Traditions, innovations, and connections in writing the history of linguistics*

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1. Introduction

Among historians of linguistics, the thirteenth International Conference of the History of the Language Sciences (ICHoLS XIII) in Vila Real (Portugal) will be recalled as a well attended and splendidly organized conference. This edition of the triennial event resulted in two substantial volumes with selected papers, a SIHoLS volume as well as a Nodus volume, both of which were published only two years after the conference.¹ Anyone taking on the task of reviewing ICHoLS proceedings is immediately confronted with the immense breadth of our field, which calls for modesty on the reviewer's part. The contributions included (60 in total) are highly diverse, not only in terms of topics, languages and periods dealt with or approaches chosen, but also (although less significantly) in terms of quality. It is fair to say that a small minority of the contributions lack sufficient depth of analysis, or fail to refer to secondary sources other than previous scholarship written by the same author. On the other hand, it would be absurd to pretend that I could critically evaluate the essays in these two volumes with any great expertise. Instead of spelling out any weaknesses I might detect in fields that happen not to be too remote from my own 'comfort zone', I will mainly limit my evaluative remarks to taking a critical look at the shape of our field in its entirety as reflected in these volumes. As a matter of fact, both volumes elicit a different kind of review, in that they invite the reader to reflect on the state of, and trends within, the present-day historiography of linguistics.

The editors deserve praise for their precision and for their meticulous work: the number of typographical errors and inaccuracies that I came across was impressively low and mainly limited to minor punctuation errors. All of the contributions (written in English, French, Portuguese and Spanish — astonishingly, German is absent) are accompanied by English abstracts, some of which would have benefitted from more linguistic revision. In accordance with earlier volumes of the series, the twenty papers of the SIHoLS volume are ordered chronologically, and are preceded by one section devoted to more general topics. The arrangement of the forty papers in the Nodus volume is based

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¹ Just as an aside, it is worth recalling that, of the five editions organized between 2008 and 2020, four were organized in the European Union, and all five took place on the European Continent. If it is ICHoLS' ambition to serve a global, and not a predominantly European, community of scholars, it could be wise to pay more active attention to the somewhat Eurocentric dynamic of last years.

on the authors' surnames — a straightforward and pragmatic decision which, however, does not make it easy for the reader to obtain a first overall impression of the volume's content. It is probably the volume's impressive size that prevented the editors from elaborating on the generic title *Tradition and Innovation in the History of Linguistics* in their introduction. It was this very title, however, which inspired this reviewer to explore traditions and innovations in the *historiography* of linguistics by taking the 60 essays as a representative selection (the editors themselves also regard the contributions included as representative of the entire field, see the editors' introduction to the SIHoLS volume, p. IX). This does not imply that this review article will be able to cover all contributions included in both volumes (a lack of mention in this review is not equivalent to a negative assessment).

2. *The self-critical reflex in the (meta)historiography of linguistics*

It might be useful to start by noting what is *not* represented in the volumes: we can conclude that the trend to establish 'metahistoriography' as a separate sub-discipline of the history of linguistics has not materialized. Many readers will recall how the question of our field's general relevance was thoroughly discussed in a host of metahistoriographical essays, most of which were published between 1980 and 2000 (some books include Schmitter 1982; Grottsch 1982; Koerner 1989; Hüllen 1990; Schmitter and van der Wal 1998; for more recent contributions, see the overview given by Swiggers 2017).

In the past, the criticism was sometimes expressed that meta-historiographers all too often knocked on open doors (see, e.g., the discussions in Schmitter and van der Wal 1998). "Wer von der Sprachwissenschaft nichts weiss", Eugenio Coseriu once let slip, in the blunt vein so typical of him, "schreibt über ihre Geschichte, und wer von der Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft nichts weiß, schreibt über die Methode der Geschichtsschreibung" (Coseriu and Meisterfeld 2003: 3). In addition, the question arises as to what extent the history of linguistics needs its very own 'meta-historiography': shouldn't historians of linguistics instead follow the relevant debates that rage in the broader field of history of science and scholarship, and perhaps even of historiography *tout court* (Swiggers 2017: 88 is a champion of *grounded theory* in sociology)? This is not the place to settle this question, but what could be emphasized here is that the self-critical reflex that was so typical of many practitioners of metahistoriography proved to be particularly sound, fruitful and productive. Without advocating a return to the at times somewhat hermetic and philosophical debates that dominated meta-historiography in its early and glorious years (cf. also Swiggers 2017: 89), a number of questions that were then regularly raised seem to me to be of undiminished importance for our discipline. One of these self-critical questions will serve as a unifying thread in this review article: how can we ensure that the fruit of our research is also perceived by an audience that is not well versed in our field?

In several respects, Margaret Thomas's significant contribution to the SIHoLS volume touches on aspects of earlier meta-historiographical debates (without, however, referring to them). Her paper shows how much weight textbooks on linguistics tend to attach to the history of linguistics. Given that survey courses in the U.S. are generally textbook-based, Thomas is entirely right to state that "[t]hese books constitute an influential gateway genre" (p. 6). Distinguishing four principal strategies — ranging from complete neglect through the insertion of some historical references to "the employment of the history of linguistics as a basic organizing principle" (p. 6) — she comes to the conclusion that an ahistorical approach prevails in most textbooks. "[I]n the absence of historical content", Thomas concludes, "few authors expose students to evidence of contradiction, debate, or rupture in the earlier language study" (p. 15). Interestingly, the two textbooks that take the history of linguistics as their organizing principle (viz. C. C. Fries' 1965 *Linguistics: The study of language* and

F. P. Dinneen's 1968 *An introduction to general linguistics*) predate the institutionalization of the historiography of linguistics, which suggests that our field has failed to impress many generalists in linguistics.

The late Rudolf Schreyer did not fail to emphasize, in the clearest of terms, that most linguists do indeed appear to overlook or neglect research results obtained in our field (Schreyer 2000:206; see also Schmitz 2010). And in a recent paper, Pierre Swiggers (2010:8–9]) notes that the 'standing' of our field can be improved:

More particularly, historiographers of linguistics, in collaboration with historians of ideas and practitioners in the field of social history, should (not cease to) stress the scientific 'standing' of the history-writing of linguistics: as an interdisciplinary inquiry, based on solid methodological foundations, into the history of linguistics, it contributes to fundamental insights into the achievements (as well as missed opportunities), rewarding pathways (as well as loose ends), principles (and pseudo-principles), techniques (as well as bricolages), theorems (and assumptions) that have marked the evolutionary course of man's interest in the basic metaphor conveying sense (and non-sense) to life: language.

After first surveying what linguists miss by overlooking our field, by taking the 60 conference proceeding papers as a representative body of texts, this review essay will point out why it comes as no surprise, at least in the eyes of this reviewer, that many results obtained in our field risk falling into oblivion among a wider readership of linguists. It will finally propose a strategy that could help strengthen our field's position, both in relation to neighbouring historical branches and to linguistics in general.

3. *Making progress in writing the history of linguistics*

Progress in linguistic historiography can be achieved in several areas. Roughly speaking, the contributions to both volumes can be subdivided into a number of categories, although it should be immediately pointed out that these categories are not mutually exclusive.

A number of papers succinctly present the work of significant, yet understudied linguists, or investigate hidden or underexplored connections between linguists. In a well-documented contribution in the Nodus volume, Iwona Milewska compares the intellectual outlook of two lesser-known orientlists of Polish origin, viz. Andrzej Gawroński (1885–1927) and Konstanty Regamey (1907–1982). In some contributions, the scholars under examination are well-known, albeit not in the first place as linguists. In a paper of substantial length, Frank Vonk searches for the views on language that are 'hidden' in the work of the logician Christoph Sigwart (1830–1904), with particular attention for subjectless sentences. Sónia Coelho and Susana Fontes offer an in-depth description of Francisco Solano Constâncio's (ca. 1772–1846) *Grammatica analytica da lingua portugueza* (1831), identifying the influences of several grammatical traditions. Kateryna Karunyk introduces the reader to George Y. Shevelov's (1908–2002) diachronic approach to the phoneme, a notion which originated first and foremost against the backdrop of synchronic studies. In an archive-based contribution to the Nodus volume, Tinatin Bolkvadze examines Giorgi Akhvlediani's (1887–1973) phonological ideas and his connections with Nikolay Trubetzkoy (1890–1938) and Roman Jakobson (1896–1982). Special attention is given to the impact of ideological systems on the development and dissemination of ideas.

In the Nodus volume, Charles-Henry Morling shows that connections between scholars are at times put forward even when the evidence is far from obvious. The starting point of his paper are claims made by the functional linguists Michael Halliday (1925–2018) and David Butt that John Rupert Firth's (1890–1960) school was "explicitly Whiteheadian in its guiding principles" (Butt, p. 259).

“If Whitehead is so central to British functionalism”, Morling asks (p. 250), “how does one account for the fact that most linguists belonging to this school are unaware of Whitehead’s work and never refer to it?” In the remainder of the article, Morling seeks to substantiate the links between both scholars by presenting close-reading evidence. Another paper focusing on complex connections between linguists is Pierre-Yves Testenoire’s contribution to the SIHoLS volume, which is entitled “Poétique saussurienne, poétique jakobsonienne: quels rapports?” The author points out how Roman Jakobson expressed his appreciation for Ferdinand Saussure’s (1857–1913) work on poetic anagrams, a somewhat atypical interest shared by both scholars, to the detriment of his work on general linguistics (“Le seul écrit accompli de Saussure au cours de son professorat genevois”, quoted on p. 222). Reasons of space prevent me from paraphrasing the very complex nature of the connections between Saussure’s and Jakobson’s theories on this matter. The following citation from the conclusion will probably suffice to arouse the reader’s curiosity: “La relation qu’établit Jakobson entre la poétique de Saussure et la sienne n’est donc pas celle d’une filiation, mais un curieux télescopage temporel évoqué à l’irréel du passé: le Saussure des anagrammes *aurait été* le Jakobson des années 10 et 20” (p. 229).

It goes without saying that Saussure and Jakobson do not fall into the category of under-studied linguists. As a matter of fact, a large number of papers are devoted to a specific notion in the work of a well-known or authoritative linguist. Going by both of the volumes under review, one has to come to the conclusion that Saussure is the most heavily researched figure in the history of linguistics — an impression which is readily confirmed by browsing through recent issues of historiographical journals. Drawing on manuscript materials, Alessandro Chidichimo explores the use of terms denoting temporality in Saussure’s work in the SIHoLS volume, with special attention given to *diachronie*, while Karen Alves da Silva draws attention to Saussure’s approach to the *sujet parlant*. Lorenzo Vitral traces changing attitudes of Noam Chomsky (1928) towards the “locus of the principles that make up the language faculty” (Nodus volume, p. 390). Anne-Gaëlle Toutain studies the embryonic development of Louis Hjelmslev’s (1899–1965) glossematic theory between his 1928 *Principes de grammaire générale*, where glossematics theory is still entirely absent, and its first appearance, in 1936.

By no means all of the contributions focus on specific linguists. A large number of papers focus on the study of a specific concept or term, or on the relationship between a certain notion and its terminography, or on a group of concepts. False friends, we might argue, exist not only in translation science, but also in conceptual history: at the first sight we think we know what a certain concept is all about, but on closer inspection it turns out to be both a confuse and a confusing notion. Ricardo Cavaliere’s contribution to the SIHoLS-volume focuses on “the concept of grammatical tradition”, as the title reads, but not exclusively, given that much attention is also paid to the notion of ‘traditional grammar’ — which is, of course, not the same thing. Cavaliere is right to point out how ‘traditional grammar’ has come under heavy attack in recent decades, without critics having a clear picture of what exactly such a grammar implied (pp. 19–21). Raf Van Rooy investigates the concept of *dialektos* by relying on a criterial grid, and Emilie Aussant guides the reader through the complex approaches to word classes in Sanskrit grammaticography. Both contributions to the SIHoLS volume exhibit insightful diagrams. One specific word class, the interjection, is singled out in Bernard Colombat’s contribution to the SIHoLS-volume. Exploring the treatment of the interjection from antiquity until the 17th century, the author succeeds in demonstrating from how many perspectives the rise of a word class can fruitfully be studied. To a certain extent, Aimée Lahaussais’ contribution to the Nodus volume represents a logical follow-up: its title “Where have all the interjections gone” makes clear that interjections tend to be absent from contemporary grammars of endangered languages.

Lahaussais' paper is a good representative of yet another type of historiographical contribution, which examines (and/or assesses) very recent linguistic work through a historiographical lens. A similar approach is present in Anja Hennemann's study of the "Spanish conditional in the (descriptive) grammars of the *Real Academia Española*", with particular attention paid to the so-called "journalistic conditional", where she shows how a historiographical perspective can help uncover discrepancies and lacunas in extant grammars. Somewhat in line with this, Alexander Kalkhoff compares approaches to diphthongs as developed in several linguistic frameworks before proposing a solution of his own.

Such approaches already indicate how some of the contributions seem to have only tangential connections to the history of linguistics. The field of missionary linguistics, for instance, is often regarded as a subfield of historiography of linguistics. However, a significant number of scholars active in missionary linguistics tend to study grammars, dictionaries and religious texts written by Early Modern missionaries from the perspective of historical linguistics rather than of the historiography of linguistics. In her contribution to the *Nodus* volume, Astrid Alexander-Bakkerus compares two Jebero versions of the Lord's Prayer, the first of which could be dated to the 17th century and the other to the 18th century. This enables her "to work out if the language has changed in the course of time and if so, how it has changed" (p. 2). Her approach is indeed, first and foremost, one of a historical linguist. In the conclusion, however, the author reveals the importance of being familiar with the special context in which the contemporary missionaries were active: instead of explaining the differences between the two texts exclusively in terms of internal language change, she points out that the divergences between the two versions should most likely be seen against the deeply changed societal background in which the 18th-century missionaries operated. Precisely because of the missionaries' longstanding presence in the Jebero communities, the Christian doctrine had been much more strongly interiorized in the meantime, which had a considerable impact on translational practices. Some other contributions are, in my opinion, further removed from the heart of our field, and will therefore not be discussed here.

Numerous contributions are devoted to the linguistic or grammaticographical activity in a particular period and region. It comes as no surprise that the main emphasis in these conference proceedings is on Portugal. In "Early Portuguese treatises and the case of scientific paradigms", Marina Kossarik argues that the contribution of Early Modern Portuguese grammarians and linguists has so far failed to obtain the attention it deserves, despite initiating several novel approaches to language. After underpinning this claim by advancing some quotes where we find, for instance, an early differentiation between terms such as *língua* or *linguagem* or between language-specific and general phonetics, she reflects on Thomas Kuhn's (1922–1996) ideas and points out that the development of ideas is always a gradual process, which explains the significance of studying "all the stages of development of a certain concept [...] and to examine the whole corpus of linguistic writings of a given period, including those that are little known or disregarded" (p. 183). I will revisit this idea at the end of this review paper, but at this point it is important to note that this contribution succeeds in combining a specific case with more general metahistoriographical questions — often a felicitous and fruitful combination. Sónia Duarte investigates attitudes towards other languages as expressed in a 1793 Portuguese Academy dictionary. She comes to the conclusion that, apart from Latin, only Spanish plays a meaningful role in this context: other languages are glossed over. Conversely, attitudes towards the Portuguese language expressed in 19th-century learning tools take center stage in the *Nodus* contribution by Thierry Proença dos Santos and Helena Rebelo. French interest in Portuguese was given a boost in the wake of Napoleon's imperialistic agenda. In general, Portuguese was typified as a beautiful language, combining, according to one author, the clarity of French with the

conciseness of Latin, and marred only by ‘the nasal intonation of some final letters’ according to another. In the *Nodus* volume, Liubov Zholudeva compares standardization proposals put forward in 16th-century Italian and Portuguese orthographies. The paper outlines several strategies to harmonize spelling and pronunciation, including adopting Greek letters (ϵ and ω) in order to make successful oppositions between open and closed vowels.

Apart from Portugal, Brazil and Latin America are very well-represented. Relying on numerous examples, Dmitry Gurevich examines the role of language norms in Brazilian Portuguese grammars. In a largely descriptive approach, Maurício Silva focuses on the Brazilian *interregnum*, spanning ca. three decades, between the dominance of historical comparative approaches on the one hand and the foundation of the *Nomenclatura Gramatical Brasileira* in 1959 on the other. Tania C. Clemente de Souza’s institutional paper investigates “political and linguistic aspects of the history of indigenous linguistics in Brazil” in the wake of the creation of the *Setor de Linguística do Museu Nacional*. Among other things, the article problematizes the at times dubious impact of the evangelical Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), with which the Linguistics Sector had a partnership dedicated to fostering the documentation of indigenous languages in Brasil. Unfortunately, her contribution also demonstrates how historiography can be overtaken by recent events. In September 2018, the National Museum of Brasil was completely destroyed in a fire, and I am not aware how the research institute was affected. Esteban Lidgett maps institutional aspects regarding the legislation of school grammars in Argentina between 1881 and 1936. Bárbara Cifuentes and María del Carmen Herrera show how Early Modern missionary work on Nahuatl was rendered productive in the Modern period: the adoption of Nahuatl words could contribute to the construction of an idea about the specificities of the Mexican national language (p. 68 of the *Nodus* volume). In a rich and archive-based paper, Muriel Jorge examines the significance attached to etymology in French primary schools between ca. 1880 and 1920. She arrives at the fascinating — and at the same time somewhat sobering — conclusion that etymology was gradually banned from schools, precisely because academic successes and progress had ultimately rendered the subject too complex and hermetic for an audience of younger pupils. Today, all academics are told that research and education should go hand in hand, and Jorge’s contribution suggests that scientific progress booked in a certain domain can give rise to a dynamic of ‘inverse proportionality’ in the field of education. Relatively recent evolutions and schools are also covered. J. Mackenzie, author of *Functional Discourse Grammar* together with Kees Hengeveld, provided a first historical overview of the Functional Grammar model as designed by classicist and general linguist Simon Dik (1940–1995) in the second half of the 20th century. What is particularly evident in his contribution is that Dik’s functional approach, although strongly opposed to the then increasingly dominant generative movement, was at the same time surprisingly indebted to it (for a recent assessment of Halliday’s functional approach, see Davidse 2018).

A limited number of papers propose a punctual, yet radical emendation in the historiography of linguistics. A case in point is Anneli Luhtala’s contribution to the SIHoLS volume, which is devoted to the so-called *regulae grammars*, one of the four types of ancient Latin Grammar that are generally distinguished. Luhtala shows why it is plausible that this specific type of grammar “was designed as a discovery procedure for native speakers”, which enabled native speakers to reflect on some features of their language (p. 70) and “to distinguish acceptable forms from less acceptable ones” (p. 80). Contrary to general belief, Luhtala continues, this method was adapted to the needs of non-native speakers only in a later stage, thus giving way to the emergence of other types of Ancient Latin grammar.

Finally, a substantial part of the papers in the *Nodus* volume are devoted to an exploratory application of innovative methods in the field of linguistics historiography. Diana Luz Pessoa de Barros

attempts to uncover continuities and discontinuities in discussing normativity by putting forward the merits of French discursive semiotics. Michael Link in turn explores how Cognitive Metaphor Theory can deepen our understanding of historical writings on language, taking the conceptualization of language in terms of authority as an example. Bruna Polachini applies a strategy developed by Pierre Swiggers in order to uncover continuities and discontinuities in the history of linguistics, viz. by distinguishing four different layers in the history of scholarship (theoretical, technical, documentary, contextual). Her case concerns the 19th-century treatment of syntax. At the end of her paper, she advocates that historiographers give more attention to the dynamic web of concepts and terminology, viz. the idea that terms acquire their meaning also on a contrastive basis, precisely through the content that is assigned to other terms (p. 294). Nadège Lechevrel, finally, examines how textometric tools can cast new light on the study of our source-texts. In line with this strand of research, the next section will posit that not only the source-texts, but also the texts that we as historiographers produce ourselves, could benefit from undergoing procedures of textmining and disclosure.

4. *Establishing dynamic connections*

The above sketch casts some light on the ever-widening scope of our field and reveals how linguists and concepts can be studied from diverse and often refreshing angles. Such an overview can spark both enthusiasm and concern. Recent progress made in the study of the languages of antiquity tempted Daniel Taylor, at the Potsdam ICHoLS-conference about ten years ago, to state almost triumphalistically that “during the past half century or so we have not just been rethinking the history of the language sciences in classical antiquity but have in fact been rewriting that history” (Taylor 2011: 109). In a more distant past also, several prominent historians of language-related thought have highlighted the seminal significance of our field by stating that linguistics can only make progress by examining its history (early examples are Kukenheim 1951:IX; Simone 1975). Dell Hymes (1927–2009), who as a linguist and anthropologist had a strong historiographical interest, once testified: “In my own work I have sometimes felt that progress in understanding was but the recapture of perspective that had been lost” (Hymes 1983: 2). Even without fundamentally questioning these claims, we can, however, readily conclude that the history of linguistics plays only an extremely minor role in the present-day linguistic discipline. This is confirmed by the somewhat sobering outcome of Thomas’s investigation, which suggests how much the history of the discipline is still perceived merely as ‘a trolley loaded with historical curiosities and misconceptions’ (for this metaphor, I am indebted to Klifman 1982:109). Is it far from the truth to state that in present-day research practice linguists are encouraged not to delve too deeply into the history of their discipline, and that history is only relevant from a ‘negative’ perspective, in that it can help prevent researchers from following dead-end paths and from repeating mistakes made in the past (see in this respect the critical observations made by Law 2003:7)? And is it not safe to say that even this minimalist approach is often difficult to achieve in practice (Haßler 2020 demonstrates that the errors made in the GDR’s functional-communicative school have meanwhile slid into oblivion, and are currently repeated in a number of present-day approaches)? And assuming this is the case, what can we do about it?

I will first try to outline one specific weakness that is currently inherent, but certainly not limited, to our field, and, second, to put forward a very specific strategy to reduce it. Among historiographers, there is a broad consensus that our branch of learning enables researchers to assess the degree of innovation of new theories from a historical perspective, to erect a somewhat ‘therapeutic’ barrier against prevailing dogmas and fashionable hyperconcentration in one linguistic domain, and also to counteract, to a certain extent, the current fragmentation of, and within, linguistics

(Swiggers, Desmet, and Jooen 1998:35; Koerner 2004; Law 2003:8). It is worth dwelling for a moment on this last point.

As a matter of fact, one could advance the argument that fragmentation is not a characteristic of present-day linguistics alone, but of its historiography as well. We are sometimes told that our field is a specialized niche. That it is far from narrow, however, can be inferred from the above overview, which has outlined how extensive, wide-ranging and multidisciplinary our branch of learning is. The number of detailed studies is so impressive that it is an impossible task for the very few full-time professional historians of linguistics to maintain an overview of the entire field. Although this is no disaster as such, we need to be aware of the fact that the growing success of our field might also bring with it undesirable side effects. Isn't there a danger that this success will make our field more hermetic and thus less accessible to outsiders, such as professional linguists, psychologists, historians and even historiographers of linguistics? Isn't there an urgent need to think of strategies which could help overcome the 'balkanization' of our field and to strengthen its centripetal tendencies? One could argue that I am painting a somewhat distorted picture here by raising this issue precisely while reviewing ICHoLS conference proceedings, which aim to offer a sampling of our field's scope rather than to ensure its internal coherence. But from a different perspective, one could posit that the very format of conference proceedings has the merit of bringing to the surface a problem which tends to remain more hidden elsewhere.

This is not to say that centripetal initiatives are entirely absent from our field. It might be a good occasion to pay tribute to the great efforts by Ludger Kaczmarek, who as Klaus D. Dutz's successor brings together, on an annual basis, as many new historiographical publications as possible in the *collectanea* section in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft*. Moreover, for a decade or so, commercial publishers have been obsessed with the production of manuals, encyclopaedias and textbooks (for commercial rather than for intrinsically scholarly reasons of course), thus encouraging us to write more work of a synthetic nature. It might indeed seem very straightforward to assume that professional linguists who happen to gain an interest in the discipline of their field will likely start reading one of the general introductions to our field, thus working their way from the generic to the specific. But it is important to highlight that recent scholarship has revealed how hierarchic and linear approaches to knowledge are, through the mounting prominence of the internet, increasingly subordinated to non-linear and hyperlinked approaches (Schiltz, Truyen and Coppens 2007). This implies, among many other things, that future linguists will be more likely to be tempted to study the history of their field in response to very specific problems and questions which are in close connection to the research questions they are examining, thus working their way from the specific to the generic rather than the other way around.

Hence, in order to attract more attention from linguists, one could make a case for yet another strategy — a strategy which may seem to be ambitious and unfeasible today, although I would not be surprised if such a strategy will eventually be widely implemented in most branches of scholarship. I am hinting at a more responsible way of indexing our work.

Almost every contribution written in our field focuses on one or more scholarly figures, works, languages and concepts. Let us first focus on scholarly figures. Many of us follow the example set by Konrad Koerner in offering the life-dates of all the authors we discuss in our articles (Koerner 2008). We could keep up this good practice, and also enhance it. Instead of just writing down these life-dates, we could (and, I think, should) consider establishing a link to the authors under investigation as they are recorded in major online initiatives, such as VIAF (Virtual International Authority File), or Wikidata, where extensive information on authors' coordinates is readily and systematically available (Färber, Ell, Menne and Rettinger 2015). There is more. In VIAF and Wikidata, each single author

has been given a unique ID number, which opens up perspectives to explore the possibilities of what is sometimes called “the Semantic Web” (files that comply with the principles of the Semantic Web are enhanced with a semantic layer that can be processed by both humans and machines). As soon as we succeed in embedding the ID numbers of such established initiatives in our historiographical articles and books, the findability and disclosure of our work will thus be given a boost, and connections to articles and books belonging to other scholarly fields and neighboring disciplines will be established in a dynamic way.

By thus providing our articles with more fine-grained metadata, we may be able to create more coherence between our often rather atomic contributions to scholarship, and this in a entirely spontaneous and organic way. It would also offer us the possibility of tracing and visualizing ongoing trends within our own ever-growing field, while at the same time improving the quality and versatility of our historiographical work. Such possibilities are not only relevant for authors and scholars under study. The same holds true for languages that are studied in our work, where we could make use of the ID numbers adopted by the widely acclaimed initiative Glottolog (Hammarström, Forkel, Haspelmath and Bank 2016). There is however no readily available initiative when it comes to indexing linguistic terms, notions or concepts, although the *Lexikon sprachtheoretischer Grundbegriffe* compiled by Gerda Hassler and Cordula Neis could offer a very useful starting point for launching an ‘ontology’ from within our field (Haßler and Neis 2009). It is safe to say that this would be a very significant challenge (precisely because terms, concepts and their mutual interconnections remain much less stable than the identity of authors), but at the same time an opportunity to map a dynamic web of terms and concepts, as advocated by Bruna Polacchini.

It might sound extremely naïve to expect so much from embedding some linked ID-numbers in our scholarly work, and admittedly, the feasibility of such a plan is, even anno 2019, not guaranteed. It might well be that we first need research funding which will enable us to enhance historiographical work which has been published with such metadata in the past, before the community of historians of linguistics will be convinced of its added value. (To some extent, the Renaissance Linguistics Archive realized some of the aims advanced here, see Tavoni et al. 2009). However, such a way of proceeding would be in line with the proposals made in the *History Manifesto*, whose publication in 2014 gave rise to a lively discussion in the field of history. Its authors, Jo Guldi and David Armitage, champion a return to Braudel’s notion of the *longue durée* by making use of ‘big data’, ‘million book libraries’ and ‘data visualization’ (Guldi and Armitage 2015; Armitage and Guldi 2015; Edelstein 2016). Critics of their approach point out that there are significant discrepancies between such manifestos advocating the large-scale reading of “million book libraries” on the one hand and the actual present-day research practices of intellectual historians on the other, for whom fine-grained interpretative analyses and close reading of a limited text corpus are of the utmost importance (Betti and Berg 2016). I think, however, that it is important to stress that historiographical methods applying distant reading approaches and relying on ‘big data or metadata’ should be conceived of as opportunities to complement, rather than to replace, traditional approaches of close reading, and that they could contribute to gaining a wider audience for our historiographical work. To round off this review article, I will try to defend this stance by referring to a number of the papers in the volumes under review.

The ‘short-terminism’ of much historiographical work is indirectly criticized in one of the contributions to the Nodus volume. In “the rationalization of the semiotic theory in the 18th century”, Serhii Vakulenko demonstrates the astonishingly long-lasting influence of the scholastic school, notably in the writings of 17th and 18th-century Portuguese philosophers. Vakulenko typifies a 1997 book by Stephan Meier-Oeser (viz. *Die Spur des Zeichens: das Zeichen und seine Funktion in der*

Philosophie des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit) as a felicitous exception confirming the rule that historical research which transcends the boundaries of the conventional eras remains extremely rare (pp. 377–378). It is, however, easier to endorse this position than to come up with viable and satisfactory solutions which will enable historians to bridge the gap between several periods, especially against the backdrop of present-day information overload and its ensuing tendencies to far-reaching specialisation. This presupposes an almost superhuman eagerness in reading and in general erudition on the part of the researcher, unless this researcher can fall back on a set of ‘signs’ or ‘breadcrumbs’, organically generated by the scholarly community, guiding one to related topics across languages and periods.

Sophie Piron’s contribution to the SIHoLS volume shows why such a strategy might prove to be productive. Relying on a well-described corpus of French grammars that appeared in the second half of the 19th century, she examines how prepositional phrases were conceived of by the different authors, which results in an interesting and systematic typology of strategies. Due to the rather poor disclosure of our historiographical work, there is a risk that only historiographers who are interested in the same object language, the same period and the same theme will stumble across and benefit from her work, whereas the relevance of her typology goes far beyond French and the 19th century. A better integration of metadata would enable us to establish a direct connection to Coelho’s and Fontes’s contribution to the Nodus volume, where the treatment of prepositional phrases takes center stage as well (p. 77).

Let there be no misunderstanding: far from launching an attack on historiographical detail studies and advocating only large-scale orchestrated research, this review article first and foremost aims to open the debate on whether, and, if so, how, we should proactively equip our historiographical papers with present-day antennae before launching them into (digital) space. Ultimately, this boils down to a discussion about whether we need to actively try to bring contemporary linguistics and its historiography closer to one another or not.

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