

Vykypěl, Bohumil

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Linguistica Brunensia. 2023, vol. 71, iss. 2, pp. 91-94

ISSN 1803-7410 (print); ISSN 2336-4440 (online)

Stable URL (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.5817/LB2023-2-5>

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/digilib.79266>

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Access Date: 16. 02. 2024

Version: 20240122

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Everyone who deals with the history of linguistics must have met with the name of E. F. K. Koerner. Last year, the sad news arrived that Koerner had died. His life was colourful and is known to those who know (see, e.g., COWAN – FOSTER 1989, SWIGGERS 1999 and most recently JOSEPH 2021), so here I will only mention its main stops. Koerner was born in a *Grenzland*: in Hofleben (Mlewiec) near Thorn (Toruń); this, perhaps, was the reason that he was aware that things are often not as clear as people not born in *Grenzländer* often think. After finishing high school in 1960 in Krefeld, where his family eventually settled, sharing the wanderer fate of many German families after WW II, he first served in the military, which apparently gave him what not a few intellectuals lack: the awareness that there are more important things than those they write about. It was not until 1968 that he finished his MA studies with a thesis on the German subjunctive submitted at the University of Gießen. More importantly, in 1971 he defended his dissertation on Saussure at Simon Fraser University in Canada, which was published in 1973 (KOERNER 1973). From then on, he worked continuously in the history of linguistics and became the most visible and active person in this field. In 1976, he even went “into the wilderness” and accepted the offer of an associate professorship at the University of Ottawa as the chance of lifetime, as he wrote himself, to advance the study of the history of the language sciences. Among his numerous activities, the most important was editing the journal *Historiographia Linguistica* and the series *Amsterdam Studies in the Theory and History of Linguistic Sciences*. After his retirement from the university in 2001, he returned home, to Berlin, but continued, with no less passion, his work in the historiography of linguistics.

If I think about Koerner’s work and the inspirations one can find in it, what first occurs to me is his appeal for specialization or professionalization in the historiography of linguistics: the demand for doing linguistic historiography not as a “by-product”, but as a separate discipline. This appeal is still relevant, or it at least seems to be, judging from the example provided by the volume of the Oxford Handbooks dedicated to the history of linguistics (ALLAN 2013) that is marked by a remarkable “non-professionalism”: an absence of both criticism of the sources and a theoretical frame. It is symptomatic that Koerner did not participate in this volume. Another thing is, of course, to what extent such a demand for a “professional”

historiography of linguistics is possible from a practical point of view; that is, more frankly speaking, to what extent one can earn one's living only from historiography of linguistics.

However, one has also to address the question of the form of linguistic historiography. Koerner has called the form preferred by him "broad positivism" (one could also say, for instance, "moderate positivism"): an approach whose aim is to describe, analyze and present historical facts according to Rank's *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist* (see KOERNER 1989, 103; 2002, 155). Positivism has a rather bad reputation as something earthbound or unimaginative, sticking to individual things. But its most important feature – at least in historiography – is, in my view, sobriety, and what one may, with ČORNEJ (2016, 15), call an empirical-critical approach: no big speculations, efforts to explain things critically starting with the things themselves, not with a *priori* constructs lying outside of the things; in historiography, then, to look upon a time with its own eyes, not with ours. Koerner's "broad" or "moderate" form of positivism, then, should see not only the individual facts but also their context; this positivism is, indeed, sceptical about big constructions, but it does not refuse abstractions in general.

In addition to the question of form, Koerner posed to himself repeatedly the question of the meaning of historiography of linguistics (see recently KOERNER 2004, 5–12): the history of linguistics may introduce us to linguistics itself; knowledge of history is a part of a scientist's education if one's aim is not merely technical acquisition of a theory or method but one also wants to be capable of understanding unexpected results or of coping with a change of method; knowledge of history may serve as a means of evaluating new hypotheses and, at the same time, lead to moderation in the presentation of new theories, in this way furthering also unity within the complex field of linguistics.

What may likewise impress or inspire is the stubbornness with which Koerner returned to themes he had written about before: it was a pleasant awareness that no solutions are definitive and it obviously resulted from Koerner's empirical-critical (positivist) framing, mentioned above.

As one particular inspiration – especially in a Czech context – Koerner's partial demystification of Roman Jakobson can be mentioned. I think that KOERNER (1999, 134) framed well the character of Jakobson's work when he emphasized two general features of it: first "his general tendency of overstating the facts, of exaggeration pure and simple" and second – he speaks of Jakobson's texts on Saussure, but it can be applied to Jakobson's texts in general – "what I would call, with Bourdieu, Jakobson's 'diversion strategy', namely, to point to works of scholars not much read or hardly known as having anticipated ideas we regularly find laid out in the *Cours*". Recently, HOSKOVEC (2018, 359–362) has pointed out a certain simplicity of Jakobson's texts, which seems to result precisely from the exaggeration and diversion noted by Koerner. I warmly agree with both Koerner and Hoskovec. Nevertheless, I would still

add that Jakobson's power apparently consisted in ideas about which problems should be solved, presented in an exaggerated and diversionist manner, not in suggestions for how the problems should be solved. This is perhaps rendered also by a memory of Morris Halle's (HALLE 1983, 72–73): when he once complained to Jakobson that he did not know what he should research, Jakobson immediately enumerated for him half a dozen themes and added: "I have so many ideas in my head that I shall never live long enough to work properly on even a tiny fraction of them".

Of course, all the praise of Koerner does not imply that all by him is pretty. At the very beginning, for that matter, stands Percival's scathing criticism of Koerner's dissertation, which was, I believe, not entirely groundless or exaggerated (see PERCIVAL 1977 and KOERNER 1999, 213–214 from his own perspective). A Czech author will notice a certain one-sidedness of Koerner's themes: Central Europe, in particular the Prague School, was a kind of blind spot for him, although this is rather surprising as regards an author who wrote on structuralism. Also, some of his opinions on specific themes should, or even must, be criticized. For example, the congruence between Hermann Paul (or more generally the Neo-Grammarians) and Ferdinand de Saussure (or more generally the structuralists) that Koerner demonstrated repeatedly (see recently KOERNER 2020, 115–161) concerns rather external things; essential is, in my view, the difference between their conceptions of linguistics, the first being passive, adopting the position of an addressee and observer, the second being active, adopting the position of a speaker and user (see VYKYPĚL 2013, 39–40).

But really inspiring work is such work that offers general tools for individual disagreement. Such is, I am convinced, also the work of E. F. K. Koerner.

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