
[65] ***Two linguistic approaches clashing: The first (true) metatheoretical debate in Finnish linguistics***

Markus Hamunen (University of Helsinki).

At the beginning of 1940s Finnish and Finno-Ugric linguistics were somewhat monolithic. Most of the scholarly work was published within historical linguistics. The paradigm was set out by Setälä (1891), which was a powerful exemplar. E. N. Setälä (1864–1935) was indispensable authority who built linguistic school in Finland with the neogrammarian method and the ory (Korhonen 1986: 141–144.) Despite the fresh air neogrammarian influence gave to Finnish linguistics at the beginning of 20th century, during 1920–30s, it gradually became evident that work on mainly history of sounds had created a somewhat biased discipline. Setälä’s school was a strong paradigm whose orthodoxy prevented studies in syntax, semantics, morphology and synchronic theoretical linguistics. Explicitly, modern trends in general linguistics reached Finland slowly and many times not without clashes (Hovdhaugen, Karlsson, Henriksen & Sigurd 2000: 337). One of the most severe debate took place at 1940s between Paavo Siro (1909–1996, PhD 1950) and Paavo Rivila (1902–1974, PhD 1932). Siro started his linguistic career in field linguistics. The scholarly role reserved to him was an expert of Mari. However, already early at his studies, he realized that the descriptive syntax of Finnish, established by

Setälä, needs reform. He familiarized himself with modern logic by Ajdukiewicz (1935) and began to plan formal description of Finnish syntax. Rivila, professor of Finnish and FennoUgric languages and historical linguist, saw many difficulties in Siro’s enterprise. Siro and Rivila had a profound debate in the journal *Virittäjä* 1944–45. The apparent topic was syntactic formalization. Nevertheless, their discussion widened to issues like empiricism, language usage and time, linguistic intuition, principles of formalization, langue and parole, etc. Ultimately, they reached questions like “what is language” and “where our knowledge of language is based on” from different angles. The debate represents still relevant metatheoretical discussion having remarkable notions some 25 years after de Saussure and 20 years before Chomsky (Anttila & Itkonen 1976: 13). This paper gives a metatheoretically relevant outline of this debate.

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