

## THE LIFE AND WORK OF PROFESSOR BOHUMIL TRNKA

(On the Occasion of his Seventy-fifth Birthday)

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Anybody facing the task of describing the life and work of Professor B. Trnka is necessarily beset with a difficult problem of formulation. To describe his life, scholarly or otherwise, involves a task of accommodating many complex and technical ideas to a short utterance such as this. In its course, the life of Professor Trnka was seemingly simple and ordinary: He was born on June 3rd, 1895, in Kletečná near Humpolec, Czechoslovakia. He studied at the Žižkov grammar school in Prague and graduated in English and Czech philology at Charles University, Prague. In 1925 he was appointed lecturer in English philology at Charles University, Prague, after having published the book *Syntaktická charakteristika řeči anglosaských památek básnických* (A Syntactical Analysis of the Language of Anglo-Saxon Poetry, being vol. II of *Prague Studies in English*), and was appointed professor in 1930. Such a seemingly 'ordinary' life, however, produced a growth of an intellectual mind of a remarkable standard, depth and originality.

The developing architecture of Trnka's scholarly work can be seen from the very start. The precise task was to outline and elaborate functional linguistics of the Prague type, now known as the Prague linguistic school, which, by the early thirties, was already considered a turning point in European linguistics both because it differed from anything that preceded, and because it was a team-enterprise. Trnka's life work is long on the time level, and extensive in the impressive number of writings he has produced. It covers some 28 titles on synchronic phonology, 13 titles on historical phonology, 11 items on English medieval and renaissance literature, 11 titles on general linguistics, 10 titles on semantics, 9 titles on morphology and syntax, 7 titles on linguistic methodology and theory, and 2 titles on linguistic typology. Such a preliminary survey is of necessity incomplete, and it levels out the variety of scientific subjects he has treated.

Alongside the theories of other scholars and linguistic schools, Professor Trnka has ever striven at all-round, hierarchical and structural approaches. He remained loyal to structural methodological tenets which accommodate an internally consistent and integrated scientific theory within which it was possible to evolve and to elaborate a method which at its very outset was roughly outlined. For its partisan it demanded a scholarly loyalty to make the method concrete, to materialize it in and on actual facts of language. The variety of linguistic problems that Professor Trnka treated may be explained by the very nature of structural linguistics, which is inherently analytic, hierarchical and functional, and which fits individual facts into a systemic overall pattern whose extent was only tentatively surmised at the outset.

Trnka's diversified work may be classified in other ways. In its history, the non-linguistic boundary of World War II is tempting as a demarcation line; in fact, it also had its personal and organisational consequences. Before the War, the focus of Trnka's interests – and those of the other members of the Prague Linguistic Circle as well – lay in phonology. In the earliest stage the notion of the phoneme and its relations to its counterparts (in a system, i.e. paradigmatically), and also in the text (i.e. in sequence, in seriation, syntagmatically) had to be defined. In such problems and methods, Professor Trnka had advanced

ahead of his colleagues and quickly penetrated on to an international forum. He was the first to work out the phonological system of modern English (*A Phonological Analysis of Present-day Standard English, Prague Studies in English*, 5, 1935; revised in 1966 and published by Hukuou Publ. Co. in Tokyo). After World War Two Trnka's focus of interest shifted to the meaningful layers of the language, to morphology, syntax and semantics, although some of the problems had been tapped by him before and side by side with phonology. He laid down the definition of the parts of speech as bundles of morphologically relevant features (see his mimeographed lectures *Rozbor nynější spisovné angličtiny*, Part II, 1954, and many individual papers such as 'Morfologické protiklady' (1958), 'Principles of Morphological Analysis' (1961). 'On the Morphological Classification of Words' (1962), 'Conversion in English' (1969), and others. There is also his paper on the relation of morphology and syntax (read at the Sixth Linguistic Congress in Paris, 1948) and articles such as 'Autonomous and Syntagmatic Words' (1966), 'On Word Order in Structural Linguistics' (1968). Trnka had a more traditional conception of syntax, even though, since the earliest stages, he had introduced into it new, Mathesian views. Nevertheless, there was no urgent necessity here to invent and evolve a brand new linguistic concept such as the phoneme had been. In this points, Trnka (and his structuralist colleagues such as Trubetzkoy and Karcevski) had only employed and reappraised old syntactic notions whose interiors he elaborated and fitted into the hierarchical pattern of a sentence. Trnka conceives of syntax as a subsystem of linguistic elements superimposed to that of morphology, and points out that both of these subsystems consist of paradigmatic oppositions (on the vertical axis) and syntagmatic contrasts (on the horizontal axis). The latter can be reduced to the following basic relationships: determination versus indetermination, coordination vs. subordination, compatibility vs. incompatibility, integration vs. contrastiveness – see his 'Principles of Morphological Analysis' (1961, p. 137). The problems of word semantics had been treated by Trnka already when he was writing on homonymy, on the content of morphology, and on the theory of proper names. In this respect, he distinguished the meanings in themselves as distinct from those in the text, i.e. in a concrete speech situation. He traces the relation of general vs. particular, of abstract vs. concrete, of infinite vs. finite, denominations of class vs. individual, and the dual function of proper names (viz. identifying vs. differentiating) – see his article 'Problém vlastních jmen' in *Philologica Pragensia*, 6, 1963, 87.

Recently, (in 1967, in the paper 'Words, Semantemes and Sememes' in the festschrift *To Honor Roman Jakobson*) Trnka defined the word in three aspects: It is a phonological form, i.e. a structure lacking the meaning, but capable of carrying semantic relations. Through them words become semantemes (i.e. lexical units) which can incorporate also disparate meanings. Cf. the word [nait] which may mean 'night' and 'knight'. The identity of a word (hand) as a single semanteme is based on a central semantic feature common to all its sememes which do not substantially differ from each other.

Trnka's most general views on language were expounded in greatest detail in his writings on the linguistic sign – see 'A Remark concerning the Linguistic Sign and Communication', 1966, in the miscellany dedicated to Margaret Schlauch; in the volume *Zeichen und System der Sprache*, 1, 1961; in the paper 'Principles of Morphemic Analysis', *Philologica Pragensia*, 4, 1961, 129–37, and in his papers on linguistic analogy (in *Časopis pro moderní filologii*, 43, 1961, in *Omaggio lui*

A. Rosetti, 1965; and in *Zeitschrift für Phonetik, Sprachwissenschaft und Kommunikationsforschung*, vol. 21, 1968). They had been heralded as early as in 1936 (in *Slovo a slovesnost*, 2, 221-2). He also discussed the relation of linguistics to the ideological structure of the period (in *Slovo a slovesnost*, 10, 1948, 73-80). Let us point out that general linguistics virtually permeates all his writings so that it could be put forth as a coherent structural theory and analysis of language.

Tracing the most general relationships has never led Professor Trnka to make deductions not firmly grounded on the corpus of natural languages. He conceives linguistic theory as a disclosing of new relations between linguistic units, and not as an end in itself, or an intellectual game with new terms denoting old concepts. He is a taxonomist and binarist in a good sense in that he conceives of language as a structure composed of a finite number of elements. In his view language is both finite (in being reducible to an inventory of details), and infinite (syntagmatic) because its speaker is capable of an infinite set of manipulations (sequences, configurations) with a finite inventory of units and relations.

Throughout his long linguistic career, Professor Trnka has endeavoured to erect linguistic methodology based on its own principles derived from language. Such an autonomy of linguistic science, however, presupposes its coexistence and cooperation with other disciplines (such as logic, mathematics, philosophy), yet in a way that he regards these sciences as ancillary to linguistics, and that he recognizes also a relative autonomy of those sciences. This standpoint may disclose, in the recent past and at present, Professor Trnka's reserved attitude towards the American methodological innovations of transformational, generative grammars and machine linguistics. In his view, other sciences may derive profit from and provide inspiration, aid or influence to linguistics, but they cannot replace, displace or absorb linguistics as such.

Destiny and life have been generous to Professor Trnka. They have given him talent and other intellectual properties necessary for a creative man of penetrating and independent thought and a man of staunch morality. They have given him lasting health, equanimity, physical liveliness and agelessness in his old age. His age seems to be only mathematical in the number of years, and does not materially reflect on his physical exterior. In view of all this it seems to be beyond any doubt that the present outline of his scholarly work is only provisional, and that we may trust to await in future many happy returns of this day, and his many works still to come.