

*Linguistic historiography: a survey with
particular reference to French Linguistics at the
turn of the century*¹

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I INTRODUCTION

A growing interest in both the history and the historiography of linguistics has in recent times been seen by many as an indication of the discipline's increasing maturity, despite the fact that in the opening sentence of his recent book (1998), Seuren laments the still insufficient volume of scholarship in this area. There was a boom in the publishing of histories of linguistics in the 1960s and early 1970s: the beginnings of a critical historiography were established, and journals and professional associations were founded. The 1990s saw a new wave of activity: apart from a plethora of edited volumes, several histories appeared and to the now established journals (*Historiographia Linguistica*, *Histoire-Epistémologie-Langage*) has been added another (*Beiträge zur Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft*, started in 1991). Among the histories are one-volume publications by Koerner and Asher (eds.) (1995), Malmberg (1991), Swiggers (1997) and Seuren (1998), as well as multi-volume editions: Lepschy (ed.) which appeared first in Italian (vol. 1 in 1990), then in English (vol. 1 in 1994), Auroux, vol. 1 in 1989, and Schmitter (1987), which is the first of a planned eight-volume series in German. A trilingual volume is scheduled to start appearing (Koerner, Auroux, Niederehe and Versteegh (eds.), in preparation). In all this, there have been many 'persistent questions' (to use a phrase from Koerner, 1995), but there have also been some shifts of emphasis. Unavoidably selective, this article will attempt to survey more recent work, referring back to older work for certain key points only (for earlier work, see Koerner, 1978b; Ayres-Bennett, 1987; Swiggers, 1987). As certain questions tend to recur, concerning, for example, the chronological versus the thematic, the descriptive versus the theoretical, or breadth versus depth of coverage, I shall try to characterise briefly a number of recent approaches, before examining certain key issues in greater detail. Finally, I shall look at two examples from the founding period of contemporary linguistics in France.

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2 RECENT WORK

2.1 *Multi-volume histories*

Lepschy, in his introduction, makes it clear that the aim of his volumes is to ensure that specialists in each area use primary sources to ‘reconstruct and illustrate different epochs and traditions within their own context’. The coverage is extensive, beginning with non-European traditions, and coming right up to the twentieth century (the Italian edition is complete, but the twentieth century has yet to appear in the English version). Each volume is rich in detail; the core of linguistic work throughout the ages is well documented, although there are certain sections in which the ‘contexts’ may be felt to be less than fully dealt with. The attention paid to both breadth and depth leaves no place for a lengthy debate about historiographical method, the editor’s belief being that ‘it is possible to offer useful contributions on the history of linguistics, without dealing in the first instance with the theory of historiography’ (Lepschy, 1998: xvii).

Auroux (1989), on the other hand, is highly selective, setting out in a brisk introduction the standpoint from which his three volumes are to proceed. Although they appear in chronological order, the predominant structuring is thematic. Thus, the first volume, which takes as its theme the creation of a metalanguage, looks at traditions outside Europe, the second (1992) volume looks at the *grammatisation* of languages (first European, then others) and the third volume (2000) deals with *comparativisme*. In very general terms, this approach could be characterised as intellectual history, although it has its own particular focus on issues relating to the history of technological change and cultural diffusion. Claiming that the nineteenth-century European view of linguistics as a ‘science’ is probably ‘*en voie de disparaître*’, the editor aims to avoid both teleological explanation and ethnocentricity. The volumes are guided by two sets of questions (‘*sous quelles formes se constitue dans le temps le savoir linguistique?*’; ‘*comment ces formes se créent-elles, évoluent-elles, se transforment-elles ou disparaissent-elles?*’) and three principles (‘*une définition purement phénoménologique de l’objet*’, ‘*une neutralité épistémologique*’, ‘*un historicisme modéré*’). There are elements of both *histoire externe* and *histoire interne*. In the introduction to the second volume (1992), Auroux substantiates the claim that the Renaissance revolution in the natural sciences was only possible because it was preceded by la *grammatisation massive* which he characterises as the second *révolution technico-linguistique* (the first of course being writing): ‘...sans la seconde révolution technico-linguistique, les sciences modernes de la nature n’auraient été possibles ni dans leur origine, ni dans leurs conséquences sociales’ (Auroux, 1992:12), an idea which is further developed in Auroux, 1994. Another example of the way in which these volumes attempt to reorientate linguistic history away from the ‘merely’ chronological, and to highlight central theoretical and epistemological issues,

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is the article by Brekle on popular conceptions of language, strategically located in second place in volume one. (In order to avoid a narrowly nineteenth/twentieth-century conception of things, the editor has stated in the preface to the first volume that the noun *la linguistique* will be avoided, and only the adjective will be used, as in the overall title; however, this vow does not last beyond the next chapter which advocates the recognition of 'la linguistique populaire' within the discipline of linguistics.) Brekle defines 'popular – or folk – linguistics' as '*l'expression naturelle* (c'est-à-dire qui ne viennent pas des représentations de la linguistique comme discipline établie) désignant ou se référant à des phénomènes langagiers ou fonctionnant au niveau de la communication' (Auroux, 1989:39). While this chapter goes little beyond the manifesto stage, it can be seen that Auroux's history has the merit of raising important issues which are not often broached in histories of linguistics.

2.2 *Other works*

Of the one-volume histories, Malmberg (1991) is the most inclusive, attempting to cover the major and enduring aspects of the study of language from China to early twentieth-century Europe and America, and considering the history of linguistics as belonging to the history of philosophy. Swiggers (1997) restricts the scope of his single volume by stopping after the nineteenth century. Seuren's *Western Linguistics: An Historical Introduction* is restricted both temporally and thematically; it takes what some call a 'presentist approach', and what the author himself terms a 'long view': 'the identification of those currents of history, both large and small, that have led to the present state of affairs' (1998:xi). The aim is a synthesis of history and theory, which closely links grammar and meaning. Given this objective, it is perhaps predictable that the focus should be not just European, but – for the post-1930s – very largely North American, with the present to which all currents of history lead being Generative Semantics. Non-European contributions to linguistic thought appear to be subsumed into 'European' linguistics, being referred to only if and when they impact on the European tradition. (Martinet merits a passing reference for having refused an early article submitted by Chomsky to *Word!*). Within these constraints this is an excellent volume, but it is in no way a general history of Western linguistics. There are, of course, other publications which offer at least a partial history of linguistics, such as the encyclopaedias of linguistics, to some of which I shall refer to later, and the anthologies which seek to introduce the reader to a selection of major texts from the discipline, of which an example is Harris and Taylor (1989). Among edited volumes, Koerner and Asher (1995) perhaps presents the most complete historical and contemporary coverage, consisting mainly of revised extracts from the ten-volume *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics* edited by Asher (1994), and going 'from the Sumerians to the Cognitivists'.

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2.3 Definitions and coverage

It becomes apparent that histories of linguistics can vary considerably in scope and approach, to the extent that different definitions of the field can be entertained. Historiographers tend to give a broad definition (Swiggers, 1997), but may in practice concentrate on a well defined part of the field (Swiggers, 1998). Robins (1988) concentrates on the history of 'European' linguistics, but in a subsequent paper (Robins 1990) observes that such a restriction, imposed only because of the impossibility of complete coverage, could be considered ethnocentric, and that one could equally well conceive of foregrounding (for example) the Indian tradition. In summary, there are for the historiographer issues of spatial, temporal and thematic coverage. As we have seen, frequently adopted solutions to these problems are to stop short of the twentieth century, or to focus on European and/or American linguistics. The field itself has grown so dramatically that authors opt increasingly to concentrate on histories of a sub-discipline or particular national tradition. The organisation of Koerner (1995), for example, differs from that of his previous edited volumes in that its third part gives brief overview histories of Sociolinguistics, American Linguistics, Linguistic Typology and Phonetics. *Historiographia Linguistica* XXV 1–2, 1998, concentrates on the Polish contribution to linguistics, and Brekle *et al.* (1996) is organised largely along 'national' lines, to cite just two further examples. A number of books are limited to the coverage of a sub-discipline of linguistics at a particular period (eg. Clark and Nerlich 1996). Finally, a distinction can be made between different methodological and epistemological approaches to history. We shall return later to the inevitable debates between the proponents of 'objective', chronological history and the projectionist or presentist variety, between a positivist belief in the possibility of 'recovering' history and the conviction that it can only be reconstructed. For the moment, let us start with an early attempt at typology made by one of the founders of twentieth-century linguistic historiography, because this touches upon many of the issues which have recurred in this field.

3 'PERSISTENT ISSUES'

Koerner (1978b) makes a distinction between four types of history writing: the first occurring when a pinnacle of achievement has been reached in a particular stage of the discipline and only 'mopping-up' operations remain; the second written to launch a new paradigm; the third a holistic attempt to represent the entire discipline at a particular point in its evolution; the fourth type (advocated by Koerner) the attempt to establish 'the presentation of our linguistic past as an integral part of the discipline itself and, at the same time, as an activity founded on well-defined principles which can rival those of "normal" science . . . itself with regard to soundness of method and rigour of application' (Koerner, 1978b:58). This harking after making linguistics a

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'science' comparable to the natural sciences is a nineteenth-century legacy which has been periodically revisited during the course of this century (e.g. Sapir, 1929). In their early search for a theoretical and methodological basis, many linguistic historiographers turned to the history and philosophy of the natural sciences, trying in particular to apply the Kuhnian paradigm. This is in fact a debate that has run and run, and is the first of our 'persistent issues'.

3.1 *Continuity, recursivity or radical change?*

Since Percival (1976), many reasons have been adduced as to why the application of Kuhnian notions to linguistic history is inappropriate. Itkonen (1991), in a volume that received mixed reviews (e.g. qualified as disappointing by Lepschy, 1994: xvi), devotes a whole section to demonstrating the fundamental differences between linguistics and the natural sciences. The former, he claims, does not have a 'long' history (in the sense of going through a number of stages, each separated by a radical change of paradigm), and its object of investigation has not changed over the years, unlike that of, say, Chemistry. Moreover, while historians of science speak of the 'multiple discovery' phenomenon to refer to the 'same' discovery usually being made by a number of scientists in quick succession, similar breakthroughs made in our knowledge about language may occur hundreds or even thousands of years apart, according to Itkonen, who uses the example of Panini and Chomsky. Hence, 'the history of linguistics turns out to be so short and homogeneous that the Kuhnian model of scientific change has no application within it' (Itkonen, 1991:333). Moreover, Murray (1994) points out that linguistics may not meet the Kuhnian requirement of the prior existence of a well-established 'normal science' against which a 'revolution' can take place. His study of twentieth-century American linguistics leads him to believe that claims of radical change consisted more of rhetoric than of reality. Joseph (1995a), in a review of Murray (1994) and Randy Harris (1993), questions the 'insatiable taste for revolution' in current linguistics, pointing out that Kuhn, who did not claim that his theory was applicable to the social sciences, would have had every opportunity to apply it to linguistics if he had wished to do so, since from 1979–91 he was a member of the Department of Linguistics and Philosophy at M.I.T.

If Joseph is right that in the early days revolution was 'the master plot for linguistic history', then the plot has taken new turns in recent years, and many write less of radical breaks than of some sort of continuity or recursivity. This change of perspective is both data and theory led. First of all, it arises from research on previously less well documented periods. Thus, while it had been common to take a point in the nineteenth century as the starting point for the discipline of linguistics, substantial research on the linguistic thought of the three preceding centuries has allowed us to establish strands of continuity from (for example) Port-Royal up to certain nineteenth-century figures. Koerner

(1989:76), analysing the examples of Port-Royal and of Humboldt reaches the conclusion that 'clear-cut discontinuities are rare, if they ever occur'. Secondly, the move away from the notion of radical paradigm change inevitably follows from the increased volume of research conducted on figures previously considered as minor, which may reveal that the concepts attributed to one major thinker were used or at least foreshadowed by a number of scholars. As an example of the 're-evaluation' of a linguist which could have a significant impact on the way in which we view twentieth-century linguistics (e.g. phonology) and thought (especially Structuralism), we can cite the case of Kruszewski, who has become better known through the publication of translated writings (Kruszewski, 1995) and studies (Radwanska Williams, 1993). The path followed in Radwanska Williams' own book in some ways mirrors that of linguistic historiography: the author starts by using the Kuhnian notion of paradigm, but adapts it fairly freely to the history of linguistics. Despite tributes paid by Jakobson to this *structuraliste avant la lettre*, his potentially important work failed to have the impact that it might have done, mainly because of various external factors. However, it can be demonstrated to be of relevance today (e.g. Anderson, 1985 for its pertinence to phonology) and is therefore a 'lost paradigm', and one which shows that the relation of past and present in linguistics is one of 'recursion'.

The idea of a thinker prefiguring a later school of thought *avant la lettre* is of course a common formula (Albrecht, 1994). While the *chasse aux précurseurs* most often concerns those who are close in time (as an example, see references to the early elaboration of speech act theory: Mulligan 1987; Nerlich & Clark, 1996), the notion of recursivity means that researchers may link thinkers who are far apart in time and previously unconnected (Danesi, 1989; Subbiondo, 1998). Swiggers (1980) quotes Canguelheim (1970) to the effect that such comparisons tend to tell us more about the historiographer than about the object of inquiry, which of course means that they can provide a useful indication of current historiographical thinking.

A third reason for the decreased emphasis given to the radical epistemological break is to be found in the 'sociological turn' that some studies have taken. Thus, Amsterdamska (1987) demonstrates how the Neo-grammarians were affected by historical and sociological factors, while Murray (1994) uses the sociology of science to study the formation groups in twentieth-century American linguistics. Murray concludes that it is not just the 'best' ideas that prevail, but those that are backed by organisational skill. Given the Western European notion of 'progress' in science, says Auroux (1987), it may simply be opportune for young researchers to lay claim to the founding of a new paradigm. Of course, the opposite may also be true: Koerner (1989:35) interprets Trubetzkoy's appeal to the work of his predecessors as an attempt to legitimise his own new approach and silence his rivals. Institutional influences may also bear some responsibility for the predominance of certain schools of thought over others, or for those which appear secondary, sometimes to

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resurface later. Thus, the rise of the universities in a decentralised Germany is held to explain German advances in linguistics, with a particular trend in German linguistics being adopted in France thereafter (Hültenschmidt 1987). Moreover, the predilections of those in positions of institutional power sometimes account for the success of one particular school; thus the influence in France of certain nineteenth-century German linguists was partly due to Bréal's diffusion of their work. Desmet (1998) uses factor analysis to trace relations within the school of 'naturalist' linguistics, which shows how this group, created by Hovelacque, Adam and others around the *Revue de linguistique et de philologie comparée*, was marginalised by Bréal and his colleagues. Of course, the diffusion of an aspect of the discipline by one of its specialists can also be interpreted as an 'internal' factor. What is interesting, however, is that a canon may be set up by an individual scholar that inhibits the diffusion of the ideas of others for some time to come, something which Hoenigswald believes to have been the case for Benfey (1869). Moreover, Aarsleff outlines convincing examples of what he calls 'self-serving institutional folk history', that is, the way in which 'as soon as a discipline has become institutionally successful . . . it tends to create a history that meets the ideological needs of its practitioners' (1982:313). At any moment in time, a particular sub-section of the discipline may be dominant. Thus, Durand and Laks (1996) demonstrate that the idea of a radical break taking place in the 1950s is at least partly due to the shift in emphasis in syntax, whereas in the case of phonology one can argue for a relatively continuous line of development (see also Laks, forthcoming).

3.2 *Ways of writing historiography and history*

Over the years, therefore, perspectives in linguistic historiography have changed: external factors are now often accorded a greater role, and there has been a small but growing trend to look less to the history of the natural sciences, and more to the history of philosophy and to the history of ideas. Koerner, while retaining an attachment to the history of science, has nevertheless been prepared to consider other approaches. Reviewing the field that his own writings have been instrumental in establishing over the last twenty-five years or so, he says that 'because of the particular nature of the subject of investigation . . . historians of linguistics must find their own framework, their methodology and epistemology, and cannot expect to be able to apply methods and insights from other fields'. He concedes, however, that in the interim 'it is quite legitimate for linguistic historiographers to look outside their own field for guidelines and models to imitate' (Koerner, 1995:4). Examining the possible application to the history of philosophy of the four genres outlined in Rorty 1984 ('rational reconstruction' – which Koerner qualifies as 'presentist' historiography, 'historical reconstruction', 'intellectual history' and 'doxography' i.e. canon formation), Koerner nonetheless retains a

conviction that the history and philosophy of science has most to offer linguistic historiographers, a view which is not necessarily now held by a majority. In a rather different vein, Auroux (1987) talks about three modes of historical writing: *évolutif* (i.e. chronological and teleological, a linear recit), *cognitif* (using contemporary linguistics to throw new light on the past) and epistemological (concentrating on defining the object of research), adding that he does not think that ‘ces trois types de contraintes puissent être réalisés en même temps, au cours du même travail d’historien’ (1987: 21).

These questions bring us to matters which are at the heart of any historical research, and it is to these that we turn briefly for our final consideration of persistent issues. As Swiggers (1992) points out, most of the problems of the history of linguistics are those of history itself: problems of periodisation, of metalanguage and of the evaluation of the past from the standpoint of the present (cf. Robins in Schmitter, 1987). Grotzsch (1982) opines that linguistic historiographers need to debate theory less, as long as they are competent in historical method. The on-going debate about the merits of the positivist approach to history, as opposed to a ‘post-modernist’ approach, is brought to bear on linguistic historiography in an article by Mackert (1993). The author contrasts two groups, those who believe it possible to establish a ‘true’ history of linguistics and to recover the meaning intended by earlier writers/linguists (Aarsleff, Koerner) and those who believe that history is an interpretative reconstruction, of which there can always be several versions (he cites work by Auroux, Schmitter and Swiggers). Mackert uses the semiotic approaches of Lotman and of Eco to argue against the ‘conduit’ model of interpretation of a message or text, and writings by Ricoeur and Gadamer in support of his argument that all interpretations are historically situated. Mackert’s arguments present the extremes of positivist versus pluralist approaches, and one might reasonably expect there to be some value in intermediate positions. Brekle (1985), while felt to be pointing in the direction of a hermeneutic approach, is quoted as offering just such a position. In an article dealing with the changing conceptualisation of the word, Law (1990) dismisses the Foucauldian approach which sees ideas developing on their own with little human intervention, but considers that linguistic historiography could do well to draw on the work of the *histoire des mentalités* school, in order to explore perceptions of language that, rather than being confined to a narrow circle of intellectuals, are found throughout society. Extreme ‘internalism’ is discredited; in an otherwise positive review, it is on this count that Douay Soublin (1994) criticises Itkonen (1991). As would seem inevitable in a trend which moves in the direction of equating the history of linguistics with the history of ideas, greater stress is now being laid on the importance of contextualisation. It is the first requirement of the linguistic historian listed in Koerner (1994) who offers an example of such an analysis in his paper “Linguistics and Ideology: A neglected aspect of 19th and 20th century historiography” (Koerner, 1999). Given that the old notion of ‘progress’ can no longer be held to obtain (cf. Schmitter,

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1987) – Joseph (1995b) argues strongly for the reconstruction of linguistic ideas within their historical and philosophical context. A number of current trends would seem to be emerging, but before concluding on the current state of linguistic historiography, we shall take a brief look at aspects of the history and historiography of French linguistics.

4 EXAMPLES FROM THE HISTORY OF FRENCH LINGUISTICS

Twentieth-century French linguistics is not well represented in histories of linguistics. An exception is Saussure, as studies continue to appear on both his linguistic thought and on his place in the history of thought (Bouquet, 1997; Normand, 2000). However, his case is a rather special one and a survey of Saussure studies is outside the scope of this article. I shall limit myself here to an illustration of the way in which two linguists have fared in the histories. In order to avoid entering into a discussion about the point at which the present becomes history, I shall not go beyond the mid-century, taking as my main examples Bréal and Guillaume. These two linguists display common elements which could be seen as representing successive stages in one particularly French approach to language. They are also linguists of stature who seem to have been undeservedly neglected by the outside world. There are obviously a number of others to whom one could refer: Meillet and Martinet come immediately to mind, though Meillet the Indo-Europeanist has received a good deal of recognition, while Martinet tends to be better known in the English-speaking world than many French linguists both because of the type of linguistic analysis in which he engages and because he spent a period of his professional life in the US. In most of the recent histories listed above, Bréal – like the majority of French linguists – is conspicuous by his absence. He receives only passing mentions in Malmberg (1983) and Koerner and Asher (1995). He is not represented in Chiss and Puech (1987), although Henry, Bally and Guillaume are, nor does he feature among those who De Beaugrande (1991) regrets not having space for, while Benveniste does. Apart from the notable exceptions to this neglect which are mentioned below, the one linguistic history which does accord a place to Bréal is Morpurgo Davies (1992).

4.1 *Michel Bréal*

It is as one of the principal founders of *la sémantique*, and as the inventor of the term, that Bréal is best known. His *Essai de Sémantique* (first published in 1897) is an outstanding example of a clear exposition of the mechanisms of semantic change as he saw it, using categories some of which (notably *polysémie*) were developed by Bréal himself. Subsequent events in linguistics have meant that scant recognition has been accorded to early semanticists. While the *Essai de Sémantique* deserves to be fully acknowledged as a landmark in semantics, Bréal's contribution was a much wider one, and in many ways what came to

be called the French linguistic school can really be said to have started with him. He aimed to enable French scholars to catch up with, and go beyond, German linguistic research. He translated Bopp's monumental Comparative Grammar into French, but made it clear in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in 1864 (*De la méthode comparée appliquée à l'étude des langues*) that although it was imperative for French scholars to emulate German philological method, the study of form alone was not enough. Bréal thus marks the beginning of a reaction in France against the organicist metaphor that had dominated thought about language ('l'abus des métaphores . . . une terminologie qui a le tort de nous dispenser les causes véritables', 1924:2), and against the notion of blind forces of sound change.

In reinstating the human in language, and seeing language as a product of human will and intelligence, Bréal sees himself as continuing in the mainstream French intellectual tradition. 'Il ne faut pas que la description du langage humain nous fasse oublier l'homme, qui en est à la fois le principe et la fin, puisque tout dans le langage procède de lui et s'adresse à lui.' (1877:249). While there are difficulties in reconciling the emphasis that he puts on the individual's will with general trends in language change (a problem that will await the *Cours de linguistique générale* for its resolution), it is the insistence on the individual speaker in (embryonic) synchronic analysis which constitutes Bréal's originality and modernity. Thus, he emphasises language as action and as communication: 'le but, en matière de langage, c'est d'être compris' (1924:7). However, language can only express our own representation of the world, and activate the hearer's; it does not function through any sort of direct or exact correspondence. Polysemy is the lynchpin of any science of meaning, incompleteness and ambiguity being an essential part of any language. 'Je me propose de montrer qu'il est dans la nature du langage d'exprimer nos idées d'une façon très incomplète . . .':

Tout ce que vous pouvez faire, c'est de provoquer ma pensée, et cette provocation sera quelquefois d'autant plus vive qu'elle paraîtra moins explicite. De même qu'une allusion suffit souvent pour éveiller en nous un monde de sentiments et de souvenirs, le langage n'a pas toujours besoin de nous détailler les rapports qu'il veut nous faire entendre. La seule pente du discours nous fait arriver où l'intelligence d'autrui veut nous conduire. (Bréal, 1877:312)

This inevitably means that words cannot be considered in isolation from their context ('les mots sont placés chaque fois dans un milieu qui en détermine la valeur'). In addition, linguists had hitherto focused on the referential, and neglected the other uses of language: 'le langage, outre les jugements, contient des vœux, des doutes, des ordres, des interrogations, des exclamations.' (1877: 361). Bréal proposes another *modèle d'analyse*, in which he demonstrates that, in what he calls a *proposition implicite* ('Ah! Que de plaisir j'ai à vous voir!'), there are two complete propositions, the first being implicit ('car un seul mot comprend effectivement le sujet, le verbe et l'attribut') and consisting of one word 'Ah!' which is the equivalent to 'je suis charmé' (1877: 363). It will not be a surprise

that Bréal comments in a particularly insightful way on various expressions of modality, and on pronouns, nor that he goes some small way towards analysing examples of 'real' usage which are not covered by conventional analysis.

The second reason for seeing Bréal as one of the main founders of French linguistics lies in his efforts to establish the subject as a recognised academic discipline. Having been appointed professor at the Collège de France in 1866, he went on to inaugurate France's first phonetics laboratory in 1897, and was also largely responsible for setting up linguistics at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes. For a large part of his career, he acted as secretary to the Société de linguistique de Paris (1868–1905). Moreover, he strongly believed in applying contemporary research in the field of secondary education. As a schools inspector from 1879 on, he wrote numerous articles in which he develops his ideas on language education, from what amounts to an advocacy of communicative language teaching to the discussion of whether and at what point secondary pupils should be introduced to the principles of comparative grammar. (The fullest commentary on this aspect of Bréal's thought is to be found in Delesalle and Chevalier, 1986). He believes in exposing children to different registers and varieties of a language, and believes that even *petits parisiens* who have no *patois* can benefit from learning about these languages: 'idiomes non moins anciens, non moins respectables que le français, mais qui, pour n'avoir pas été la langue de la capitale, ont été abandonnés à eux-mêmes et privés de culture littéraire' (1877:371).

The work mentioned above of course antedates by several decades the periods when speech act theory and work on 'énonciation' on the one hand, and functional language teaching on the other, became common. It predates the main works by Bühler, as well as those by Guillaume and then Benveniste in France, or Gardiner, Firth, and then Halliday in Britain. Yet in various ways Bréal's work can be said to anticipate all of the above, although for some time it was not easily accessible, especially for English-speaking linguists. The English translation of the *Essai de Sémantique* was reissued in 1964, and a collection of essays translated and introduced by Wolf came out in 1991. The latter well chosen selection makes available some interesting articles which are otherwise hard to obtain. However, the translation is at times misleading or inadequate (cf. Peeters, 1994); for instance, the simple misplacing of the adverb 'only' falsifies the meaning of the phrase quoted above: 'la seule pente du discours nous fait arriver où l'intelligence d'autrui veut nous conduire'/'Only the direction of the conversation can take us where an interlocutor wants us to go.' (Bréal/Wolf 1991:87). The neglect of Bréal in English was first remedied by Aarsleff (1982) who sets out with great clarity both Bréal's role in turn of the century French linguistics and his place in nineteenth-century thought, touching on parallels between Bréal and thinkers in other areas, such as Taine and Claude Bernard. He proposes that there is more reason to compare Bréal and Saussure than Whitney and Saussure, and demonstrates that the *langue/parole* distinction, the role of syntagmatic relation-

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ships and the conception of linguistics as the analysis of one among many symbolic systems, are all present in embryonic form in Bréal's writings, as is the notion of 'valeur', illustrated with the same coin analogy as in the *CLG*. More recently in English, Bréal is given an important place in Nerlich (1990 and 1992) and Nerlich and Clark (1996). There is overlap in these three publications, in particular in the sections on Bréal in Nerlich, 1992 and Nerlich and Clark, 1996; however, the first concentrates on a comparison with Wegener and Whitney, the second on Bréal as early semanticist and the third comments briefly on Bréal as a precursor of pragmatics. In France too, there has been some renewed interest in Bréal (Delesalle and Chevalier, 1986; Bergounioux, forthcoming). There is no doubt that Bréal's writings on the pragmatic, communicative and subjective aspects of language were well ahead of his time and will still repay further study. At the very least it has to be said that he was the decisive figure who prepared the way for modern linguistics to take root in France. Aarsleff, referring to Meillet's claim that the main school of 'French linguistics' was founded by Bréal and Saussure, concludes: '(Saussure's) terminology gave (French linguistics) a catching systematic quality, but it was Bréal who supplied the conceptualization that gave the new linguistics its fresh French cast and principles.' (1982: 393).

4.2 *Gustave Guillaume*

It is because of his intrinsic interest, his place in French linguistic history and his neglect by the historiographers, that I have dwelt at some length on the example of Bréal. However, it has to be said that my next example fares little better. Guillaume stems from the Bréal/Saussure/Meillet line, succeeding the latter in 1938 at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, where he remained until 1960. The 60,000 sheets of notes that he left after his death have been gradually edited as the *Leçons de linguistique* by the Fonds Gustave Guillaume of Laval University. Guillaume himself claims to have taken the idea of language as 'un système où tout se tient' as a guiding principle and he constantly avows a debt to Saussure; indeed, in many ways, he exploits and extends notions that are only touched upon in the *Cours*. Saussure's *langue/parole* distinction is broadened by Guillaume into a distinction between *Langue* and *Discours* – or as it is sometimes more explicitly expressed, between *Langue-puissance* and *Discours-effet*. He emphasises that while *Langue* is a system for representing the world, *Discours* is for communicating. The language act consists of going from *Langue* to *Discours*, and it is the description of this operation that is the object of Guillaume's *psychomécanique*, while the study of *Langue* is entitled *psychosystématique*. Guillaume's followers (e.g. Lafont in Tollis, 1991: ix) point out that the 'psycho' prefix indicates a mentalist approach and not a claim that linguistics is part of psychology. The Saussurean *signifié* is usually called 'signe', with 'signifiance' being used to designate 'le procès par lequel les signes nous renvoient à l'ensemble des opérations de pensée qu'ils représentent' (Chiss et

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Puech, 1987: 251). Guillaume's vision is of language as dynamic and creative, the linguist being concerned with the cognitive processes that enable the potential of language to be translated into actual usage ('Ce qui fait la phrase ce n'est pas le système mais l'exercice de la phrase . . .', *Leçon du 6/12/51*); this turning of the potential into the actual receives the name of '*cinèse opératrice*'.

Guillaume's work is forward-looking in his emphasis on the cognitive aspects of language on the one hand, and his idea of language as the production of discourse on the other. In two major books, his ideas were applied first in a study of the definite and indefinite articles (Guillaume, 1919) and then to the cognitive structures of the verb phrase (Guillaume, 1929). The parallel between Guillaume's theory in which the article turns a *nom en puissance* (belonging to *langue*) into a *nom en effet* (part of *discours*), and deep and surface structure, has been pointed out. So too has the way in which the central role given to the *locuteur* makes of him a forerunner of theories of *énonciation* (Jolly, 1987). It is difficult to do justice to Guillaume's lengthy exposition in a few lines (for fuller but still brief accounts, the reader is referred to Wilmet, 1991 and Hewson, 1995). There can be no doubt about the interest of his work, nor about the impact that it has had on a small band of adherents in France, Canada and Belgium. His work has been insightfully applied to other languages (e.g. Molho, 1975 on the Spanish verb, Chesterman, 1991 for more recent work on the article), and has been drawn upon by a variety of linguists, from psycholinguists to pragmaticists (see for example the Montpellier Praxiling group's *Cahier no.7: Praxématique et psychomécanique du langage*, 1986). Nonetheless, he remains the victim of neglect, or sometimes downright hostility, and is often omitted from general overviews or histories of twentieth-century linguistics. Even his followers admit that his style and terminology can be daunting ('un certain parti-pris d'opacité et . . . les excès d'une terminologie parfois esotérique' Tollis, 1991: 349). However, help is at hand, in the form of clear expositions e.g. Wilmet, 1991, a recent dictionary of terminology (Boone et Joly, 1996), and for the Anglophone reader, Hirtle and Hewson's translation. For his followers, his long career – as Boone and Joly point out, his first publication antedates the *Cours* and his last postdates *Syntactic Structures* – is of great significance for the history of linguistics:

Pour la première fois en effet dans l'histoire de la science du langage on assiste, avec lui, à une tentative réussie de restituer enfin au langage humain, à l'aide d'une méthode rigoureuse et appropriée, sa véritable dimension, qui est anthropologique, installant ainsi l'étude du langage dans une perspective résolument phénoménologique. . . (Valin: Introduction aux *Leçons de linguistique*, 1971:9).

4.3 *Lessons to be drawn from the treatment of Bréal and Guillaume in linguistic histories*

The details given above, although brief, should suffice to demonstrate that there are enough common concerns and approaches from Bréal and Saussure,

Meillet and Guillaume, through to Benveniste and Culioli, for us to recognise what Meillet termed 'l'école linguistique française'. (Articles in Montaud and Normand, 1992 situate Benveniste in relation to both his predecessors and his successors; for an up-to-date introduction to Culioli's work, see Durand, forthcoming). It has been suggested that the neglect of French linguists in the English-speaking world may be due to their 'Frenchness' (Wilmet, 1991: 201 quotes an admiring but somewhat baffled English reviewer of Guillaume), but this does not necessarily explain why they are often neglected, albeit to a lesser degree, in France itself. There is the paradox that some French linguists, theorists and historians alike, argue strongly for their own particular tradition in principle, but in practice often defer to outside models. Thus, while Asher (1994) and Koerner and Asher (1995) are the exceptions among overviews in English in devoting space to Guillaume, the situation is often not much better in French-speaking publications. Mounin (1972) has chapters on Whitney and Z. Harris but none on Bréal or Guillaume. There are signs that this is changing to some extent. Huot (1991) and Desmet (1996) try to rehabilitate linguists neglected since the turn of the century; the former contains a chapter on Guillaume, as does Chiss and Puech (1987). In Antoine and Martin (1995), which contains a section on the evolution of linguistic theory, Guillaume fares quite well, presumably because the chapter entitled 'Théorie grammaticale et description du français' is written by Wilmet; in the same publication, however, Bréal is accorded only two references – against thirty-three for André Breton! There is certainly a case for better understanding the contribution of French linguists by viewing them within their own wider intellectual tradition. Bréal is categorical in his assertion of debt to Condillac, Voltaire and Rousseau, and Guillaume's ideas have been likened (Jacob, 1970) to those of Piaget, Bergson and Teilhard de Chardin in other areas. At the same time, it is of course important to chart the influence of scholars whose work crosses cultural boundaries (see, for example Gadet and Sériot, 1997).

5 CONCLUSION

If, after a general overview of the field, the cases of Bréal and Guillaume have been very briefly cited, it is because – besides the fact that they are interesting linguists who have not always received the attention that they merit – their cases are pertinent to some of the issues that have been raised. We have seen the role that institutional and/or ideological factors can play in promoting some schools of thought or scholars above others. While Bréal was responsible for the *de facto* demotion of certain French linguists, he himself has been neglected, with the 'folk-history' of linguistics establishing German linguists as the immediate precursors of Saussure (Aarsleff, 1982: 293–334), and with Saussure himself stressing his debt to the American Whitney, when there was at the very least a reciprocal influence much closer to home. In their different ways, both Bréal and Guillaume have been eclipsed by the 'Saussure

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phenomenon': since in the codification of linguistic history, the *Cours* has become a useful stopping and starting point (Malmberg, 1991 is just one example). Awkwardly astride Saussurean and non-Saussurean linguistics, Bréal and Guillaume fit uneasily with this, both chronologically and intellectually.

If this is less easily comprehensible in the case of Guillaume, who himself thought that he was continuing and fleshing out the ideas of the *Cours*, it is only when viewed in a broader intellectual context that it can be understood. One consequence of the development of linguistic historiography as a discipline has been to underline the importance of seeing the study of language within its social and historical context, this being particularly appropriate in the case of certain movements or periods. A pertinent example would be Hutton (1999), who leaves no doubt about the ideological link between Indo-European linguistics and the political events of twentieth-century Europe. Just as the comparativist and evolutionary trends of the nineteenth century call out for interdisciplinary analysis, so too does twentieth-century Structuralism. Suffice it to say here that the enthusiasm of scholars for applying Saussurean ideas to other disciplines had the effect of fixing particular interpretations of the *Cours* which took centre stage, sometimes leaving in the shade those who felt that they were continuing the *projet Saussurien* in linguistics (Guillaume, the Geneva School).

Research done on 'minor linguists' often shows that the history of linguistics has – perhaps inevitably – been one of selection, exclusion and canonisation. If this makes an entirely 'objectivist' view of linguistic history difficult to hold, this does not mean that a 'reconstructivist' approach is satisfactory either. While history may for some be a series of *récits* about events reconstructed from a variety of sources, linguistic history deals almost solely with the primary texts of the discipline, which are different in status from the raw material of history itself or even of the history of some other disciplines, such as a natural science. (In this context, it is interesting that two of the great French-speaking linguists of this century are known mainly through their posthumously published lecture notes). The most reliable way to construct the history of linguistics and to combat any anomalies of folk-history, may be to analyse the source texts firmly within the intellectual history of their time. While this has been done by some of those linguistic historiographers whose names have been mentioned above, there remains much to be done, particularly in the area of twentieth-century French linguistics.

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