HUNGARIAN LINGUISTICS IN A GENERAL DISCOURSE

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If one has only a few pages to summarize the contribution of Hungarian linguistics to scholarship, the most fruitful way to accomplish the task would perhaps be to give a taxonomic overview, starting with Gramatica Hvngarolatina of János Sylvester (1539), continuing with the other grammars first in the seventeenth century (see the works by Albert Szenci Molnár 1610; István Geleji Katona 1645, György Komáromi Csipkés 1655; Pál Pereszlényi 1682; Pál Kövesdi 1686), then with a new wave of grammars from the end of the eighteenth century (cf. Sámuel Gyarmathy 1794; Debreceni grammatika 1795; Miklós Révai 1803–6; the works of Ferenc Verseghy 1821, József Kassai, András Vályi etc), proceeding with the start of Hungarian comparative linguistics (Sajnovics, Gyarmathy), with the beginnings of academic researches in the 1830s, then with the formation of professional linguistics from the 1860s (including names such as Budenz, Simonyi, Brassai), with a modernization period between the two world wars (revealed by the works of Gombocz, Laziczius, Lotz), with a centralized period after 1949 with growing Saussurean conservativism (developed in the so called Budapest school of Pais and Bárczi), and finishing with another period of modernization from the 1960s, based on American structuralism and later transformational generative grammar, and the beginnings of Hungarian text linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, pragmatics. One should only enumerate the best linguists, the most important works from period to period, the several branches of linguistics studied, and the most obvious contacts with other linguistics. Everybody would get a clear picture of that contribution.

Nevertheless the case is a bit more complicated, and that clarity would be a simplified one. First, the theme or concept of contribution has a historical character. Therefore I have to speak about processes, about facts in those processes (i. e. in history) that are connected here with one central concept, namely contribution. History cannot be seen in itself, but in description it is immediately connected with a conceptual web, and so description of history is based on the relation of facts and concepts, and one cannot speak about history without making somehow clear the most important concepts (as R. Koselleck gave a theoretical frame for this question already in his early works; cf. 1979: 349).

Contribution to scholarship has a general discourse character within history. I use this category in the way Michel Foucault discussed it (Foucault 1971). Dis-

course means interaction, talk through time and space, so in our case a talk about language with a teleology to approach language as much as possible. Even at this first stage we have to face further questions. How can or must one approach language: from the standpoint of specific languages or of universal grammar, from a historical or a descriptive view, in the frame of an autonomous syntax or in a more complex, pragmatic one. But this dilemma is only one of many. According to Foucault the other characteristic of discourse is its institution-like feature. Every discourse has a kind of order, and this institutionalized order makes the decisions how and under what conditions to take part in a discourse. (This idea is relatively close to the theory of T. Kuhn.)

When talking about the contribution of Hungarian linguistics to scholarship, in the next step I have the task of giving an approximate definition of the scope of interest, in other words what belongs to Hungarian and what belongs to linguistics.

Although the general discourse of linguistics (or the discourse of science) gives a relatively stiff frame to describe Hungarian linguistics, the two above mentioned categories can also be seen in another way. And that is the first point where I can show the open-ended, fuzzy nature of the question set here. Hungarian means ethnicity on one hand, and it means language on the other hand. There have been Hungarian linguists, who have dealt with Iranian, Turkic, Germanic, and Slavic languages or with classical Greek and Latin (e.g. János Harmatta, Lajos Ligeti, Miklós Hutterer, István Kniezsa, Károly Marót), as well as Finno-ugric studies (cf. the works of György Lakó, Péter Hajdú) or whose scope of interest concentrated on the general questions of linguistics (e.g. János S. Petőfi, Edit Moravcsik). They all have been respected and often cited scholars, though in some of their works there has not been a single word about the Hungarian language or linguistics. And there have been all those linguists who have always dealt with Hungarian language as linguists (from János Sylvester to the latest generation). In the present overview I will take the wider frame; I do not want to draw a narrow and strict borderline.

The next question I want to consider is the scope of linguistics itself. Again I have to take this domain of the question in the broad sense, so for example stylistics, text linguistics or sociolinguistics belong to linguistics as well as syntax or semantics. This decision is not based on some kind of power politics of one particular tendency but on the linguistic considerations achieved during the last few decades in such work as in the phonetics of Iván Fónagy (e. g. Fónagy 1963), in the text model of János S. Petőfi (e.g. Petőfi 1978) or — to mention non Hungarians — in general pragmatics, in the functional grammar of M. A. K. Halliday (1978) and in the holistic type of cognitive grammar (by Talmy Givón, Ronald Langacker etc.). Nevertheless because of restricted space my examples will refer mainly to those works and trends that have formed the grammar writing of Hungarian language.

Let us return now to the discourse of linguistics. This order gives us a canonized history of the discipline from the classical ages. Since we can talk about

Hungarian approaches to language from the sixteenth century, now I will follow this linear sequence from that time forward, and after demonstrating this compact history I will return to the question of the main characterestics of its structure. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Hungarian approaches to language can be considered a first step toward descriptive grammar writing, the patterns of which were Latin European school grammars. Not only the grammatical pattern was Latin, but also the general setting of these grammars had its origins in the Middle Ages. Language as a divine or natural phenomenon was set in a linear history and interpreted in the manner of the chronicles. The first such grammatical works concerning Hungarian were written in Latin and also started out of Latin, i. e. Sylvester's grammar (1539) was written as a Latin grammar and the parallel Hungarian forms were given to that system. The grammar (1610) and dictionary (1604) of Albert Szenci Molnár were also based on and written in Latin. This kind of early language description contributed to linguistics mainly through the information about the Hungarian language available in the volumes published. As these works followed the system of Latin grammars, they were highly understandable for those not of Hungarian origin. So for a general discourse of linguistics this method resulted also in a certain distortion of the language described.

So even by that time the discourse order of Hungarian scholarship dealing with language was devided into two main directions and these directions were not completely in balance. From the point of view of Hungarian language research I can call one of the directions the import direction and the other one the export direction. The discourse order of linguistics made the import direction a substantial one that gave the theoretical frames, the major categories and methodology; and the export direction provided data about Hungarian language in those frames. The non-balance of import-export relations in linguistics have remained a major question in Hungarian linguistics and in *geisteswissenschaftliche* studies in general. And as we will see it in the following paragraphs, this type of parficipation in the discourse of linguistics has not (or not always) been a result of the lack of originality, but was due to other phenomena.

Continuing the historical overview, I can refer to the canonized history of European and American history from the eighteenth century. If we accept the interpretation of the major trends of general linguistics in the following linear sequence: comparative linguistics → nineteenth-century historical linguistics and language typology → new grammarians → structuralism (with the schools of Saussure, the Prague Circle, Hjelmslev, Bloomfield and Harris) → generative grammar, then we can get a certain picture of the import-export relations of Hungarian linguistics in general. In comparative linguistics the Hungarian contribution was a major one. After some earlier attempts János Sajnovics published his book with the first proofs of Hungarian–Finno-ugric (Hungarian–Lappish) linguistic affinity (Sajnovics 1770); then Sámuel Gyarmathy's work appeared (Gyarmathy 1799). Both linguistic works seem to be the first ones in the history

of comparative linguistics, therefore their contribution includes not only provid-
ing data but also the foundation of comparative methodology and theory at the
same time. As the first really important contribution, this episode raises also
questions. These works were written in Latin, so they were understandable for
scholars at least in Europe; and they certainly had some effect, but not as much
as one would expect. Nevertheless at that time Hungarian contribution to general
linguistics was balanced.

On the other hand the slow exploration of the Finno-ugric language family,
the need for the standard variety and the new interpretation of the concept of
Hungarian language community and nation led to a different kind of linguistics at
the end of the eighteenth century. Since the concept of history was changing too,
the whole question appeared as the history of the community in the reflexive
mind. The concept of history was considered to contain the unity of the sphere of
mind and the sphere of acts (Koselleck 1979, 130). In this respect Hungarian
linguistics was producing Hungarian grammars in great number from the mid
1790s until the first academic grammar in 1846 (Gyarmathy 1974, Debreceni
grammatika 1795, Révai 1803–6, Kassai 1817, Verseghy 1821 etc.) documentat-
ing the codification process of standard Hungarian. These grammars had a main
descriptive part and an even more important preface, an introductory chapter
that explained the relation between language (which meant grammar) and lan-
guage community. These prefaces refused every foreign pattern in the codified
language itself, but not of course in the descriptive methodology. Due to the in-
fluence of Herder and Humboldt *Sprachgeist* became the most important notion
in the overall idea of language; and because in this theory every language had its
own special form, its own special spirit, the Hungarian contribution meant the
explication of the special Hungarian component among the world's languages. So
in the age of comparative linguistics Hungarian research concentrated on de-
scriptive and prescriptive work. On the other hand the aesthetical views of Ka-
zinczy emphasized the importance of discourse both in practical and theoretical
questions of language and he himself provided the best example (cf. Kazinczy
1819, Teleki 1821).

This was the first time when Hungarian grammarians wanted to describe
Hungarian in its own terms in a teleological act for the comminuty. So they
turned inwards, though always in some kind of discourse with European linguis-
tics, which was not a purely descriptive science at the time, but a discipline led by
linguistic ideals (see the works of the authors of the French Encyclopedia, Herder,
Humboldt, Gottsched, Adelung, Jenisch). The Hungarian contribution was be-
coming somewhat latent because as a substantial part of the question of language
at that time, the most important works were written in the Hungarian language.
The earlier works of Miklós Révai and Ferenc Verseghy had still been in Latin;
and this fact had been building an obstacle between the two participants in the
language discourse. From that time on the rare knowledge of Hungarian among

foreigners has become a central difficulty in communicating new achievements. However the example of Farkas Kempelen shows that initiating ideas about language in general and phonetics in particular could be mediated effectively (see Kempelen 1791).

In the second half of the nineteenth century, when the romantic comparative linguistics was turned into a positivist comparative and historical linguistics (united in the new grammarian school), Hungarian linguistics continued to approach language in the frame of community viewed through its own history. Enormous efforts were taken to gather as much linguistic data as possible for the history, the descriptive grammar, and the varieties (i. e. rural dialects) of Hungarian. However, the positivist philosophical background had only a restricted effect on Hungarian linguistics. The preeminent role of grammatical rules and the importance of data and philological evidence were accepted and built in to the methodology; but the strongly evaluating language typology of Steinthal, Müller, Schleicher and others, which were based on the theory of Darwin and Spencer, was rejected because in this general typology Hungarian as an agglutinative language received only a middle position. And although Zsigmond Simonyi wrote an article discussing the whole idea, and it was published in Hungarian (Simonyi 1889a), it did not achieve its purpose.

While European linguistics considered itself a positive science (i. e. part of the natural sciences), Hungarian linguistics was positivistic only in part; while European language typology accepted the interpretation system of Spencer or Taine, Hungarian linguists tried to modernize the idea of historical community and its language. Zsigmond Simonyi, the greatest Hungarian linguist at the end of the nineteenth century, published excellent and extensive volumes on Hungarian grammar (especially on morphology and syntax) from both the historical and the descriptive aspects of the problem; and instead of applying determinist theories he tried in a heroic effort to unite the idea of historical (ethnical) community and its traditional language with the literary standard, the *Gemeinsprache* of Hermann Paul. Since this view of language and community came from the features of Hungarian history and from the linguistic ideal that was still alive, it could be mediated (exported) only with difficulty. One of his main works, *A magyar nyelv* (1889b) [The Hungarian Language] was published also in German (*Die ungarische Sprache,* 1907), but it could be understood rather in the parts detailing Hungarian grammar.

Therefore the discourse was relatively one-sided during this period. The European influence was quite strong, although it was transformed, but despite new results in Hungarian linguistics the world took little notice. The example of Sámuel Brassai clearly illuminates this situation. He worked out the first version of functional sentence perspective – for Hungarian and a general perspective as well – before Gabelentz (Brassai 1863–65), but he had little effect on linguistics in Europe because outside Hungary few could read his works, and in Hungary

the discourse proved to be too strong in maintaining the traditional subject—predicate structure in the sentence. Later he discussed Gabelentz's ideas in a profound study, again in Hungarian, but without much effect (Brassai 1885).

With the appearance of Saussure the position of Hungarian linguistics in the general discourse has also changed. European and American linguistics turned toward another direction of the "positive" sciences: instead of a historical basis scholars started to build on formal logic (and behaviorist psychology) and restricted the scope of linguistics to formal phonology, morphology and syntax (as Saussure himself, Hjelmslev and Bloomfield had done). It was a major choice between different philosophical backgrounds: between the semiotic systems of Saussure and Pierce and the Cartesian and hermeneutic theories. As a result of an earlier choice in the eighteenth century when language was to be considered a mere instrument of mediation (cf. Foucault 1966) the former proved more viable. The heritage of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rationalism became alive once more. Language became an object totally independent of the speaking man, his community and its historical character, first in Saussure's *langue*, later from the 1960s in computer analogy. Hungarian academic linguistics recognized only in part the significance of this turn. The main field of research in the period between the two world wars was the history of language, mainly etymology, the history of soundsystem and morphology. However, the historical grammar of Imre Antal Klemm was a considerable achievement for descriptive linguistics as well (Klemm 1928, 1940, 1942). Nevertheless most of the planned projects remained in fragments. The unfinished character of historical works and the new geopolitical situation created by the Paris treaties after World War I put a psychological burden on Hungarian linguistics to produce the important syntheses of the history of Hungarian language, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century language ideal. But this work was completed only in the works of Dezső Pais and Géza Bárczi in the 1950s and 1960s and led to a certain isolation, a partial decline of linguistic exchange (Pais 1953, Bárczi 1963).

In the interwar period we can note individual achievements, revealing the particular twentieth-century character of Hungarian linguistics. Those who took part in the general discourse were actually not in central positions in Hungarian linguistics and thus their influence was stronger abroad than in Hungarian linguistics itself. Perhaps Zoltán Gombocz was the exception. He was accepted at home as a historian of language, but his papers on linguistic theories, on Saussure and others (especially in the last period of his life) did not get sufficient attention or response in Hungarian linguistics. Nevertheless he was one of the better informed linguists of his time, well-cited by his foreign contemporary colleagues. His *Jelentéstan* [Semantics] published at Pécs, in 1926 was cited by Stephen Ullmann. Until now it had not been understood that Gombocz wanted to give a new synthesis of structuralism and the traditional view of language, a synthesis of autonomous descriptive syntax and historical processes, a synthesis of

language and its sociocultural background — a project of anthropologically based linguistics (cf. the works of Dell Hymes) from the seventies and cognitive grammar from the eighties.

Gyula Laziczius with his *Fonétika* [Phonetics] of 1944 and *Általános nyelvészet* [General linguistics] in 1942 represented another significant but short chapter in the history of Hungarian linguistics. He had a great influence among his young contemporaries before 1945 in giving a new, modern direction to Hungarian linguistics by introducing structuralism (together with the late Gombocz and the young Lotz), but after this short period he was "forgotten" for ay leats two decades. János Lotz published a Hungarian grammar written in German in 1939. Full of ingenious ideas, it created the first structuralist descriptive grammar of Hungarian; but again it did not have much influence on Hungarian linguistics, especially on academic linguistics. This grammar is employed even today as the most usable one on Hungarian in a foreign language. Although his influence and contribution on Hungarian language was great abroad, his next volume of selected papers was published in Hungary only in 1976. Lotz was the first of those linguists living partly or mainly abroad who were forced to break contacts with linguists at home, at least on the official level. Naturally this political intervention damaged the conditions of scientific discourse.

After 1949 the situation of Hungarian linguistics changed once more, this time radically. Total centralization and total isolation was introduced. Inner linguistic discourse was centred around the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and at the same time nearly every connection with western linguistics was broken. This political and ideological intervention resulted in the conservation of the just adopted Saussurean structuralism mixed with some remains of new grammarian theory. And we can assert that while Hungarian linguistics (in the stricter sense, i. e. dealing with the Hungarian language itself) produced much more general works (a descriptive grammar, cf. Tompa, ed., 1961–62; a dictionary, cf. Bárczi and Országh, eds, 1959–1962; an etymological dictionary, cf. Benkő, ed., 1967, 1970, 1976; a universtiy grammar, cf. Rácz, ed., 1968; a semantics, cf. Károly 1970; a linguistic atlas, and monographs on standard Hungarian, cf. Pais 1953, Benkő 1960; monographs on Hungarian historical syntax, cf. Benkő, ed., 1991, Benkő, ed., 1992) than ever before, in this process it was withdrawing from general discourse concerning theory, methodology, and terminology. Therefore Hungarian and general discourse on language started to diverge. The data gathered and treated by academic linguistics could not enter into general discourse, because it was processed in another language and theory. This was a time when a considerable part of Hungarian linguists were used to one particular way of discourse. Ideas and theories came from outside; and therefore these ideas were considered foreign ones and largely refused. On the other hand scholars of Slavic, Finno-ugric, Roman, Greek, Turkic and Oriental studies took part in international discourse to an extent never seen before.

Beginning with the 1960s there emerged a slow change. When László Antal, Zsigmond Telegdi, György Szépe, László Dezső, Ilona Molnár and others introduced formal linguistic methodology and when the first papers were published on generative grammar (cf. Antal 1964, Szépe 1969, Telegdi 1977 and the volumes of *Általános Nyelvészeti Tanulmányok*) a new period began. Although again the adaptation proved to be strong and the special Hungarian contribution weaker, a discourse started again with linguistics in general.

This was also the period of emigrant linguists. Some of those who could not stay at home became the most well-known Hungarian linguists in the 1960s and 1970s. In compeletely different fields: Thomas A. Sebeok (semiotics), Iván Fónagy (phonetics), Gyula Décsy and Denis Sinor (Finno-ugristics, Orientalistics), János S. Petőfi (text linguistics), Edit Moravcsik (language universals), István Fodor (languages of the world), Ádám Makkai (functional grammar), Susan Gal (bilingualism) made important contributions. As their achievements have been individual ones, mainly independent from Hungarian academic lingusitics, they have hardly become part of Hungarian discourse on language. It became possible chiefly with Hungarian translations or Hungarian originals only beginning with the 1970s (as in the example of Sebeok or Petőfi; Iván Fónagy was perhaps the only one who published his influential works parallel in Hungarian and in French, German or English).

This situation was changed when Ferenc Kiefer, who had studied under Chomsky, returned to Hungary after several years abroad. He was the first linguist after 1945 who was accepted and became well-known among western linguists and returned back to Hungary to establish closer links in at least in one important area, generative grammar, between Hungarian, European, and American linguistics. Although generative research parallel to structuralist approaches started already in the 1960s on Hungarian grammar, the first serious results appeared at the beginning of the 1980s and the significant ones only emerged in the 1990s (cf. Kiefer, ed., 1982, Kiefer, ed., 1992, Kiefer, ed., 1994, Kenesei ed., 1985, 1987, 1990). The direct participation of the generative school in general discourse has been the strongest in the last decades and in complete synchrony with the prevailing main stream of transformational generative grammar. Interestingly enough one of the most successful contributions to that kind of language description is the work of Katalin É. Kiss (1981), who united the generative conceptual framework with the functional sentence perspective of Brassai, modelling Hungarian sentence in a unique way, and giving new and langauge specific contribution to the general theory.

The Hungarian generative school showed the possibility of direct contribution to the general discourse. New achievements in psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics has begun to be the part of general discourse in the 1980s, while text linguistics has only started to demonstrate the Hungarian specialities, and stylistics is in the process of modernization. By the end of that decade new trends (especially cognitive

linguistics) have appeared in many fields in Hungarian linguistics from English to German or Slavic syntax; (cf. the works of Zoltán Kövecses and András Kertész), and also in Hungarian grammar. For the new generation participation in general discourse is a more natural phenomenon than for their predecessors. However, it has to be emphasized that the quantity and quality of citation of Hungarian linguistics in internationally used handbooks and monographs (e. g. in the Cambridge textbooks, in recent handbooks) is far from sufficient.

In a very concise way and leaving many schools and persons unmentioned the history of Hungarian contributions to the general linguistic discourse was presented here as a linear one, according to the canonized history of linguistics. Looking over this history once more we can recognize that it was not linear at all. The history of Hungarian linguistics and therefore its contribution to general scholarship is full of discontinuities, corrections and resumptions, which were due partly to the failure of Hungarian linguists to mediate their achievements in describing their mother tongue, and due partly to external political and ideological circumstances. Our hope is that the positive period starting about ten or fifteen years ago will last for a longer time than any previous one.

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