

# REVIEW ARTICLE

THE VIEWS AND CHARACTERISTICS  
OF PROFESSOR BOHUMIL TRNKA:  
*HIS SELECTED PAPERS IN STRUCTURAL LINGUISTICS*

KEITARO IRIE

*Okayama University*

0. On the twenty-sixth of February in 1984, I received a black-edged letter in Czech. It was an obituary from the Faculty of Philosophy in the Caroline University of Prague, announcing the sudden death on the fourteenth of February in 1984 of Professor Bohumil Trnka. I was just beginning to read his last great book: *Selected Papers in Structural Linguistics*. So the announcement gave me a great shock.

If I am permitted to be confidential for a while, I wrote my first paper on Dryden's language based on Professor Trnka's *On the Syntax of the English Verb from Caxton to Dryden* in a Japanese translation. Novice as I was, I dared to send my paper to the world-famous scholar, Professor Trnka, saying that I was a disciple of Professor Michio Masui at Hiroshima University. Professor Trnka wrote a letter to me, unexpectedly, and gave a few papers of his. From then on, he kept on encouraging me with his advice and papers.

When his last book: *Selected Papers in Structural Linguistics* was published, I congratulated him on its publication. To my great joy, a copy of the book was presented to both Professor Masui and me with his signature on it. So his sudden death meant a loss of the pillar of the study for me.

As far as I know, Professor Bohumil Trnka's relation with Japan dates from the year 1956, when the late Professor Shizuka Saito translated into Japanese *On the Syntax of the English Verb from Caxton to Dryden* (1930). The translation contributed remarkably to the English studies in Japan.

Around 1962, the late Professor Tetsuya Kanakiyo suggested to Professor Trnka that he should republish his "Phonological Analysis of Present-day Standard English" (1935) which had been out of print for many years, and in 1966 *A phonological analysis of present-day standard English in* the new revised edition was published here in Japan through the efforts of Professors Tetsuya

Kanekiyo and Tamotsu Koizumi. To our admiration, the first edition was made public no less than four years before the appearance of N. S. Trubetzkoy's "Grundzüge der Phonologie," and thus was a pioneer work in this field.

The scholarly friendship between Prof. Bohumil Trnka and Professor Michio Masui also should never be forgotten. This friendship matured in the former assuming an advisory editor of *Poetica*, and he himself contributed his paper: "A Few Remarks on Homonymy and Neutralization" to this journal (*Poetica* 1, April 1974).

1. Professor Bohumil Trnka's *Selected Papers in Structural Linguistics* was published in 1982 by the Mouton Publishers. The book consists of papers written for fifty years and is divided into five sections: section one — general linguistics (11 papers), section two — synchronic phonology (10 pp.), section three — statistical linguistics (3 pp.), section four — historical linguistics: diachronic phonology and morphology (12 pp.), and section five — synchronic morphology, syntax and style (14 pp.). The brief and to-the-point Introduction by the Editor, Vilém Fried and the Afterword by Roman Jakobson embrace these papers.

Treating all the papers contained in this book is beyond the ability of the present reviewer. Therefore, the following line will be adopted: at least one paper is selected from each section and, at the same time, from each decade of the fifty years. And in reviewing these seven papers chronologically, we shall make an attempt to find out some views and characteristics of Bohumil Trnka's attitude to the linguistic analysis.

### 1.1. Is Analysis More Perfect than Synthesis?

(Section five) — "Analysis and Synthesis in English" (1928)

This paper was published in *English Studies* 10, 1928.

In the beginning, the Author points out that under the change of synthetic into analytic constructions, and vice versa, 'there must be psychological motives causing the speakers to use or prefer analytical (or synthetical) means of expression, and the hearers to adopt them.' It is to be noted that, later in his researches, psychology is entirely denied to linguistics. Then the Author tries to find characteristics of the morphology of Modern English from a viewpoint of the analytic tendency.

After putting his finger on analytic phenomena in English and other languages, he remarks that the growth of analytic structures in a language is not a mark of its progress, as we are liable to think after having read O. Jespersen's "Progress in Language," nor has anything to do with the development of culture and thought as some persons believe.

The notion of the 'drift' to analysis is worthy of note. According to the

Author, the change of the synthetic into the corresponding synonymous analytic constructions is likely to take place in languages where the 'drift' to analysis is prevalent because of the 'capability' of the combined words. These words 'express the same notion periphrastically, to lose their full meaning in the combination, so that this periphrasis supplants the synthetic forms which have fallen into disuse for various reasons.'

In conclusion, the Author reverts to the question: 'whether an analytical language is more perfect from the technical point of view as an instrument for the expression of human thought and feeling.' The simplicity of English morphology induces us to think that English is more perfect than synthetic languages. And the simplicity of expression is an advantage for the speaker. However, the analytic structure offers greater difficulties to the hearer. In English, 'the inconvenience of analysis is tempered by the presence of so many borrowed words of Latin origin.' These 'ex-Latin' words are still synthetic in nature. The Author seems to withhold a definitive answer.

### 1.2. Application of Trubetzkoy's View of Phonology

(Section Two) — "General Laws of the Phonemic Combinations" (1936)

This article was originally published in *TCLP*, 1936, reprinted in *PSRL*, and partly revised.

In his "Zur allgemeinen Theorie der phonologischen Vokalsysteme," N. S. Trubetzkoy made up phonological laws which apply to all linguistic systems. These laws, in which Trubetzkoy refers to the hierarchy of phonological factors in languages, may be reduced to either of the following formulas: 'If there is *a*, *b* also exists. If *a* exists, *b* is missing.' He contends that all linguistic laws that cannot bear this test will have only a limited validity.

In "General Laws of the Phonemic Combinations," the Author searches, with the method drawn up by Trubetzkoy, for the special rules regulating phonemic combinations in English. The present writer will not elaborate on details, but will comment on a few points which seem to be noteworthy.

The rule which is suggested by Trubetzkoy and may be expressed by the formula: 'If there is *p*, it must be neither followed nor preceded by *p*<sup>1</sup> in the same morpheme,' may be called 'the law of the minimal phonological contrast.' With this concept of the minimal phonological contrast, which becomes too much famous later, the Author attempts to analyze English phonemic combinations, revealing subtle differences among phonemic relationships. And the comparison of monomorphemic combinations in various languages leads him to 'risk' the formulation of the general tendencies of consonantal combinations.

Here, as everywhere else, we can see the Author's tendency to the generalization based on linguistic facts.

### 1.3. For Scientific Literary Study (Section five) – "The Problem of Style" (1941)

This article, originally published under the Czech title: "K otázce stylu" in *Sas* 7, 1941, was later translated by the Editor.

After surveying various views on style of A. Schleichner, K. Vossler, L. Spitzer, Ch. Bally, E. Winkler, and M. Deutschbein, the Author shows his concept of style. For him, 'style is neither an individual matter nor a purely supra-individual (collective) matter.' Both spheres of language, realized in oral and written utterances, are also present in their stylistic domain and both cannot be separated.

Indeed it is possible to treat either the first or the second sphere of language from the researcher's focus, but each of the two spheres must be considered either as 'the point of departure' or as 'the goal of research.' The individuality has always interrelationship with the collectivity, without which the uniqueness could not exist. We can recognize the structural view here.

It is worthwhile to note the following remark that stylistics differs from syntax in that the former deals with the various components from the viewpoint of the highest linguistic unit, the utterance, whereas the latter examines the interlexical relations in the sentences, the smaller segments of the utterance.

J. Mukařovský's aesthetic analysis of utterance is interesting to us. According to his view, the aesthetic elements of a poetic (or other) utterance are 'determined by the speaker's or writer's intent to direct the hearer's or reader's attention to the expression itself, while the extra-aesthetic elements are governed by their communicative function.' The aesthetic components often show themselves in the utterance in isolation, which focuses the reader's and hearer's attention for a while from the communicative context to the expression itself, and Mukařovský calls this aesthetic phenomenon (e.g. an incidental rhyme, alliteration, metaphor, etc.) the 'unstructured aesthetic.'

With regard to this view, the Author maintains that both communicative and aesthetic elements are present in each and every utterance. He opposes separating both elements distinctly. The difference between the two types of utterances results from their dominant intent as to the aesthetic function or as to the communicative function. After all, Mukařovský's practical interpretation of poetic works is one example of stylistic analysis, but its complexity makes itself part of aesthetics rather than linguistics, so the Author contends.

Finally, what does the Author think is the main task of stylistics? There is a rigorous, functional regularity in style. This regularity reflects functional oppositions. 'The detection and classification of these oppositions is the main task of stylistics.'

### 1.4. For Adequate Means of Communication and Expression (Section one) "General Problems of Structural Linguistics" (1943)

This paper was published in Czech under the title: "Obecné otázky strukturálního jazykozpytu" in *Sas* 9, 1943. It was translated by Philip H. Smith in the U.S.A. in 1962.

Several points are to be taken up which need to be mentioned. The nineteenth-century linguists considered the genetic comparison the only valid method, whereas the Prague School structural linguists directed their attention to the then novel view that 'language at a given period represents... a system whose components are maintained in a relatively unchanging form by the fixed mutual relations of their elements,' and, at the same time, 'in which complementarity (synonymity) and the capacity of some components to replace others (homonymy) allow for change and thus enable it to function adequately through time.' Thus, the Author insists, historical linguists must necessarily use the structural method, if they want to comprehend the movement of a language. In phonology, for example, they have to speak of the phonologization of phonemic oppositions in a given position in the word, the loss of neutralization, rephonologization, the re-grouping of phonemes, and so on.

Both 'langue' and 'parole,' the two aspects of language, are represented in the movement of the linguistic system. From the Author's viewpoint, a change in one aspect is not the cause of a change in the other, and deviation in the 'parole' is not the forerunner of a shift in the 'langue.' Both aspects are sides of the same coin. So historical linguists, seeking to have scientific accuracy, must look for their laws in the constant relations between older and newer stages of a language.

To structural linguists, a linguistic system is made up of several sub-systems. They intersect and cooperate smoothly, without overlapping. Each sub-system makes sense by itself. All the same they are autonomous. It is this autonomy that permits us to deal with each sub-system separately in researches.

It is also necessary for structural linguists to discover the goal which gives sense to the sequence of functional changes and orders them into a 'tendency.' Without assuming a goal, mutations would be merely isolated changes.

Last, is there any regular correspondence between a language and the psychology of its speaker? The Author insists that phenomenology denies any such direct relation. Linguistics and psychology of speech are two separate sciences. Henceforth this attitude becomes one of his fundamental principles.

All in all, the general point of the development of languages is that language always tends to be an adequate means of communication and expression for its user.

## 1.5. From Quantity to Quality

(Section three)—“Quantitative Linguistics” (1951)

This article was first published in Czech under the title: “Kvantitativní lingvistika” in *ČMF* 34, 1951. The article is slightly abridged and revised, and is also translated by the Editor.

The Author says that quantitative linguistics is a branch of linguistics for revealing the numerical characteristics and defining more precisely the quantitative relations.

He reminds the reader of the fact that the quantitative idea is already inherent in the definitions of the fundamental linguistic oppositions, and that a quantitative fact may be a qualitative factor, or a quantity may shift into a quality in the course of time.

The quantitative view can be seen in the development of modern linguistics. O. Jespersen tried to demonstrate syntactic relations by means of mathematical formulas. It is said that Baudouin de Courtenay and also Ferdinand de Saussure started from mathematics. It is needless to say that Chomskyan generative grammar is closely related with mathematics or logic. Any concrete linguistic fact cannot be understood without the quantitative concept. Only through achieving ‘full agreement between quantitative and qualitative analysis,’ an overall understanding of linguistic reality will be ensured.

In the field of phonology, for example, the qualitative analysis of phonemes intends to ‘stocktake’ and to find out whether they appear in certain positions or not. On the other hand, the quantitative analysis does intend to show their existence, and also to examine their exact numerical occurrence in the whole vocabulary of a language.

The Author’s remark on the quantitative analysis of literary texts deserves to be noted, since most researches on language are carried out on actual texts. He says that in principle quantitative analysis has two aims: ‘(a) determining the contextual frequency of the various constituents,’ and ‘(b) determining their periodicity, i.e., stating the pauses by which the constituents in question are separated in a running text.’

As is always the case with him, the Author tries to find the possibility that there may exist general laws which regulate the quantitative structures of all languages. He names as predecessors B. Bourdon, J. van Ginneken, N. S. Trubetzkoy, J. B. Estoup, and G. K. Zipf, and introduces Estoup’s and Zipf’s laws.

The Author devoted much time to foreign language teaching. He published several textbooks of English, Dutch, Danish, and Swedish for Czech students. So he puts stress on the significance which the quantitative concept has for the teaching of modern languages. All the same, he warns the reader against the overestimation of the frequency. The most important thing is that the

‘statistician’ should be a linguist first of all. He should not be concerned, among others, with the statistics itself, but deal with linguistic data and facts. With these reservations, the linguist is able to make better use of the quantitative method for the furthering of his science.

The Author’s belief in linguistic facts gleams here, too.

## 1.6. A Few Characteristics of the Prague School

(Section one)—“Prague Structural Linguistics” (1958)

This paper was originally published in *PP* 1, 1958.

As an introduction, a brief mention must be made of the Prague School. The ‘Cercle Linguistique de Prague’ is, or, more strictly, was the Circle established in Prague in 1926. This Circle was discontinued in 1950, and was superseded by the ‘new’ Circle of Modern Philologists. The ‘old’ Circle has had a world-wide renown for its functional and structural view of language, especially for one of the fruits of its works — phonology.

In the first place, the assumption that the objectivity of the Prague linguistics is the analysis of speech utterance, both spoken and written, is described as its starting point.

Then, structuralism is defined as ‘the trend of linguistics which is concerned with analysing relationships between the segments of a language, conceived as a hierarchically arranged whole.’

And the Author undertakes to delimit three schools of structuralism apart from the school of Geneva: the Cercle Linguistique de Prague, the Cercle Linguistique de Copenhagen, and the American descriptive linguistics centered around the school of L. Bloomfield.

Although it is generally said that the Prague linguists were influenced by F. de Saussure at the earliest stages, the Author is negative towards the Geneva School: he says that the Prague School does not hold the Saussurian dichotomy ‘langue’ — ‘parole’ to be a realistic basis of linguistic researches. The Prague linguists consider what de Saussure describes ‘parole’ as utterance, from which a code of inherent structural rules is to be found out.

As for the relationship with glossematics, the Author claims that Hjelmslev’s ‘logically consistent and conceptually well-arranged theory appears to be divorced from, and inadequate for, linguistic reality,’ and that the Prague linguists have not been influenced by the Copenhagen linguist.

For the difference between the Prague linguistics and the Bloomfieldian linguistics, the former lays emphasis on ‘the analysis of the phoneme into the relevant features which constitutes it,’ while the latter puts stress on ‘its distributional features in words or in utterances.’

One of the other important divergences is that linguistic theory is not viewed by the Prague linguists as ‘an a-priori discipline independent of all

experience, but as a theoretical framework derived from concrete linguistic materials and liable to verification, development and improvement by the use of further material and by further research work.' This attitude to linguistic research is essential to the Prague linguists, especially to the Author, who has been faithful to the tenets of the Cercle Linguistique de Prague.

Naturally, there are members of the School spoken of. According to the Author, the development of the Prague structuralism was started in part by Josef Zubatý (1855–1932), whose anti-mechanistic views were held by his pupils (B. Havránek and J. M. Kořínek), and in part by V. Mathesius (1882–1945) and his disciples (B. Trnka and J. Vachek), who concerned themselves in establishing more precise methods in both synchronic and diachronic linguistics. R. Jakobson, N. S. Trubetzkoy, and S. Karcevskij, all of them Russians, were also members of the Cercle Linguistique de Prague.

In short, the results of research works of the Prague School will remain to be most significant contributions to linguistics.

#### 1.7. Analogy Works on All Levels, with Their Own Laws (Section four)–“About Morphological Analogy” (1961)

This paper, originally published in Czech under the title: “O morfonologické analogii” in *ČMF* 43, 1961, was translated into English by the Editor.

The Author makes a survey of views on ‘analogy’ from the Greek and Latin down to the modern times. He highly evaluates the view of H. Paul, who emphasized, in his *Prinzipien der Sprachgeschichte* (1937), the importance of analogy as the basis for the creative linguistic activity. Rather out-dated as they seemed, the ideas of H. Paul’s linguistic theory made it possible that this theory was almost universally accepted by linguists. ‘Later research,’ the Author insists, ‘brought nothing much new, it only extended or emphasised some factors of this theory.’ And the remarkable view of the Prague School that language is ‘a structural system of signs composed in various levels,’ each operating with its own autonomy, does ‘permit a new and far more penetrating analysis of analogy.’ This structural concept allows him to conclude that analogy works on all levels according to their own laws which do not ‘infringe’ on the laws of the other levels.

After this introduction, the Author comments on the morphological analogy. Taking up several languages by way of example, he contends that the morphological analogy never infringes upon the laws of phonological structure of the language, but that it only works on the level of morpheme. This view leads the Author to conclude that we may use analogical innovations to grasp the fact that the phonological law which they broke to all appearance, had in reality died out and been replaced by another phonological

law. Indeed this linguistic fact was already known to the Junggrammatiker, but the fact was never expounded clearly.

The Author summarizes the causes of the morphological analogy: (i) the morphemic two-member structure of lexical units, and (ii) the complementarity of the phonemic realization of the morphological oppositions.

As is the case with his other papers, here we can see the Author’s scientifically oriented attitude to ‘approach’ the morphological analogy. To him, each level of language follows its own autonomous law, working together with other levels. He expects further researches for reliable formulations of the laws governing morphological and morphonological processes.

2. The seven papers selected have revealed views and characteristics of the Author, Bohumil Trnka, in relation to his linguistic achievement.

It is true that at the earliest stage of his research work, Trnka is affected by the psychological view of language, but later he drops out of it, separating distinctly psychology from linguistics.

He aims at scientifically solid methods, which lead to generalization. At the same time, he is flexible in his thinking. He does not hold a linguistic theory to be an a-priori discipline, but to be a theoretical framework derived from linguistic materials, which allows further investigation for improvement. In dealing with concrete problems, he tends to draw them to his favorite ‘field’ of phonology, that is, the ‘stronghold’ of the Prague School, to whose tenets he holds on for his life.

Bohumil Trnka wrote many papers in his mother tongue. Regrettably, however, those many articles are very difficult to be understood beyond the Slavic World. Indeed some papers originally in Czech were translated into English for the better understanding and appreciation of this book. But there are still more papers in Czech, not a few of which I have been given by Trnka himself. I wish those ‘unknown’ articles to be translated in English for a better appreciation of the late Professor Bohumil Trnka’s linguistic ideas.

It is not too much to say that we should find one of the greatest linguists that the twentieth century has ever produced, in *Selected Papers in Structural Linguistics*.