

**REPORT FROM THE SYMPOSIUM ON LINGUISTIC
PERSPECTIVES IN
STOCKHOLM NOVEMBER 1978**

Jens Allwood
University of Gothenburg

In connection with the celebration of the 100 years anniversary of University of Stockholm the Stockholm Linguistics Department arranged in November 1978 a symposium entitled LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVES. The purpose of the symposium was to try to capture some of the main current trends in (Swedish) linguistics. The participants were linguists from Sweden and Finland.

Below I will briefly present the speakers and outline the contents of their papers, and then try to extract some common themes from their talks and the ensuing discussions

The meeting was opened by Staffan Helmfrid president of the University of Stockholm. The first speaker, Benny Brodda, University of Stockholm then gave some of the background for the symposium. Among the points raised by Brodda were that although there are many challenging problems in linguistics today, there no longer seems to be a single approach that a majority of linguists are ready to support. Linguistics is at a turning-point and the state of the art is unclear. The main purpose of the symposium therefore to clarify the direction in which the field is developing.

The second speaker, Eva Ejerhed, University of Umeå spoke on constructivism in linguistics semantics. Among other things Ejerhed was concerned with the reality of truth conditional semantics. What kind of complexity be allowed in the logical analysis of the tense system of a particular language before the analysis becomes unrealistic as a model of a particular language before the analysis becomes unrealistic as a model of a particular speaker's competence?

Björn Lindblom, University of Stockholm, the third speaker, spoke on the consequences of the choice of linguistic theory. Lindblom discussed the autonomy of linguistics and suggested that a fruitful approach to many problems in linguistics lies outside of pure linguistic studies. Research in the *substance* of language turns out to be revealing for the study of the *form* of language.

The title of the paper given by the fourth speaker, Jan Anward, University of Uppsala was *From speech planning to social structure and back again*. Anward discussed the possibility of grounding syntactic rules in communication needs. He further tried to show how this approach makes it possible to view syntactic structures as being motivated by specific socio-structural requirements.

The fifth speaker Östen Dahl, University of Gothenburg, considered some of the uses of prototype theory in linguistics. Can the notion of a prototype be used to replace the characterization of concepts by way of necessary and sufficient conditions? For example, it seems hard to give a definition of "subject" in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. Perhaps this classical idea should be abandoned and instead a prototype should be introduced.

The sixth and final speaker of the first day, Sven Öhman, University of Uppsala, discussed our view of the history of linguistics. Among other things he considered the part played by Holger Pedersen's book *The discovery of language* and the Kuhnian notion of a paradigm in our conception of the history of linguistics. One of the consequences of Kuhn's influence is that most young linguists today want to create their own little paradigms. The second day the symposium was opened by Bengt Sigurd University of Lund, who considered some of the differences between communication between humans and computers. Sigurd pointed out that in order to avoid unwanted consequences, conversation with a computer has to be severely restricted. He then compared these restrictions to those that are imposed by mutual expectations between speaker and listener in a normal conversation.

The second speaker was Per Linell, University of Stockholm, who argued that, if any serious steps are to be taken toward a psychologically real model of linguistic competence, then linguistics needs to become more concerned with real spoken language and the way in which it is produced and perceived. To illustrate what such an approach would entail, Linell showed how speech planning can be studied through observations of such things as speech errors, hesitation, prosody and non-verbal communication

The third speaker was Jens Allwood, University of Gothenburg. Allwood gave two talks. One talk was devoted to a discussion of the kind of rules and regularities that exist in conversations. The other talk dealt with the kind of explanations that are needed in linguistics and it was argued that a pluralistic approach including causal laws for the biophysical aspects of language, conventional rules for the social aspects of language and individual strategies for the personal aspects of language was not only but necessary in order to obtain a proper picture of how language works.

The fourth speaker, James Lubker, University of Stockholm, spoke on the topic *Phonetics and some attempts at understanding our most human characteristic*. In his talk Lubker presented some challenging examples of problems within the realm of phonetics. Lubker also pleaded for more integration of purely linguistic studies with studies of a biological, medical and acoustical kind.

The fifth speaker, Tore Janson, University of Stockholm, discussed the concepts of capacity, competence and norm. Janson pointed out the fundamental nature of these concepts for the science of language and presented a set of definitions in order to clarify them.

The final speaker was Fred Karlsson. University of Åbo, Finland. Karlsson presented data on the development of linguistic studies, in Finland. He then discussed the data in the light of several different theories drawn from the philosophy of science and the sociology of knowledge.

I will now try to extract some themes which appeared both in the papers presented above and in the discussion following each paper.

The perhaps most widely shared theme of the symposium was the very large agreement amongst the speakers that the days of pure autonomous linguistics are over, for the time being, in Sweden. Almost every speaker mentioned the necessity of integrating linguistics with other disciplines in order to achieve greater empirical realism. For example, several talks emphasized the need for empirical studies to ensure the "psychological reality" of various linguistic hypotheses.

Going along with the theme of greater empirical realism, one could say there was a trend away from merely accounting for the linguistic product toward studying the processes which underlie and produce the product. This trend was perhaps most clearly brought out in the talks by Linell, Lindblom and Lubker.

Another theme of the symposium was social awareness both when it comes to studying the conditions that govern language use (Anward and Allwood) and when it comes to noticing the forces that determine the development of the science of linguistics itself (Öhman and Karlsson).

We very briefly summarize: the symposium gave a picture of the field of linguistics which to my mind is very hopeful. A growing number of researchers are realizing that a multiplicity of approaches are needed to help us gain better insight into what language is all about. Language is simultaneously a physical, biological, social, psychological and personal phenomenon. No approach to language to which excludes any of these aspects will be exhaustive enough. The present situation would perhaps be even more encouraging if the road from professed desires for empirical realism to actual empirical studies turns out to be not too long.