The new "philosophical" approach

Realisations:
• Artificial languages ("characters")
• Abstract/formulaic approaches to natural languages
• Theories of the origins of language
• Classifications of languages, typologies
Often combined in particular discussions
(In some ways these were present earlier too)

Artificial languages

Fundamental assumptions:
• The totality of reality and our knowledge of it can be exhaustively described as a huge construct of items ordered by strictly hierarchical relations (taxonomy – beginnings of the age of Encyclopedias!)
• Language as well as our concepts are ideally isomorphic to reality (but only ideally, this is why artificial languages are needed)

Artificial languages

Examples:
• Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646–1716): Characteristica universalis (never described in detail, Kurt Gödel later suspects great conspiracy)
• George Dalgarno (†1687): Ars signorum, vulgo Character universalis (also works out a sign systems for the deaf)
• John Wilkins (1614–1672) An Essay towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language (see handout, also →)

Abstract approaches to language

Syntax: Port Royal grammar

(Grammaire générale et raisonnée, 1660, by Antoine Arnauld and Claude Lancelot)

The invisible God created the visible world.

God is invisible

the world is visible

God created the world
Abstract approaches to language

Port Royal cont’d

Also word classes:
• all adverbs are preposition + noun comb’s
  – wisely = with wisdom (sapienter = cum sapientia)
• only verb: to be; all other verbs = be + partic.
  – Peter lives = Peter is living/alive
  – actually Aristotle’s idea!

Abstract approaches to language

At lower levels of language (sounds, syllables, word forms, roots)

• E.g. the *Fünffacher Denckring* in Georg Philipp Harsdörffer’s *Deliciae mathematicae et Physicae* (1677) [see handout] →

Ellipsis: the conflict between reason and use

Already in Antiquity:
Gr *pheugo se* = I flee you – why object when not affected (as opp. to *I hit John*)?
Solution: preposition missing, elliptical construction (**pheugo dia se**) – typical feature of syntactic discussions of the era
### Abstract approaches to language / Roots

**Other (extended) example: the development of the root-notion**, new in the 17th century

Antiquity & middle ages: no concept of root (or any morphological structure, except prefixes)
- word forms have properties, not constituents
- paradigms are collections of forms
- derivational relations also between words/word forms

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**thema / positio (prima positio):** specific word form on which others are based

within paradigms: 1Sg verbs, NomSg nouns

in derivation: *species principalis*, *species primitiva* or simply *primitivum* vs. *species derivativa* (e.g. *mons* → *montanus*)

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**All variations of verbs hold the accent in the same place as the theme. I ánimate, thou ánimatest, &c.**

Ben Jonson (1640) *English Grammar*, Ch 7 Of the accent

“The kind [of a word] is to know whether the word be a primitive, or derivative; as *man*, *love*, are primitives; *manly*, *lover*, are derivatives.” Ch 8 The notation of a word

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**Antiquity & middle ages: no concept of suffixation**

*terminatio:* any (sequence of) letter(s) at the end of a word, regardless of morphological status
Abstract approaches to language / Roots

“The English in its substantives has but two different terminations for cases; that of the Nominative, which simply expresses the Name of the thing, and that of the Possessive case.”

Robert Lowth ([1762] 1794) *Short Introduction to English Grammar*, p 24

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

Pronomen affixum – affixed pronoun (clitic pronoun) also from grammars of Hebrew (then other Semitic languages)

He ʕavdekhā ‘your servant’, ʕavaðti̯kha ‘I served you’
Ar ʕabdūka ‘your servant’, ʕabadtu̯ka ‘I served you’

(Very important in early Hungarian grammars!)

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

• Notion of root or stem (radix) appears with grammars of Hebrew, later Arabic in the 16th century
• shortest possible form from which other forms can be derived
• Not root/stem in modern sense; always a full word form (practically always a 3SingMascPerf verb form in Semitic)
(why? because no letters need to be added, e.g. Ar. kataba ‘he wrote’, i.e. ʔktb)

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

Root used sporadically and inconsistently beginning with the 16th c.

“His thre chefe rotes, that is to say, his theme, his preterit participle and his present infynityve… je parle, jay parlé, parler”

John Palsgrave (1530) *L’éclaircissement de la langue française* Introduction xxxi [of verbs]
"child formeth the plural by adding *r* besides the root; for we say not *children*, which, according to the rule given before, is the right formation, but *children*, because the sound is more pleasant to the ears."
Ben Jonson (1640) *EGr*, Ch 14

On the second declension

"the single consonant [goes with the preceding vowel] in *en-amel, in-ordinate, un-easy, need-eth, hear-ing*... for letters joined in the root must not be parted in the branches"
Charles Butler (1633) *English Grammar* p 35

Continental developments:

Justus Georg(ius) Schottel(ius) (mid-17th c., several works):
- *Wurzel/Stammwort* (~ absolute stem)
- *Hauptendung* (~ derivational suffix)
- *Zufällige Endung* (~ inflectional suffix)

(cited from Jellinek (1913) *Gesch. der neuhochd. Gr.*

Abraham Gotthelf Mäzke (late 18th c.)

*Grundsilbe ≠ Stammwort*

*erröten* ‘to blush’ → *röt* (Gs) but *rot* (Sw)

(cited from Jellinek (1913) *Gesch. der neuhochd. Gr.*)
### Abstract approaches to language / Roots

#### Practical applications vs. speculative approaches

Practical application of root-notion:
- descriptive device
- recommendations for spelling

Based on "empirical" root-notion

#### Speculative approaches in England

**Horne Tooke: The Diversions of Purley**
(1786, 1805)

Example of etymological analysis (vol 2):

- \textit{bar} ‘to defend’ →

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barren (\textit{barred} from producing vegetation/offspring)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barn (covered enclosure to protect grain etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baron (armed, defenceful or powerful man)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bargain (confirmed, strengthened agreement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bark (stout vessel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bark (of tree = defence of tree)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bark (of dog = by which we are defended by that animal)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Philipp von Zesen (17th c.), Friedrich Karl Fulda, A. G. Mäzke (18th c.)
Abstract approaches to language / Roots

• barken (dialectal word, enclosed yard)
• burgh/borough (fortified town)
• burrow (defended place for rabbits)
• borrow (any person or thing by which repayment is secured)
• bury (defend)
• burial (defended place)
• barge (strong boat)

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

Alexander Murray *Philosophical History of the European Languages*, 1823:

speculative principle taken to extreme, all words of then-known Indo-European languages explained from primeval "radicals" *ag, bag, dwag...*, in three stages

“Taste and philosophy will receive with aversion the rude syllables, which are the base of that medium, through which Homer, and Milton, and Newton, have delighted or illumined mankind. The words themselves, though inelegant, are not numerous: each of them is a verb and name for a species of action...
Abstract approaches to language / Roots

...Power, motion, force, ideas united in every untutored mind, are implied in them all. The variation of force in degree was not designated by a different word, but by a slight change in the pronunciation. Harsh and violent action, which affected the senses, was expressed by harsher articulations.” (p 31)

IX. To move with a weighty strong impulse, SWAG.
These nine words are the foundations of language, on which an edifice has been erected of a more useful and wonderful kind, than any which have exercised human ingenuity.” (p 32)

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

I. To strike or move with swift equable penetrating or sharp effect was AG! AG! If the motion was less sudden, but of the same species, WAG. If made with force and a great effort, HWAG…

II. To strike with a quick, vigorous, impelling force, BAG or BWAG, of which FAG and PAG are softer varieties........

“The Chinese, whose language continues to be monosyllabic, had recourse to the expedient of varying the sound with the sense, a method sufficient to serve ordinary purposes, but of narrow compass, and liable to difficulties in practice. But the fathers of those nations, whose languages were to receive the most abstract or animated thoughts which the mind is capable of forming, began early to compound their words, and to multiply terms with all the fertility of arithmetical permutation.” (p 34)
Abstract approaches to language / Roots

So far so good, but then where do affixes come from?
one possible answer (also endorsed by Murray): they are degraded roots that became attachments to other roots and lost their autonomy
e.g. -ly ~ like; -dom ~ doom; -ship ~ shape
General idea since Renaissance times: languages did not have affixes a long time ago

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Abstract approaches to language / Roots

The "suffix from word" idea is often right, but developed into a general explanatory principle without sound methodology (attitude called “agglutination theory” by B. Delbrück, 19th c. linguist & historian of linguistics)
Legitimate cases and processes studied under the rubric grammaticalisation

The origins of language

Not a historical issue!
Fundamentally a theoretical question (then called philosophical question) of how language functions & what role it plays
• Sporadically discussed in Antiquity (cf. Plato’s Cratylus)
• In Middle Ages the Genesis-story taken more or less for granted, but what was the language Adam & Eve spoke? Hebrew?
The origins of language

Hotly debated question in 18th century & later

Cartesian view of the 17th century (← René Descartes):
• reason & knowledge are private achievements
• mental discourse does not need language
• communication compromises knowledge
• language tends to fall victim to distorting forces of rhetorics, emotions, persuasion
• the ideal is emotion-free information language
→ "cognitive appropriation of language" (H. Aarsleff)

Cf. Leon Panetta on President Obama:
"Obama approaches things like a law professor in presenting a logic of his position. There is nothing wrong with that. We want to have a president who thinks through the issues. My experience in Washington is that logic alone doesn’t work. Once you lay out a position, you are going to roll up your sleeves and you have to fight to get it done. That is key in Washington." (7th Oct 2014, MSNBC)

The origins of language

Hotly debated question in 18th century & later

Cartesian view of the 17th century:
• Language is split into two:
  – natural, cognitive, descriptive
  – unnatural, tainted by passion

  the former was the language of the Golden Age of perfect communication and harmony

The origins of language

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(cf. also Leibniz: words with and without meaning)
The origins of language
Anti-Cartesian backlash in 18th century (George Berkeley, David Hume, Etienne B. Condillac, with John Locke an important influence):

• belief in small beginnings and progress in the development of communication and knowledge
• humans are social beings by nature
• language also developed in a social context
• instinct and sympathy are fundamental forces, also in development of language: combination of instinctively affective communication and reflectively conceived signs

"The best method of explaining and illustrating the various powers of the human mind... arises from an examination of the several ways of communicating our thoughts by speech, and from attention to those literary principles which contribute to persuasion and entertainment." (Adam Smith Essays on Philosophical Subjects, quoted from Aarsleff in Cambridge History of 18th Century Philosophy, p. 452)

The origins of language
Anti-Cartesian backlash in 18th century

• Language is inherently creative, rhetorical expressivism is at its heart
• Language is part of man’s natural history: gradual development in the context of social interaction
• Language influences the way speakers see the world (→ Weltansicht ‘vision of the world’)
• All forms of communication and expression are theoretically interesting: pantomime, dance, music, acting, poetry etc.

The origins of language
Sum: cognitive vs. social function primary?

Cartesian view (17th c.) favours cognitive, later views (18th c.) favour social-emotive origins