Sins of Generativism

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1 Shaumyan (1987: 30) summarizes what may be called the Sins of Generativism as follows:

Generativism distorts linguistic reality in the following ways:
1) It confounds the phonological level with the morphological level.
2) As a result of 1), it rejects the phonological level.
3) It uses fictitious entities called *deep structures* and fictitious phonological representations.
4) It confounds the constituency relations with linear word order, which involves an inferior formalism that is inadequate for a study of linguistic relations and formulating linguistic universals.

Up to the present day, “The only right alternative to generativism is the semiotic method with its concept of semiotic reality” (Shaumyan 1987: 29), and “semiotic reality is determined by the Principle of Semiotic Relevance [...]: Only those distinctions between meanings are relevant that correlate with distinctions between their signs [i.e. forms C.K.], and, vice versa, only those distinctions between signs [i.e. forms C.K.] are relevant that correlate with distinctions between their meanings” (Shaumyan 1987: 322).

2 Recently, the first two sins of generativism have seen a curious revival in Russia, possibly as a consequence of contacts with the Netherlands (lastly resulting in Хопаслаар 2001).

Касаткин (1998), who develops the Moscow school of Russian phonemics (for a recent survey see Касаткин 1995 — also available in Касаткин 1999) criticizes opinions of members of the “Санкт-Петербургская фонологическая школа” (СПФШ), i.e. the former Leningrad phonological school, and represents their

Then he says:

C точки зрения СПФШ в предложе под звуки [n] и [n°] представляют фонему /n/, звуки [А], фоакальный [Ан] и, очевидно, имполяционный [А>] — фонему /A/. [...] Другие указанные выше звуки в предложе под являются представителями нескольких фонем: гласный звук [o] — аллофон фонемы /o/, а [А] и [т] — фонема /a/, согласные звуки [т], [т'], [т'] — аллопоны фонем /т/, /т'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'/, /у'.
whether the linguists who accept this notion of the phoneme understand why they need the term phoneme. [...] the concept of the phoneme as a class of physically related sounds dominated American descriptive linguistics and was very popular elsewhere, too. (Shaumyan 1987: 63)

The “elsewhere” here is, of course, the Leningrad (Petersburg) school, where the incidental use of a phoneme notation has unfortunately survived Дюрович’s (1975: 45) verdict that “так называемая ленинградская фонологическая школа представляет собой скорее лишь исторический интерес”. The more visible Leningrad (Petersburg) school of phonetics is another issue, but could be criticized as well.

3 Next, Касаткин (1999: e.g. 56-57) opposes the Moscow school conception of the phoneme to that of the “Prague” school. The two are kept apart by the usual “<>” notation for the Moscow school and the usual “//” notation for “Prague” phonology (not to be confused with the Leningrad school). This opposition is historically correct, of course, but it is a somewhat false comparison, because “Prague” phonology does not exclude morphonology / morphophonology writable in “<>” (cf. e.g. Kortlandt 1974); only the latter is comparable with the Moscow phonology developed by Kasatkin. In the list of под examples, the morphonological notation (representing what would be pronounced if all segments were in strong position, i.e. in the position where the maximal opposition class is found) is, of course, <pod>. Nor does “Prague” phonology exclude alternations like that in Каа́яра ~ Каа́яркаЮ: (cf. KacaxКHH 1999: 109 ff).

The spelling principle exemplified in the под examples is “МОРФОНЕМАТИКА” according to the Moscow school and “ФОНЕМАТИКА” according to the Moscow school (Касаткин 1998: 132). From the “Prague” point of view it is “morphonology” (“<>”). (Note that it does not follow that the Petersburg concept of the phoneme equals Prague “//” phonology.) What would exemplify a Prague (“//”) phonological spelling principle is the graphical differen-
tiation between cases where the opposition hard ~ soft exists, and cases where this opposition is neutralized (irrespective of pronunciation); if there is opposition softness is expressed in spelling (by means of vowel graphemes and absence ~ presence of Ь); but in мостък, идяя, Пенза, for example (Касаткин 1998: 133), no Ь appears after the first consonant in the cluster despite its (potential) soft pronunciation: there is no opposition. (But in cases like свалъбе spelling is analogous with the hard forms свалбъ etc., where the soft consonant is in a strong position. As is well known, the redundancy of Ь in examples like свалъбе is about to disappear. Another redundant spelling of Ь occurs in foreign names such as Кваснёвский; the first part of a compound like четвертьвежовой (Огонек 1997, 35: 51) is, as far as Ь is concerned, treated as a separate word in spelling, just like it is a separate vowel reduction unit in speech.)

4 For the time being, the anecdote ends with Касаткин (2001): the author now uses a “//” notation for his own Moscow phonology! By doing so he has unfortunately opened the door for Shaumyan’s (1987: 87) criticism of generativism:

The complete lack of understanding of the sign nature of language has led to disastrous consequences – to a confusion of synchrony and diachrony and a confusion of the phonemic level with the morphophonemic and phonetic levels.

Let us hope that the history of generativism will not repeat itself in Russia.

5 Shaumyan’s admirable treatment of the Third Sin of Generativism is a succinct explanation of the argumentation called “soep argument” in Dutch (Keijsper 1990):

Generativism as a methodological postulate is an attempt to justify fictitious entities in linguistics by devising mechanical rules that convert fictitious linguistic entities into observable linguistic objects.

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Even if one fully digim split between scribe to his pan an undesirable n “[generativism]” which involves of relations and fore advocates his At dependent of w 106, 109). This ѣ by a very weak i 1987: 1-13), viz. relevant that cor other sign-base between signs [f their meanings” This principle smiles 1987: 13-1 starting point th should lead to th senseless wastef. Advocating his - logical starting p

(1a)  Peter gr
If a linguist claims that his mathematical design is a model of the grammar of a real language, it is not enough for him to show that grammatically correct sentences can be derived by applying formal rules to certain initial objects. He also bears the burden of proving that the initial objects are not fictitious. [...] The semiotic method [...] rejects generativism as a methodological postulate. (Shaumyan 1987: 29)

Even if one fully agrees with Shaumyan's treatment of the essence of the paradigm split between generativism and the semiotic method, one need not subscribe to his particular semiotic alternative to generativism. It has, in my view, an undesirable restriction, related to the Fourth Sin of Generativism, viz. "[generativism] confounds the constituency relations with linear word order, which involves an inferior formalism that is inadequate for a study of linguistic relations and formulating linguistic universals." As an alternative, Shaumyan advocates his Applicative grammar, which treats constituency relations as independent of word order and as complementary to dependency relations (1987: 106, 109). This grammar can be regarded as adequate only if it is accompanied by a very weak interpretation of the Principle of Semiotic Relevance (Shaumyan 1987: 1-13), viz. of the idea that "only those distinctions between meanings are relevant that correlate with distinctions between their signs [i.e. forms, in another sign-based terminology, C.K.], and, vice versa, only those distinctions between signs [forms] are relevant that correlate with the distinctions between their meanings" (Shaumyan 1987: 322).

This principle (which, by the way, does not exclude polyvalent signs – Shaumyan 1987: 13-16) should, in my view, be accompanied by the methodological starting point that languages are economical codes: difference of form [sign] should lead to the suspicion that some difference of meaning exists, i.e. no senseless wasteful form distinctions should be presupposed.

Advocating his Applicative grammar, Shaumyan cannot share this methodological starting point: he holds the view that the change of, for example,

(1a) Peter gave money to Nancy
(1b) Peter gave Nancy money

“must be regarded as a syntagmatic process that does not affect the meaning of the sentence or the relations between terms” (1987: 326). In my view, the fact that “they differ only with respect to the presence or absence of the preposition to and the different sequencing of terms” (Shaumyan 1987: 325-326) should lead to an investigation, i.e. to the suspicion that some semantic difference exists. Applicative grammar can only ignore differences between converse structures (cf. Keijsper, to appear, piece five).

Likewise, Applicative grammar cannot deal with the fact that Russian, for example, phenotypically has both “syntactic relations” (i.e. hierarchy encoded in verb form and cases) and linear-intonational hierarchy. It is true (Shaumyan 1987: 267) that English uses word order (and the corresponding NP + VP (VP = V+NP) linear-intonational hierarchy) to express Subject – Object relations:

(2a) Anna teaches Peter
(2b) Peter teaches Anna

whereas Russian uses case forms to that aim:

(3a) Anna učí Petra
(3b) Annu učí Petr

But apart from 3a and 3b, Russian also has, among others,

(4a) Petra učí Anna
(4b) Petr učí Annu

Applicative grammar cannot deal with semantic differences such as those between 3 and 4 (with an intonation implied). The comparison between 2 and 3 shows that Chomsky’s (1965: 71) definition of Subject and Object was wrong (i.e. the idea that the definition was universally applicable is incorrect) (Keijsper 1994: 297 ff.). But it does not show that linear-intonational hierarchy, if it were

analysed correctly, rather than genetically, that we used at the time. Universal model time are unable: These models in place the semiotic

Notes
1 According to Bon
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analysed correctly, is semantically irrelevant. In my view, Sin Number Four is rather that generativism has failed to analyse linear-intonational hierarchy adequately: that would have been a study of “performance”, in the terminology used at the time.

Universal models dealing with language in abstraction from its realization in time are unable to analyse large areas of language specific semiotic relevance. These models include both Generative models and Applicative grammar, despite the semiotic orientation of the latter.

Notes
1 According to Bondarko и др. (1997: 63) “было установлено, что различение двух степеней редукции в предударных слогах реально только для альлофонов фонемы /a/ [i.e. Leningrad school С.К.] тогда как остальные гласные в предударной позиции реализуются почти одинаково и в первом и во втором предударном слоге (Бондарко, 1987). С другой стороны, было показано, что для всех гласных характерно противоставление предударной и заударной редукции, связанное со значительным ослаблением артикуляции к концу слова (Бондарко, Кукольникова, Павлова, Светлова, Шетин, 1977)”. These findings are relevant to “Prague” phonology only if the number of elements in every opposition class of vowels (the five-member set, the three-member set, and the two-member set, not to mention special cases, cf. Kortlandt 1973: 74-75) is affected; members of different opposition classes need not be discretely different from one another phonetically.

The 3300 member set of vowel allophones mentioned on page 68 of Bondarko и др. (1997) is, of course, not a set of allophones in “Prague” phonology, but, say, a set of (potential) phonetic realizations of Leningrad school “phonemes”.

2 For example, Bondarko и др. (1997: 76 ff.) contains the baffling idea that diphones must be created on the basis of an already available (?) set of allophones placed in pseudo words which are recorded and then segmented. The whole sense of creating diphones, however, was in avoiding allophones in speech synthesis: given the former, the latter are redundant, and vice versa. Opinions differed on which method was best. The wish to realize both models (1997: 64-65) is incomprehensible and expensively useless (not to mention the number of diphones needed to overcome the segmentation problems discussed on page 78 ff). As Панков (1995: 34-37) explains, the Leningrad conception of the syllable (Bondarko, Павлова 1967) was not a good idea either.

3 In one case the phonological system described in Kortlandt (1973) is about to change (or has already changed in the younger norm) under the influence of the hardening of nonfinal consonants in clusters ending in a soft consonant (Касачкин 1993, see also in 1999): a new hard ~ soft opposition of the type за[a]́р[e]́ → ́тo[l][e]́, қa[л]a[e]́ше → свa[л]o(e) (dentals before soft labials) arises if soft pronunciation in the former cases becomes (or is already) impossible. The other cases discussed in Касачкин (1993) remain cases of neutralization from the point of view of “Prague” phonology, but have in the younger norm another pronunciation than that given in Kortlandt (1973: 78-79). The position before the clitics -ca, -re (boundary type), and, of course, before boundaries between words (vowel reduction units) – also if the boundary is not rendered in spelling, were already strong, of course; for sonorous dentals, the position before -ca/ is
strong (американский) ~ тайский, кипчакский ~ ладинский; in this position, the phoneme opposition corresponds to the alternation of the type петербургский ~ валежинский.

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