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Can Linguistics and Historiography of Linguistics Profit from Each Other?

Nowadays, the gap between linguists and historiographers of linguistics seems to be getting wider and wider. Most of the former do not show any interest in the history of linguistics, viewing it as immaterial to their own scientific concerns; on the other hand, many of the latter only deal with past scholars or theories, without showing any interest in the current problems of the field. I think that both attitudes (which are not without exceptions, of course) are wrong: today's linguists can profit from the research carried out in the past (more or less recent), and a knowledge of contemporary linguistics may be helpful, if not necessary, to the historiographers of the discipline. I will offer support for these claims by means of two case studies, which aim at showing how theoretical linguistics and historiography of linguistics can profit from each other, to avoid misunderstandings and shortcomings, even in their respective fields.

The first case study concerns the notion of predication: it has been referred to in several recent works, but a glance at its history easily shows that these works somewhat misrepresent it. The second deals with Immediate Constituent Analysis, which, according to some scholars, dates back to long before Bloomfield: this conclusion was drawn by implicitly equating 'constituent' with 'word group', while the two concepts actually differ, as I will try to show.

This discussion almost unavoidably leads to the issue of 'paradigm' in Kuhn's sense: to what extent are scientific (in our case, linguistic) notions worked out in different epochs and conceptual frameworks comparable (if they can be compared at all)? My opinion is that they can be compared, but only with some epistemological distinctions, which I will try to illustrate and motivate.