

W. P. Lehmann (ed.), *A Reader in Nineteenth-Century Historical Indo-European Linguistics*. (Indiana University Studies in the History and Theory of Linguistics.) Bloomington and London; Indiana University Press, 1967. Pp. vi + 266.

Despite its title, this is a book for the synchronic linguist – particularly that brand of linguist (probably in the majority, these days) who has had little or no experience of historical linguistics apart from hearsay and possibly Pedersen; who has read briefly about such collocations as ‘Grimm’s law’; who is aware that in some way Sir William Jones’s paragraph about Sanskrit, Latin and Greek was ‘epoch-making’, and that Rask’s essay was ‘brilliant’. This kind of semi-awareness of the nineteenth-century scene (and indeed earlier) can be very dangerous: one develops a false perspective, overemphasizing some personalities at the expense of others, maintaining trends where none existed, seeing things in black and white instead of various kinds of grey – even, at times, getting one’s facts quite wrong by uncritically following secondary sources (cf. Teeter’s review of Waterman in *Lg* 41 (1965) 512–518). Examples would be the way in which people are aware of Grimm’s law, but unaware of Rask’s earlier formulation; or again, aware of Grassmann, but not of von Raumer and Lottner, who anticipated many of his points. The concentration on Jones’s solitary paragraph has given many people the impression that he was primarily a philologist, whereas his interest in language was peripheral (as with others at that time, such as von Schlegel); in fact the paragraph stands out rather oddly in his discourse, which was essentially a report on Indic culture. Again, the neo-grammarians are regularly discussed as if they were a revolutionary (in a pejorative sense) movement of little permanent consequence, which judgement ignores certain basic continuities to be found in their work and fails to recognize the positive contribution they made to the clarification of linguistic principles in general, e.g. their emphasis on the importance of the contemporary language.

What this book does is give the reader a sense of context and continuity by providing primary source material for the major developments in linguistic concepts and methodology in the nineteenth century; it thus can be used as a useful corrective for many of the misunderstandings referred to as well as a foundation for a more profound knowledge of the period.

The following authors are all represented: Jones, von Schlegel, Rask, Bopp, Grimm, von Humboldt, von Raumer, Schleicher, Lottner, Grassmann, Verner, Hübschmann,

#### SHORTER NOTICES

Brugmann, Osthoff and Brugmann, Sievers (two selections), de Saussure and Whitney. The editor has translated, or had translations made of all foreign language material. On the whole he has included complete sections of text, and not just brought together a set of short excerpts; occasionally he provides paraphrases of relatively unimportant passages; and some of the shorter essays are printed in full. The extracts have clearly been very carefully chosen, and they are quite coherent in illustrating the points at issue. Difficulties over interpretation are largely anticipated by Lehmann in the extremely helpful introductory remarks preceding each selection – a mixture of exposition, critique and biography, that places each author firmly and sympathetically in his historical setting. In addition, non-historical work during the century (particularly in the latter half) is regularly referred to.

Perhaps the most striking impression one gets reading through this book is the extent to which so many of the ideas (good and bad) of twentieth-century linguistics can be traced back to the nineteenth: see, for example, the emphasis on spoken, as opposed to written language, which emerges very strongly in the latter half of the volume (e.g. in Osthoff & Brugmann's preface); the emphasis on grammatical criteria, particularly the notion of 'system' (in Rask); the development of a precise articulatory phonetics (as in the remarkably perceptive work of von Raumer); Siever's concern to study the sentence as the primary linguistic unit; and so on. One of Osthoff & Brugmann's famous pronouncements (202) deserves to be quoted again, even in a short review, as it shows how comments relevant then can still be relevant now: 'only that comparative linguist who for once emerges from the hypotheses-beclouded atmosphere of the workshop in which the original Indo-European forms are forced, and steps into the clear air of tangible reality and of the present in order to get information about those things which gray theory can never reveal to him, and only he who renounces forever that formerly widespread but still used method of investigation according to which people observe language only on paper and resolve everything into terminology, systems of rules, and grammatical formalism and believe they have then fathomed the essence of the phenomena when they have devised a name for the thing – only he can arrive at a correct idea of the way in which linguistic forms live and change, . . .'

This book will be a useful way in to the history of ideas in early linguistics; in addition it illustrates the methodology of historical language study (see especially Verner's masterly presentation), and provides a background for contemporary discussion. People who want to get the feel of the nineteenth century in as short a time as possible will find it invaluable.

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