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Alf Sommerfelt: **Diachronic and Synchronic Aspects of Language** (Selected Articles). 's-Gravenhage (Mouton & Co), 1962. Pp. 421, price not given.

It was certainly a very good idea to publish in one volume a collection of papers written in the course of the last four decades by one of the most distinguished linguists of our time, President of the International Permanent Committee of Linguists, well known also in this country by his sympathetic understanding of the effort of the Prague linguistic group of the late 'twenties and 'thirties. The topics of the papers are demonstrative of the wide interest of the Norwegian scholar: they range from general linguistic issues to those of phonetics and phonemics, Indo-european, and especially Germanic and Celtic comparative grammar, and to problems of vocabulary.

Professor Alf Sommerfelt belonged, in the earliest years of his scholarly activities, to those who assiduously tried to find new ways leading linguistics out of the impasse to which it had been dragged by the hegemony of the Neogrammarian ideas and methods. His research into Modern Celtic languages, Irish and Welsh, as well as his study with some French sociologically oriented scholars (among whom Antoine Meillet appears to have exerted the greatest influence upon the linguistic novice), helped the young scholar to build up his early linguistic creed. In it he urged that, in the long run, changes of language are socially conditioned. At the same time, however, he admitted the inner (today we should say, systemic) motivation of such changes. He was convinced, however, that the ultimate choice of the process to implement that change was motivated by the social conditions in which the language in question was used. At a very early age he defended the French sociological conception of language and linguistics against one of the old masters of Nordic philology, Hjalmar Falk (the paper is also included in the reviewed selection).

The year 1929, which saw the publication of the first two volumes of the series *Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Prague*, was to become an important date in the development of Sommerfelt's linguistic thought. He was particularly impressed by Trubetzkoy's paper on the general theory of the phonological systems of vowels in which he saw an interesting attempt at establishing some panchronistic regularities applicable to all languages in all their periods. Equally strongly he appears to have been impressed by Jakobson's thesis that all changes must be examined with regard to the system of language affected by them. Sommerfelt soon contacted the Prague scholars. He took part in the 1930 International Phonological Conference organized by them (his paper read at the conference is also included in the reviewed volume), and his conception of the development of language was getting ever closer to that of the Prague scholars. He not only accepted the concept of the phoneme, but tried to avoid all one-sidedness often associated with that concept: he denounced the all too mechanistic conception of the phoneme by L. Bloomfield and some of his followers and at the same time did not hesitate to emphasize the psychological aspects of the term (aspects not infrequently overlooked by the Prague scholars themselves).—Sometimes Sommerfelt's thinking is astonishingly parallel to that of the Prague people: one finds here, e.g., the thesis that "la langue commune", having a natural tendency to expand over wider territories, is apt to become structurally simplified—a thesis which will certainly remind the Czech reader of analogous statements by B. Havránek, published in the early 'thirties. Analogous premisses are seen here to have led to analogous conclusions. Like Havránek and Jakobson, the author also duly stresses the major part played by bilingual speakers in the convergent (or parallel) development of neighbouring languages (see, e.g., Havránek's contribution to the 1939 Congress of Slavists in Belgrade). — More instances of the kind could be quoted, of course.

Another sphere of Sommerfelt's interest, very aptly represented in the volume, is that concerned with the mutual relations between language and culture. The author is very well informed of the views of all those scholars (especially B. L. Whorf, H. Hoijer, etc.) who have devoted much energy to attacking these problems and presents a most useful survey of the problems as he sees them, warning, very justifiably, against exaggerations or hasty conclusions. Equally commendable are his pages devoted to another delicate subject, the relation of language and thinking where the reader is warned against unjustifiable applications of European (or even Western European) categories to non-European language and thought. Most illuminating are

the passages concerned with the differences of European reasoning, based on Aristotle's logic, and the reasoning typical of the Chinese. Naturally, the problems here are rather pointed out than definitely solved, but the way they are pointed out is both highly stimulating and formally elegant.

Another most important common feature of Sommerfelt's and Prague views is the emphasis laid on the fact that changes in language are effected not gradually but by jumps. While the Prague linguists were led to this thesis rather by considerations of philosophical nature, in Sommerfelt's case the thesis appears to have been motivated mostly by empirical observation not only of his own but of some older investigators (e.g., by P. Rousselot's well-known analysis of the changes in the French patois of Cellefrouin). It is most remarkable to see how Sommerfelt was able to synthetize the powerful inspiration he had drawn from the French linguistic tradition (besides Meillet, M. Grammont appears to have been one of his favourite masters) with the structuralist ideas of the Prague group. In referring to this group Sommerfelt usually means Trubetzkoy and Jakobson; it is interesting to note that he appears to have been distinctly less informed about the activities and achievements of the Czech members of the group (such as Mathesius, Havránek, Trnka, etc.). The parallelism of Sommerfelt's and Havránek's views has already been pointed out; with Mathesius Sommerfelt shares, apparently not being aware of it, a number of other essential points—e.g. the emphasis on the selective activity of the speaker of language displayed by him in analysing the complex reality of the outside world into elements to be denominated; further, the distinction of the inner and outer motivation of linguistic changes, etc.

The above comment had to be confined, for technical reasons, to those papers of the reviewed volume which deal with issues of general linguistic interest. The papers concerned with issues of comparative grammar can only be mentioned here, though they will certainly arouse much attention of the specialists (mainly Celticists). There is, however, another group of Sommerfelt's papers which, however small, should not be left unmentioned here, despite the very narrow limits of the present report. It is a group of three obituaries of distinguished linguists, two of which will undoubtedly be read with great interest by any student of language. They are those devoted to the memories of Hugo Schuchardt and Antoine Meillet. One can easily understand why it was exactly these two giants of linguistic research that were to attract Sommerfelt's attention (and why, consequently, it was found most appropriate to include them into the reviewed volume). Both these scholars must have been very close to Sommerfelt's heart, just as their approach of linguistic problems had been, in principle, very close to his. Schuchardt, an ingenious author of monographs of the type *Slawo-Deutsches und Slawo-Italienisches*, throwing intense light on the problems of the mixing of languages, must have strongly attracted the young Norwegian whose attention had been, since the earliest days of his scholarly career, concentrated on the same category of problems. He had seen particularly instructive examples of the problems not only in the countries where modern Celtic languages are still spoken, but also in the notorious Russenorsk which, in his younger years, he still could have heard in actual use. As for Meillet, who had been Sommerfelt's direct teacher and whose impact upon the early period of Sommerfelt's activities had been so powerful, he could hardly find a more competent biographer than his Norwegian pupil. The adequate evaluation of work is here accompanied by intimate human touch which is illustrative of Sommerfelt no less than of Meillet himself. The obituaries, thus, supply a worthy frame to the wealth of brilliant ideas contained in the volume, and they will be found hardly less impressive by the general reader than those papers which discuss strictly linguistic issues.

It is rather regrettable that a relatively large number of misprints (especially in the English articles) may disturb, however slightly, the pleasure of reading this most welcome and most valuable volume.

Josef Vachek

Style in Language

Six years is a period long enough for the development of a modern scientific discipline. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning again the book which, under the title *Style in Language* (The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1960), brings materials from a conference on style held at Indiana University in the spring of 1958. The conference was attended by linguists, psychologists, literary critics, and cultural anthropologists, "each speaking his own professional language, each starting from at least a somewhat different base than the others". The complex character of scientific methods may of course give a clue to the solution of problems concerning literary style, which is a subject to be regarded as a complex phenomenon in its very nature.