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ON “AUTHORIAL” VERSION OF THE HISTORY OF LINGUISTICS

*Remarks on the margins of interpretation
of Jean Jacques Rousseau’s theory of language*

In the introduction to the collective work entitled “Studies in the History of Linguistics – Traditions and Paradigms” and published in Bloomington in 1974 Dell Hymes¹ raised a topic for discussion regarding the techniques and methods of conducting historical research in the field commonly known as history of linguistics. The inspiration for the discussion was a famous book by Thomas S. Kuhn entitled “The Structure of Scientific Revolutions”², which in the 1960s resulted in a significant increase in interest in the various aspects of scientific studies whose turning points, characterized by rapid changes of the notional device, problems and methods of research, appeared to be the most attractive for reflection.

The basic questions formulated by Kuhn are: What is science? How is the development of science conducted? How are some theories replaced by others? These are the problems traditionally associated with philosophy or methodology of science. Kuhn is convinced that the answers to the above-mentioned questions cannot be found in the field of the traditionally conducted philosophy of science for its abstracts from history. Therefore, Kuhn objects to any attempt made to evaluate scientific views of the past from the point of view of canons and patterns which have come to be taken for granted. This ahistoric evaluation makes it impossible to understand

¹ Dell Hymes, *Introduction: Traditions and Paradigms*, in Dell Hymes (ed.), *Studies in the History of Linguistics – Traditions and Paradigms*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, London 1974, pp. 1–40.

² Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, The Chicago University Press, Chicago 1962.

a process which governs shaping scientific knowledge. He falsely suggests that in the past scientists were engaged in the very same problems which they either solved or left to the contemporarily known theories to do so. He creates an illusion that the whole process of the development of knowledge is of an utterly cumulative character masking revolutions in science which are based on changing of “paradigmatical points of views”. Therefore, it is false to treat later theories as a purely logical development of the previous ones because, among other things, theories which are historically older were submitted to absolutely different patterns and assumptions – paradigms of science conducted in the historically and culturally defined place and time.

Kuhn assumes that the development of science is to the same extent a development of the defined paradigmatical points of view as well as a revolutionary abandonment of the previous “views on the world” fed by other assumptions and scientific canons. According to him, the theory of knowledge which does not take into account a historic and sociological conditioning of scientific contents by accepting only “the context of justification” and eliminating “the context of discovery” has to be one-sided.

Kuhn’s work, which was published in 1962, coincided with a radical change in the research movement in the American linguistics, the beginning of which was marked by Noam Chomsky’s book entitled “Syntactic Structures” and published in 1957. The concept of linguistics as presented by Chomsky challenged classical structural linguistics in the subject of research and, above all, in the field of the method applied. Kuhn’s idea could hardly need a more spectacular confirmation than the outgoing “linguistic revolution”.

Dell Hymes accepts the basic assumptions of Kuhn’s doctrine. Nevertheless, he claims that a presentation of the history of linguistics as a one-sided consequence of the paradigms which result in the fundamental change of the research perspective is as inadequate as a chronological history of the linguistic thought written in accordance with the Hegelian vision of history’s progress for none of the paradigms has ever captured the whole field of linguistics³.

A fundamental problem arises when it comes to the definition of the scope of the term “history of linguistics” contrasted with the multitude of the outgoing linguistic research, conducted not only by linguists, but also by psychologists, psychiatrists, physiologists or physicists. Contemporary linguistics is slowly becoming an integral part of the new field of research known as cognitive science. Hymes suggests comprising a wide range of source material, in other words, any pretheoretical reflection on the language

³ Dell Hymes, *Introduction...*, op. cit. pp. 13–14.

supported by anthropological or ethnographic research, under the name of folk linguistics, national philologies and general linguistics, assuming that material research has been giving necessary data for a universal generalization on the scale of the latter discipline⁴.

It is clear that in the so widely-defined research perspective one can hardly separate all the paradigms in the linguistic perspective present in the course of history. It is even harder to separate one dominating pattern. Nevertheless, it does not discredit the essence and importance of Kuhn's theory. Apart from its controversy, it does explain the essential features of the scientific cognitive process. Kuhn assumes that a new paradigm or a new insight is not simply better. It differs from the previous paradigm in terms of its ability to explain new things which the former one failed to do, and continues to have explanatory qualities of the previous paradigm. It is rather impossible to fully transfer Kuhn's model of historic research to the research field of linguistics since, according to Hymes, the change of paradigms in linguistics did not meet both requirements because of the character and features of the method accepted in numerous fields of linguistics.

According to Hymes, in case of linguistics the term of linguistic community creating a research group or school which is gaining a dominating position in the given period is far more significant than the term of paradigm. Hymes's suggestion is an elaboration on Kuhn's thesis which assumes a need for the consideration of a wide cultural context accompanying institutional science before and in the course of revolutionary change. In other words, it treats a wide sociological aspect of paradigm's change. While analyzing a spectacular success of Chomsky's theory, Hymes highlights social and psychological inner-linguistic reasons of numerous attempts recalling the term of a paradigmatical community. Such a community, concentrated around a certain leader and accepting a certain theory, is conscious of its participating in a revolutionary change whose rank depends mostly on personal qualities of the author's theory and his power to influence the community. Although not directly, Hymes claims that in case of Chomsky and his believers the "revolution" is not the result of the fact that their paradigm is more effective, but it is rather the result of that revolution's proclaiming. Hymes notices that self-awareness of the so-called paradigmatical community is one but not the last aspect of the process of change which has its roots both in science as well as beyond it. The recognition of every element in this process would allow for its objective evaluation⁵.

⁴ Ibid., p.13.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 15–16.

It can be easily noticed that the American structuralism was reinforced as a result of the establishment of linguistics as an academic branch independent of philology or anthropology. Chomsky's theory appeared at the moment when the prestige of its representatives was increasing. A previous group needed independence. Chomsky and his group inherited that independence as a natural consequence which resulted in the fact that students began studying linguistics just like they started together.

Hymes highlights that such a situation brings a temptation to write a history of the branch once again since Chomsky postulates connecting it with psychology and defining its area and methods once again. This is an approach caused by the belief, still present in linguistic literature, that in the past linguistics was in the right position only when its frames were in accordance with the currently accepted definition. Instead of an overall history of the branch we are exposed to its certain stages organized according to one of the chosen paradigms in the pale of science. This kind of history can be called a history of anticipation.

While developing his theory of linguistics, Chomsky broke with the widely accepted tradition of behaviorism accepted in the American structuralism. He acknowledged that notional apparatus of behaviorism did not describe the essence of language – its creative character expressed in the ability to produce and interpret an unlimited number of replies. Grammar in this framework is understood as a limited number of rules generating an unlimited number of sentences. Thus a grammar theory should be a deductive theory of language general enough to cover all possible languages.

It has to be made clear that Chomsky created his theory independently of any existing philosophical system. He notes that the direction of research in creating an adequate theory of natural language has been inspired by the research and results achieved in mathematics in the twentieth century. The need to appeal to the philosophical tradition was felt considerably later, namely in the half of 1960s. For Chomsky, rationalism became an alternative to behaviorism which was rooted in empiricism.

Although Chomsky appeals to the rational tradition in many works, it is Cartesianism that he chooses as a historic basis for his theory of language. While searching for philosophical ancestors, Chomsky wanted to find thinkers with whom he could share both a vision of language as well as a vision of the world. Universal grammar theories of the Middle Ages were of rational character, but that was rationalism rooted in epistemology of the Aristotelian empiricism – rationalism rooted in the belief that being was primary in its relation to thinking. Two basic theories of Chomsky's research concern a thesis about a creative character of the language and a thesis

about the existence of a universal mechanism responsible for the acquisition and use of the language characteristic for human beings. They demand an acceptance of the fact that being is primary in relation to existence. This assumption makes the foundations of Cartesian philosophy⁶.

Chomsky acknowledges that the Cartesian theory of mind is identical to the one which makes the foundations of generative grammars. He also highlights the identity and concurrence of his views to the views presented in the works of the Cartesians, especially as presented in the Grammar from Port-Royal⁷.

The choice of the historical and philosophical perspective of generativism may be interpreted in many ways, one of which is searching for the arguments confirming the principles of the Cartesian version of rationalism. We may attack the choice accusing it (as Hans Aarsleff does) of overinterpreting the texts included in the so-called Cartesian tradition as well as of the unconscientiousness of Chomsky's historic study (Aarsleff calls Chomsky's history of linguistics a partisan history)⁸. We may as well decide that the choice for a philosophical perspective does not throw any important light as far as the theory of generativism is concerned; it is rather an element of decoration, an expression of Chomsky's philosophical taste. Finally, this choice may be utterly questioned bearing in mind the anti-linguistic character of the Cartesian philosophy. Apart from its controversy, it cannot be doubted that Chomsky is credited for including a certain philosophical tradition in the history of the linguistic field, a collection of numerous questions and problems which have appeared in the long run of the history. The opening of the "Cartesian" perspective has resulted in the number of studies and monographs which verify historic material of "The Cartesian Linguistics". However, one should keep in mind the fact that Chomsky did not create his theory based on any philosophical system. It was not until the moment when the theory was put forward than the need for a philosophical background appeared. Therefore, all we can appreciate is the rightness of his choice of historic material.

A linguistic reflection of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries undoubtedly revealed some seeds which would germinate in the modern theories of linguistics but the mechanism of anticipation is extremely deceptive,

⁶ Compare Jerzy Kopania, *Wstęp*, in *Antoine Arnauld, Claude Lancelot, Powszechna Gramatyka Racjonalna (Gramatyka z Port-Royal)*, Warszawa 1991, xiv–xvi.

⁷ See Noam Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics*, Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, London 1996.

⁸ See Hans Aarsleff, *The Tradition of Condillac*, in Dell Hymes (ed.), *Studies in the History of Linguistics*, op. cit., p. 111.

therefore, there have to be some strong proofs to state the identity of reasons presented in the completely different systems of knowledge. An interpretation of historic data always reveals some amount of subjectivism which is to some extent connected with the persona of the author – selector of facts, theories and directions within the boundaries of the given field. According to Hymes, this subjectivism makes an integral part of history itself like a motivation to write history whose consecutive version is the result of the increase in knowledge as well as the change in the research perspective and numerous outer and inner scientific reasons. We could even accept “rewriting” history every time we face a turning point in science. But we should demand that inevitable subjectivism of authorial histories should both agree with the data and stay in harmony at least to a certain degree. Unfortunately, Hymes notices that this demand is not what many researchers of the contemporary linguistics respect⁹.

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As we know, one of the turning points in the twentieth history of linguistics was the theory of language as presented by Ferdinand de Saussure. The historians of idea have been trying to define the source of his inspiration and the framework of the tradition it grew in. Kazimierz Polański¹⁰ presents a review of these points in the introduction to the last Polish edition of “The course of general linguistics”. Although none of the researchers has ever questioned the originality of de Saussure’s achievements and there is a common agreement as to it, there are differences when considering the degree of the influence the author of the “The course of general linguistics” experienced while studying numerous texts and theories written by those researchers. One thing is certain – the theory of de Saussure makes the climax of the wide European linguistic tradition whose general framework is highlighted by the conventional character of language.

Therefore, Jacques Derrida’s statement that at least at the level of theoretical intentions, outlines and basic terms there are no principal disproportions between de Saussure’s grasp of linguistic field and its opening by Jean Jacques Rousseau¹¹ sounds surprisingly enough in the context of

⁹ Dell Hymes, *Introduction*, op. cit., p. 20.

¹⁰ Kazimierz Polański, *Wstęp*, in Ferdinand de Saussure, *Kurs językoznawstwa ogólnego*, translated by Krystyna Kasprzyk, PWN Warszawa 2002, pp. 10–20.

¹¹ Compare Jacques Derrida, *Le cercle linguistique de Genève* in *Marges de la philosophie*, Minuit, Paris 1972. I present the views of Derrida on the basis of Bogdan Banasiak’s text entitled “Szkic o szkicu Rousseau” preceding a Polish edition of Jean Jacques Rousseau’s “Szkic o pochodzeniu języków”, translated by Bogdan Banasiak, Aureus, Kraków 2001.

the research conducted by E. Coseriu, Jakobson or Aarslef. In the book published in 1968 and entitled "About grammatology", Derrida devoted big parts of his book to the analysis of Rousseau's texts. Several years later he completed his considerations adding a view that a principal vision of language as presented by Rousseau did not differ from the vision of de Saussure who has come to be recognized as the creator of the modern linguistics as well as the model of scholarship in the field of humanism in general.

In Derrida's opinion, Rousseau takes a fundamental part both in the discovery of modern linguistics' territory and the process of its boundaries' constitution. This process is accompanied by an inevitable turning away from the reflection on the language traditional for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries whereas its basic aim is to define a system of basic notions, requirements and standards governing contemporary linguistics.

In his turning away from the traditional research on the language's sources, Rousseau conducts a research on the conditions of the possibility of its construction rejecting Condillac's theological hypothesis and initiating exiting a "bewitched circle" which presupposes speech before an idea or an idea before speech. According to Derrida, a starting point for Rousseau is the assumption that "society and language came into life simultaneously". This assumption allows for the establishment of a certain independent sphere of research in whose framework "society, language, agreement, history, etc. together with all the possibilities accompanying them constitute a certain system, certain organized whole, whose primarity may become a subject for some theory (...) A break from a genetic and factual derivation becomes a necessary condition for this sphere's research. An ideal genealogy or a structural description, as Derrida states, make the crux of Rousseau's project. In Derrida's opinion, under the pretext of consideration of genetic and fictional issues concerning the source Rousseau managed to formulate the whole theory of language: functional, systematic and structural¹².

Let us try to confront this view with Rousseau's linguistic doctrine as presented in the published posthumously *Essai sur l'origine des langues* as well as in *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité*. It seems probable that the philosopher started his *Essai* while he was writing *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité*. Primarily *Essai* was meant to be a sort of comment¹³ on *Discours*. Therefore, although *Essai sur l'origine des langues* is an independent part, it seems that its posthumous

¹² See Bogdan Banasiak, *Szkic o szkicu*, in J. J. Rousseau, *Szkic o pochodzeniu języków*, op. cit., p. 18.

¹³ See B. Banasiak, *Szkic o szkicu Rousseau*, in Jean Jacques Rousseau, op. cit., p. 18.

edition deprived of the final authorial editing together with its thematic connection with fragments of *Discours* should be studied as a confrontation with the author's other works concerning his remarks on language.

Making an attempt to answer the question concerning the origins of language, Rousseau in his *Essai sur l'origine des langues* joined a group of thinkers who promoted a reflection on language as independent from any material research building their theories based on critique or acceptance of views and assumptions existing in literature and reinforced by an accidental knowledge about facts. Therefore, *Essai sur l'origine des langues* has to be treated as a theoretical work deprived of objective empirical background just as Condillac's *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* with which it remains in conflict. However, it is necessary to highlight the fact that the whole of Rousseau's literary output is characterized by an additional anti-methodological background which was the result of his philosophical beliefs. It was reflected in questioning the primary role of mind in the process of knowledge acquisition which resulted in his abandonment of science based on rational or empirical foundations and hostility towards any kinds of intellectualism responsible for the development of civilization, which, according to the philosopher, would result in the degradation of mankind. Rousseau condemns civilization with all its products, depriving them of any value. He replaces the category of reason with the category of emotion whereas civilization as a source of all evil is opposed to nature. Rousseau saw nature in a different light than his contemporaries did. For him, nature is the most perfect primary state and people deprived of the civilization's influence constitute an essential part of it¹⁴. In his *Essai* Rousseau presents the fundamental assumptions of his doctrine in the linguistic context and his views on the genesis and functions of language are obvious consequences of these assumptions.

Chapter I, entitled *Des divers moyens de communiquer nos pensées*, starts with the statement: "La parole distingue l'homme entre les animaux: le langage distingue les nations entre elles; on ne connaît d'où est un homme qu'après qu'il a parlé. L'usage et le besoin font apprendre à chacun de la langue de son pays: mais qu'est-ce qui fait que cette langue est celle de son pays et non pas d'un autre? Il faut bien remonter, pour le dire, à quelque raison qui tienne au local, et qui soit antérieure aux mœurs mêmes: la

¹⁴ Compare Władysław Tatarkiewicz, *Historia filozofii*, PWN, Warszawa 1993, vol. II, pp. 151–153. However, it is necessary to add that the theoretical trend of the linguistics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries reveals remarkable works which are the result of creative reflection on extensive material research. They include the works of G. W. Leibniz as well as *Grammaire générale et raisonnée* by Antoine Arnauld and Claude Lancelot.

parole étant la première institution sociale ne doit sa forme qu’à des causes naturelles”¹⁵. In the first paragraph Rousseau highlights a few problems which he intends to tackle. The first problem deals with the fundamental difference between the worlds of people and animals. The second problem tackles the linguistic differences in the people’s world. The third one is about their foundations whereas the fourth one deals with the conventional character of language whose source is in nature.

Rousseau notices that although the construction of the vocal mechanism of animals is good enough to communicate in the right way for a person, it is not decisive when producing a language: “...l’invention de l’art, de communiquer nos idées dépend moins des organes qui nous servent à cette communication que d’une faculté propre à l’homme qui lui fait employer ses organes à cet usage, et qui, si ceux-là lui manquaient, lui en ferait employer ses organes à cet usage, et qui, si ceux-là lui manquaient, lui en ferait employer d’autres à la même fin.”¹⁶ Similarly to Descartes and Leibniz, Rousseau considers the rights of physiological nature but he does not allow for animals’ ability to create a language on other grounds. Let us remind that according to Descartes, the lack of language in case of animals is a consequence of the absence of thinking process whereas Leibniz does not make a direct statement that animals do not speak because they do not think but because they do not have a necessary tendency to create a language. It may seem that Rousseau, in accordance with his predecessors, is apt to raise a question of the dependence of language on thinking process in the context of essential differences between man and the world of animals. The conclusion Rousseau arrives at is surprising enough. In his opinion, animals do not need to create any new language because they communicate by the means of their natural language. This is an inborn language/languages – “les animaux qui les parlent les ont en naissant; ils les ont tous, et partout la même; ils n’en changent point, ils n’y font pas le moindre progrès”¹⁷. Rousseau highlights that he has no doubts as for this matter. Nevertheless, a question arises whether animals do not create a language because they have it from nature. A positive answer to a considerable extent weakens the argument concerning the lack of proper abilities. What would that ability be for if not for creating another new language? There appears a new dilemma whether to create a new language when there is a better one backed up by

¹⁵ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Essai sur l’origine des langues*, introduction, notes, bibliographie et chronologie par Catherine Kintzler, GF Flammarion, Paris 1993, p. 55.

¹⁶ J. J. Rousseau, *Essai sur l’origine des langues*, p. 59.

¹⁷ J. J. Rousseau, *Essai...*, p. 60.

nature. One is tempted to name this ability “thinking” or “the Leibnizian apperception” but Rousseau does not agree with that. Commenting on the issue of relations between language and thinking process and their mutual conditioning in *Discours de l'inégalité*, Rousseau claims that it is impossible to prove such relations suggesting silence or continual work in the course of centuries in this difficult subject.

Rousseau presents his own, original to his mind, conception. He assumes that language is the means to transmit our ideas:

“Sitôt qu’un homme fut reconnu par un autre pour un être sentant, pensant et semblable à lui, le désir ou le besoin de lui communiquer ses sentiments et ses pensées lui en fit chercher les moyens. Ces moyens ne peuvent se tirer que des sens, les seuls instruments par lesquels un homme puisse agir sur un autre. Voilà donc l’institution des signes sensibles pour exprimer la pensée. Les inventeurs du langage ne firent pas ce raisonnement, mais l’instinct leur en suggéra la conséquence”¹⁸.

Nevertheless, he highlights that the oldest known languages of the world contradict the conviction as to the their rational background – “Ces langues n’ont rien de méthodique et de raisonné; elles sont vives figurées”¹⁹.

According to Rousseau, the background for creating a language is not thinking but rather a spiritual need or, as he calls it, a passion. It is a quality which makes the difference between human beings and the world of animals. Furthermore, it is an ability which, leading to a language, uses its foundations to build both culture and civilization. Therefore, it is not intellect but rather passion that marks an essential difference between man and animals. Should it be understood that animals possess intellect but they lack that creative ability responsible for an animal type of language which is different from a natural type? Rousseau does not seem to notice this aspect. Although he notices that thanks to the language agreed upon “l’homme fait des progrès, soit en bien, soit en mal, et pourquoi les animaux n’en font point”²⁰, but the assumption as to the primary role of passion in the process of creating a language allows for a sort of thinking in case of animals. It is necessary to add that the philosopher is not fully convinced as to the linguistic creativity of the function of passion since in one chapter he points out feelings or emotions whereas later, while discussing a developmental process of languages of the soul, he talks about ‘the vitality of pleasant passions which made people speak’. A few sentences later, while

¹⁸ J. J. Rousseau, *Essai*, p. 55.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

formulating the hypothesis as for the development of northern languages, it is no longer pleasure which is complementing passion but needs which are the results of certain emotions that make the crux of the languages, “tristes filles de la nécessité”²¹.

Surprisingly enough, Rousseau is not consequent. In Chapter II he ignores Condillac’s hypothesis claiming that although “on prétend que les hommes inventeront la parole pour exprimer leurs besoins”, this view cannot be accepted. As we can see, it is no longer one but at least two causes that decide whether a language can be created. None of them (and here Rousseau is consequent) relates to the intellectual categories which are systematically questioned by him.

If we accept Rousseau’s statement that the most perfect state for man is the state of nature, we may ask a question whether in this perfect primary state deprived of the civilization’s influence its member possesses an equally perfect (because natural) system of communication or is rather deprived of any language. It seems that the author of *Essai* is closer to the second solution. In *Discours sur de inégalité* he notices that it is difficult to imagine the causes for which languages could become useful. Since people did not have any connections for they did not need any, the necessity of this discovery as well as its possibility become unclear if it has to be essential²². In the state of nature a language of the child trying to communicate all his needs to the mother was the only means of communication²³. The language was private, singular, and transitory, doomed to die at the moment of the disconnection with the mother. Rousseau explains “ces temps de barbarie étaient le siècle d’or, non parce que les hommes étaient unis, mais parce qu’ils étaient séparés”²⁴. The philosopher denies the existence of any social institutions understood in the contemporarily term but he advocates the belief that although there were no peoples, there were families and home languages. The author of *Essai* is surprisingly inconsequent. There was a language and at the same time there were no languages; there were families but at the same time people lived separately. It may seem that Rousseau wants to connect the creation of language with the process of the society’s formation presenting mutually excluding ideas. He notices in *Discours de l’inégalité*: “Le premier langage de l’homme, le langage le plus universel, le

²¹ See J. J. Rousseau, *Essai*, p. 98.

²² See Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes*, ed. J.-L. Lecercle, Éditions Sociales, Paris 1971, p. 86.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

²⁴ J. J. Rousseau, *Essai...*, p. 85.

plus énergique, et le seul dont il eût besoin avant qu'il fallût persuader des hommes assemblés, est le cri de la nature. Comme ce cri n'était arraché que par une sorte d'instinct dans les occasions pressantes"²⁵. The cry does not differ much from the animal speech – “Des cris inarticulés, beaucoup de gestes, et quelques bruits imitatifs, durent composer pendant longtemps la langue universelle”²⁶.

While reading *Discours de l'inégalité* one may have a feeling that Rousseau is finally ready to present the idea of the simultaneous development of man, society and language pointing out their mutual conditioning. A primary system built on the instincts exits beyond the sphere of private consideration. Singular family languages in the conditions of social interference remove from natural motivation creating a conventional system of signs which is the first social agreement. However, it does not look like this for one cannot reconcile the idea of gradual development of language with the view that contradicts the idea of primary language presented in the text. According to Rousseau's view advocated in *Essai*, this primary language was a poetic language, the language of tropes and metaphors characterized by an extraordinary richness of expressive means²⁷. The author has no doubts as to the fact that all the expressions of that language were to be found in pictures, feelings and metaphors. In many respects it reminds Chinese, Greek and Arabic. It may seem that this vision of the language reinforced by a creative passion excludes the need to develop for it is no longer a cry of nature similar to the language of animals but an artistically sophisticated system. Why should one fix something which is almost immaculate? In that light the idea of social interference becomes useless for it is difficult to place such a linguistic conception in the first social institutions, for instance, a family.

Rousseau was not the first philosopher who wanted to connect the beginnings of language with the beginnings of society. All French writers dealing with the issue of language in the eighteenth century made attempts to answer the question “which was before: language or society?”; the question which replaced a former dilemma regarding the mutual conditioning of the language and intellect. Most writers agreed with the assumption that society forwarded a need to create a common means of communication. Condorcet and Rousseau were an exception to the general agreement. According

²⁵ J.J. Rousseau, *Discours...*, p. 88.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

²⁷ J. J. Rousseau, *Essai...*, pp. 66–67.

to Condorcet²⁸, even at the most primitive stage of his development man possessed a language to communicate his needs whereas the development of the communities contributed to the perfection and development of language. Disagreeing with the views accepted in literature, Rousseau gives a number of his own solutions. Nevertheless, he does not manage to give convincing arguments as regarding the parallelism of the development of social institutions and language. He gives up in his *Discours sur l'inégalité*²⁹. While facing multiplying difficulties, he sees the impossibility of appearance of languages and their acceptance by only human means as almost proved.

The Enlightenment aimed at the systematical elimination of irrational aspects in scientific research. Inasmuch as intellect had become the final stage in the field of mathematics and natural science, the pre-scientific research in many fields which dealt with man and his history still remained in close connection with the Biblical vision of the world. Rousseau was not the only promoter of the divine intervention but in his case a reference to the natural order was an escape which enabled him to abandon a creative role of intellect in the process of the language formation. It seems that the author, overburdened by the excess of ideas, includes supernatural power into the process of language creation which reveals the assumption that the author of this process is a person equipped with mind.

Therefore, Rousseau comes to the starting point. With one sentence he destroys all his efforts put into proving the dependence between the development of language and other social institutions for he is not able to decide "what was more useful: the already formed society which influenced the creation of languages or already formed languages which influenced the raise of the society?"³⁰.

Rousseau's theory of language is written in the research context of XVII and XVIII centuries which is characterized by a rapid increase in the literature dealing with the beginnings of human race and different social institutions. To illustrate this, we can mention Condillac's *On the origin of human knowledge*, Fontanelle's *L'origine des fables* and Poisent de Sevry's *L'origine des premières sociétés*. In the seventeenth century the issue of the origin of language appeared not only in connection with outgoing material

²⁸ Antoine Nicolas Caritat Condorcet, *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*, Euvres, ed. A. C. O'Connor and H. F. Arago, Paris 1847, Vol. VI, p. 11. After Pierre Julliard "Philosophies of Language in the Eighteenth-Century France, Mouton, Hague-Paris 1970, p. 25.

²⁹ See J. J. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, p. 92.

³⁰ Ibidem.

research but it was also situated in the context of questions regarding the history of human race which was gaining a new meaning in the framework of the discovery of communities of the New World. At the same time scientists came to realize that in the field of the ancient history they neither had true insights nor possessed necessary means to exploit it. They came to the conclusion that before they could start talking about the reality of the ancient life, it was necessary to exploit how people had spoken, counted and measured time. It appeared that the discovered civilizations had their past which exceeded the timeframes established by the Bible. For scientists, the past was still an anthropomorphic area. The history of human race, societies and peoples was at the same time the history of the Earth whereas a natural history was rather a history of great catastrophes than a history of slow evolution. There was a theory of the immutability of classes accepted; the idea that the world of nature is subjected to evolution and has a time dimension was still to face its great future³¹. Therefore, one can hardly expect Rousseau to present a theory of language which would be ahead of his predecessors as well as his contemporary researchers. What is more, one can hardly expect a singular convincing theory on language origins for there is no such theory even today. Nevertheless, one can expect cohesion of reasoning from anybody who tackles the issue. What makes Rousseau different from the rest is his consequent inconsequence which puts a serious thesis that Rousseau has not simply created the theory. His *Essai sur l'origine des langues* together with the extracts on language from *Discours sur l'inégalité* may be regarded as the evidence of his trials with mutually contradicting assumptions.

Pierre Juliard in *Philosophies of Language in the Eighteenth-Century France*³² presents a critical analysis of linguistic trends present in the works of the French writers. A comparative analysis rooted in the philosophical and cognitive context reveals that in his thesis dealing with the origins of language Rousseau was not very original for the majority of researches were involved into similar considerations referring the first hypothetical language which could not be reconstructed. In their linguistic research they were rather philosophers than linguists. The main aim of their research was to situate and coordinate the views on language with their own system rather than to construct a pure theory of linguistic system. Juliard points out that

³¹ See Halina Świączkowska, *Harmonia linguarum. Język i jego funkcje w filozofii Leibniza*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, Białystok 1998, p. 41.

³² Pierre Julliard, *Philosophies of Language in the Eighteenth-Century France*, Mouton, Hague-Paris, 1970, p. 25.

the contemporary state of knowledge did not create necessary circumstances for the theory of linguistic system to be created.

While Julliard explains what Rousseau has written, Derrida points out the things which, according to Julliard, could not have been in the philosopher’s text but, according to Derrida, are nevertheless present. For Derrida, *Essai sur l’origine des langues* anticipates ethnology as presented by Claude Lévi-Strauss as well as the ideas of general semiology with its theory of natural language³³. In the framework of the historic and comparative strenuous analysis, Derrida’s interpretation is undoubtedly attractive. Therefore, there arises a question as to the accuracy of the interpretation. An inquisitive reader is advised to study *Cours de linguistique généralé* on his own.

Clumsily indicated anticipations became the source of impetuous attacks on Noam Chomsky, the father of transformative and generative grammar, who, as many historians of idea³⁴ claim, presented his own history of linguistics in *Cartesian Linguistic* which became the basis for his theory of language. Inasmuch as historic context served as an ornamentation for the theory of Chomsky (not fortunately chosen: the theory defends itself well enough), the incrustation of the *Course of general linguistics* with the ideas of Rousseau without the possibility of getting de Saussure’s permission to do that should become the subject of the detailed analysis. In his hypothesis dealing with the origins of language which constitute only a part of his linguistic ideas, Rousseau stayed in the framework of paradigms accepted by his epoch.

Translated by *Renata Jermolowicz*

³³ Jacques Derrida, *O gramatologii*, translated by Bogdan Banasiak, Wydawnictwo KR, Warszawa 1999, pp. 223–304.

³⁴ Compare Hans Aarsleff, *The History of Linguistics and Professor Chomsky*, in H. Aarsleff “From Locke to Saussure”, Althone, London 1982, pp. 101–119.