

REVIEW

# The importance of historiographical studies for language science

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## ABSTRACT

This review aims at sharing the key questions discussed in the roundtable promoted by *Abralin Ao Vivo - Linguists Online* that welcomed four researchers of Historiography of Linguistics to discuss current trends on language historiographical studies in Brazil. The presentations covered, respectively, the methodology of documental basis organization available in documentation portals, the theoretical-methodological criteria and prerequisites of History of Portuguese teaching and the historical conflict between roles of grammarian and linguist. The thoughts presented put into perspective the importance of historiographical studies for language science, showing three study areas that may inspire and interest several other research areas.

## RESUMO

Esta resenha tem o objetivo de compartilhar questões centrais discutidas na mesa redonda promovida pela *Abralin Ao Vivo* que contou com a presença de quatro pesquisadores da Historiografia da Linguística, discutindo tendências atuais nos estudos historiográficos da linguagem no Brasil. As comunicações apresentadas abordaram, respectivamente, a metodologia de organização de base documental, a partir de portais de documentação, os critérios e pressupostos teórico-metodológicos da História do ensino de Língua Portuguesa e o antagonismo histórico entre os papéis de um gramático e um linguista. As reflexões apresentadas colocaram em perspectiva a importância dos estudos historiográficos para a ciência da

linguagem, mostrando três linhas de estudo que podem servir de inspiração e despertar interesse para várias outras linhas de pesquisa.

KEYWORDS

Historiography of Linguistics. Linguistics Documentation. History of Portuguese Teaching.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Historiografia da Linguística. Documentação Linguística. História do Ensino de Língua Portuguesa.

The table formed by four researchers of Historiography of Linguistics, where three of them delivered their presentations moderated by Ronaldo de Oliveira Batista (UPM/CNPq), aimed to discuss the current research trends for Historiography of Linguistics (HL) in Brazil. Batista introduced the discussion by defining History of Linguistics as a set of events that treats language along the time, and he clarifies that making HL means to study those events, as well as any thought around language at all, within a specific timeline.

The first presentation, performed by Marli Quadros Leite (USP), named *Documental basis: the first step for historic research*, covered the relevance of building a documental basis as part of research within HL. Unfortunately, that work scientifically is seen as less important, once does not deal with a theoretical and methodological foundation, besides of being part of a research method in areas that work with data analysis. As a result, we have seen, in Brazil, a slow starting building a strong database for language studies, and only in the end of 20th century the work of organizing corpus<sup>1</sup> has started to be developed, and became essential to methodology of historiographical studies.

According to Leite, the creation of a corpus for documental basis needs to follow specifications related to research area that intends to support. Therefore, the concept of organizing a corpus should base on criteria construction, on selection of metalinguistic texts, on linguistic knowledge and on electronic promotion. A corpus organized to support one language in a heterogeneous format (according to discursive and textual genders) may result on a content valuable to different extents of research and source data.

Leite closed her speech by highlighting the result of such huge work on organizing a corpus represents an opportunity for the researcher to study deeply an author on his/her area of coverage,

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1 Reference to linguistic corpus mentioned by speaker during presentation: Center of Lexicographic Studies at UNESP, Brazilian Corpus located in Department of Applied Linguistics and Language Studies (LAEL) at PUC-SP, NURC/Recife and CTFL (Corpus de Texts Linguistiques Fondamentaux). Corpus dedicated to historiographical research in Brazil: PHPB (Project for History of Brazilian Portuguese) and Portuguese Historical Tycho Brahe Corpus, both still with small collection and restricted access.

besides of fostering collaborative content for other researchers, in order to drive the growth of language scientific studies.

The second presentation, from Neusa Barbosa Bastos (UPM/PUC-SP), named *Teaching and Historiography of Linguistics*, introduced the criteria adopted to the development of historiographical research employed in teaching materials, which embrace, primarily, the studies conducted by Research Group *Historiography of Portuguese*, coordinated by Bastos who sustains an intersection between HL and Portuguese teaching. Bastos's discussion based on three main authors: Konrad Koerner, Pierre Swiggers and Sylvain Auroux. Each of those authors has contributed in different ways on how making historiography. Some of the criteria and principles from such authors are responsible by outlining theoretical-methodological ways and procedures for works requiring *Historiography of Portuguese*.

One of Koerner's principle is metalanguage as an instrument used by historiographer of language and that considers three aspects: contextualization, immanency and adequacy. Contextualization seeks to understand the knowledge on an investigation area and general history. Immanency corresponds to discussions on object to be investigated, where may be considered a metalinguistic and non-metalinguistic object, for example, in the investigation of a grammar, we have a metalinguistic object, however, it is necessary to take into account the educational laws of the period, representing in this case, the non-metalinguistic object. Finally, we have adequacy that seeks for possible dialogues between perspectives of a work from the past compared to theoretical-methodological perspectives at present, when possible.

The main prerequisites from Swiggers, presented by Bastos, are parameters and objectives. The parameters stand for: coverage (period, geographic area, and theme), perspective (internal or external) and depth (determined by historiographer or content). In addition, Swiggers suggests a triple objective for the historian of language teaching: reflective attitude, descriptive forms and contextualization of teaching. Those objectives include thinking of language teaching, describing ways on language teaching and contextualizing the language. As of these elements, Swiggers proposes a fourth objective to learn how the authors organize their arguments in relation to their readers.

To conclude, we have Sylvain Auroux, who connects to metalanguage matter as well, and takes into consideration works on History of Linguistics within three categories: those who build a documentary basis; those who are homogeneous to cognitive practices from where derivate; those who go back to the past in order to legitimize a contemporary practice.

When analyzing teaching material for elementary school, for example, we find BNCC (*Base Nacional Comum Curricular*<sup>2</sup>, National Common Curricular Base) that guides the creation of such materials, however, at other times we also find different laws and official documents. Therefore, we can highlight intersection between teaching material and historical-educational context of each period means fundamental for research in that area, as argued Bastos. That said, Koerner, Swiggers

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<sup>2</sup> Translator's note: BNCC (*Base Nacional Comum Curricular*, National Common Curricular Base) is a Brazilian set of rules that guides essential teaching content for elementary school and high school.

and Auroux represent great influences, as based on their principles and criteria we are able to guide Teaching and HL researches.

In the third presentation, we counted with speech of Ricardo Cavaliere (UFF) who brought to the table the theme *Grammarian, Linguist and Speaker: a journey of conflicts*, where was valuably addressed the issues that cause competition between the roles of grammarian and linguist, according to layman's perspective. Cavaliere based his thoughts on Sapirian concepts, leading us to definitions on differences of grammarian and linguist roles.

The grammarian, in Sapirian concept, is a person who focuses his/her work exclusively on grammatical structures of a text and, on a layman's perspective, is seen as someone who treats text coldly, by a certain lack of interest in content. From a pragmatic perspective, the layman has personal interest in the roles that provide financial return, and based on that thought, grammarian's role becomes more understandable and acceptable. The grammarian, on layman's view, is the person who teaches the language and performs well in its knowledge and application. The layman usually lives or had lived great part of educational background close to a grammarian as a reference.

On the other hand, the linguistic is not able to demonstrate clearly for the layman what means linguist's role within his/her area and what is his/her compensation to execute that work. Then, Cavaliere continued with thought by explaining as grammarian has a stereotype established, the layman has a full understanding of what a grammarian does, but has no idea on what is a linguist's role.

The linguist stays embedded by an academic environment where, despite of being aware of his/her work relevance, does not have recognized visibility and importance outside the academic community. The layman does not recognize linguist as a scientist and, sometimes, his/her studies are questionable, since there are doubts because of not trusting in the scientific perspective of a linguist's work, which results, consequently, on distancing of layman's interest by language science.

According to Cavaliere, in Brazil, particularly, the competition between grammarians and linguists has occurred within a political context, due to period of military regime that began in the 1960s. On that time, the university became a symbol of resistance to the regime and the linguist assumed a role of driving the resistance movement, within academic environment. Meanwhile, the grammarian, known as a text expert, assumed the stereotype of rule sponsor within current regime. Cavaliere completed that antagonism between roles is no longer meaningful and no longer seen in the same way.

The roundtable History of Linguistics: what is it? presented different studies in HL field as a result of speeches of those three guests who represent different trends in the area in Brazil. Therefore, presentations helped us to understand how to build a documentary basis for making material available, which is essential data source for historiographical research; we could think of some theoretical-methodological criteria and prerequisites that support analyzes on History of Portuguese teaching, and we've seen that competition between grammarian and linguist no longer makes sense, as each one has its role and relevance to the language science.

This kind of discussion represents an opportunity to demonstrate the importance of thinking on history of linguistic knowledge in each period, strengthening the importance of historiographical

studies within academic research and contribute to linguists and language teacher's formation. However, unfortunately, that importance is still not understandable in such way within language science.

### REFERENCES

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