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DIACHRONIC AND  
SYNCHRONIC ASPECTS  
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*SELECTED ARTICLES*

*by*

ALF SOMMERFELT

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## HUGO SCHUCHARDT\*

Hugo Schuchardt who in 1912 was elected a member of our Academy died on April 21, 1927, 85 years of age.

He was a professor of Romance languages, but his interests were so varied, his knowledge of different language groups and his contributions to the study of them so manifold, that he cannot be regarded as a Romanist only. He saw the problems in the widest possible context. His production is so vast and varied that I can here only single out some of his greatest achievements and try to explain some of his main ideas on language and language development.

Schuchardt was born in 1842 in Gotha and studied first in Jena and then in Bonn under Ritschel and also under the founder of Romance language studies, Diez. By accident, he says, in 1862, he became interested in the Latin of Christian inscriptions and that interest determined the trend of his studies. In 1866–68 he published his great book: *Vokalismus des Vulgarlateins*, a book of fundamental importance to the development of Romance studies. All through his long life he published contributions to the solution of Romance problems. In a party in G. Curtius' house in Leipzig in the beginning of the 1870's he met a well-known Celtic scholar, the Welshman John Rhys, and that made him particularly interested in Celtic. Some years later he went to Wales to learn the language. His stay there resulted in original contributions to Celtic and to the study of the relations between Celtic and Romance, and between Celtic and Basque. In 1876 he was made professor of Romance Philology in Halle and shortly afterwards in Graz where he spent the rest of his life. His stay in Austria made him interested in Magyar and in Slavic. And he continued his study of Basque all through his life and became a leading Basque scholar. In his paper *Die iberische Deklination* he was able to determine, through the forms on coins, a number of Iberian flexional endings which, he thought, showed that Iberian and Basque were related. From Basque his interests turned to North African languages, especially to those of the Berbers, and he tried to establish genetic relations between Hamitic and Basque.<sup>1</sup> The study of Basque also led him to take up Caucasian which he has dealt with in many papers. Particularly important is his *Über den passiven Character des Transitivs in den kau-*

\* Originally published in Norwegian in the *Arbok* 1928 of the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters (Oslo, 1929).

<sup>1</sup> *Revue des études basques*, 1912 and 1913.

*kasischen Sprachen* in which he elucidates a special character of the verb in Caucasian languages.

Schuchardt was a typical representative of general linguistics at a time when such scholars were rare. He reacted against the use of philological methods in linguistics and against the exaggerated importance which was given to the old languages. As a typical example of how language was studied in his time he mentions an incident which happened to Musafia, who asked one of his pupils to write on the blackboard "the emperor called on Roland" in Old French: *li emperere at apelet Rolant*. – "Well, now write the sentence in modern French." – "Herr Professor, Neuf Französisch habe ich noch nicht betrieben." – Schuchardt therefore did not take the philological road: "Schon 1872 sagte mir ein massgebender Fachgenosse, ich würde nicht vorwärtskommen, wenn ich nicht einen altfranzösischen Text herausgäbe. Ich sagte zu mir: ich wag's. Es ging."

It went so well that Schuchardt's work has left its mark on almost all fields of general linguistics. But his name is above all connected with some great problems which he has contributed to elucidate: the history of phonetic change and of change in the vocabulary, language mixture, the genetic relations between languages and the character of archaic languages.

As far as phonetics is concerned he opposed the neo-grammarians. Linguists of later times have taken his side in the dispute, and I think I may say that history has decided in favour of his criticism. When one now studies his paper: *Über die Lautgesetze gegen die Junggrammatiker*,<sup>2</sup> one is surprised to see how much still remains relevant and also to see to what extent later organo-psychical research has followed his directions. Now we have given up the idea of "sound laws" of the kind with which the neo-grammarians operated. These "sound laws" are in reality only special aspects of general psychological principles found in all men.

The neo-grammarians affirmed, as is well known, that the so-called "sound laws" did not admit of any exceptions, a theory which seems to go back as far as to Schleicher. In the beginning these "sound laws" were regarded as physical laws, a point of view which was given up by the leaders, but which was maintained by others and which probably still may be met with. The neo-grammarians would not distinguish between different categories of words; Brugmann says this expressively in his *Zum heutigen Stand der Sprachwissenschaft* (1885). Paul, in his *Prinzipien*, tried to find a psychological reason for this theory: the "kinetic feeling" (*Bewegungsgefühl*) is not formed for each word separately, but everywhere in speech the same elements are articulated with the same "kinetic feeling". If therefore this "feeling" is changed through the pronunciation of an element in one word, the change determines the pronunciation of the same element in other words.

The neo-grammarians regarded the speech articulations as occurring unconsciously. Consciousness steps in at a later stage, they thought, when analogy re-establishes order in the havoc caused by the sound laws. Against this Schuchardt maintained that there

<sup>2</sup> Berlin, 1885.

is no opposition between the physical and the psychic; all sound changes are determined by psychical factors. He protested against the view that "sound laws" do not admit of exceptions within the same dialect. The term "dialect" is in this connection wholly ambiguous as there are no dialect limits. Even Delbrück's modification of the principle – he reduced "dialect" to mean the speech of one single individual – could, of course, not be maintained. Schuchardt writes that a sound change starts in some words used by a limited number of individuals and then spreads to other words and other individuals. And the neo-grammarians apply the term "laws" to principles the validity of which is limited in space and time. The method of the neo-grammarians, Schuchardt maintains, have been unfortunate in that they have turned the interest away from the investigation of the causal factors in sound change. All these thousands of "sound laws" are of no interest as long as they are not brought into a coherent system. The neo-grammatical methods have led to a very unfortunate mechanization of research and reduced thought to a minimum. By a curious lack of consequence the neo-grammarians think they can explain the exceptions, but not the "laws". To those who said that if the "sound laws" suffered exceptions, one might give up the idea of a real science of language, he replied temperamentally that terror ought not to be used in discussions of scientific problems. The two alternatives are without any foundation in the facts; everything is subject to causality.

Posterity has begun, as I mentioned already, to agree with Schuchardt's views, but he seems himself not to have taken part in the efforts to determine the conditions in which the linguistic process of change takes place. That may be due to his temperament. His special interest was the *nuance*, the always changing and complicated character of language and its history. He could not stand bureaucrats who called for *Ordnung* and had no sense for the *nuances*. He liked subjective – individualistic views which did not lack objectivity. He makes, in one of his last papers in which he tells a little about himself, remarks which give a charming impression of his personality: "Ich empfinde es immer wohlthätig wenn unter dem kühlen Panzer der Objektivität hervor mich ein warmer Hauch von Subjektivität anweht, die ja doch nie fehlt. Der Mitforscher tritt mir dann näher, wird mir verständlicher."

Schuchardt's views of phonetic development made him quite naturally react against the disproportional weight laid in etymology on phonetic criteria. In the study of etymology meaning is of equal importance to the explanation as phonetics. Schuchardt showed in his etymological studies a real sense of the importance of the history of a word as a social problem, whether it be the case of a traditional word or a loan-word, and he knew how to disentangle the web of elements contained in such a history. It is not surprising that he had an open eye especially for the role of contamination – "und in the title *Wörter und Sachen*", he once wrote, "ought to change from a symbol of an addition to one of multiplication in order that we might arrive at a *Sachwortgeschichte*." Few have as he insisted on the necessity of studying the fortunes of individual words. "Wortgeschichte," he writes, "geht vor Sprachgeschichte." His insistence upon the importance of the geographical distribution of words and of other linguistic pheno-

mena have had consequences. Many of his ideas have contributed to the rise of geographical linguistics.

Schuchardt wanted to see everything placed in a complete system which "is not determined by the sound but by the meaning". Sound changes are not everything in language history, the changes of expression, of meaning must also be the object of systematic research. In the history of lexicography facts are more important than ingenious hypotheses. If we did not know the way in which a certain kind of *foie gras* is prepared we would not be able to explain the history of the Romance words for "liver". Such word shed light on the development of civilization. Behind word history Schuchardt envisaged a museum. "Perhaps Romance word history one day would give rise to a museum," he says. During his last days, his hopes were partly realized through the Linguistic Atlas of Switzerland Italy by Jaberg, Jud and Scheuer-meyer.

It was quite natural that Schuchardt became interested in language mixture. He is one of those linguists who have contributed most to the study of this problem. In a period when language was still regarded as an independent organism and when men as Max Müller and Whitney maintained that real language mixture was impossible, he wrote that every language was mixed and that the mixture was of a social, not of a psychological character. In a number of publications, especially on Creole languages based on French, Portuguese, Spanish or English, and on his well known *Slawo-deutsches und Slawo-italienisches* (1884) he collected and interpreted a great number of facts of fundamental importance to the problem, taking into account the external as well as the internal history of the linguistic forms in question. He was brought to the study of these problems by his wish to unravel the influence the pre-Latin languages may have had on Romance. It is possible to agree with him on many points when one defines precisely what is meant by a mixed language. That the different social layers with their special linguistic traits is of the greatest importance to the development of a *langue commune* is evident. Extensive influence in phonetics, grammar and vocabulary between dialects or language closely resembling each other is well known. It is enough to mention the case of the Norwegian Riksmål which is a compromise between certain Norwegian dialects and written Danish. But in the case of languages which are not closely related and where the speakers of one do not understand the language of the other, the case is different. Then it is necessary to distinguish clearly between grammar in the sense of the concrete grammatical forms, and the other parts of language, what Schuchardt does not do and does not want to do. In such cases we must reckon with substratum as well as adstratum influence. Phonetic influence by a substratum language is a well known fact although there are linguists who are more or less blind to it – especially because the search for such influence is so often carried out unsystematically and unmethodically. Words and derivations may be borrowed extensively. The "inner form" of a language may be transmitted from a substratum to a conquering language. New grammatical categories may be due to the influence of a language which has been replaced by another. Those who have read Synge will have seen

many Irish cases of this. But concrete, overt grammatical forms are not usually taken over though cases may be found, due to special conditions. The linguistic forms studied by Schuchardt were not always well suited to make a clear distinction between the different kinds of influence possible; some of them were rudimentary linguistic forms, used in commerce, *Notsprachen* as Schuchardt called them. He writes that he once regarded them as typical mixed languages, but that he soon changed his opinion of them. The problem of mixed languages is for the moment being lively discussed, especially on account of theories advanced by certain Russian linguists. I do not think it is possible to come to a definite result as far as these problems are concerned before we have more material at our disposal. Most of the languages which have been the object of systematic study hitherto do not seem to provide cases of mixture of forms from unrelated or only distantly related grammatical systems. When the problem will be taken up in its whole purport Schuchardt's publications will be precious.

Schuchardt's views on language mixture were of consequence to his theory of language parentage. His articles on this problem are for the most part directed against Meillet and are parts of a controversy which from both sides was carried on with great courtesy. Meillet thinks that an unbroken tradition back to a *langue commune*, the speakers' intention of using and their will to use the same language, is the criterium by which the problem may be solved. To him there is "langue une là ou des individus se comprenant entre eux, ont, d'une façon consciente ou inconsciente, le sentiment et la volonté d'appartenir à la même communauté linguistique." Genealogically related languages mean different modifications of one original *langue commune*. In order to prove such relations Meillet used grammar. A grammatical system or parts of it are not borrowed by one language from another. Only when there is a break in linguistic tradition —, when they adopt a new language, do people take over such conjugations as French *j'aime, tu aimes, il aime, nous aimons*. This, he writes, can be shown from the history of those language groups which have been the object of the most systematic study, especially the Indo-European language family, and one cannot use historically little known and little studied languages as counter-evidence. Meillet understands by genealogical relationship a historical fact and he maintains that genealogical relationship between languages does not imply any inner similarity between them. It is not in every case possible to find the necessary criteria which permit one to draw conclusions. In languages where grammar is expressed only through a minimum of flexional forms, it is impossible to arrive at a definite result, he thinks. The languages studied by Schuchardt, such as Negro French and others are in the same case; they are, Meillet thinks, exceptional cases without historical importance.

Against this Schuchardt writes that it is impossible to reckon with any will to speak the same language and that grammatical forms are not of any special character. Endings and suffices such as *liebst, liebte, lieblich, liebreich, liebevoll, beliebten* are external forms, quite as much as *du, tat, gleich, reich, voll, bei*. Therefore the final decision lies in the vocabulary. That some parts of it are more resistant than others is

of no fundamental importance. Linguistic development takes place through a great number of criss-cross movements. Mixture and borrowings form no absolute contrasts. "Sprachverwandtschaft ist nicht minder abgestuft wie Personenverwandtschaft. Das Baskische hat verwandtschaftliche Beziehungen zum Kaukasischen wie zum Hamitischen." It is also necessary to reckon with relations between the "inner forms" of languages, the ideas and categories which constitute the covert aspect of a language, the *elementare Verwandtschaft*.

Schuchardt's use of the term *Sprachverwandtschaft* is rather vague. His *Elementare Verwandtschaft* may, as Deen maintains, be regarded as an object of ethnopsychological study<sup>3</sup> and I think one must, as Meillet does, use the term *parenté de langues* to cover only historical facts. But that does not imply that general similarity between languages is without interest for the language historian; it may be an indication of a very distant common historical origin.

Schuchardt also dealt with the problem of the origin of language, or rather with the character which the oldest forms of language may have had and how they may be supposed to have developed. He thinks the holophrase must have been the first form of articulated language. And he believes that the holophrase must have had a verbal character. From the process, "aus dem Vorgang ergibt sich in fließender Folge der Beginn des Zustandes, der Zustand, die Eigenschaft." And he rejects the rather naive objection that the earliest sound complexes used by the child have the character of nouns. When a child says *mama* that does not mean: *that is mother* (and not father), but something like: *there mother comes*, or rather: *mother must feed me, mother must take me*. Schuchardt's ideas correspond to what we, especially through Lévy-Bruhl's research, know about the development of human reason.

Schuchardt wrote no manuals, but spread his ideas in series of papers. It is therefore difficult to get a complete idea of his views. That explains why his influence on the linguistics of his time did not correspond to the importance of his work. In 1922, however, Swiss scholars got the excellent idea of publishing a selection of his papers on general problems instead of presenting him with a *Festschrift* on his 80th birthday. The selection was made by Leo Spitzer, and was the most appropriate way in which Schuchardt could be honoured.

Schuchardt did not belong to that type of scholars who make sensational discoveries which impress the public. But his importance to scholarship is not lessened by that fact. He has spread about him riches which have inspired his contemporaries and which will survive him. In the reorientation which now takes place in linguistics Schuchardt's thoughts have their part, a fact which seems to be forgotten in certain circles of his fatherland.

<sup>3</sup> *Over taalverwantschap, meeningen en vragen* (Amsterdam, 1926).