THREE MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

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Abstract

One has identified three misconceptions about language and its study, namely linguistics. Their persistence is intrinsically dangerous, as there are many misconceptions in the minds of the people. Yet these misconceptions are worth a look because they have been uttered by people teaching in the field of humanities.

The first misconception is that there are very distinct languages of culture and languages of civilisation. The second misconception revolves around the idea that the metaphor is the only thing that matters. The third misconception lies in the blunt statement that linguists only ever draw tables.

The purpose of this short work is to show that humanities ought to be seen as an integrated and developing field.

Introduction

All misconceptions which have found their way and grown in the minds of the people are intrinsically dangerous. The reason why misconceptions they dangerous is due to the fact that they are constructs based on statements which can be considered logically invalid because they prove not to be true when confronted with the immediate reality. (See Figure 1.)

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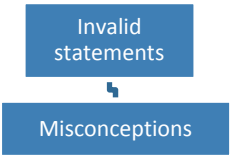

Figure 1: A graphic representation of a simplified model of the relationship between invalid statements and misconceptions

The result of the development of misconceptions invariably from invalid statements is unfortunate twice fold. Misconceptions can be deemed at the same time Immoral and unscientific. (See Figure 2.)

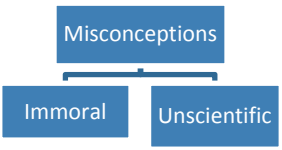

Figure 2: A graphic representation of the unfortunate qualities of misconceptions

First and foremost, misconceptions are without a shadow of a doubt highly objectionable form a moral standpoint because they are marked by a behaviour whence people abide by no other rules than their own arbitrary ones. (See Figure 3.)

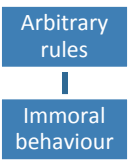

Figure 3: A graphic representation of a simplified model of the relationship between arbitrary rules and immoral behaviour

Secondly, people with misconceptions behave unscientifically, because their purposes, in this case, is to retain their own arbitrary principles not to further knowledge and thus hinder progress of knowledge in any field of human activity. (See Figure 4.)

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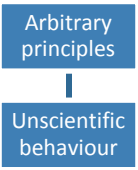

Figure 4: A graphic representation of a simplified model of the relationship between arbitrary principles and unscientific behaviour

When such misconceived ideas which lead to such behaviours are identified amongst the very professionals in a field, theses ideas need to be disproved by means of serious and well-informed discussions. (See Figure 5.)

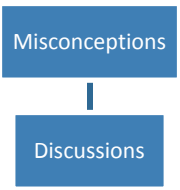

Figure 5: A graphic representation of a simplified model of disproving misconceptions by discussions

One has identified some misconceptions about language and its study, namely linguistics. These misconceptions are worth a look because they have been uttered by people teaching in the field of humanities. (See Figure 6.)



Figure 6: A graphic representation of a simplified model of identified misconceptions about language and linguistics

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There are, basically, three misconceptions: languages of culture and languages of civilisation; the metaphor is the only thing which really matters and linguists only ever draw tables. (See Figure 7.)

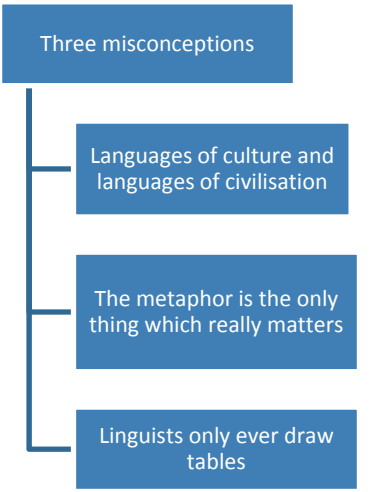

Figure 7: A graphic representation of the three identified misconceptions about language and Linguistics

First misconception

As the name would have one know, there are languages of civilisation and there are languages of culture which are distinct in nature. (See Figure 8.)

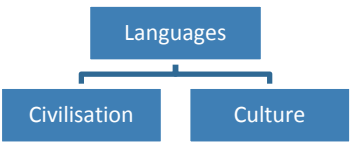

Figure 8: A graphic representation of the classification of languages according to the first misconception.

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According to this tenement, the first category of languages, that is the languages called languages of civilisation, supposedly produce civilisation. (See Figure 9.)

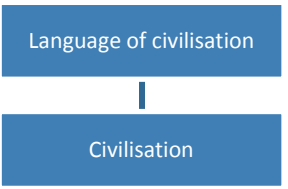

Figure 9: A graphic representation of the supposed product of any language of civilisation

The second proposed type of language, the languages of culture, are supposed to follow the very same pattern when it comes to their product. As the name implies they are said to produce culture. (See Figure 10.)

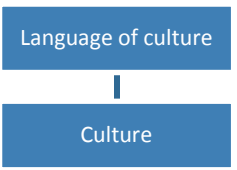

Figure 10: A graphic representation of the supposed product of any language of culture

It goes without saying that such statements are indeed rather shallow and will not do. However to disprove such a simplistic view a new multi-perspective model is necessary. (See Figure 11.)

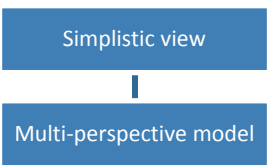

Figure 11: A graphic representation of the paradigm shift from the original simplistic view to a more objective multi-perspective model

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Looking at this first misconception form different angles, in the multi-perspective model, yields different types of counter-arguments to its thesis. (See Figure 12.)

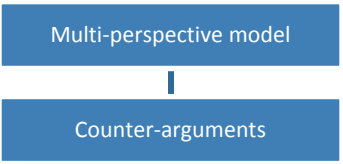

Figure 12: A graphic representation of the relationship between the multi-perspective model and the counterarguments

In the case of the first misconception, one has identified two perspectives to more objectively view it and analyse it from: a linguistic perspective and a cultural perspective. (See Figure 13.)

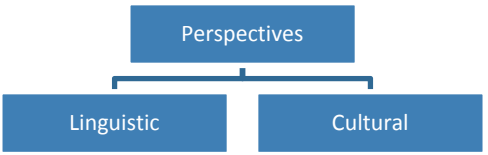

Figure 13: A graphic representation of the two perspectives on the first misconception

This means that there will be two types of counter-arguments to this first misconception. It also goes without saying that these two types will be linguistic counter-arguments and cultural counter-arguments. (See Figure 14.)

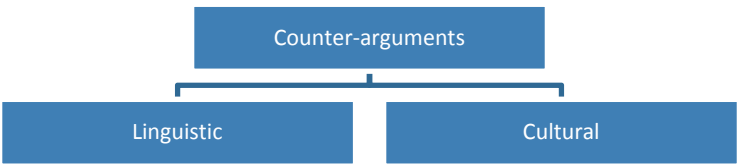

Figure 14: A graphic representation of the two counter-arguments to the first misconception

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The first type of counter-arguments is centred on two questions of semantics. Accordingly, the linguistic counter-arguments are the self evidence of the fact that the semantic level of all languages is undoubtedly vast and the related idea that all languages constantly produce new meanings. (See Figure 15.)

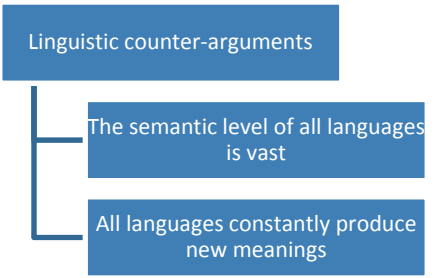

Figure 15: A graphic representation of the two linguistic counter-arguments

As for the second type of counter-arguments, it is based on commonsensical observations on the relationship between culture and civilisation. The first cultural counter-argument presented here is the idea that the link between culture and civilisation is very strong, while the second is that, with the first argument in mind, no work treats culture and civilisation separately. (See Figure 16.)

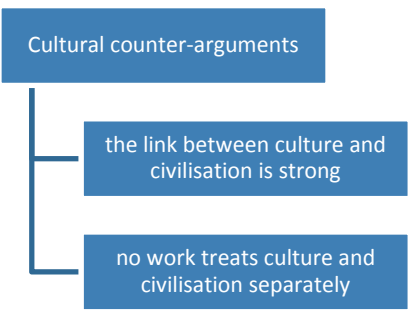

Figure 16: A graphic representation of the two cultural counter-arguments

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Second misconception

This misconception is a rather attractive aesthetic idea taken to an ugly extreme. The main tenement of the second misconception is that the metaphor is the only thing that matters.

Much like in the case of the first misconception there will be different critical approaches to the thesis of the second misconception. Critical approaches will again lead to different counter-arguments. In this case, there will be three counter-arguments. (See Figure 17.)

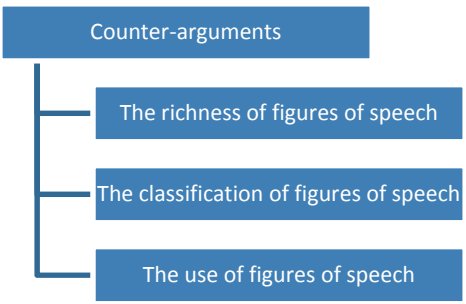

Figure 17: A graphic representation of the three counter-arguments

The first Counter-argument is based on the fact that any language has produced a huge number of figures of speech. To get a superficial idea of the multitude of figures of speech a brief list has been compiled to be presented here:

aphorism, assonance, chiasmus, conceit, epistrophe, euphemism, hyperbole, irony, kenning, litotes, metaphor, metonymy, onomatopoeia, oxymoron, parallelism, personification, pleonasm, redundancy, rhetorical question, sarcasm, simile, spoonerism, synecdoche, tautology, understatement, zeugma, etc.

The second counter-argument is rooted in the possible classifications of the figures of speech. That is to say, there are so

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many figures of speech that one can classify them according to different criteria. For the purposes of this work two manners of classifying figures of speech have been chosen. The figures of speech could be classified either in two categories or five categories. (See Figure 18.)

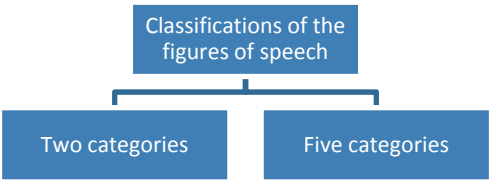

Figure 18: A graphic representation of the classifications of the figures of speech

In the case of the first classification one can speak of two categories of figures of speech. The first category is that of figures of speech which alter syntax; these are called schemes. The second category refers to figurative figures of speech and they are called tropes. (See Figure 19.)

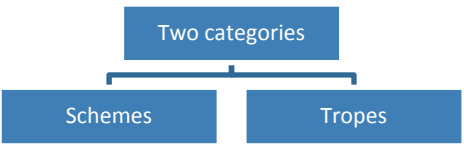

Figure 19: A graphic representation of the two categories

When one speaks about the second classification, one speaks about five categories of figures of speech. The first category is that of figures of resemblance or relationship. The second category is that of figures of emphasis or understatement. The third category is that of figures of sound. The fourth category is that of verbal games and gymnastics. The fourth category is that of errors. (See Figure 20.)

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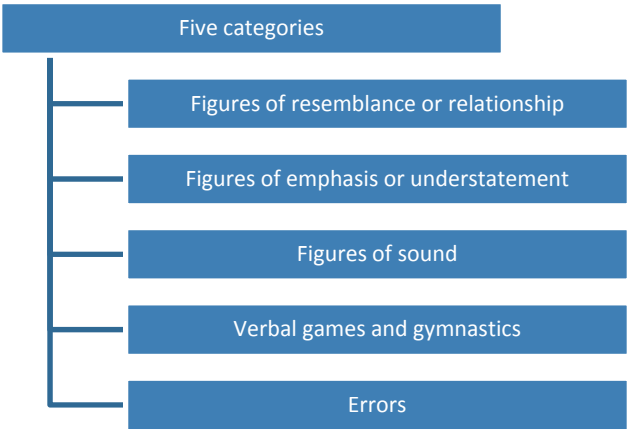

Figure 20: A graphic representation of the five categories

The third counter-argument has everything to do with the use of language. The use of figures of speech is language and context-specific and cannot be generalised.

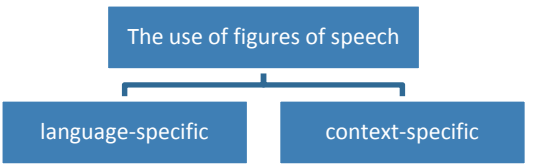

Figure 21: A graphic representation of the use of figures of speech

Third misconception

The last misconception is perhaps the most interesting of the three, since it shows a complete and utter misunderstanding of what linguists actually do. To put it briefly, the third misconception is based on the idea that linguists only ever draw tables.

In the following paragraphs this idea will be deconstructed by looking at the activity of linguists from two angles. Firstly, one has to keep in mind that linguistics has such a vast scope that linguists have to approach it in diverse ways. Secondly, and more importantly,

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regardless of the approach, there are always interesting questions about language phenomena. (See Figure 22.)

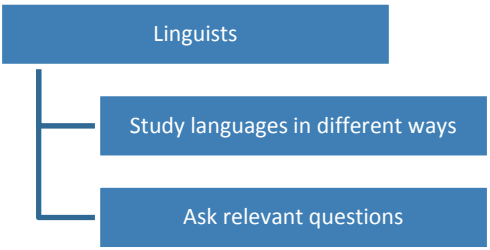

Figure 22: A graphic representation of the counter-arguments to the third misconception

When it comes to the first counter-argument, that is Linguistics is one of the most complex fields, one needs only take a look at the diverse manners of approaching to language. There is theoretical linguistics, followed suit by descriptive linguistics and applied linguistics. (See Figure 23.)

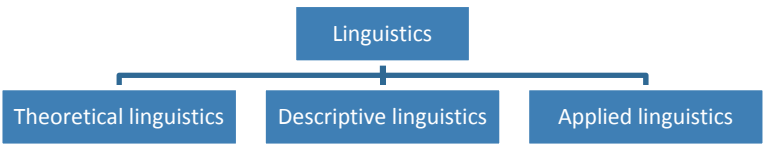

Figure 23: A graphic representation of the general branches of linguistics

And one must remember that each branch has its own divisions which in turn have their sub-divisions. But it is rather irrelevant which branch of linguistics one chooses to study for there will always be relevant questions to answer. Here a brief but eloquent selection of just such questions:

How did language emerge?
How is language acquired?
What is the relationship between language and thought?

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Conclusions

Having reviewed all the misconceptions, there are two conclusions which need to be drawn in order to sum up this way of thinking. This simplistic way of looking at language and literature highlights the fact that there are, at the same time, a matter of understanding and a problem of identity. (See Figure 24)

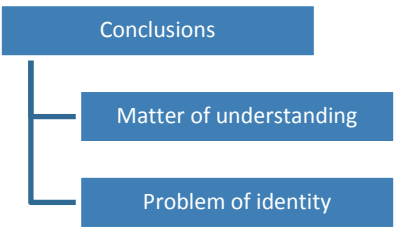

Figure 24: A graphic representation of the conclusions

To wit, first and foremost, this is a matter of understanding because such misconceptions reveal that there is preciously little insight into the scope of linguistics and indeed into the entire field of humanities. (See Figure 25)

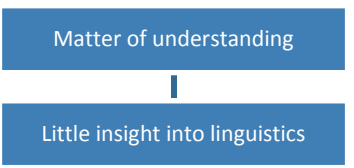

Figure 25: A graphic representation of the explanation of the first conclusion

Secondly, but equally important, this is a matter of identity because the misconceptions in question create a schism between linguistics and literature. (See Figure 26)

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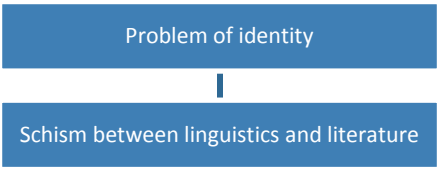

Figure 26: A graphic representation of the explanation of the second conclusion

Ultimately the field Humanities is reduced to a single element, literature, which is supposed to be more valuable than linguistics.

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DREI MISSVERSTÄNDNISSE ÜBER SPRACHE UND SPRACHWISSENSCHAFT

Zusammenfassung

Man hat drei Missverständnisse über Sprache und seine Studie, nämlich Sprachwissenschaft, identifiziert. Ihre Beständigkeit ist an sich gefährlich, wie alle Missverständnisse in den Köpfen der Menschen. Doch diese Missverständnisse sind einen Blick wert, weil sie von Menschen, die auf dem Gebiet der Geisteswissenschaften lehren, geäußert wurden. Das erste Missverständnis ist, dass es unterschiedliche Kultursprachen und Sprachen der Zivilisation gibt. Das zweite Missverständnis dreht sich um die Idee, dass die Metapher das Einzige ist, was zählt. Das dritte Missverständnis liegt in der Aussage, dass Linguisten immer nur Tabellen zeichnen. Der Zweck dieser kurzen Arbeit ist es zu zeigen, dass die Geisteswissenschaften als integriertes und sich entwickelndes Gebiet gesehen werden sollten.

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TREI NEÎNȚELEGERI REFERITOARE LA LIMBĂ ŞI LA LINGVISTICĂ

Rezumat

Am identificat trei neînțelegeri referitoare la limbă şi la studiul său, respective la lingvistică. Persistența acestora este periculoasă în mod intrinsic, asemenea tuturor neînțelegerior care salajluiesc în mintea omenească. Dar aceste neînțelegeri merită private cu atenție fiindcă au fost formulate de oameni care predau în domeniul filologiei. Prima neînțelegere este că ar exista limbi de cultură distincte de limbi de civilizație. A doua neînțelegere se bazează pe ideea că metafora e singurul lucru care contează. A treia neînțelegere constă în afirmația că lingviştii nu fac altceva decât să creeye tabele. Scopul Acestei scurte lucrări este să arate că filologia ar trebui văzută ca un domeniu integrat şi aflat în dezvoltare.

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