

Studien zur Geschichte der Quantitativen Linguistik

Band 1

Karl-Heinz Best

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Preface

The aim of this volume is to show that quantification, measurement, testing of hypotheses, modeling etc. are known in linguistics since the 17th century. The trend towards mathematization began very slowly – combinatorial reflections began already in antique Greece, countings for settlements of accounts for writing are known since the 7th century (cf. Best 2006: 7) – and much later than in natural sciences but even in linguistics one stated that some phenomena can be expressed more exactly and more appropriately if one used numbers. The first steps were simple plays with numbers, later on one observed that if some property changes its value, some other property does it, too, and one began to search for links between properties.

Quantification is not an ephemeral paradigm which comes and goes and then lets the discipline return to its antediluvian state; it is a quite natural way of developing science. At its beginnings, one simply tried to measure, without well developed statistics, without testing but at least with some intuitive hypotheses because one “felt” that “there is something”. Expressions like “more, many, sometimes, greater, similar, frequently” etc. occur(ed) currently but even this is better than a categorical dichotomism behaving like a religious dogma. The men whose endeavor was to make some steps in this direction were known only if they wrote also other works in the vein of classical linguistics. Their contributions to quantification are mostly not even mentioned in the official histories of linguistics.

In order to contribute to the equilibrium in the historiography some volumes concerning the achievements of past linguists will be presented. We begin with German linguists. The articles concerning them have been published in different issues of *Glottometrics*. Since almost all concern German linguistics, the articles are presented in German but all following volumes will be edited in English.

Even history is a science which tries to find the motives, the “causes” of phenomena, and not only describe what happened. In historical linguistics sometimes even the capturing of a phenomenon, e.g. assimilation, is a trial at capturing the cause. Unfortunately, in language it is mostly associated with psychological phenomena which may differ according to age, gender, education, social group, language, etc. but the dispersion and cooperation of these phenomena is quite complex and the links cannot be captured without at least a little bit of statistics.

Statistics is, again, a means for testing linguistic hypotheses. And hypotheses should be derived from some previous knowledge. Hence, in developed science, one derives the hypotheses, constructs(!) data which are relevant for their testing, tests the hypotheses and interprets them in the light of the hypotheses. This way is, of course, very complex. The predecessors who will be

described here made the first steps which should not be forgotten. They came from different states and in all cases they performed pioneer work.

The articles in this volume have been checked and if it was necessary, corrected.

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Inhaltsverzeichnis

Preface

Arens, Hans (1911 - 2003)	1-6
Bacmeister, Adolf Lucas (1827 - 1873)	7-13
Behaghel, Otto (1854 - 1936)	14-20
Behn, Siegfried (1884 - 1970)	21-25
Bianchi, Lorenzo (1889 - 1960)	26-29
Busemann, Adolf (1887 - 1967)	30-34
Drobisch, Moritz Wilhelm (1802 - 1896)	35-41
Elderton, William Palin (1877 - 1962)	42-45
Faust, Manfred (1936 - 1997)	46-50
Förstemann, Ernst Wilhelm (1822 - 1906)	51-61
Gabelentz, Georg von der (1840 - 1893)	62-64
Harsdörffer, Georg Philipp (1607 - 1658)	65-67
Herdan, Gustav (1897 - 1968)	68-73
Jean Paul (1763 - 1825)	74-77
Kaeding, Friedrich Wilhelm (1843 - 1928)	78-85
Kerndörffer, Heinrich August (1769 - 1846)	86-88
Knauer, Karl (1906 - 1966)	89-98
Kunath, Erwin (1899 - 1983)	99-101
Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm (1646 - 1716)	102-105
Lindgren, Kaj Brynolf (1922 - 2007)	106-111
Marbe, Karl (1869 - 1953)	112-115
Meier, Helmut (1897 - 1973)	116-118
Menzerath, Paul (1883 - 1954)	119-134
Pott, August Friedrich (1802 - 1887)	135-137
Schleicher, August (1821 - 1868)	138-140
Schrey, Ferdinand (1850 - 1938)	141-145
Sievers, Eduard (1850 - 1932)	146-150
Thumb, Albert (1865 - 1915)	151-153
Laut-und Buchstabenzählungen im frühen 19. Jahrhundert	154-158