

tion to the pragmatics literature and is witness to the great potential offered by taking an interdisciplinary approach to language and language use.

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References

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Michael Dürr and Peter Schlobinski: *Einführung in die deskriptive Linguistik*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990.

In 1972 Bertil Malmberg stated that 'at the outbreak of the First World War ... purely descriptive linguistics ... (was) generally looked upon as nonscientific. The leading authorities did not realize its necessity' (Malmberg 1972: 223). A descriptive linguist these days may sometimes have the impression — not in her/his best of moods, of course — that things have not changed very much. This is not the case, of course, as we all (?) know. The publication of an introduction to descriptive linguistics should help to overcome thoughts of this kind, especially if our somewhat depressive descriptive linguist is a German realizing with some astonishment that it is a German introduction to the discipline (written by Germans in German). Alas, as to its topic it is not a germane book, which is something that (not only) a (German) linguist reading it must soon come to realize.

After an adequately modest introduction, some practical hints for using the book, and some maps that attempt to give a rather rough impression of where the languages mentioned are spoken, the book starts with an introductory chapter that abounds in the authors' immunizing strategies against criticism (for example pp. 26, 28; see also pp. 8, 9, 11). Moreover, although this introduction starts with some polemics against Chomskyan linguistics, it ends with more kowtowing to the master — an inconsistency that alarms the attentive reader, who fears that she might be confronted with more inconsistencies of this kind in the pages to come.

Chapters 2–6 attempt to give a survey of the linguistic subdisciplines 'phonetics/phonology', 'morphology', 'syntax', 'semantics', and 'pragmat-

ics'. It is the authors' didactic aim to discuss basic linguistic problems and concepts with the help of examples from different languages — to be as 'descriptive' as possible. In this manner they want to impart to students the ability to analyze speech data from the (descriptive) linguist's point of view. To achieve their aim the authors have developed a number of exercises for the reader to do after having worked through each of these five chapters of the book. Chapter 7 presents what the authors call an 'outlook' on data collection and corpus analysis — and it is at this point that descriptive linguists who want to use this book for their teaching find themselves completely puzzled: aren't they accustomed to always starting (!) their work with the collection of data for their linguistic purposes? However, the reader is somewhat relieved to remember that the authors' practical hints allow her/him to be rather free in the sequence in which the chapters of their book are dealt with

The book ends with notes to the chapters (most of which are just references that could easily have been incorporated — for example, in parentheses — into the text proper), hints for doing the exercises, the bibliography, and an index.

In the preface the authors encourage their readers to criticize their book (p. 9); let me therefore use this license for the following comments: in general, the authors have some rather good ideas with respect to the conception of their book, and they certainly put some real effort into the different topics they deal with, but all in all, the book is, unfortunately, not well done. For example, it is rather annoying that the authors are inconsistent with respect to their quotes: sometimes they present the original source (occasionally) with its German translation in brackets, sometimes they give only German translations (by whom?) of English or Spanish sources (for example, pp. 20, 22, 24f., 26, 44, 96, 189, 190f.). Moreover, they do not always refer to their sources unequivocally, and readers may get the impression that the authors themselves collected the respective data (for example, p. 220): however, the ethnocentric comments that on occasion accompany their data presentation (for example, pp. 215, 220f.) reveal that this cannot be the case.

After briefly skimming through the quite eclectic bibliography, the descriptive linguist must even come to the conclusion that the authors are not too familiar with the relevant literature. It is rather surprising that in a German introduction to the field of references does not mention German descriptive linguists such as, for example, Ebert, V. Heeschen, Sasse, Seiler and his Cologne akup project, and Winter and his co-workers — to mention just a few: moreover, there is no reference to descriptive grammar series such as, for example, the Croom Helm series, the Mouton Grammar Library, the Pacific Linguistics series, etc. Why the authors

prefer to give German translations of English originals in their list of references remains completely unclear. However, at the same time the authors seem to be rather bold, indeed: they feel competent enough to construct sentences in a language with which they are not familiar at all (p. 147) — this is definitely completely out of place, especially in an introduction to the field!

In the chapter on phonetics/phonology one misses a reference to the new 'IPA Kiel Convention' published in the *Journal of the International Phonetic Association*, (1989: 19, 67–88) that updates the IPA transcription conventions. There is also no reference to a pronunciation dictionary. In the 'syntax' chapter the comments on phenomena like 'topic and comment' are often rather unclear; in the chapter on semantics concepts like 'prototype' are mentioned (p. 152) without reference to the more recent relevant literature. Finally, in the chapter that deals with data collection and data analysis the authors (p. 249; see also p. 25) refer to the 'lingua franca' the linguist uses while working with informants instead of demanding that — ideally — descriptive linguists should speak the respective languages themselves so that they are able to elicit data monolingually without resorting to a 'lingua franca' of sorts ... Further, it goes without saying that a computer in the field is a rather powerful and helpful tool for the linguist, yet many descriptive grammars have so far been written without this device — and they are not necessarily among the most unreliable grammars.

The number of inconsistencies, errors (for example, on pp. 89 and 266 a 'Klarsichtschuttscheibe' becomes a 'Klarsichtschutzhülle'; on pp. 90f. and 267, there are incorrect numbers on the exercises and their solutions; on p. 267, read 6 for 5, 7 for 6, 5 for 7; on p. 137, Comrie 1981 and Dik 1980 are quoted but not to be found in the bibliography), and printing errors is quite annoying. Especially the printing error on p. 41 with respect to the phonological rules presented there is rather fatal. Moreover, that German linguists cannot spell Otto Behaghel's name correctly (pp. 258 and 298) is really frustrating (I am sure that Bernard Comrie will not be too pleased that his first name is misspelled as well: p. 297).

This (by the way, incomplete) list of errors, shortcomings, and outright sloppiness unfortunately thrusts the positive aspects of this book into the background. In its general design it can be used — and may even be rather helpful — in introductory seminars as one of a number of other teaching aids. I may use it myself for preparing an introductory seminar to the field, but only after having checked books like Gleason (1961), Ruoff (1972), Cowan and Rakusan (1985), etc. In its present form, however, the book may especially serve as a — negative — example for demonstrating to the student that one of the cardinal virtues required in

linguistics in general and in descriptive linguistics in particular is meticulous and conscientious work.

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R. H. Robins: *General Linguistics. An Introductory Survey*, 4th ed. London and New York: Longman, 1989. xvii + 445 pp. £11.95 paper.

This book was first published in 1964, and it was in general welcomed and saluted by its reviewers.¹ In the subsequent editions (second edition: 1971, third edition: 1980), the author repeatedly made modifications in order to adapt the book to recent developments. But he never abandoned his original principle, according to which there is no understanding of current approaches in general linguistics if the thought and methods of scholars such as Leonard Bloomfield, J. R. Firth, Daniel Jones, Edward Sapir, and other founders of structural linguistics are ignored. The general plan of the book reflects this principle: most of the text is about structuralist notions and methodology and about the data which support them. Only one of the nine chapters of the book (chapter 7) is on 'Current linguistic theory'.² Such a conception presupposes quite a reserved attitude toward theoretical linguistics. In fact, the author is not especially committed to any of the current theories, nor does he reject any of them. But it should be stressed that this attitude is not the expression of indifference: the author, instead of supporting one type of theory and rejecting others, constantly discusses and illustrates the various fundamental alternatives which have determined theoretical developments and conflicts in linguistics over the past 60 years. This is certainly an appropriate way of writing a recent history of linguistics. But is it acceptable for an introductory textbook? There are two general arguments in favor of a positive answer. The first concerns the internal structure of the discipline. General