

A GLANCE AT THE HISTORY OF LINGUISTICS

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Volume 7

Holger Pedersen

*A Glance at the History of Linguistics,
with particular regard to the historical study of phonology*

HOLGER PEDERSEN

A GLANCE AT THE HISTORY OF LINGUISTICS
WITH PARTICULAR REGARD
TO THE HISTORICAL STUDY OF PHONOLOGY

Translated from the Danish
by
CAROLINE C. HENRIKSEN

Edited with an Introduction
by
KONRAD KOERNER
University of Ottawa

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FOREWORD

Almost ten years have passed since I approached Dr. Caroline C. Henriksen of Copenhagen to consider undertaking an English translation of Holger Pedersen's 1916 study, *Et Blik på Sprogvidenskabens Historie*, a smaller and, as the subtitle reveals, a much more restricted account of the study of language in the 19th century. It was my view that this earlier text could shed interesting light on Pedersen's later synthesis, which, in its 1931 translation, had become so popular, particularly in North America, and that his account of the development of historical phonology in the earlier study would be more easy to follow, prior to the 'Saussurean Revolution' in linguistics at least.

Subsequent to this change in the disciplinary matrix the material available in historical-comparative Indo-European linguistics became studied with perhaps an increasing intensity, but surely by a gradually decreasing number of students. As the result of a misunderstanding of Saussure's true intentions (which were largely misrepresented by the editors of the *Cours*), the idea had gained widespread currency that synchronic linguistics could not only be dealt with quite separately from diachronic linguistics, but that the latter was little more than an accessory to the former which could easily be dispensed with.* We may recall that Bloomfield's *Language* of 1933 followed the model provided by the *Cours* in separating these two 'points de vue', even to the extent that the historical portion of his book contains no single cross reference to anything mentioned in the preceding descriptive section, indeed as if there were two sciences of language entirely divorced from each other and as if one such field could operate satisfactorily without reference to the other.

We are now painfully aware of the damage that this misre-

* Comparison between the *Cours* as edited by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye and the critical edition prepared by Rudolf Engler (Wiesbaden 1967-68, 1974) reveals that each time the 'vulgata' text speaks of an incommensurability between the synchronic and the diachronic viewpoint, Saussure had merely spoken of a (methodologically important) difference between the two in his Geneva lectures.

presentation of Saussure's teaching has inflicted on the study of language. This overemphasis on a kind of general linguistics, soon to be identified almost exclusively with linguistic theory, and, in various quarters, as the only truly scientific pursuit within the discipline, has tended to lead, under various followers of Noam Chomsky, to a linguistics void of language. As a result, Pedersen's, in his own view 'popular', account of the development of research in historical Indo-European phonology, not least his various 'digressions' (represented by smaller type in the text), has become much more difficult to follow for students of linguistics today than it was in Pedersen's own day. To this we can add the fact that few students today have received training in the classical languages, something which, at least in Europe prior to World War II, formed a regular part of grammar school education. However, lack of a general historical interest, especially in North America, has no doubt had the most unfortunate effect on diachronic linguistics.

Happily, there are signs that there has been a reawakening of interest in historical linguistics in recent years and a growing respect for a more widespread data-orientation in the study of language. Thus, it seems that the delay in publication of the present book may not have been so regrettable after all as the times for an appreciation of a survey of the present kind appear to be better now than they were perhaps ten years ago.

Since texts written in languages other than English have become less easily accessible to many modern linguists, I am grateful to Dr Caroline C. Henriksen for her translation of the Danish text. Personally, I owe her an expression of thanks for her collaboration and for providing me with important supporting material, including drafts of Pedersen's bibliography — originally compiled by Peter A. Henriksen — of the back matter to the present volume, copies of the original texts of Pedersen's 1899 and 1916 works as well as a picture and a signature of Pedersen. Last but not least, I am grateful to her for having read an earlier version of my introduction and for having approved of the organization of the volume as a whole.

Finally, I would like to thank various people at Georgetown University, in particular certain members of its School of Languages and Linguistics and the personnel at the J. M. Lauinger Memorial Library, for assistance received in the research for the present edition. For making my sojourn so pleasant and profitable, I owe special thanks to Kurt R. Jankowsky for his friendship and his ubiquitous and generous support.

Washington, D.C., May 1983

K. K.

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Holger Pedersen

HOLGER PEDERSEN
A SKETCH OF HIS LIFE AND WORK

Holger Pedersen was born on 7 April 1867 as the son of a school teacher at Gjelballe, near Lunderskov, Kolding province, Jutland. After completion of grammar school, with distinction, he entered the University of Copenhagen where he took courses in Greek, Latin, and Danish.¹ His teachers were Karl Verner (1846-96), Vilhelm Thomsen (1842-1927), Hermann Möller (1850-1923), and Ludwig Wimmer (1839-1920); one could hardly imagine a better slate of professors in the fields of Classics, Slavic, and Germanic. Following completion of his studies with the highest marks in 1890, Pedersen started his career as an academic, sending off his first papers to the most distinguished journals in historical-comparative linguistics of the period at the age of

¹ For further biographical information — not a single one of them in English, consult the following obituaries: Louis Hjelmslev (1899-1965) in *Oversigt over Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskabs Virksomhed* maj-juni 1953.97-115 (1954); Alf Sommerfelt (1892-1965) in *Orbis* 3.343-46 (1954); Albert Grenier in *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres* 1953.427-28 (1954); Louis Leonor Hammerich (1892-1979) in *Jaarboek van de Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde te Leiden* 1953-1955.122-26; Jan Otrębski in *Lingua Posnaniensis* 5.238-41 (1953); Joseph Vendryes (1875-1960) in *Etudes Celtiques* 7.244-45 (1955), and F. B. J. Kuiper in *Jaarboek van der Koninklijke Nederlands Akademie* 1955-56.262-69. — For the present account, I have consulted in particular the obituary by Sommerfelt, "In memoriam Holger Pedersen (1867-1953)", as reprinted in *Portraits of Linguists*, ed. by Thomas A. Sebeok, vol.II, pp.283-87 (Bloomington & London: Indiana Univ. Press, 1966), and the necrology by Louis Hjelmslev, translated into French by François Marchetti and published in L. Hjelmslev, *Essais Linguistiques II* (Copenhagen: Nordiske Sprog- og Kulturforlag, 1973), pp.29-39. (The original obituaries by Sommerfelt and Hjelmslev include portraits of Pedersen.)

twenty-four.² These include Adalbert Bezenberger's *Beiträge zur Kunde der indogermanischen Sprachen*, Karl Brugmann and Wilhelm Streitberg's *Indogermanische Forschungen*, and Adalbert Kuhn's *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung*. The years 1892-96 constituted Pedersen's *Wanderjahre*. His first station was the Mecca of Indo-European philology, the University of Leipzig, where he studied comparative linguistics with Brugmann (1849-1919), Slavic and Lithuanian with August Leskien (1840-1916) as well as with the much lesser known Robert Scholvin (b.1850), Sanskrit and Celtic with Ernst Windisch (1843-1918), Indo-Iranian with Bruno Lindner (1853-1930), and attended lectures by Eduard Sievers (1850-1936) in the field of Germanic. (Pedersen's important paper, "Das indogermanische *s* im Slavischen" (Pedersen 1895b), which impressed Brugmann so much that he recommended its publication in *Indogermanische Forschungen*, is dated "Leipzig, d. 14. februar 1893".)

Pedersen's collaboration with Brugmann went so far that he undertook a trip to Korfu with him from March to August 1893 to study Albanian *in loco*. (Only in 1891 had the Neogrammarian Gustav Meyer [1850-1900] published his *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der albanesischen Sprache* [Strassburg: Trübner].) This field trip resulted in a number of publications. On the recommendation of Brugmann and Leskien, a 200-page edition of Albanian texts with a glossary appeared in the series issued by the Royal Saxon Academy of Sciences in Leipzig (Pedersen 1895a), and articles on Albanian etymology and phonology were published in Bezenberger's and in Kuhn's Journals (Pedersen 1894a, 1895c), with others following several years later (e.g., Pedersen 1897c), including a German translation of the Albanian texts (Pedersen 1898b).³ Pedersen continued to publish in this field for many years after, several items appearing in Albanian translation in the journal and series published by the Mekhitharists in Vienna (Pedersen 1904a, e; 1907a, c; 19011) and others in German linguistics periodicals and various additional scholarly outlets (e.g., Pedersen 1900c, d; 1905b, 1906b, 1914, 1924c).

But Pedersen had no intention of becoming a mere specialist of Albanian, and for the Winter semester of 1893/94 we find him taking courses with Johannes Schmidt (1843-1901) and probably others, such as the In-

do-Iranian philologist Karl Friedrich Geldner (1853-1929), at the University of Berlin. (Pedersen 1895c, for instance, is dated "Berlin, den 7. februar 1894".) According to Hjelmslev (1973:32), Pedersen profited greatly from Schmidt's teachings, but when he goes on to state that Pedersen learned nothing from Georg von der Gabelentz (1840-1893), this cannot only reflect on Pedersen's interest in Chinese and general linguistics, which no doubt was scant at best, but it must also be noted that Gabelentz had died in December 1893 and therefore could not be frequented by Pedersen any more.

Pedersen's publication record indicates that he had moved to the University of Greifswald by Fall 1894 — compare the date indicated at the end of Pedersen (1897c): "Greifswald, den 19. december 1894". There, he studied Sanskrit and particularly Celtic with Heinrich Zimmer (1851-1910), a scholar who must have impressed him profoundly, since he continued to work in Celtic studies from that time onwards for most of his long life, in particular until about 1930, by which time several other branches of Indo-European were receiving his attention. Pedersen spent the summer and fall of 1895 on the Aran Islands, west of Galway, Ireland, studying a particularly conservative variety of Gaelic. As it happens, this West-Irish dialect had been studied by Franz Nikolaus Finck (1867-1910) in the previous year; but before Finck's two-volume grammar and dictionary left the press, Pedersen had been able to communicate to him a number of errors and omissions he had noted in the 1896 publication of the *Wörterbuch*. They were added as 47 pages of "Nachträge" to the two-volume publication, *Die Araner Mundart: Ein Beitrag zur Erforschung des Westirischen* (Marburg: Elwert, 1899). The first result of Pedersen's field work however was a short paper on modern Irish incantations (Pedersen 1896). But, most importantly, it led to his doctoral dissertation submitted to the University of Copenhagen in 1896, and published subsequently as a monograph (Pedersen 1897a) and a

² Although the first papers appeared with an 1893 imprint, several of them were submitted as early as 1891, as may be gathered from the places and dates given by him at the end of his contributions; e.g., his second paper (Pedersen 1893b) is dated "Kopenhagen, 25. mai 1891".

³ Many years later, in 1928, a number of these Albanian folk-tales were translated, together with five others collected by Auguste Dozon (1822

130-page contribution to Kuhn's *Zeitschrift* (Pedersen 1897a), which he dedicated to his former teacher Zimmer. By that time, Pedersen had become firmly established in the scholarly field.

In November 1896 Karl Verner had died, and Pedersen, who defended his thesis early in 1897, with Thomsen and Otto Jespersen (1860-1943) as jury members, was wondering already then whether he should not give more attention to Slavic, the subject taught by Verner, though it was not before the turn of the century that Pedersen published on the subject (e.g., Pedersen 1902b, 1904c, d; 1905c, 1909b, etc.). In 1897, Pedersen became a lecturer in Celtic, adding Slavic to his subjects of instruction in the following year;⁴ by 1900, Pedersen was a reader in comparative grammar at the University of Copenhagen. When, in 1902, he received the offer of a professorship at the University of Basel, he declined the offer but managed to persuade the authorities at his own university to establish an extra-ordinary professorship for him in the following year. He had to wait ten years to receive the chair held by Vilhelm Thomsen who retired late in 1912 at the age of seventy.

Before ascending the last rung of the academic ladder, however, Pedersen had received yet another offer of a professorship abroad: this time, in 1908, from the University of Strassburg, since the Franco-Prussian war a German university. But Pedersen had no inclination to be stationed outside his home country, though in matters of scholarship he was by no means a nationalist.⁵ In 1909 and 1913, Pedersen published his *magnum opus*, a 1400-page Comparative Grammar of Celtic, written in German with the imprint of Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht in Göttingen, where

to 1891), and published by Paul Fennimore Cooper in a volume entitled *Tricks of Women and other Albanian Tales* (New York: W. Morrow & Co., 1928), xvi, 204 pp.

⁴ Whenever there is a divergence in matters of dates between Sommerfelt (1966) and Hjelmslev (1973) — see end of footnote 1 for details —, I have followed the latter as he was more closely associated with Pedersen, and for a longer period of time, succeeding to his chair in 1927.

⁵ There is no hint in his work that he held particularly strong anti-German sentiments, as is frequently expressed by Danish scholars especially after World War II. Cf. Cahen's affirmation of 1916 that Pedersen "n'est pas un germanophage" (see note 14 below, p. 153).

it was reissued as late as 1976. In 1937, *A Concise Celtic Grammar* appeared with the same publisher, a project on which he had collaborated with the Welsh scholar Henry Lewis (1889-1968).⁶ By then, Pedersen had become a very broad Indo-Europeanist, who had distinguished himself in the areas of Celtic, Armenian, Slavic — he published a Russian grammar and textbook in 1916 — and Baltic, in addition to Greek and Latin, languages with which he was familiar from childhood. Pedersen also addressed general questions concerning the Indo-European proto-language and Germanic. From around 1930 onwards and especially following his retirement in 1937, he devoted more attention to those languages that only in our century had been identified as Indo-European, Hittite and Tocharian (e.g., Pedersen 1933b, 1934a, 1935a, 1938, etc., and 1941, 1943b, 1944, etc., respectively). During this period, Pedersen dealt with questions of method in Indo-European linguistics more frequently than in his earlier career. Thus he discussed the relationship between Hittite and the other Indo-European languages in a 227-page study (Pedersen 1938), investigated the relationship between Baltic and Slavic (Pedersen 1943c), followed by a similar work concerning Tocharian (1941), Lycian and Hittite (1945a), and the question of the common Indo-European and pre-Indo-European stops (1951a), to mention just a few. However, there is only one small paper in which the question of General Linguistics is broached, in a contribution to the festschrift in honour of the first decipherer of Hittite, the Czech scholar Bedřich Hrozný (1879-1952), whose first efforts Pedersen had not found to be particularly praiseworthy in his 1916 survey (see pages 25-26 of the present volume). Here Pedersen (1949c) asks the question of whether a general linguistics on empirical grounds is at all possible. His response, given more than thirty years after the publication of the *Cours de linguistique générale* (Lausanne & Paris: Payot, 1916; 4th ed., 1949), is very curious indeed, since for Pedersen such a general linguistics would have to consist of two parts, a phonology and a morphology — with syntax being, as in August Schleicher's argument 100 years earlier, a

⁶ In 1954, a Russian translation was published (Pedersen 1954).

more doubtful domain of linguistic (in the sense of 'sprachwissenschaftlich') analysis. In Pedersen's view, General Linguistics is thus not what Hermann Paul would have called a 'Prinzipienwissenschaft', a field mapping out the methodological and epistemological framework of scientific research, and of course nothing comparable to what we have learned from Saussure's teachings.

Pedersen's biographers agree that he was and remained a comparative-historical philologist, though, as his scholarly work suggests, a widely read and thoroughly trained one in almost every branch of the Indo-European language family. But they also agree, with regret, that he showed little, if any, interest in general linguistic theory. This personal bias is particularly obvious in his historiographic work, which will be the subject of the remainder of this introduction. But, before continuing, let us conclude the narrative concerning Pedersen's biography. According to Hjelmslev, Pedersen always enjoyed a 'santé de fer', in fact to the extent that he was somewhat insensitive to the physical frailty of others, including Karl Verner, on whom he wrote an obituary (Pedersen 1897b). Following his travels to Germany, Greece, and Ireland during the 1890s,⁷ he rarely left Denmark for the remainder of his life, which was devoted to teaching and research. He died in 1953 at the age of eighty-six.

No doubt Pedersen is best known among modern students of language, especially in North America, for his *Linguistic Science in the 19th Century*, which first appeared in Danish in 1924 (and in Swedish translation in the same year), and which was translated into English by the professor of Germanic languages at Northwestern University, John Webster Spargo (1896-1956) and published in 1931. It was reissued in 1962 under the pretentious and misleading title "The Discovery of Language", and has seen a number of subsequent reprintings, having become something like a textbook to be acquired by every student in the field.⁸

⁷ Pedersen also spent a few months in 1894 at the University of Moscow, but he was not particularly impressed by the teachings of Filipp Fedorovič Fortunatov (1848-1914), the head of the 'Moscow School'.

⁸ For reviews of the 1962 reprint, see Robert Austerlitz in *Word* 19.126 to 128 (1963), and Neville E. Collinge in *Foundations of Language* 1.