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SADRŽAJ

JEZIK, KNJIŽEVNOST, TEORIJA

IDEOLOŠKO-HERMENEUTIČKE TEORIJE

THE POST- IN CONTEMPORARY FICTION: TIME TRAVEL, FUTURES, MYSTERIES, VORTICISM, THE BODY, AGEISM, TRAUMA

PRELAMANJA KROZ PRIZMU TEORIJE

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THE THEORY OF NOT HAVING A THEORY: DESCRIPTIVE LINGUISTICS IN PRACTICE

Abstract: This paper discusses the principles that guide current practice in language description. Descriptive linguistics, it is argued, can be reduced to pieces of information collected by a field linguist in order to recognise specific configurations, i.e. patterns and structures. The framework of language description has a strong empirical connotation because it is essentially typological-oriented. Dixon's Basic Linguistic Theory, which has become the standard in fieldwork research, is often referred to as either an 'a-theoretical' or 'theoretically neuter' framework. But is it really possible to build a framework where there is no room for theory? Is Basic Linguistic Theory a theory like Generative Grammar or Frame Semantics or should we understand it as a different sort of approach with a different array of purposes? By delineating the way we understand and relate to complex phenomena with the ultimate goal of describing them, the discussion will tackle these questions and provide some remarks on the very presence of theory in linguistic description.

Key words: descriptive linguistics, Basic Linguistic Theory, fieldwork

Dishwares, snakes, and robots

In the last ten years or so, the former Spanish premier Mariano Rajoy has gained a reputation for a particular type of comment based on what we could call 'the auto-evidentiality of things'. Uttered in public speeches and during (rare) interviews, the multi-word expressions used by Mr Rajoy have rapidly established themselves as 'memes', i.e. they have gone viral. One of his more memorable expressions (remembered, *çava sans dire*, by commentators not aligned with Mr Rajoy's policies) is the following:

Un vaso es un vaso y un plato es un plato
'A glass is a glass and a plate is a plate'

The intention behind the logicality is to draw attention to the need for common sense: common sense dictates that if a certain matter is so clear, simple, and evident, then no further explanations are needed or possible. A glass is a glass because...it is a glass. Indeed, this is true.

A plate doesn't need an explanation. It doesn't need a description either, at least not in most of present-day society. The dish Mr. Rajoy is referring to exists in the minds of his audience as a prototypical object defined partly by its function (a physical support for serving food) and partly by its cultural acceptability (a flat-bottomed man-made container). The audience would hardly associate the word *plato* with a banana leaf, although a banana leaf covered in steaming rice would immediately be described as a *plato de arroz (servidoenunahoja de plátano)* 'a plate of rice (served on a banana leaf)'.

On the other hand, a portion of steaming rice served directly on the ground (i.e. with nothing between the soil and the food) would not be labelled as *plato de arroz.* Therefore, the notion of *plato* pops up in two cases: when the object satisfies all the physical criteria attributable to the prototypical 'plate' according to the idea rooted in a given society or, on the other hand, when the object, even if not recognised as a 'plate' per se (as in the case of a banana leaf), fulfils the main function of a plate by 'behaving' like one. Words can be slippery, and words for simple objects all the more. Let's suppose that instead of the word for plate, Mr Rajoy had used 'particle accelerator' and let's also suppose that both the orator and the audience have a sound grasp of what a particle accelerator is.

> *Un acelerador de partículas es un acelerador de partículas*
> 'A particle accelerator is a particle accelerator'

A particle accelerator is so specific and complex that Mr Rajoy would have easily passed a 'definition endurance test': you name an item, start describing it, and the more you can advance in your description without being contradicted, the more points you get. If a person knows the object – how it works, its purpose(s), the general theory behind it – then the final score of the test will depend entirely on who knows more. It is a mere question of knowledge and expertise, the test-taker and the tester measuring themselves against an item equally distant from their everyday lives. But how would our orator perform if he stuck to the object 'plate'? And what about a definition endurance test taken in front of a multi-cultural and well-travelled audience? That would be a real nightmare. In that case, in order to be successful, the test-taker should encompass all the possibilities that the notion of 'plate' offers and do it by avoiding any exclusive definition. As a matter of fact, it would be too risky to state that plates are only hand-made, or flat-bottomed, or that a calabash can't be turned into a container for serving food – somebody in the audience could certainly disagree. One way to work around the problem might consist in downscaling the society to a bubble reality where all the potentialities of a plate are virtually reduced to a minimum. A politician, for example, could compare her or his country to a cafeteria along a highway. In this cafeteria, we will learn, all the plates look the same: they are round, flat-bottomed, and made in China. A square plate made of wood would be simply inconceivable. This is why Mr Rajoy is not referring to any concrete object, but instead he is using the idea of an object that all his listeners are familiar with. An object with no exact shape, no colour, no defined material – an object that, in spite of all this indefiniteness, is perfectly recognizable.

We had a lot of time to get accustomed to objects such as plates and glasses. We recognise these tools even before understanding them. For this reason, when we come across an item such as a chair, we do not need to stop and think how to use it properly. If we want to avoid it, then we just do so. By experience, we know what makes the position of a chair stable as well as what would happen if we broke two of its four or three legs. Exposure over time has made all of this possible.

We can think of something more primordial than a chair or a dishware, something that *Homo sapiens* have known for a very long time and that does not fall under the suspicion of belonging to the realm of material culture: snakes. Snakes are a good example because they have accompanied us for hundreds of thousands of years and because we have developed specific strategies to deal with the challenges posed by their presence. First, what *Homo sapiens* did was to develop an instinctive emotion of fear and repulsion whenever a snake appeared. Then the brain of our ancestors started to refine the strategy

employed to trigger the survival-oriented reaction of fear: instead of focusing on types of snakes – let's say, a hypothetical and fatally venomous yellow-striped reptile –it went modular. For the sake of survival and immediateness of response, the complexity of a snake has been reduced to modules, i.e. salient features that put us in the condition to, roughly speaking, 'react before thinking'.

Humans have the ability to recognize a pattern and link it to the notion of a dish, a chair, or a snake. Complex robotic intelligence, on the other hand, is currently struggling with the challenges posed by the inability to recognise a pattern: no matter how well elaborated, a robot designed to behave like a human would still act strangely if it ran into an object as (apparently) simple as a chair. A robot would start considering the constituents of the object one by one (e.g. legs, spindles, back, seat, etc.), and only at the end of the process, once the consistency of the object with a pre-programmed scheme had been checked, would the mysterious object be recognised.

The language is physical

We move in the world that surrounds us by recognising patterns. Sometimes we are called to put these patterns into words, e.g. by describing them. Descriptions can vary enormously depending on many factors: the depth we want to reach, our ability to perform the task, and the consistency between our background and the target of the description (a theoretical physicist will be more successful in describing a particle accelerator than, say, a cardiologist). Dishes and snakes are interesting items, but languages seem to be even more interesting. This is not just the understandable point of view of a linguist: whereas dishes are a by-product of our culture and snakes those creatures with which we share a common ancestor, languages are 'special' because they are a direct product of *our* evolution. A language is the specific manifestation of a cognitive ability that we have acquired over the course of our evolutionary history.

Before tackling the topic of the relation between language description and theory, I would like to stress the importance of two features possessed by languages: (1) their belonging to the physical world and (2) their complexity. Languages will be considered here as information (i.e. packages of data) as well as the realisation of such information for communication purposes. As the Computational Theory of Mind has demonstrated, information – such as ideas, notions, desires, beliefs etc. – is never abstract: it all goes down to bits of matter (among others: Landauer 1996, Pinker 1997: 25, Aunger 2002: 137-145). The same applies to the internalised rules of a language. In this sense, phonetic material and internal grammar cannot exist outside the physical word: they are both intrinsically grounded in some kind of matter, the only difference for us being that in one case we are able to 'touch' (=hear) the matter and in the other we are not. As for the complexity issue, even a second-rate politician would not argue through statements like 'a language is a language' for the reason that we tend to classify languages as complex entities. The general awareness of this complexity is evident when we try to learn a new language or whenever we get caught up in some grammatical aspects of the language we are supposed to master. The Metalinguistic Awareness Test designed by Pinto and others – aimed at assessing the ability of bilingual speakers to give explanations about some aspects of the languages they know (Pinto, Titone, and Trusso 2009; El Euch 2010) confirms that as soon as we start reflecting on our own language, things are

not as linear as they appear. Rather than being like dishes, languages are like kitchens. Professional kitchens need some basic items in order to be functional; they have cells for storing different kinds of food at different temperatures and electrical appliances that can perform some tasks more efficiently and rapidly. They are equipped with stoves, pots, and many utensils needed for operations such as cutting, peeling, pitting, scaling, mixing, grinding, etc. But apart from that, kitchens can be functional only if several sets of rules are applied: rules concerning the disposition of dishware and food stuff, the preparation of food, the cleaning, and the organisation of the personnel. Languages too need some basic items in order to work: a larynx and a tongue, just to name a couple of them, or hands in the case of a sign language. Articulatory organs, on the other hand, are useless without segmental content, and meaningful segmental content comes from an impressive number of rules and instructions. Now, the question is: what do we do when we set foot in a kitchen we do not know?

Purposes of language description

For the scope of the present paper, I shall narrow the focus of my analysis to the specific sub-discipline of descriptive linguistics and to the way researchers operate when carrying out their descriptions in the field. A definition of descriptive linguistics is quite straightforward: it aims at describing a language as comprehensively as possible by taking into account the maximum amount of data available to the researcher during her or his stay in the place where the target language is spoken. As Evans and Dench put it, "the job of descriptive linguistics is to describe individual languages as perceptively and rigorously as possible, with maximal accountability to a naturalistic corpus of data ideally collected within a broad program of language documentation [...] to ensure that the full spectrum of language structures are represented" (Evans and Dench 2006: 3).There is a general consensus about what the output of a successful description should be. Ideally, a description should consist of a grammar, a dictionary, and a collection of texts. Lehmann argues that in order to be of any value, the Boasian trilogy must comply with three defining criteria: essential completeness, intelligibility, and adequacy (Lehmann 1994: 4-5).

The essential completeness criterion tells us that a description should cover all the main aspects of the language (phonology, morphology, syntax) and be accompanied by a lexical description as well as a collection of texts. Such a description should also be intelligible, meaning that the theory and terminology used to describe the language must be comprehensible to a professional linguist. Technical terminology tied to a specific theoretical approach that was popular in the past but that later on went out of fashion is among one of the factors that can make a grammar unintelligible. Finally, a description is required to be adequate: a valuable descriptive work should be consistent with the typological literature, i.e. it should be carried out by adhering to a typology-oriented categorisation of grammatical features also by adopting its relevant terminology.[1]

In other words, a linguist is called to organise a meaningful bulk of data in a comprehensible way drawing from a 'pool' of grammatical features that are relevant to the target language. In its broadest sense, such a pool is constituted by all the features that have been found across natural languages over the decades (from vowel harmony to

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[1] An exhaustive profile of the three criteria can be found in Chelliah and Reuse (2011).

logophoric pronouns, including anti-passives, ambitransitivity, word order, and so on). These features have already been labelled, hence the linguist is not required to exert his or her creativity by forging new terms (this is a very important aspect, since terminological consistency is paramount to grammatical comparison).

Typology as a guide

If we took the over-simplified account sketched in the very last paragraph of the previous section as a description of what a linguist does and of how he or she operates, then we would surely miss something. What should be stressed here is the predominant role of typological discourse in language description. The comparison of systems (e.g. pronominal system of language A vs. pronominal system of language B, consonant inventory of language C vs. consonant inventory of language D, etc.) leads to a categorisation of languages according to types. But since language types are always tied to a specific feature on the basis of which the type is defined (e.g. we talk of SVO language taking into account word order, of ergative and non-ergative languages considering the marking of the subject, etc.), the primary concern of typology resides ultimately in the identification of linguistic features. In this sense, the most practical function of typological literature is to serve as a 'catalogue of features', an all-encompassing list of all the possibilities so far recorded across natural languages. Hence, the work of a linguist will consist in (a) identifying the features productive in the target language, (b) scanning the language in order to discover unknown phenomena, and (c) recognising the peculiarities of the language against statistical predictabilities. The points (b) and (c) are the ones that can make a difference. All languages deserve to be investigated and all languages are 'interesting'. Nevertheless, paraphrasing Dixon, some languages are more interesting than others (Dixon 2009: 14 ff.). Description has tackled only a portion of the existent languages and typological studies have provided us with reliable information on *what have been found*. As the uncharted territory diminishes under the slow efforts of fieldwork research, new linguistic features are doomed to surface and merge, in a way or in the other, with language types already known. Apart from the discovery of new features, one could also recognise the uniqueness of a language in the way some features fit with the predictions that can be made according to what is known about language types. Little can be done to foresee whether a language will be revealed as something unique or not, and a linguist's choice is often dictated by factors unrelated to the 'specifics' of his or her target language (e.g. access to funding allocated to projects dealing with minority languages, the fact of having been working on neighbouring languages, etc.).

Until now, linguistic features have been treated as independent units, i.e. feature A and feature B can coexist in the same language without drawing our attention. However, in reality many features are interrelated, so that there might be a well-established typological profile where the presence of feature A entails the presence of feature B, and feature B is incompatible with feature C. Knowing the language type we are dealing with is useful to formulate hypothesises and make predictions, always remembering that typological inferences are statistically grounded, meaning that the formulations we shall get accustomed to are more similar to 'type A language is *likely* to have features B, D, and F' than to 'if type A, then B, D, e F'. This can better be illustrated when we consider the typology of African languages proposed by Heine. Heine, after observing that "some

word orders allow for more generalizations than others" (Heine 1976: 39), proceeds with the description of four main language types established according to word order. Type A (partly equalling the SVO type identified by Greenberg), for example, includes all those languages presenting SVO *and* O-Adv *and* N-Gen *and* other 9 features (Heine 1976: 39-40). Type A also presents 3 sub-types (which Heine terms Banda, Bantu, and Duala), each of them deviating from the main type for one feature (e.g. opposite to type A, in Banda type languages adjectives precede nouns) (1976: 52-53). From a practical point of view, relating single features to language types (and a type can be seen as a configuration of coexistent features) is a powerful tool for formulating working inferences and investigating the 'unexpected' aspects of a language. It should be noted that within these 'configurations' of features that constitute the language type, some features carry more information than others – they are, in a sense, more important. The kind of information I am referring to is not grammatical, but strictly typological: the 'important' feature is the one that helps us to predict a certain configuration according to our current understanding of language types.

If we take a step back and consider once again the three criteria formulated by Lehmann, we will notice that the only theoretical reference is of typological order. But typology, *stricto sensu*, is not a theory: it is a cumulative, empirical based framework aiming at the systematic comparison of language structures. The linguist on the field, called to detect the features of a target language, will use typology as an organisational guideline in order to produce a meaningful description. When selecting the reference material to be consulted in the field, there is a high chance that formal theory books will be left on the shelf and that a typology textbook will be packed instead. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that introductory books to linguistic typology explicitly claim among their functions that of 'guide to field linguists' (see for example Velupillai 2012: 4).

The field: from data to feature

A field linguist does not collect features. What a linguist collects are data. A feature, in order to be detected, described, and labelled, is the output of a more or less extensive collection of data. Let's suppose that a linguist who has been working on a West African language is now back from the field drafting a grammatical outline. Her work has covered all the major aspects of the language, including of course the pronominal system. The language displays a set of logophoric pronouns, that is pronouns that serve to report the speech or thought of their antecedents. As a feature ready to be described, logophoricity is a highly complex product: before reaching the point where the logophoric system becomes meaningful to the linguist (i.e. the point in the on-going research where logophoricity can be understood and described with a reasonable degree of detail), the fieldwork researcher must follow a series of steps and go first – to a greater or lesser extent – through lexical description, phonology, verbal morphology, and syntax, just to name the more evident aspects. There are many questions our linguist will pose to her informants before being able to draft a chapter (or sub-chapter) on the logophoric pronouns of the language she is working on. The popular statement according to which the work of a researcher consists in asking stupid questions to intelligent people is always true: complexity comes out of the way basic-level entities join and combine. Since trivial questions sum up in view of a 'greater picture', being a dumb person or risking looking

like one (the awareness of which, at least in the first stage of the research, is a trump card) is just part of the process.[2]

Collecting data is a manifold practice. There is not a fixed set of norms to follow when carrying out linguistic fieldwork. Field conditions, attitudes of the speakers, relations built with the community, predisposition, and preparation of the researcher: all these factors concur in determining pace and efficacy of the work. Moreover, it is entirely up to the field researcher to choose which basic-level element to tackle first: some linguists could prefer to cover the lexicon in the first place, while others are keener to target the grammar as soon as possible. Lexicon, grammar, and texts – the three components of the Boasian trilogy – are all equally important and mutually dependent. It is not rare to dedicate a few days to the lexicon, then record some oral texts, work again on the lexicon, and then start with the grammar. Alternating these three macro-sections over the length of the fieldtrips, besides being a necessity dictated by conditions that are beyond the researcher's control, speeds up the understanding of the language and the community in which the researcher operates.

Human factors and contingent issues aside, fieldwork can be subdivided into two main practices, each of them requiring its own methodological approach: elicitation by means of controlled sessions (controlled environment) and elicitation through observation (non-controlled or semi-controlled environment). Fieldwork research is a negotiation between the researcher's efforts to work in a natural setting without giving up all the control over the unpredictability of the natural setting itself. In the definition of descriptive linguistics given above, Evans and Dench make reference to a 'naturalistic corpus of data'. What is meant is that data need to be collected in the place where the language is spoken and with minimal interference from the researcher. Ideally, the research actor should stay in the background, observing (i.e. recording) the language as spoken by its speakers, and writing down the data with the assistance of one or more informants. Besides, the researcher might aim also at learning the language, gaining an invaluable insight by trying to internalize its rules. An approach consisting in avoiding any sort of control can be very time consuming and rarely are language descriptions based solely on elicitation through observation. Direct elicitation, on the other hand, entails a maximum degree of control: the researcher asks his or her informants a series of questions prepared beforehand based on predetermined objectives. This kind of approach allows the researcher to gather information on specific topics in a rapid way, but it can also turn into a very distressing practice (both for the researcher and the informant) if carried out for a prolonged period of time. Daily direct elicitation sessions ought not to last too long and alternating interviews to either observation or text collection is certainly a recommended practice.

Although elicitation through observation is often seen as the quintessential approach for describing a language, there are some circumstances that weaken the effectiveness of this method. The purpose of language description is to describe a language as it is *hic etnunc*, i.e. there is no diachronic dimension. But languages change and they can change rapidly: features are constantly acquired or dropped, and this is particularly true in *Sprachbünde*, or linguistic areas, where micro-migrations favour the intertwining of communities and, consequently, of their languages. Suppose, for instance, that a certain feature is present in a given language, but used only rarely by a few speakers This is

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[2] My personal feeling is that one should not worry about the dumbness of his or her questions. What should be of concern is avoiding posing questions in a dumb way.

the case of verbal plurality in Kushi, a West Chadic language spoken in northeastern Nigeria. Verbal plurals refer to two kinds of plurality: a concord plurality where the plurality of the argument requires a plural verbal form, and a semantic plurality used to encode the iterativity or multiplicity of an action and that is independent of the argument number. Not all verbs have a plural form and among the ones that do some use the plural in a mere concordial way while other use it for semantic purposes. Now, during my fieldwork I had a hard time detecting plural forms by means of observation or text collection. The occurrences were rare and nothing too meaningful could have been said about their morphology: simply, the data were not enough and although I knew that the feature was there I could not convert it into a pattern, at least not by limiting my approach to observation and text collection only. I am not sure whether Malam Alhassan Shehu Kuro, my Kushi teacher, was happy to accompany me into the fascinating world of verbal plurality, but elicitation questionnaires did the job.

Elicitation techniques targets data, not features. Features are constructions in the mind of the researcher: they follow data and between them and the researcher there is nothing but the question that is going to be asked. Data are small pieces of meaningful information that the linguist will arrange in more and more complex configurations. Opportunely collected and categorised, data will be shaped into features, and features into configurations of features, with the ultimate goal to have as comprehensive a description of the language structure as possible.

Where has the theory gone?

In this last section I will pose the following question: it is possible to have a language description without any contribution of theoretical order? So far I have talked of patterns, features, and data in order to frame the essentials of language description. I have discussed the importance of typology, not just for language comparison but also for guiding the researcher in the field. Data are collected in order to describe features and structures and establish patterns. The important thing about patterns is that we do not need all the details to recognise them. This is true for plates and chairs, but also for languages. A linguist, to describe a feature or even a language, needs just a *reasonable* amount of material. Of course, the sense assigned to 'reasonable' can vary, but still there is a consensus about the fact that at a certain point one must stop collecting data and proceed with the next steps.

But again: what about theory? Theory seems to have been taken out of the equation. If everything can be traced back to a mere piece of information – to the presence of labial stops in language X or to the negative marker of the perfective in language Y – then the room for theory is reduced to a minimum. In his acclaimed work, Dixon makes it perfectly clear: language description is a branch of natural sciences (Dixon 2009-2012). The fieldwork researcher is called to stick to facts, not to prove or test any theory. In principle, describing and labelling a language is not too different from describing and labelling a plant. 'Basic Linguistic Theory' (BLT), the typology-oriented framework proposed by Dixon and largely used by fieldworkers all over the world, is a theory in the same sense given to the theory of evolution: evolution is a fact, and so is language. Since we all know that languages do exist, what can we retain from the apparently obvious statement that a language is a fact? Languages – all languages – are

objects of the same order: they possess recognisable patterns and function in a system of features that can be described from scratch through appropriate fieldwork-based elicitation of data. As in the case of the famous and non-existent Precambrian rabbit (whose discovery would eventually turn upside-down our current understanding of the evolutionary process (Ridley 1993)), finding a language without verbs, or a language where pronouns and adjectives constitute one single class, or again a language without vowels, would certainly make us reconsider some aspects of the way languages can work. While waiting for such overwhelming cases to fill a field researcher's notebook, there is no other solution than to be consistent with what the patterns already observed tell us. In this sense, BLT, being based on assumptions and observations accumulated from previous research, is strictly empirical.

Saying that a language is a fact – i.e. an object, a packet of information – does not answer the question posed at the beginning of this paragraph. Theory, in the strictest sense, does not belong to language description because language description can be carried out without adopting any substantial formal theoretical perspective. A typology-based framework such as BLT is powerful enough to cover in detail all the basic aspects of a language allowing for both extensive description and inter-language comparison. Nevertheless, stating that theory has been neutralised and completely replaced by empirical evidence is only partly true. Thinks of mere data, like, for example, the sounds of a language. The linguist will start collecting a reasonable number of lexemes in order to detect and list all the sounds he or she encounters. But as we know, a list of sounds – of phones – is just an intermediate step: the ultimate goal is to arrange sounds in a meaningful way and understand how they work as a system. In order to do so, a higher degree of abstraction is required. The researcher is interested in the phonemic status of the phones being recorded. He or she will look for minimal pairs, check out the distribution of sounds in relation to the context in which they are found, and finally build a phonemic table accompanied by a set of phonological rules. What the researcher is doing is applying the basic principles of Distinctive Feature Theory. This well-known theoretical framework did not come out of nothing: modern Distinctive Feature Theory is the result of a discussion initiated by the members of the Prague School (among others, Roman Jakobson and Nikolai Trubetzkoy) and continued by phonologists of the Generative School (like for example Morris Halle, Gunnar Fant, and again Roman Jakobson) who shaped the theory and gave it its highly formalised status (see Halle 1959; Jakobson, Fant and Halle 1963). Even if language descriptions based on BLT rejects the use of a formal language, phonological rules are usually given by following a certain degree of formalism that is a direct by-product of generative phonology. Or consider again the logophoric system of a language. There are certain instances where logophoric pronouns can be understood only in reference to the thematic roles present within the discourse, but the very notion of thematic role has a solid theoretical background: Fillmore's Case Grammar Theory to start with (Fillmore 1968), and then Frame Semantics (Fillmore 1977), Discourse Representation Structure (Kamp 1981, see Sells 1987 on logophoricity), and so on. In this sense, theory plays a role in linguistic description and – finally answering the initial question – no, there cannot be a language description without any contribution of theoretical order.

Two final remarks are needed. First, the idea that language description and analysis are two separate spheres is not correct. Description always involves a certain amount of analysis: only by confining ourselves to the mere listing of data would we avoid analysis

– but collecting data and presenting them 'raw' is not describing a language. As we have seen above, no phonology of a language can be explained without recognising a system in which a certain number of rules apply. Hence, the work of a field linguist is not just to gather data but also to connect them to reveal a working configuration, and analysis is the tool used to go from data to system.

The second remark concerns the analytical depth we aim to reach within a description. Of course, a linguist may want to include in his or her grammar a chapter devoted to emotion metaphors or to illustrate extensively the Force Dynamics Models. Where should a linguist stop? Again, typological literature can be of help in distinguishing what is basic and what is not. Beyond the basics of a language (and a grammar is always an approximation), there is an entire universe that deserves to be analysed, a universe that includes all those people who have reached their boiling point because a closed door barred them from entry.

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Gian Claudio Batic

TEORIJA U KOJOJ NEMA TEORIJE: DESKRIPTIVNA LINGVISTIKA U PRAKSI

Rezime

U radu se razmatraju principi kojima se vodi savremena praksa u opisivanju jezika. Smatra se da deskriptivna lingvistika može da se redukuje na pojedine informacije koje terenski lingvista sakupi da bi prepoznao specifične konfiguracije, tj. obrasce i strukture. S obzirom da je suštinski tipološki orijentisan, teorijski okvir jezičkog opisa ima jaku empirijsku konotaciju. Diksonova Osnovna lingvistička teorija (Basic Linguistic Theory), koja je postala standard u terenskim istraživanjima, često se opisuje kao 'ateorijski' ili 'teorijski neutralni' okvir. Ali da li je zaista moguće izgraditi okvir u kome nema mesta za teoriju? Da li je Osnovna lingvistička teorija na isti način teorija kao što je generativna gramatika ili semantika okvira, ili bi trebalo da je shvatimo kao drugačiju vrstu pristupa, sa drugačijim namerama i svrhom? Specifikujući način kako shvatamo složene pojave i kako se prema njima odnosimo sa krajnjim ciljem da ih opišemo, rad razmatra ova pitanja i daje komentare o tome kako je teorija zaista prisutna u lingvističkom opisu.

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