Linguistic relativity and language as epiphenomenon: two contradictory positions

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ABSTRACT:
The assumption of linguistics relativity and the definition of languages as epipheno-
mena are certainly known as two contradictory positions from the last century. But I
will start my discussion of them in the period of their appearance and then use this as
a basis to evaluate the heuristic value of these positions in present day linguistics. I
will start with the definition of language as an epiphenomenon and then I will go on
with the linguistic relativity.
The notion of ʿepiphenomenonʾ is usually used to exclude certain aspects of a scientific
object because they are considered to be deduced from others. In linguistics, restrictions
of the research object were made, invoking the notion of ʿepiphenomenonʾ, which was
partially done with a polemical attitude, and was always responded to polemically.

KEY-WORDS: linguistic relativity, epiphenomenon, two positions.

1. Epiphenomena of language in Chomsky and his adversaries

The best-known definition of languages as an epiphenomenon is that
proposed by Chomsky, who declared that the specific realisations of language
do not warrant scientific attention. This is an important point which has led to
critical evaluations from the viewpoint of descriptivism and functional gram-
marians and from structuralists whose work is based on corpora. If one reads
the following passage written by Ludwig Jäger in the *Festschrift* for Peter von
Polenz, the definition of languages as an epiphenomenon can be understood as
destruction of the identity of linguistics and of ist research object:

> Wenn auch die Unterscheidung des grammatischen von anderen kognitiven
> Systemen, die der Sprachverwendung zugrunde liegen, auf den ersten Blick
> nur einen begrifflich-methodischen Sinn zu haben scheint, so wird bei näherem

Besehen deutlich, dass ihre eigentliche Intention in der radikalen definitorischen Einschränkung des linguistischen Erkenntnisobjektes liegt: es geht Chomsky nämlich um eine zweifache Transformation des Sprachbegriffs, die sich zweier Begriffs-Substitutionen bedient: einmal der Substitution des Begriffs Kommunikation durch den der Sprache und zum zweiten der Substitution von Sprache durch Grammatik. Der Begriff Sprache wird nicht nur seines kommunikativen Gehalts entleert, sondern er wird auch seinerseits im Lichte der überragenden Bedeutung des grammatischen Kenntnissystems zur Peripherie erklärt. (Jäger 1993: 15)

Jäger reproaches Chomsky for having eliminated functional elements from his notion of language, which are considered as constitutive aspects in concurring theories" (Jäger 1993: 23). Following Jäger, Chomsky assumes that these functional, concurring theories represent a vague notion of language.

But the arguments proposed by Jäger are problematic as well. He insists that all linguistic research should take communication as its point of departure and should define its categories on this basis. The notion of funcion which has been largely integrated into generative and cognitive linguistics as well, is in a way appropriated by Jäger for communicative functions.

In linguistic theories related to text and communication, the notion of epiphenomon refers in the opposite way to linguistic structures. In this sense Hopper declares:

[…] that the study of grammaticalization tended to undermine the assumption of a pre-existent a priori grammatical component that stood as a prerequisite to discourse and a precondition for communication, and he proposed instead that grammar was an emergent property of texts. "Structure" would then be an epiphenomenal by-product of discourse   (Hopper 1996: 231).

From this follows that texts are considered by Hopper as a lower level, from which emerge the grammatical structures as a higher level. This higher level is however considered as an emergent by-product which depends on the lower level, which means it is an epiphenomenon (Dahl 2004: 37). As we have already seen, the term epiphenomenon in linguistics can be used with two different meanings. First, it can signify a non-functional property or a by-product. Secondly, it may refer to the non-essential effects arising from a central cause or object.

Actually, for Chomsky the question of the nature of knowledge of a language has priority in relation to the study of language acquisition or the usage of language. The fundamental cognitive relation is a grammar: the knowledge of a language is deduced from it, meaning that it is epiphenomenal. Chomsky underlines the fundamental cognitive distinction between the generation of phrases by a grammar on the one hand and the production and interpretation of utterances by the speaker on the other hand. These are of less importance and do not refer to any element of what we call knowledge of language:

> The ultimate outcome of these investigations should be a theory of linguistic structure in which the descriptive devices utilized in particular grammars are presented and studied abstractly, with no specific reference to particular languages. (Chomsky 2002 [1957]: 11)

But how seriously should we take the attribution of an epiphenomenal character to language in light of Chomsky's polemics against American structuralism? Chomsky's research object is the genetically anchored universal capacity of humans to produce and to understand correct utterances by a computational system of a mental language. Language is understood in this sense as an epiphenomenon of language. In order to justify this, he had to delimit himself strictly from Bloomfield, who attributed a less fixed role to syntax than to morphology. Bloomfield justified this by the complexity of an utterance and the possibilities of variation:

> The forms of syntax are less fixed than those of morphology, because the utterance of a sentence is a more complex process and one more easily displaced than that of a word. In exclamation, especially, the usual syntactic habit is often disturbed, the elements of the experience effecting expression in other than the accustomed form. Thus we may exclaim *A rabbit – white!* Instead of *a white rabbit* (Bloomfield 1914: 168).

Even the multiplicity and diversity of languages in the expression of the discursive relations of predication and attribution, such as the non-explicit expression of predication in Latin *Magna culpa*, one-word sentences in Nahuatl or the omission of the personal pronoun in zero subject languages (Bloomfield 1914: 167-169), were by no means epiphenomenal for Bloomfield.

To be able to reduce such linguistic elements to universal syntactic structures, Chomsky had to regard them as epiphenomena and as derived from deep structures. Already in his early works he took this derivation of linguistic specificities very seriously, regarding the delivery of a grammar for each language as one of the tasks of his theory:

> One function of this theory is to provide a general method for selecting a grammar for each language, given a corpus of sentences of this language (Chomsky 2002 [1957]: 11).

Nevertheless, even some statements in the Minimalist Program show that Chomsky did consider the epiphenomenon of languages in the elaboration of his theory. So, he recognises that the unexpected (!) richness and complexity of the phenomena of language created a tension between the goals of descriptive and explanatory adequacy:

> Recognition of the unsuspected richness and complexity of the phenomena of language created a tension between the goals of descriptive and explanatory adequacy. (Chomsky 1995: 4)

However the main task of Chomsky's research is to show that the apparent richness and diversity of linguistic phenomena is illusory and epiphenomenal, the result of interaction of fixed principles under slightly varying conditions:

> The primary one [task] is to show that the apparent richness and diversity of linguistic phenomena is illusory and epiphenomenal, the result of interaction of fixed principles under slightly varying conditions. (Chomsky 1995: 8)

1.2. The heuristic value of the declaration of languages as an epiphenomenon

What is the heuristic value of the declaration of languages as an epiphenomenon? We can see that the notion of epiphenomon was used from different points of view to eliminate disturbing aspects of language in order to obtain a coherent theory. If in doing so the chosen point of abstraction remains transparent, this procedure seems to be legitimate. States of a system are declared
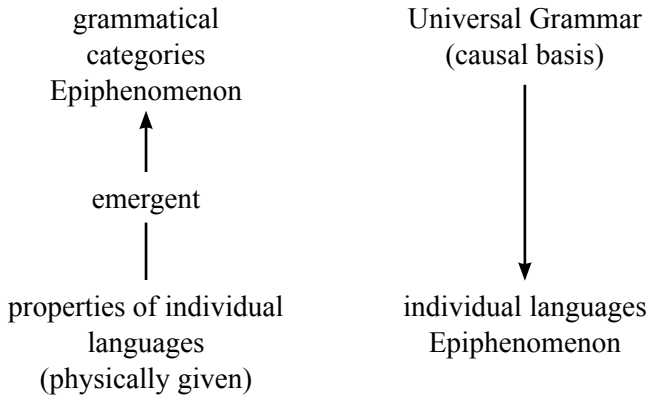
as epiphenomena, if they have no significant effect or no causal effect at all on the system.

In philosophy epiphenomenalism became popular especially through the works of Thomas Henry Huxley (1825-1895), but it was already asserted by Charles Bonnet (1720-1793), who used it as a specific kind of rebuttal of Descartes' dualism. Bonnet had pushed aside the dualistic opposition of matter and the mental, non-physical word with his objection that there was a sufficient physical cause for each action. A causation by immaterial entities would thus be unnecessary. Mental states were explained as epiphenomena of physical states, while causal effects on subsequent physical states were ascribed to preceding physical states.

mental state M1		mental state M1
↑ causes		↑ causes
physical state P1	physical state P2	physical state P3
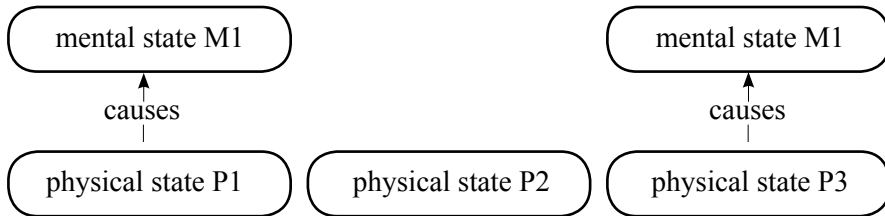
In its application to language, this explanation would rather confirm the position of descriptivism and the derivation of physical linguistic elements of individual languages from other physical elements.

As we have seen on the example of Hopper, there had been such explanations of the mental and abstract categories of language description as emergent und epiphenomenal, while Chomsky, at the contrary, reversed the relation and defined grammar as the causal principle and the languages themselves as epiphenomena.

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   grammatical                Universal Grammar
    categories                  (causal basis)
   Epiphenomenon
         ↑                            │
                                      │
      emergent                        │
                                      │
         │                            ↓
 properties of individual        individual languages
      languages                    Epiphenomenon
  (physically given)
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The definition of certain aspects of language as an epiphenomenon should therefore not simply be rejected out of hand; it is indeed valid as an instrument for managing the unwieldy complexity of human language and the diversity of individual languages under a certain point of abstraction. It is, however, important that this point of abstraction remains conscious.

The move to emancipate theoretical linguistics from languages, their diversity and heterogeneity had been made before Chomsky from scholars embracing different points of view. Let me recall Wilhelm von Humboldts (1767-1835) reproach of language scientists, in which he said that most of them would spend their life wandering around without even once adopting a point of view from wich they would be able to see the whole and ist arrangements „die Meisten, Gelehrte und Sprachgelehrte nicht ausgenommen, ihr ganzes Leben in ihnen [den Sprachen] herumwandern, ohne sich einmal auf den Standpunkt zu stellen, von welchem sie das Ganze und seine Anordnung zu übersehen im Stande wären" (Humboldt 1903-1936: V, 625). For Humboldt, the object of a theoretical consideration of language was of course not cognitive grammar; he simply called this kind of language study "philosophical":

> Die Grundlage alles Sprachstudiums muss immer die philosophische seyn, und bei jedem einzelnen Punkt, jedem noch so concreten Falle muss man sich mit vollkommner Klarheit bewusst werden, wie er sich zum Allgemeinen und Nothwendigen in der Sprache verhält (Humboldt 1903-1936: V, 450).

In the same way for Saussure language was not an object given immediately to our perception, but linguistics has to determine which unities are valid

in research (vgl. Jäger 1993: 18). In his lecture on general linguistics, which in this point agrees with the manuscripts found at the end oft he last century, we can read that language in its whole is polymorphic and heterogeneous, but that the system of language is an instrument of classification:

> In ihrer Gesamtheit ist die Sprache vielgestaltig und heterogen; sie wurzelt gleichzeitig in verschiedenen Bereichen, dem physischen, dem physiologischen und dem psychischen, sie gehört weiter sowohl dem individuellen als auch dem sozialen Sektor an; sie lässt sich [als Ganzes] keiner der Kategorien menschlicher Gegebenheiten zuordnen, denn man weiß nicht, wie man ihre Einheit erfassen könnte. Das Sprachsystem dagegen bildet für sich genommen eine Einheit und ist ein Klassifikationsinstrument. Sobald wir ihm den ersten Platz unter den sprachlichen Gegebenheiten zuweisen, führen wir eine natürliche Ordnung in einen Komplex ein, der sich jeder anderen Klassifikation entzieht (Wunderli 2013: 73).

> Pris dans son tout, le langage est multiforme et hétéroclite ; à cheval sur plusieurs domaines, à la fois physique, physiologique et psychique, il appartient encore au domaine individuel et au domaine social ; il ne se laisse classer dans aucune catégorie des faits humains, parce qu'on ne sait comment dégager son unité. La langue, au contraire, est un tout en soi et un principe de classification. Dès que nous lui donnons la première place parmi les faits de langage, nous introduisons un ordre naturel dans un ensemble, qui ne se prête à aucune autre classification (CLG, Chapitre III, §1. La langue ; sa définition).

As for the role of the point of abstraction for the determination of the object of linguistics, Saussure gave a clear, but often neglected answer: the viewpoint creates the object:

> Der Gegenstand ist keineswegs vor dem Gesichtspunkt dar, vielmehr ist es der Gesichtspunkt, der den Gegenstand schafft; überdies sagt uns nichts im vornherein, daß eine dieser Betrachtungsweisen den andern vorangeht oder ihnen übergeordnet ist (Wunderli 2013: 71).

> Bien loin que l'objet précède le point de vue, on dirait que c'est le point de vue qui crée l'objet, et d'ailleurs rien ne nous dit d'avance que l'une de ces manières de considérer le fait en question soit antérieure ou supérieure aux autres (CLG, Chapitre III, §1. La langue ; sa définition).

We can summarise so far that the characterisation of individual languages as an epiphenomenon does not mean their discreditation, but it only marks explicitly the research interest and the point of abstraction. In real research individual languages occupy an important place in generative grammar as well.

1.3. Explanations of individual languages as epiphenomena in earlier language theories

In the following I will examine if a definition of individual languages as epiphenomena appeared already in earlier eras of thought and if we should attribute continuity to this idea. For this, two preliminary remarks are necessary:

(1) First of all, I have to remark that the so-called spin-off of linguistics in the early 19th century does not represent a threshold for me. For the task of discovering the nature of language for itself, formulated by Jacob Grimm, „selbstständige entdeckungen zu machen und in die natur der sprachen um der sprache selbst willen vorzudringen" (Jäger 1993: 11), one could give earlier examples. Furthermore, from the standpoint of today, postulating an autonomous cognitive interest of linguistics might be regarded as a temporary phase of history.

(2) Second, if we are looking for explanations of individual languages as epiphenomena in earlier periods of thought about language, we have to proceed onomasiologically, that means we must not look for the teram *epiphenomenon*, but we have to search for conceptual relations and their development under different denominations and in texts.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, the diversity of languages was regarded as a proof of the idea, that their physical manifestation as a corporeal fact had nothing to do with the mental world of thought. Diversity of languages served as well as an argument, to put Cartesian dualism into doubt and to finally overcome it.

Statements like the one given by John Wilkins (1614–1672), that peoples would coincide in their concepts despite different forms of expression, show a possible exclusion of language differences which become the basis of the development of a universal language:

Though several Nations may differ in the Expression of Things, yet they all agree in the same Conceit of them (Wilkins [1641/1707] 1984: 58).

The innate principles, common to all humans, are the basis to which Johann Amos Comenius (1592–1670) traces back the rules of all individual languages whether they were Indian, Ethiopian or European. Compared to the universal method of all languages that Comenius wants to establish, the individual languages are epiphonomenal in their diversity**:**

Nam *Notionum innatarum syntagma,* utcunq; mansit integrum: nec ubi opinionum prava phantasmata rectificanda sunt, aliis ratiocinandi Regulis opus habet Indus, aut Æthiops, qvàm Europæus. *Sed cùm de Rebus loqvendum est, ùm in diversa abimus,* mille modis aliter atq; aliter easdem res exprimentibus his, illis, istis. *Qvæ Lingvæ varietas qvid fit, & unde, & qvanta,* si rationabiliter fuerimus contemplati, ad universalem Lingvarum Methodum vestigandam inde etiam momenti aliquid accedere posse spero (Comenius [1648] 1978: 29).

The common ground of all languages is traced back by Comenius to the fact that they were given to humanity as an instrument by god. As such an instrument they allow communication and the acquisition of other languages as well:

Habent tamen omnes Lingvæ aliqvid, qvô in commune prosint. Nempe Omnes Sapientiæ DEI organon sunt: & omnes hominibus usum qvem debent (unaqvæqve locô suô, pro modulo suo) præstant: & omnes deniqve sororibus cæteris aliqvid conferre possunt, qvantillum etiam illud sit. Puta ad melius rem hanc vel illam intelligendum; ad aptius nomen huic vel illi rei indendum: verbô, ad locupletandum & acuendum sese invicem: modò hominum industria non desit (Comenius [1648] 1978: 48).

The actual language of theoretical rationalism was not developed by Descartes, but already in the 17th century and still more in the century of Enlightentment several attempts were made to supply a complement to Descartes' doctrine in the theory of language. The authors of these attempts saw the action of a soul which does not depend on corporeal circumstances in different instances of actual communication between human beings, such as the invention of universal languages, the acquisition of a foreign language and in language acqisition by children.

Gérau(l)d de Cordemoy (1626–1684) can be considered as an author who elaborated such a linguistic complement to Descartes. Following Cordemoy the universal rules of grammar are already present in the language acquisition process of children in which the principles of reason manifest themselves in a simple and observable way. In the language acquisition process in which children learn their language, distinguishing meanings of words and arranging their thoughts, and behind all arbitrariness and contingency of circumstances one could discover the reason. This would deliver sufficient arguments for distinguishing between body and soul. On this basis, differences between languages are considered as unproblematic, because they constitute only the exterior, corporeal appearance, and not the nature of language, which subsists in reason and soul. Words are interchangeable, as soon as one has found the concepts named by them:

> Il n'est pas difficile maintenant de concevoir, pourquoy nous avons tant de facilité à apprendre une langue estrangere d'une personne qui la sçait, & qui sçait aussi la nostre: car alors nous pouvons nous enquerir aysément, du nom de chaque chose. Nous pouvons aussi par ce moyen apprendre plusieurs langues, estant manifeste qu'après avoir appris le mot qui signifie une chose en François, l'on peut apprendre encore par quels mots les Italiens, les Espagnols & d'autres Nations expriment cette chose: & ce qu'il y a de remarquable est, que quand nous sommes une fois convenus que plusieurs mots signifient une mesme chose, nous joignons si bien l'idée ou la pensée de cette chose à chacun de ces mots, que souvent nous nous souvenons tres-bien qu'on nous en a donné l'idée, sans nous souvenir duquel de tous ces mots on s'est servy; d'où vient, que quand on se trouve avec des personnes de differens Pays dont on sçait les langues, on retient aisément chaque nouvelle, & tout ce qui a esté dit sur les sujets dont on a parlé, sans pouvoir précisément se ressouvenir des mots ny de la langue dont on s'est servy, pour nous donner les idées qui nous en restent (Cordemoy [1668/1677] 1970: 60–62).

The rationalist-Augustinian tradition the *Grammaire générale et raisonnée* of Port-Royal (1660) offers another example of regarding language differences as epiphenomena. At the beginning of its second part we find Descartes' comparison of the mechanical use of language with the speech production of parrots. Arnauld and Lancelot give much more attention to the mental side of language than to the corporeal one. It is remarkable that they reduce the unlimited number of possibilities of expression to a very limited number of sounds,

of phonemes, we would say today. This production of an infinite quantity of utterances, using a finite number of sounds corresponds to the nature of man and to the independency of his action:

> Jusqu'ici, nous n'avons considéré dans la parole que ce qu'elle a de matériel, et qui est commun, au moins pour le son, aux hommes et aux perroquets.

> Il nous reste à examiner ce qu'elle a de spirituel, qui fait l'un des plus grands avantages de l'homme au-dessus de tous les autres animaux, et qui est une des plus grandes preuves de la raison: c'est l'usage que nous en faisons pour signifier nos pensées, et cette invention merveilleuse de composer de vingt-cinq ou trente sons cette infinie variété de mots, qui, n'ayant rien de semblable en eux-mêmes à ce qui se passe dans notre esprit, ne laissant pas d'en découvrir aux autres tout le secret, et de faire entendre à ceux qui n'y peuvent pénétrer, tout ce que nous concevons, et tous les divers mouvements de notre âme.

> Ainsi l'on peut définir les mots, des sons distincts et articulés, dont les hommes ont fait des signes pour signifier leurs pensées (Arnauld / Lancelot (1969 [1660]: 22).

The concept of economy of elements and of their organisational levels seems to have accompanied the development of theories of language which oppose a natural, mental principle, determined by reason, to the arbitrary forms of expression, already in very early occurrences.

It would be possible to enumerate more examples of the removal of differences between languages into the domain of epiphenomena. César Chesneau Du Marsais (1676–1756), for example, in his encyclopedia article on construction mentions various differences between languages, but then he traces them back to the function of representation common to all words and to their relations:

> Il est vrai qu'il y a des différences dans les langues; différence dans le vocabulaire ou la nomenclature qui énonce les noms des objets & ceux de leurs qualificatifs; différence dans les terminaisons qui sont les signes de l'ordre successif des correlatifs; différence dans l'usage des métaphores, dans les idiotismes, & dans les tours de la *construction usuelle*: mais il y a uniformité en ce que par-tout la pensée qui est à énoncer est divisée par les mots qui en représentent les parties, & que ces parties ont des signes de leur relation. (*Encyclopédie*, Artikel *Construction*, Du Marsais 1754: IV, 75).

For Charles De Brosses (1709–1777) the common ground of all languages goes back to their common origin, which remains recognizable despite the apparently very dissimilar shapes and histories of the different languages:

> Que les choses étant ainsi, il existe une langue primitive, organique, physique & nécessaire, commune à tout le genre humain, qu'aucun peuple au monde ne connoît ni ne pratique dans sa premiere simplicité; que tous les hommes parlent néanmoins, & qui fait le premier fond du langage de tous les pays: fond que l'appareil immense des accessoires dont il n'est chargé laisse à peine appercevoir. […] Que néanmoins toutes les routes, malgré la diversité de leur tendance apparente, ramenent toujours enfin, en revenant sur ses pas, au point commun dont elles se sont si fort écartées (De Brosses 1765: I, xv-xvji).

James Beattie (1735–1803) assigns the tasks of collecting the specificities of individual languages to their grammars and vocabularies, while he raises the description of the *commonalities* to the object of a science, called *Universal* or *Philosophical Grammar*.

> […] therefore, resemble men in this respect, that, though each has peculiarities, whereby it is distinguished from every other, yet all have certain qualities in common. The peculiarities of individual tongues are explained in their respective grammars and dictionaries. Those things, that all languages have in common, or that are necessary to every language, are treated of in a science, which some have called *Universal* or *Philosophical Grammar;* whereof I shall now endeavour to unfold the principles. The knowledge of it will not only illustrate what we may already have learned of the grammatical art; but also, by tracing that matter to its first elements, will give us more comprehensive views of it than can be obtained from any particular grammar; and at the same time make us better judges of the nature and extent of human language, and of the connection, that obtains between our words and thoughts (Beattie [1788] 1968: 105–106).

Whereas Beattie sees and recognizes the large differences in the individual languages on the level of sound, he assigns the commonalities to the mental part constituted by the meanings and the use of language:

> The words of different languages differ greatly in sound. Nay, in this respect two languages may be so unlike, that the most perfect knowlege of the one would not

enable us to understand a single word of the other. If, therefore, all languages have some things in common, those things must be sought for, not in the *sound* of the words, but in their *signification* and *use* (Beattie [1788] 1968: 125).

An outstanding example of the separation of general and particular grammar is Nicolas Beauzée (1717–1789), who regarded general grammar as a *science* and relegated the grammars of particular languages to the domain of *art*, regarding them as inessential for a scientific consideration of language.

The existence of general basic principles is deduced by Beauzée, among other reasons, from the fact that people would not be able to communicate among each other without them. He was able to determine the nature of the universal basis of language as mental and obligatory, while he assigned a hypothetical and contingent character to the principles of particular individual languages. General grammar is therefore prior to the individual languages and their arbitrary conventions. It is a science because its object is the immutable and generally valid basic principles, whereas the grammars of particular languages have only to apply these principles to particular languages. Without the guidance and the principles given by general grammar, the grammar of particular languages would not be able to come to reliable statements:

> La Grammaire admet donc deux sortes de principes. Les uns sont d'une verité immuable & d'un usage universel; ils tiennent à la nature de la pensee même; ils en suivent l'analyse; ils n'en sont que le résultat. Les autres n'ont qu'une vérité hypothétique & dépendante de conventions libres & muables, & ne sont d'usage que chez les peuples qui les ont adoptés librement, sans perdre le droit de les changer ou de les abandonner, quand il plaira à l'usage de les modifier ou de les proscrire. Les premiers constituent la Grammaire générale, les autres sont l'objet des diverses Grammaires particulieres. La Grammaire générale est donc la science raisonnée des principes immuables & généraux de la parole prononcée ou écrite dans toutes les langues. Une Grammaire particuliere est l'art d'appliquer aux principes immuables & généraux de la parole prononcée ou écrite, les institutions arbitraires & usuelles d'une langue particuliere. La Grammaire générale est une science, parce qu'elle n'a pour objet que la spéculation raisonnée des principes immuables & généraux de la parole: une Grammaire particuliere est un art, parce qu'elle envisage l'application pratique des institutions arbitraires & usuelles d'une langue particuliere aux principes généraux de la parole (*voyez* ART). La science grammaticale est antérieure à toutes les langues, parce que ses

principes sont d'une vérité éternelle, & qu'ils ne supposent que la possibilité des langues: l'art grammatical au contraire est postérieur aux langues, parce que les usages des langues doivent exister avant qu'on les rapporte artificiellement aux principes généraux. Malgré cette distinction de la science grammaticale & de l'art grammatical, nous ne prétendons pas insinuer que l'on doive ou que l'on puisse même en séparer l'étude. L'art ne peut donner aucune certitude à la pratique, s'il n'est éclairé & dirigé par les lumieres de la spéculation; la science ne peut donner aucune consistance à la théorie, si elle n'observe les usages combinés & les pratiques différentes, pour s'élever par degrés jusqu'à la généralisation des principes. Mais il n'en est pas moins raisonnable de distinguer l'un de l'autre, d'assigner à l'un & à l'autre son objet propre, de prescrire leurs bornes respectives, & de déterminer leurs différences (*Encyclopédie*, article *Grammaire*, Beauzée 1757: VII, 841–842).

The example of Beauzée shows clearly that the individual properties of language are given a subordinate place in rationalistic general grammar and that they are regarded as an epiphenomenon. Despite this, even Beauzée himself assigns only a relative signification to the separation of *science* and *art*, as far as he regarded their objects as different, but considered a cooperation of both kinds of grammar as possible and expedient.

Already at the beginning the establishment of a universal grammar was seen as problematic and provoked many critiques. One of these critiques should be mentioned: Dieudonné Thiébault (1733–1807) asked in 1802 "Do we really have a philosohical grammar", and he gave his answer immediately: certainly not, and what concerns the general grammars, we shall never have one which deserves this name. The reason for this estimation is seen in the impossibility to compare all languages and to reduce them to the same principles. Besides this, such a comparison would be impossible because nobody could know all languages:

[…] mais avons-nous une Grammaire vraiment *philosophique*? on peut assurer que non; et quant aux Grammaires *générales*, on peut affirmer que même nous n'en aurons jamais qui soient parfaitement dignes de ce nom: car comment tracer un code qui devienne celui de toutes les langues? comment rattacher les usages de toutes les langues aux mêmes principes? Et si la chose n'étoit pas impossible, quel homme seroit assez savant pour l'entreprendre et n'y pas échouer? (Thiébault [1802] 1977: I, 5)

Obviously Thiébault was not ready to consider the diversity of languages as an epiphenomenon. Even the rationalistic assumption of a universal mental basis of all languages which could be postulated as a universal grammar, was no longer accepted in the 18th century. But we can conclude that there were early relegations of properties of individual languages to the domain of an epiphenomenon of grammar, to the domain of an art and not a science. These relegations from a certain point of abstraction did advance theories of language, even though they took a point of abstraction that did not correspond to the complexity of language.

Selective bibliography

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Nota do editor: articulista convidado. Excepcionalmente, manteve-se a formatação original das referências.