the possible segmentation of sequences such as the initial consonants of *chess* and *just*, and thus carried to an extreme their systematization of the procedures available for the phonological analysis of language. In such an atmosphere F.'s proposal, in one of his lectures, that δ might be consigned to the prosodies of English rather than listed among phonemes because it occurred primarily in a small set of pronominal forms seemed incredible. At one of the pleasant informal lunches that in the past made up one high point of Linguistic Institutes, Bernard Bloch, who had the opportunity of getting to know F. well through sharing an office with him, joined other theorists in frankly admitting their failure to understand what F. meant by prosodies and firmly rejected as inadequate an attempt at explanation volunteered by an auditor in F.'s lectures.

The currently most articulate group of American linguists also fails to grasp F.'s thinking. The devotee of the M.I.T. school who took upon himself the task of acquainting "linguists and others interested in the development of linguistics in this century with the character of the dominant school of descriptive lingu-

stics in Great Britain today" (1) falters on successive pages in searching to explicate what F. meant by prosodies:

It should be apparent from this discussion that, aside from certain small differences, F.'s prosodic analysis is identical with what has come to be known in America as long-component analysis. ... The nearly complete identity of the objectives of prosodic analysis and long-component analysis cannot be stressed too strongly. ... (54f.)

Since R. H. Robins, one of F.'s leading students, has recently published a closely argued review of L.'s book (*Lg.*, XLV [1969], 109-116), treating especially F.'s prosodies and their position vis-à-vis the phonology found in transformational grammar, this topic will not be pursued here. Rather, F.'s own position on the study of language will be examined, particularly those facets omitted from L.'s book or from Robins' critique.

For, despite the title and subtitle of L.'s book, it focusses on F. It comprises four chapters, following an Introduction (1-6), of which the first, "The Linguistic Views of B. Malinowski" (7-36), is aimed at "evaluating the influence of M.'s views about language, and in particular about semantics, on J.R.F. and the London school..." (35). Chap. 2 deals with "The Early Views of J.R.F." (37-48); Chap. 3 with "The Later Views of J.R.F." (49-75), though the Appendix (69-75) on J. Lyons' *Structural Semantics* discusses publications admittedly posterior to F. Chap. 4 provides "Exemplifications of Prosodic Analysis" (76-115).

A sociologist of science might find L.'s second sentence revealing: "That school can quite fairly be called the creation of one man, John Rupert Firth, and its date of origin can be given as 1944, the year in which Firth acceded to the Chair of General Linguistics at the University of London" (1). Linguistic activities must be carried out by a school; the name of the creator is disclosed, so is the date of creation.

It follows naturally, then, that the "school" is assessed in terms of M.I.T.'s transformational theory. As L.'s allotment of space may indicate, he finds most arresting F.'s approach to phonology. F.'s views on semantics he considers the second area worthy of note, though he dismisses them as of "no interest at all for the study of meaning" (3). And he states flatly that F. contributed virtually nothing to syntactic research. All in all, the London School shows up poorly when the appraiser has the aims of TG in mind.

Possibly the crucial question to be directed at a book of this kind is its adequacy. Does this one really achieve a description of the London School? To be sure, schools change, as both L. and Robins indicate. One symptom of the change in the London School, or of contrasting views regarding it, is the amount of space L. reserves for publications by W. S. Allen, esp. pp. 53-57 and 83-98, virtually a fifth of the total. Allen, like Haas and Halliday, was excluded by F. from the roster of those producing "works based on similar principles and methods" (*Papers in Linguistics 1934-1951*. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1957, pp. 228f.). L.'s image of the London School therefore seems to differ

from the concept of that school held by others, including F. himself, if indeed it is useful to propose such an entity.

F. probably would have downplayed the notion. One essay in his collection, "Atlantic Linguistics" (orig. date: 1949), attempted to "emphasize the weight of the American schools of linguistics and the advantage of the Atlantic grouping" (1957, p. 156); for him this classification included the linguistic work of the Russians. He concluded his essay by pointing out "that the tendencies noted under the title 'Atlantic linguistics' are world wide" (1957, pp. 171s.). His personal discovery on becoming acquainted with American linguists was that their aims and methods agreed far more with his own than he had expected. Significantly, of the American linguists who emerged in that context he singled out Harry Hoijer.

For to F. language was to be studied in relation to society. In his essay "Personality and Language in Society" he declared:

Our studies of speech and language, and indeed a good deal of our educational methodology, have been dominated far too much by logic and psychology. Individual psychology tends to emphasize a kind of experience which is incommunicable or at any rate is not usually shared. And logic has given us bad grammar and taken the heart out of language. (*Papers*, 186)

In his essay "Atlantic Linguistics" he had stated "the London point of view" and reviewed his "own contribution":

General linguistics in London has had the advantage of association with two well-known schools — the School of Phonetics founded at University College by Daniel Jones, and the School of Social Anthropology built up by Malinowski at the London School of Economics, and now flourishing under his successor, Professor Raymond Firth. That perhaps accounts for what students have described as my "spectrum" method of handling linguistic material at a series of levels. "Spectrum" analysis makes sure of the social reality of the data at the sociological level,¹ before breaking down the total meaningful intention into the semantic, grammatical, lexical, phonological, and phonetic components each dealt with at the suitable level of abstraction employing specialized techniques. Speech at all levels is regarded as a social and bodily process not forgetting the biological or physical basis of personality. (*Papers*, 170f.)

¹ Professor A. V. Isačenko of Bratislava, in a recent article in *Slovak*, expresses agreement with this order of approach, which was first emphasized in this country in my little book *Speech*, first published in 1930. He says we have got used to the "ascending" course of thinking in linguistics (i.e., "from the phoneme to the sentence"). The opposite descending procedure is the right one. And so say all of us. In the early thirties, when I was teaching at the Indian Institute in Oxford, I remember Professor F. W. Thomas, Boden Professor of Sanskrit, one of our most senior and highly respected scholars, followed up a reference to similar topics, with an outline plan for a grammar beginning with Syntax and "descending" to phonetics in an appendix.

These passages quoted at length indicate what F. considered important innovations of his own, i.e., the study of language in human society; they also indicate that he refused to dismiss the study of syntax.

But earlier in his essay on "Personality and Language in Society" he had

expounded his fundamental disagreement with formal linguistics, saying of Saussure:

It is the study of this *langue* which is the real purpose and object of linguistics synchronic and diachronic, i.e., descriptive and historical. Such a language in the Saussurean sense is a system of signs placed in categories. It is a system of differential values, not of concrete and positive terms. Actual people do not talk such a "language". However systematically you may talk, you do not talk systematics. ... In this country such theory has not taken root in professional linguistics. ... For my own part and for a number of my colleagues, I venture to think linguistics is a group of related techniques for the handling of language events. ... Our schematic constructs must be judged with reference to their combined tool power in our dealings with linguistic events in the social process. Such constructs have no ontological status and we do not project them as having being or existence.

If now an exponent of extreme formalism in linguistics and of a rationalist approach attempts to appraise in accordance with his own opinions the work of a linguist holding strikingly different views of language and linguistics, his evaluation may be more informative of his own thinking than of the thinking at issue. In making this statement I am condemning neither the author nor his school, nor, for that matter, his or F.'s approach to the study of language. Readers of L.'s book simply should know that he and F. hold totally diverse beliefs regarding language.

Moreover, in the assessment of a "school", all of its views should be taken into account and balanced. L. somewhat contemptuously dismisses one study of the "London School" as ethnography rather than linguistics (65). Obviously, F.'s conception of linguistics was wider, and if the "London School" is to be judged with fairness, such seemingly tangential inquiries must be included.

One of L.'s difficulties, like those of the American linguists in 1948, and even of F.'s direct student Robins, is the pioneer's idiosyncrasy of being "proteanly awkward to pin down on specific details" (Robins, *Lg.*, XLV, 115). But F. was, we recall, quite specific in defining linguistics, in delimiting the task of a linguist, in his uses of the term "language", and in his commitments to a theory of language:

Descriptive linguistics is thus a sort of hierarchy of techniques by means of which the meaning of linguistic events may be, as it were, dispersed in a spectrum of specialized statements. We are now a long way from de Saussure's mechanistic structuralism based on a given language as a function of a speaking mass, stored in the collective conscience. ... The unique object of Saussurean linguistics is "*la langue*", which exists only in the *collectivité*. (*Papers*, 183)

Language, counter to Saussure's monolithic definition, F. used in three principal senses (*Papers*, 186f.). In the second sense, 'traditional systems or habits of speech learnt and maintained by social activity', language is SYSTEMIC. But "we must not expect to find one closed system" (*Papers*, 187). For F. "the study OF ONE PERSON AT A TIME seems ... amply justified as a scientific method" (loc. cit.). We may disagree with F.'s notion of language or reject his view of

scientific method. But F. left no doubts about either, and "a study" of his theories ought to encompass them.

Since few linguists can fail to be acquainted with the tenets of TG, as propounded by Chomsky and his followers, it is scarcely necessary to point out why members of that group would find inadequacies in F.'s approach to language. At one point L. is quite explicit in voicing his astonishment about F.'s analysis of language:

One might say that F. took the current notions of phonological, morphological, and lexical contexts, which were already well established in linguistics, added the Malinowskian notion of context in situation, and devised a view of language that may be regarded as an arrangement of contexts, each one serving as an environment for the elements or units at each of various levels. ... F. made no serious attempt to define any of these levels rigorously, and paid relatively little attention to any of them except the phonetic and the semantic levels. In particular, he made no attempt to arrange these levels systematically with respect to each other. ... (37)

The goals set for linguistics were distinctly more modest than those of Chomsky and his adherents. In F.'s *Papers in Linguistics* he aimed at a

developing linguistic theory. ... Such linguistic theory as may appear in the paper is not intended as an attempt to establish universals for general linguistic description, but rather as an approach to general linguistic theory to be applied to the particular description of specific language material, in the hope that it may be useful in renewal of connexion with experience. (xi-xii)

From such statements L. infers that F. denied "universal grammar"; understandably, he is puzzled by the discovery that nonetheless F. retained "the conceptual and terminological tradition of grammar" (68).

In his Introduction L. remarks: "A systematic study and ... commentary on the linguistic theories and notions propounded by F. have ... long been needed", partly because "no one else has ever successfully presented an explicit formulation of the theories of the London School and showed the historical and theoretical connections between them and those of the American and Continental linguists" (3). It is scarcely surprising that a young doctoral candidate fell short of reaching this aim. L. capably rephrases some phonological statements of the London School in TG terms; these are the most useful ingredients of his book. In addition to distinctly broader experience than may be expected of a relative beginner, anyone attempting "the total history of the development of the London School" (or, for that matter, of any school) would need to bring to his work somewhat warmer sympathy for it than L. manifests. F.'s interest in the works of pre-19th-c. linguists simply reflects, we learn, "an antiquarian's delight" (4). Yet F. was explicit in adducing the reasons for his references to early studies of language; and he encouraged younger scholars, like Robins and Allen, to concern themselves actively with the history of linguistics, a line of curiosity which has meanwhile yielded good fruits in his country.

L. flatly asserts that F.'s

rejection of the principle [of complementary distribution for phonology], unlike Halle's and Chomsky's rejection of it, was not for any logical reason, but for an aesthetic one. ... The theory of prosodic analysis was arrived at simply by pushing the decision to reject complementary distribution to its ultimate conclusion and still remain within the framework of a taxonomic phonological theory. Prosodic analysis is really nothing more than a notation for carefully distinguishing features in an utterance which are diagnostic of a particular environment from those which are not. ... (5)

The last statement may be true, but as F.'s suggestion about E. ð indicates, he transcended the framework of a taxonomic phonological theory. A later comment on F.'s phonological views is even less generous (45):

By adopting this position on complementary distribution, of course, F. was able to sidestep the contemporary live issues concerning that principle, for example, whether the sound after the *s* in *stick* is to be identified with the phoneme *t* or *d* (72), and whether *ŋ* and *h* are members of the same phoneme in English (74).

By interpreting properly F.'s remark he had just quoted (44) L. might have gathered that F. considered this not a live issue but an "unnecessary and probably erroneous" assumption. In judging L.'s comments I uphold neither F.'s views nor those of the phonologists favoring the principle of complementary distribution; I simply champion the demand for a modicum of respect from a review of a man's life work.

Nor is it edifying to watch L. describe a remark made by one of F.'s disciples as "characteristic of the 'numerology' of the London School" ... comparing F.'s "definition of grammatical meaning" (60).

L. further seems to be outraged by specific statements of F.'s and Malinowski's. At any rate he plants a [sic] after an expression of wit by Malinowski. F. was not invariably solemn either, witness his statements about German scholars and those on grammar, which repel L. By grammar here F. apparently referred to an approach which taught students constructions like the ablative absolute in English. F. was appalled by such stupidity and by gratuitous dogmatism.

Linguistics has developed such strength that it deserves to be included in works on the history of science. But such syntheses will be inadequate unless they evaluate men and "schools" for their contributions to their subject during their lifespans rather than for possible inadequacies exposed by subsequent achievements. L. is confident that neither F. "nor his colleagues in the London School made any substantive theoretical contribution to the study of syntax or morphology ..." (65). One is almost amused by the quotation he includes on the following page concerning "colligation" in syntax:

The various structures of sentences in any given language, comprising, for example, at least two nominal pieces and a verbal piece, must be collated, and such categories as voice, mood, affirmative, negative, tense, aspect, gender, number, person, and case, if found applicable

and valid in descriptive statement, are to be abstracted from, and referred back to the sentence as a whole.

F.'s approach here closely resembles the current procedure in syntactic analysis of distinguishing between modality and what is often called the proposition.

There may be little point in finding the germ of later developments in a man's work. But it is even less defensible to misinterpret a man. F. was a vigorous polemicist; one of his prime contributions to linguistics was to have achieved recognition for it as an independent discipline. As the career of Sweet, and even that of F., may indicate, linguistics never profited from the playing fields of Eton. F. himself enjoyed reporting the reaction of non-specialists to the term "linguistics" as seen in their response on hearing the word: "What are they?"

Besides achieving recognition for his chosen subject, F. attempted to keep a proper perspective on language. He might have been amused, not to say irritated, by the super-structuralism of TG, which threatens to reduce language to a scheme consisting of three or so boxes on a page. Conceivably it was educational to invite a young transformationalist to evaluate the *oeuvre* of such a man and his influence; the result tells more, however, about the student and HIS school than about the subject selected. For F., "the easy definition of language ... is a euphemistic over-simplification of the facts of life. The approach to speech must ... be chiefly sociological" (*The Tongues of Men and Speech*, 135). After citing F.'s warning against over-simplification, it is hazardous to make much of F.'s emphasis on speech and of Chomsky's on grammar. For F. it was vital to study language as a part of culture; his "review of the tongues of men has been cast in the form of a cultural history" (*The Tongues of Men and Speech*, 138). Loyal to his approach and to his aims, F. neglected studies that other linguists deem important. An analysis of his ideas and their impact ought to concentrate on his central, inalienably personal contributions. [W. P. LEHMANN, *The University of Texas at Austin*]