

The new "philosophical" approach

Realisations:

Artificial languages ("characters")

Abstract/formulaic approaches to natural languages

Theories of the origins of language

Classifications of languages, typologies

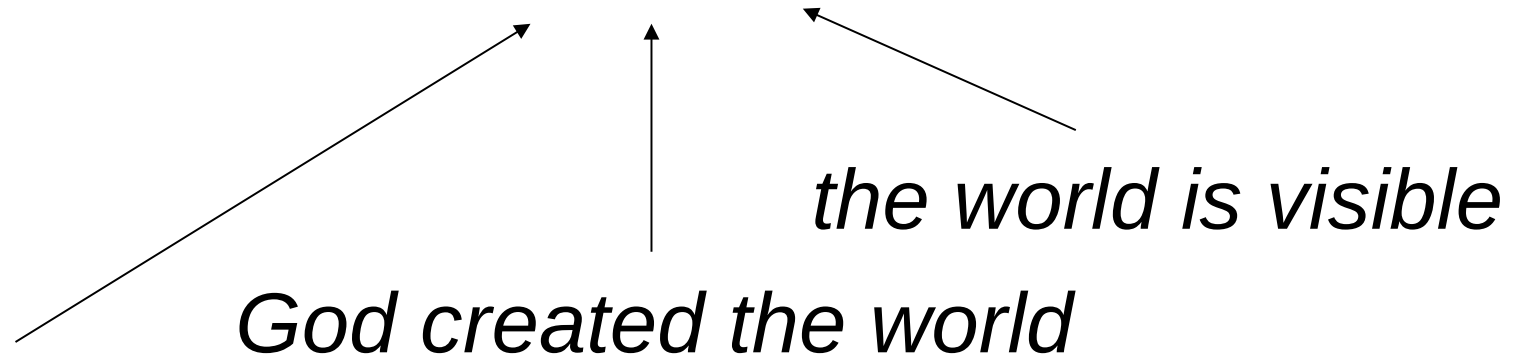
Often combined in particular discussions

Abstract approaches to language

Syntax: Port Royal grammar

(*Grammaire générale et raisonnée*, 1660, by
Antoine Arnauld and Claude Lancelot)

The invisible God created the visible world.



God is invisible

Abstract approaches to language

Port Royal cont'd

Also word classes:

all adverbs are preposition + noun comb's

– *wisely = with wisdom (sapienter = cum sapientia)*

only verb: *to be*; all other verbs = *be* + partic.

– *Peter lives = Peter is living/alive*

– actually Aristotle's idea!

Abstract approaches to language

Ellipsis: the conflict between *reason* and *use*

Already in Antiquity:

Gr *pheugo se* = *I flee you* – why object when not affected (as opp. to *I hit John*)?

Solution: preposition missing, elliptical construction (***pheugo dia se***) – typical feature of syntactic discussions of the era

Abstract approaches to language

At lower levels of language (sounds, syllables, word forms, roots)

E.g. the *Fünffacher Denckring* in Georg Philipp Harsdörffer's *Deliciae mathematicae et Physicae* (1677) →

Image source: <http://ub-dok.uni-trier.de/ausstellung/durchgang/ausstellungen/Romanmaschinen/Romanmaschinen2.jpg>

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

Other (extended) example: the development of the **root-notion**, new in the 17th century

Antiquity & middle ages: no concept of root (or any morphological structure, except prefixes)

- word forms have properties, not constituents
- paradigms are collections of forms
- derivational relations also between words/word forms

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

thema / positio (prima positio): specific word form on which others are based

within paradigms: 1Sg verbs, NomSg nouns

in derivation: *species principalis, species primitiva* or simply *primitivum* vs. *species derivativa* (e.g. *mons* → *montanus*)

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

“All variations of verbs hold the *accent* in the same place as the *theme*. *I ánimate, thou ánimatest, &c.*”

Ben Jonson (1640) *English Grammar*, Ch 7 Of the accent

“The kind [of a word] is to know whether the word be a primitive, or derivative; as *man, love*, are primitives; *manly, lover*, are derivatives.” Ch 8 The notation of a word

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

Antiquity & middle ages: no concept of
suffixation

terminatio: any (sequence of) letter(s) at the
end of a word, regardless of morphological
status

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

“The English in its substantives has but two different terminations for cases; that of the Nominative, which simply expresses the Name of the thing, and that of the Possessive case.”

Robert Lowth ([1762] 1794) *Short Introduction to English Grammar*, p 24

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

- Notion of *root* or *stem* (*radix*) appears with grammars of Hebrew, later Arabic in the 16th century
- shortest possible form from which other forms can be derived
- Not *root/stem* in modern sense; always a full word form (practically always a 3SingMascPerf verb form in Semitic)

(why? because no letters need to be added, e.g. Ar. *kataba* 'he wrote', i.e. <ktb>)

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

Pronomen affixum – affixed pronoun (clitic pronoun) also from grammars of Hebrew (then other Semitic languages)

He *˘avdeka* ‘your servant’, *˘avađtika* ‘I served you’

Ar *˘abduka* ‘your servant’, *˘abaduka* ‘I served you’

(Very important in early Hungarian grammars!)

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

Root used sporadically and inconsistently beginning with the 16th c.

“His thre chefe rotes, that is to say, his theme, his preterit participle and his present infynityve... *je parle, jay parlé, parler*”

John Palsgrave (1530) *L'éclaircissement de la langue françoise* Introduction xxxi [of verbs]

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

“*child* formeth the plural by adding *r* besides the root ; for we say not *children*, which, according to the rule given before, is the right formation, but *children*, because the sound is more pleasant to the ears.”

Ben Jonson (1640) *EGr*, Ch 14 On the second declension

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

“the single consonant [goes with the preceding vowel] in *en-amel*, *in-ordinate*, *un-easy*, *need-eth*, *hear-ing*... for letters joined in the root must not be parted in the branches”

Charles Butler (1633) *English Grammar* p 35, spelling normalised

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

Continental developments:

Justus Georg(ius) Schottel(ius) (mid-17th c., several works):

- *Wurzel/Stammwort* (~ absolute stem)
- *Hauptendung* (~ derivational suffix)
- *Zufällige Endung* (~ inflectional suffix)

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

Continental developments:

Abraham Gotthelf Mäzke (late 18th c.)

Grundsilbe ≠ Stammwort

erröten 'to blush' → *röt* (Gs) but *rot* (Sw)

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

Practical applications vs. speculative approaches

Practical application of root-notion:

- descriptive device
- recommendations for spelling

based on "empirical" root-notion

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

"Speculative" approaches:

Very limited set of putative prehistoric roots,
e.g. CV combinations of 4 C's and 4 V's

Philipp von Zesen (17th c.), Friedrich Karl
Fulda, A. G. Mäzke (18th c.)

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

Speculative approaches in England

Horne Tooke: *The Diversions of Purley*
(1786, 1805)

example of etymological analysis (vol 2) :

bar 'to defend' →

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

- *barren* (*barred* from producing vegetation/offspring)
- *barn* (covered enclosure to protect grain etc.)
- *baron* (armed, defenceful or powerful man)
- *bargain* (confirmed, strengthened agreement)
- *bark* (stout vessel)
- *bark* (of tree = defence of tree)
- *bark* (of dog = by which we are defended by that animal)

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

- *barken* (dialectal word, enclosed yard)
- *burgh/borough* (fortified town)
- *burrow* (defended place for rabbits)
- *borrow* (any person or thing by which repayment is secured)
- *bury* (defend)
- *burial* (defended place)
- *barge* (strong boat)

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

Alexander Murray *Philosophical History of the European Languages*, 1823:

speculative principle taken to extreme, all words of then-known Indo-European languages explained from primeval "radicals" *ag, bag, dwag...*, in three stages

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

- St 1: Nine radicals (monosyllables) for elementary meanings (AG, BAG...)
- St 2: Simple combinations of radicals (concatenation, agglutination in modern terms)
- St 3: Attested forms of attested languages

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

“Taste and philosophy will receive with aversion the rude syllables, which are the base of that medium, through which Homer, and Milton, and Newton, have delighted or illumined mankind. The words themselves, though inelegant, are not numerous: each of them is a verb and name for a species of action...

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

...Power, motion, force, ideas united in every untutored mind, are implied in them all. The variation of force in degree was not designated by a different word, but by a slight change in the pronunciation. Harsh and violent action, which affected the senses, was expressed by harsher articulations.”

(p 31)

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

“I. To strike or move with swift equable penetrating or sharp effect was AG! AG! If the motion was less sudden, but of the same species, WAG. If made with force and a great effort, HWAG...

II. To strike with a quick, vigorous, impelling force, BAG or BWAG, of which FAG and PAG are softer varieties.....

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

...IX. To move with a weighty strong impulse, SWAG.

These nine words are the foundations of language, on which an edifice has been erected of a more useful and wonderful kind, than any which have exercised human ingenuity.” (p 32)

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

“The Chinese, whose language continues to be monosyllabic, had recourse to the expedient of varying the sound with the sense, a method sufficient to serve ordinary purposes, but of narrow compass, and liable to difficulties in practice. But the fathers of those nations, whose languages were to receive the most abstract or animated thoughts which the mind is capable of forming, began early to compound their words, and to multiply terms with all the fertility of arithmetical permutation.”(p 34)

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

So far so good, but then where do **affixes** come from?

one possible answer (also endorsed by Murray):
they are degraded roots that became attachments to other roots and lost their autonomy

e.g. *-ly* ~ *like*; *-dom* ~ *doom*; *-ship* ~ *shape*

General idea since Renaissance times: languages did not have affixes a long time ago

Abstract approaches to language / Roots

The "suffix from word" idea is often right, but developed into a general explanatory principle without sound methodology

(attitude called “agglutination theory” by B. Delbrück, 19th c. linguist & historian of linguistics)

legitimate cases and processes studied under the rubric *grammaticalisation*