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► **To cite this version:**

| Pablo Kirtchuk. Principia Linguistica. 2008. hal-00545240v1

HAL Id: hal-00545240

<https://hal.science/hal-00545240v1>

Preprint submitted on 9 Dec 2010 (v1), last revised 7 May 2013 (v6)

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Principia Linguistica

Pablo Kirtchuk

My purpose in this book is to propound LUIT, an explicitly unified and integrative theory of language, following the one presented implicitly in my Ph.D. (Kirtchuk 1993) and henceforth (see bibliography). Keywords :

Actancy, Afroasiatic, Altruism, Amerind, Biology, Borrowing, Communication > Cognition and Categorization, Context, Deixis, Dynamics, Emotion, Epigeny, Ergativity, Evolution, Foc(alization), Function, Gestalt, Grammaticalization, Iconicity, Indo-European, Information Structure, Interaction, Intonation, Love, Multiple Encoding, Nostratic, Ontogeny, Origin of Language, Phylogeny, Pragmatics, Prosody, Proto-Sapiens, Rhythm, Subsegmentals and Cosegmentals, Topic(alization), Typology, Valency.

Preamble

Language is comparable to an iceberg of which grammar, with syntax at its summit, is but the emerged part. From a structural viewpoint ‘morphology is yesterday’s syntax’ (Givón 1976), but yesterday’s syntax is the previous day’s pragmatics and *Homo sapiens sapiens* language is the descendant of hominid vocal-cum-gestural communication (Kirtchuk 1993). In actual language both levels coexist, and in certain circumstances (highly emotional and/or spontaneous and/or urgent, &c.) communicational needs override grammar. In other words, not only *Parole* is the laboratory of *Langue* in diachrony but in several respects it also controls it in synchrony, and that is true also in ontogeny and phylogeny and in borrowing. Structuralism mistook the iceberg for a mountain and attributed a real existence only to language’s systemic apparent - and apparently separate - parts, while Generativism inverted perspectives altogether, presuming that the mountain’s summit (grammatically speaking syntax; psychologically speaking ‘competence’) generates and commands the ‘lower’ levels. As both approaches failed to recognize the iceberg, they inevitably collided with its submerged part.

The first task linguistics is facing now is recognizing its own intrinsic unity, which follows from the intrinsic unity of language, due not to an imaginary universal grammar but to the fact that in language, all levels - phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon, semantics, pragmatics, diaglottics (borrowing, language contact, creolization), second language acquisition), ontogeny, phylogeny, &c. - are solidary and must therefore be investigated as such: as in any other complex phenomenon, language as a whole is greater than the sum of its components, separate only on methodological grounds. Linguistic analysis must reflect the unity of language and not impose on it a division into domains with little or no connection with each other, blurring what language is and the way it works. Syntax is certainly not autonomous, but neither are phonology, morphology or lexicon; language’s first aim is communication, *i.e.* transmitting pragmatic and conceptual content, and the means to do it is form, which in itself conveys and to a tangible extent reflects meaning, since the linguistic sign is not completely *arbitraire* but to some extent iconic; oppositions in language are more often than not scalar and not binary, and language is not synchronic or diachronic but dynamic. It is in this sense that LUIT is unified.

Doing scientific research can be likened to assembling a jigsaw puzzle, with several differences. (1) the pieces of the scientific puzzle are not pre-established: it is up to the researcher to determine which piece of evidence belongs to it and under which form ; (2) the researcher does not have a model of the puzzle sought for; (3) the researcher does not even know the number and nature of dimensions of the puzzle, namely the domains which have to be properly assembled : as far as language is concerned, pragmatics, grammar, prosody, semantics, but also biology and psychology, among others, are only some such dimensions; (4) this jigsaw puzzle itself is but a piece among others in a jigsaw puzzle of a higher order, which is itself a piece in a jigsaw puzzle of a higher order and so on and so forth. *Exempli gratia*, language itself is but a piece of the puzzle constituted of communication, in which devices more ancient and more central than verbal language and certainly more universal than the structure of any given language continue to play a preponderant role. Communication itself as a permanent activity, however, is a defining property of our species, from which other defining properties derive ; as such, language is a piece in the puzzle of communication, which is a piece in the puzzle of *Homo sapiens sapiens*, who is a piece in the puzzle of life, &c. Assembling them is the painstaking and sometimes painful pleasure called science. When assembling a puzzle, one has sometimes to leave one part unfinished, then work on another part and leave it unfinished as well, and so on and so forth, and only then, once the context changed substantially, go back to the first part. Likewise, crucial issues in the linguistics puzzle cannot be elucidated if only linguistic evidence is considered. Only if we take in account other factors as well will the manifold reality of language reveal some of its best-kept secrets. Language is but an expression, albeit probably the most complex one, of human properties which are not linguistic in themselves. Accordingly, it must be explored within a larger framework that comprises other sciences of life too. It is not mathematics that language and linguistics are related to, but biology. In other words, the jigsaw puzzle of higher order superior to linguistics is biology, and the natural phenomenon superior to language is communication, and above it, life as displayed in our species. True, linguistics has always applied to biological metaphors (language *families*, *branches*, *trees*, etc.). Time has come to go further and deeper: language is linked to biology not metaphorically but fundamentally, in its very essence. It is in this sense that LUIT is integrative: it integrates language into a broader framework. One corollary is that the concept 'natural language' is a pleonasm. Another corollary is that 'sign language' (or other types of so-called 'languages') is not a language save in a metaphorical sense. It is undoubtedly a great tool of communication for people with speaking and/or hearing impairments, but it still is an adaptation, of necessity partial and imperfect, of the language faculty and of a particular language - whatever it may be - in the first and only non-metaphorical sense of those terms to people who cannot exert this faculty and communicate in that language as they are: Such a sign system is neither a faculty in itself nor a language in itself. To give but an example, pretending that 'sign language' is endowed with phonology is not to understand what phonology is; what the language faculty is and what particular languages are.

It is the task of linguistics to disclose the unity underlying the different aspects of language and the relationships among them. No doubt, grammar *i.e.* the structure of the linguistic system, is the specific domain of linguistics – biology, psychology, philosophy won't deal with that specific component of language. It is however the task of linguistics

as well to reveal the links between that particular aspect of language with its other aspects. In other words, linguistics is at the same time specific and general, it deals with structural components but at the same time it should deal with language as a whole. Indeed with language *qua* puzzle, which is itself a key part of another puzzle.

In the framework of LUIT, several notions are reconsidered which allow attaining a better knowledge of language and its expressions.

LUIT hopefully confirms Kuhn's thesis concerning the structure of scientific revolutions: significative progress in science does not consist of cumulative, steady and linear work but of successive revolutions by which an existing paradigm ends up being replaced by a radically different one.

Popper: inadequate in biology

When Popper speaks about 'science', 'scientific theories' and the like, he speaks about physics. And it cannot be otherwise : his long existence has been concomitant with the blossoming of physics since the *annus mirabilis* 1905, when Einstein published his main papers, of the 20th century; then the discovery of Radium by Marie Curie then the control of atomic fission and the bomb in 1945 ; through the Big-Bang theory followed by that of Strings and Super-Strings: the century that Popper crossed from beginning to end has been physics'. And here, indeed, one observation can do away with a whole theory: a single apple that, once plucked off the tree, would remain in the air raise upwards instead of falling down would do away with the law of gravity. Indeed, the business of physics (be it classic, modern or otherwise) is disclosing the general laws that govern the universe and suffer no exception. Yet even here, Heisenberg principle of uncertainty and Gödel's incompleteness theorem suggest that things aren't so simple.

In biology they are definitely not so simple, and if need be, let me remind that – and language is proper to a biological being.. An apple with no grains or an apple tree giving twice as many apples as a normal one or no harvest at all would prove nothing whatsoever as far as the apple's nature is concerned. In the realm of the living, we are not dealing with laws but with tendencies, orientations, mutations. One observes above all a constant interaction between the entity and its environment – that I should call context – by which the first constantly adapts to the second, while modifying it at the same time ; it is the context which judges of the adequation of the entity to pursue its career as a living phenomenon. For the observed entity n° 1 is part of the context for any observed entity other than itself. There is indeed not only ontogeny and phylogeny, but also epigeny. Without epigeny, language as a faculty would not have developed, and languages wouldn't change. Popper's considerations, which most of us have adhered to with enthusiasm while we still were romantic youngsters in quest of absolute, do not apply to language *qua* biological phenomenon of a biological entity. Popper's main criterion of scientificity, namely the possibility to falsify a theory on the grounds of observation, led him to proclaim Darwinism 'a metaphysical theory'. This (as late as 1976, when Popper was 74 years of age : it is then by no means a juvenile error, it is on the contrary the conclusion of a mature philosopher. Alas, rather than falsifying Darwinism, it falsifies Popperism as far as the phenomenon known as *life* is concerned. Popper's approach is totally inadequate for biological reality. It shows that Popper did not grasp the essential difference which distinguished life from any other phenomenon. LUIT, decidedly

conceived within a pragmatic, biological and psychological framework (let us not forget that Popper had ruled out psychology as non scientific either) is by no means popperian.

The Dynamics of language

Language dynamics exists in many domains including synchrony and diachrony but not restricted to them. Other such domains are phylogeny - the evolution of the language faculty within the species; ontogeny - the developmental acquisition of language by the child; epigeny - the emergence, functioning and change of language out of interaction with the medium, consisting primarily of fellow beings; creolization - the merger of two or more languages into a new one out of their pragmatic use; diablottics - borrowing of terms or structures by one language from another.

Phylogeny, ontogeny, epigeny, creolistics, diablottics, synchrony and diachrony are all relevant and necessary criteria of linguistic analysis.

The Pragmatic nature of language

Pragmatics is the alpha and the omega of language emergence, function and structure. Just as there is a *pragmatics* consisting in the use of constituted language (which is the traditional meaning of the term), there is a pragmatics before the emergence of language, which ends up creating the language faculty itself.

Grammar is the part of language ever systematizing out of interaction in pragmatic use.

Grammar is therefore a mechanism of organization, in other words of reduction of the entropy characteristic of pragmatics.

The central concept of pragmatics is **context**. Context is what pragmatics is about.

Grammatical rules are therefore pragmatic since they consist in the application of allo-forms depending on linguistic context, namely co-text, cf. morpho-syntactic agreement as well as multiple encoding in general (see below, see also Kirtchuk 2007).

It follows that, just as anaphor is but intra-discursive deixis, grammar as a whole is but intra-discursive pragmatics.

Syntax is neither autonomous nor universal.

Grammar as a whole is neither autonomous nor universal.

Pragmatics is, to a point, both autonomous *and* universal.

Language is not reducible to grammar.

Any linguistic utterance can be deprived of grammar but not of pragmatics.

Language is pragmatocentric not grammatocentric the way our astronomical system is heliocentric not geocentric.

No linguistic utterance is deprived of context.

Grammatical rules are pragmatic inasmuch as they consist in the application of linguistically context-dependent linguistic allo-forms.

Hence, grammar itself is nothing but intra-discursive pragmatics.

All linguistic utterances can be deprived of grammar but not of pragmatics.

It is pragmatic functions that determine syntactic functions, not the other way round.

Pragmatic functions may or may not freeze into syntactic functions. Syntactic functions, however, do not freeze into pragmatic functions. Therefore the *doxa* according to which *focalisation* and *topicalisation* are 'dislocations' is false (Kirtchuk 2005).

The Emergence of the language faculty

The emergence of language is an autopoietic process anchored in communicative interaction, eminently pragmatic (Maturana 1973; Kirtchuk 2007; Mazaudon & Michailovsky 2007).

Language emerges, functions and changes in context and in function of the interaction with context, which consists of other beings endowed with language, *i.e.* humans, as well as of all the other constituents of the *milieu*: this is epigeny. In this too, language is a biological reality, since it evolves as the result of interaction with its context.

No real linguistic utterance is deprived of context, even if this context is not mentioned in the analysis of the said utterance.

In the process leading to the emergence of the language faculty in phylogeny and to its activation in ontogeny (Kirtchuk 1994; 2007): (1) communication in deictic context emerges before communication out of deictic context; (2) deictic elements emerge before conceptual elements; (3) melodic and rhythmic (*i.e.* intonational and prosodic) schemes, so-called supra-segmental phonemes, as well as the organs necessary to produce them, emerge before the clusters systemically distinct of articulatory proprieties, *i.e.* segmental phonemes, as well as the organs necessary to produce them; (4) iconic mechanisms emerge before symbolic ones; (5) semantically concrete elements emerge before semantically abstract ones (Li & Hombert 2002); (6) communicative functions (*topic-comment*) emerge before syntactic ones (*subject-predicate*); (7) simple parts of discourse emerge before complex parts of discourse (e.g. *noun* before *verb* in the languages which possess this opposition, cf. Bopp 1816, Jespersen 1924, Cohen 1984, Barner & Bale 2002, Parish & al. 2006).

Elements which have emerged first in phylogeny are (1) seldom borrowed (Thomasson and Everett 2002 confirm it though their aim was to infirm it); (2) present in all languages, stages and registers thereof, including Creoles, child language and spontaneous register of adult speech.

The elements that emerged first in phylogeny (1) emerge first in ontogeny, epigeny and diachrony, (2) are language's hard core in synchrony.

Intonation and Prosody

No linguistic utterance is deprived of intonation-prosody. When these are in conflict with other parameters of the utterance, the former override the latter. The *doxa* according to which intonation-prosody complexify or circumvene the supposed linearity of language is false.

Language is not linear but multi-dimensional, the rhythmic and melodic elements (which have always coexisted with gestural elements, and still do, see below) are the ones upon which the rest is based (cf. aussi Meschonnic 1982, Lieberman 1991).

If a linguistic utterance can be disambiguated by context and/or by intonation-prosody, it is not ambiguous to begin with.

The Articulatory / Auditive nature of language

All linguistic utterances are uttered orally and meant to be perceived auditively. Any other transmission system of linguistic utterances, *e.g.* writing or elaborated sign-*'languages'* - to the difference of gestures - are but secondary representations of a system whose phonatory and auditive properties are constitutive and inherent. They are

constitutive of Man just as bipedalism is inherent to his spatial posture, both static (position) and dynamic (movement).

Just as the anatomy of the legs is conditioned by the fact that they support the body and move it about, the anatomy of the larynx in phylogeny and ontogeny is conditioned by the fact they articulate language, and the anatomy of the skull is conditioned by the form and volume of the brain, determined by the presence of organs developed in order to give birth to language or as a consequence of it. Hence, our very aspect - human aspect - is conditioned by language.

On the other hand, the anatomy of the hands in phylogeny and ontogeny is *not* conditioned by the fact that they communicate by signing.

From the two preceding statements it follows that the communication mode proper to humans is spoken language and not 'sign language'.

If two million years of evolution preferred vocal language to sign language, it is because the latter monopolizes the hands of the signer as well as the eyes of the observer, while spoken language does not monopolize the speaker's organs of phonation / breathing / ingestion, nor the hearer's audition ones. This is so because sound propagates spherically (one does not need to have ears in one's back in order to hear whatever is said behind one's back), while light rays propagate in straight line, as a function of its diffraction angle (one does not grasp an image lest one has one's eyes upon it, or that it otherwise enters one's field of sight). In situations in which survival depends on communication coupled to action in real time, *e.g.* coordinated group defence / attack against competing groups as the HSS was emerging as a different species; or, *e.g.*, a surgeon operating on a patient at present time, or still an astronaut executing in real time instructions received from the ground station, the advantage of spoken language is determinant.

The fact that language as such and its particular manifestations – particular languages – are constitutively spoken and not signed or written is reflected in languages' structure: segmental phonemes with co-articulation don't play a grammatical role but rarely (see the post-glottalized, so-called 'emphatic' consonants in Semitic) and are subject to strong constraints (see Grassmann law in IE).

The Interactive nature of language

All linguistic utterances are both (1) uttered by somebody, and (2) meant for somebody (cf. Benveniste 1966, I: 242: 'any utterance supposes a speaker and a hearer, and implies that the former wishes to influence the latter in some way', my translation, PK).

Speaking is an action insofar as it involves activity by the speaker, but also insofar as it acts upon the hearer.

Linguistic utterances are therefore actions, more specifically interactions.

A language is said to be extinct if it (1) isn't the vehicle of interactions in real communication; (2) isn't the mother tongue of a given population; (3) doesn't experience diachronic change resulting from linguistic interactions with and in context. A language is therefore supposed to be extinct if it hasn't got pragmatics, ontogeny, diachrony or epigeny. The fact for a language to possess – or not – a grammar is of no significance in this respect. This is why Latin, whose grammar is very elaborate, is an extinct language.

A language is said to be living if it is (1) a vehicle for interaction in real communication; (2) a mother tongue of a given population; (3) subject to diachronic change. A language is therefore living if it has pragmatics, ontogeny, epigeny and diachrony. The fact for

such a language to possess a grammar or not is of no significance. This is why Creoles, whose grammar is relatively loose, are living languages while Esperanto is not. No linguistic utterance is deprived of intonation-cum-prosody. If a linguistic utterance can be disambiguated by context and/or by intonation-cum-prosody, it is not ambiguous to begin with.

The Biological nature of language

Language's hardcore is not symbolic but iconic, not conceptual but deictic, not segmental but sub-segmental.

Language's hard core is founded on the biological nature of the species it defines.

Though endowed with language, Man is a biological being.

There is no contradiction between Man being endowed with language and it being a biological being.

There is no language without languaging people.

Properties of language

Language is both a (1) complex and (2) dynamic phenomenon. It must therefore be investigated as such. Any partial analysis, which would take the local for global, is bound to yield partial, nay completely false results.

Language is characterized by a certain number of properties, which distinguish it from any other system abusively called 'language'. Among those properties are deicticity, fixity, dynamism, iconicity, multiple encoding, taboo and interactivity.

The concept 'natural language' is a pleonasm.

No system called 'language' other than language itself can be considered as a language except in a metaphorical sense. Such systems include among others animal-'languages', sign-'languages', computer-'languages' and artificial-'languages'.

Language is not an act - and certainly not an entity - but an activity (Humboldt...).

Language as Love. Both as the defining properties of *Homo sapiens sapiens*.

We human beings live in and through language (Maturana 1978).

We human beings are languaging beings even when we are not involved in linguistic activity and even when our language faculty is impaired to whatever degree.

Homo sapiens sapiens is what it is through language and thanks to language.

Homo sapiens sapiens is not a rational and/or symbolic species, but a species whose individuals are animals capable of reasoning and symbolizing.

It is language that makes us human. All other human specific properties derive from language.

Language emergence is an autopoietic process which cannot have taken place but in a species engaged in close social relationships spanning all aspects of life and all periods of year, practising extensive and consistent collaboration and cooperation rather than competition and war though not restraining from them (Maturana 1973 and henceforth).

Language as a continuous, conscious and collaborative interaction is a permanent encounter (Buber 1923: *Alles wirkliche Leben ist Begegnung*), or, in terms rather morally than emotionally inspired, the permanent ability and need to share with other languaging beings, it is *selfless behaviour* (Lieberman's 1991). In Maturana's terms (1978) language simply results from and denotes *love* For the psychological aspects, cf. Mitchell (1988).

Epilogue

The advantage of LUIT, based on observation of linguistic data and reflection thereupon is manifold: it (1) enriches the linguistic scene with data that until now were at best treated as merely ‘expressive’ (Bally [1932] 1965) or at worst deliberately left out of it; (2) establishes clear links between linguistic facts that until now seemed unrelated to each other; (3) does so by an inversion of perspectives between *cause* and *effect*, *central* and *marginal*, *prior* and *late*, and in this sense it is a Copernican revolution in linguistics; (4) allows to explore the development of language not only from present day backwards, but also from its evolutionary beginning onwards, *towards* present time: to dig the tunnel in both directions, so to speak, which is bound to yield faster and better results; finally it (5) links language to other phenomena characteristic of the form of life known as *Homo sapiens sapiens*. Taken individually the phenomena dealt with may seem ‘expressive’, the term that for a long time allowed to account for them without integrating them into analysis. Yet their omnipresence at all realms and at all levels of language, any language at any stage, leads to see them not as accidents but as manifestations of the nature of language and its speakers. Of language not grammar for it is the former not the latter that is the object of linguistics. Grammar is only the emerged part of the iceberg called language. All linguistic theories are false which postulate (I) three equal grammatical persons, and/or (II) deictics as pro-nouns, and/or (III) multiple encoding as restricted to grammar, and/or (IV) syntactic structures as commanding communicative ones, and/or (V) non-segmentals as additional phonemes, and/or (VI) verb as such in language as such, and/or (VII) language as restricted to grammar.

The relationship between structural linguistics and LUIT is akin to the one between classic and modern physics (as for generative linguistics, it evokes Ptolemaic astronomy). If we (a) look at language as it is through its particular manifestations including among others infant speech, spontaneous adult speech and creoles; (b) pay the communicatively and pragmatically salient elements of language as much attention as the one devoted to the conceptually important ones; (c) consider diachrony not as historicity but as dynamism; (d) conceive human beings not as rational animals but as animals capable of reason, as Jonathan Swift had it; (e) grasp all the information linguistic data and speaking people offer us and ask all the questions they keep replying to, we are bound to conclude that language is part and parcel of (human) evolution.

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