ZSIGMOND TELEGDI
(1909−1994)*

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Abstract: This paper intends to give a detailed account of Zsigmond Telegdi's life and scientific activities. In respect of the former, the sources quoted include his personal papers, bequeathed to us from his *Nachlass,* which help enlighten the events of his career. As for the latter, his main fields of research, i.e., the history of linguistic thought and Persian linguistics, are discussed. This includes the descriptive problems of Classical and Modern Persian (occasionally Tajik as well) and the historical development of New Persian. The paper attempts to demonstrate the interactions between data-based studies of Persian and theoretical investigations (e.g., into the nature of word classes or compounds of Indo-European types) in Telegdi's linguistic thought.

Keywords: history of linguistics, Classical and Modern Persian linguistics, history of the New Persian language, compounds, history of the notion 'transformation'

1. Zsigmond Telegdi, a professor of Eötvös Loránd University for half a century with only brief interruptions, died on 5th March 1994 at the age of 85. Born in Enying, a small village which at the time belonged to Veszprém county, on 29th December 1909, he was still an infant when his father, solicitor Dr. Ede Weil died on 16th August 1913. His mother, Elza

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* Telegdi's studies are quoted according to the first publication, and then in brackets, according to the publication in *Opera omnia,* vol. I–II, ed. by Éva M. Jeremiás, The Avicenna Institute of Middle Eastern Studies, Piliscsaba – Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 2006. I wish to thank dr Sára Liptai and dr Zoltán Szombathy for the English translation of this paper.

Erzsébet Telegdi, decided to move to Székesfehérvár with her seven children, of whom Zsigmond was the second youngest. Later they changed their surname to Telegdi. It was in Székesfehérvár—Alba Regia, the first capital of the mediaeval kingdom of Hungary—that Zsigmond Telegdi began his schooling with primary studies in a Jewish community school, proceeding to the state-run Royal Hungarian Ybl Miklós secondary school (1919–1927). Within a few months of receiving his *baccalauréat,* he passed a complementary examination in Latin and Greek with honours at St. Stephen's, the secondary school of the Cistercian order in Székesfehérvár, incidentally Ignaz Goldziher's former alma mater.

The particulars of his early career can be gleaned chiefly from his application in 1952 to the vacant position of Reader at the Department of Turkish Philology of Eötvös Loránd University. He writes:

> "After the *baccalauréat,* I wished to enrol at the university to study linguistics; I was particularly drawn to the languages of the Middle East. However, university education would have placed me under a huge financial burden; besides, I had little hope of being admitted in the first place because of numerus clausus [the law limiting the proportion of students of Jewish descent at universities in Hungary]. Therefore in 1928 I enrolled at the Rabbinical Training Seminary of Budapest, which gave me the necessary financial support as well as allowing me to pursue university studies outside the restrictions of numerus clausus. I spent two years of my university studies abroad, in Breslau (1929–1930) and Paris (1930–1931). The financial means for these periods came from the Rabbinical Training Seminaries of those cities. As I met all their educational requirements with ease, I was able to dedicate the majority of my time to attending the universities of the two cities. I studied linguistics, especially Semitic and Iranian philology. After I received my doctorate in 1933 [scil. from the Pázmány Péter University—É. J.], I left the Rabbinical Training Seminary without having completed my studies there."[1]

Telegdi's private papers indicate that in the academic year 1928/29 he also enrolled at the Faculty of Arts of Pázmány Péter University (the predecessor of Eötvös Loránd University). In 1934, the year after receiving his doctorate, Telegdi took up a position as unpaid assistant professor under Gyula Németh, a professor of Turkish Studies. His contract, however, was not renewed in 1936. As he relates in his curriculum vitae, throughout this period, until 1945, he survived by giving private lessons.

Although the curriculum vitae quoted above, written in 1952, does not mention it, conversations with him and other documents reveal that

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[1] Curriculum Vitae written by Zs. Telegdi (October 12, 1952).

his lifelong interest in the Iranian languages, in addition to the Semitic and Turkic ones, began during the periods he spent studying abroad. In Breslau (today's Wrocław) he attended classes by C. Brockelmann on Arabic and Syriac philology, and by F. Giese on Persian. He was also captivated by the great German tradition of philosophy, especially the legacy of I. Kant, and by the great writers on historical linguistics and linguistic philosophy, such as H. Paul and W. von Humboldt. While in Paris, he pursued studies chiefly in Arabic, Ethiopic and Persian. His personal papers show that he attended classes by M. Cohen, W. Marçais and H. Massé at the *École Nationale des Langues Orientales vivantes.* Cohen was to remain his role model throughout his career, while Massé was instrumental in kindling the young Telegdi's passion for Persian language and literature. We know from personal communication that he also attended the lectures of E. Benveniste. It was from Paris that he wrote to Rabbi Immanuel Löw (1854–1944), Chief Rabbi of Szeged to solicit his advice on a doctoral research topic.[2] In this letter, dated 5th April 1931, Telegdi writes that, motivated by a keen interest in linguistics, he had already consulted both C. Brockelmann and M. Cohen, but their suggestions—the speech of African Jews, and the contemporary dialects of Abyssinia—did not inspire him, inexperienced as he was in the spoken forms of the languages he studied and having little prospect of gaining such experience any time soon. "Regarding my qualifications", he writes in the letter, "I can read Arabic, Syriac, Ethiopic and Persian without difficulty, in addition to the classical languages and Hebrew." It was Immanuel Löw who suggested to him the comprehensive survey of the phonology of borrowed Iranian vocabulary in Talmudic literature for his doctoral dissertation, a topic never before attempted. As he would later recount, he consulted E. Benveniste about this choice of subject in Paris. Benveniste tried to dissuade the junior scholar from embarking upon this excessively difficult research. Fortunately, Telegdi was not discouraged: he received his doctorate *summa cum laude* in the humanities in 1933— majoring in Persian philology, with supplementary studies in Turkish and Semitic philology,—from Gyula Németh, who was the dean of the faculty of the Pázmány Péter University (Budapest) at the time. Telegdi's doctoral study was first published in a private edition in Hungary, with

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[2] The *Nachlass* of I. Löw has been deposited in the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem. The letter of Zsigmond Telegdi is part of the legacy; and I would like to express my sincere thanks to Professor Shaul Shaked for providing me with a copy of it.

a revised version in the *Journal Asiatique* (Paris).[3] His next publication was the edition of a Turkish grammar in Arabic by an anonymous author that appeared in the *Kőrösi Csoma Archívum* series.[4] Around this time Gyula Németh recommended him for a one-year research scholarship at the Viennese *Collegium Hungaricum*. Telegdi's research there resulted in the publication of a treatise on the grammar of Christian Sogdian[5]; and it was also in Vienna that he gathered the source material for his ambitious work entitled "The Khazars and the Jews",[6] which was published in 1940. According to a letter of recommendation by Gyula Németh from 1952, Telegdi frequently consulted professor H. Mžik on the Oriental sources for early Hungarian history during his stay in Vienna. These research studies came to an abrupt end with the *Anschluss*. Telegdi's personality, not lacking in self-irony, is reflected in two stories he would tell about this period. On the day of the *Anschluss*, he was standing in a queue at the butcher's when a police patrol passed by and, simply on account of "my phiz" as he would later put it, detained him and took him to a police station. As a Hungarian citizen and a scholarship holder, he was promptly released and came to no harm, but his scholarship was suspended, and in March 1938 he returned to Hungary. The other story evoked nicer memories of his sojourn in Vienna. Having bumped into him in the library several times, the director of the *Collegium Hungaricum* approached him and, learning that Telegdi was all on his own in Vienna, invited the young scholar to his house. Telegdi spent the Christmas of 1937 as a guest of the director and his family. The two books by J. Burckhardt in Telegdi's library that bear a handwritten dedication by the director were given to him as presents on that long ago Christmas day.

Telegdi writes in his curriculum vitae that in 1939 he travelled to Paris with his elder brother's financial support to seek employment there with the help, as promised, of his former tutors and friends. However, help was not forthcoming, so Telegdi was forced to return to Budapest in the autumn of 1939. From 1940 until 1945 he did forced labour with just eighteen months off over the entire period. A document survives from 1941, in which the Presidium of the Supervisory Committee for Standards of Secondary School Instruction of Budapest specifies the prereq-

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[3] Telegdi (1933; 1935).

[4] Telegdi (1937).

[5] Telegdi (1938).

[6] Telegdi (1940).

uisites for granting a teaching diploma at the petition of Dr. Zsigmond
Telegdi, a candidate for becoming a teacher of Hungarian, Latin and
French. Telegdi fulfilled these requirements in 1942 in respect of Hun-
garian and Latin. In another, undated, document from the same period,
Gyula Németh, as Director of the Institute of Turkish Philology and Early
Hungarian History at the Royal Pázmány Péter University appoints Dr.
Zsigmond Telegdi to compile and investigate the Oriental (Arabic and
Persian) sources for ancient Hungarian ethnohistory. The document re-
veals that at the time Telegdi was on leave from forced labour service,
and he intended to file a request to be granted study leave for the purpose
of this project. I have no information on the outcome of this petition. His
curriculum vitae tells us that he spent the subsequent, increasingly per-
ilous, period underground. Telegdi and his wife, Emma Haas — a teacher
of German and English and his faithful, caring companion to the end of
his life — survived the months following the rise to power of the Nazi-
affiliated Hungarian Arrowcross Party with the help of benevolent people
and the use of false identity papers. Telegdi's personal papers include
a Schutzpass issued by the Royal Embassy of Sweden and two identity
cards, one issued from the Comité International de la Croix Rouge, Délé-
gation en Hongrie and one from the Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs
of Hungary, which certify his status as a government employee, an in-
terpreter, between some time in 1944 and January 1945. Both Telegdi
and his wife lost several members of their families in the deportations
of Hungarian Jews.

   After the end of the Second World War Telegdi worked as a librar-
ian at the Budapest Municipal Library (1945–1948). In 1947 he fulfilled
the conditions of obtaining the title *Privatdozent* (cf. his *Decretum Ha-
bilitationis*) in the field of Iranian philology. In these years he attended
various courses organized by the party after having joined the Hungarian
Communist Party (MKP) in 1945. These years must have been spent
acquiring his considerable knowledge of Marxist theory and various ac-
tivities involving daily tasks of party activism. In December 1948 Telegdi
was appointed to the post of chairman of the National Centre of Libraries,
a leadership position which he filled for barely a year as part, in all prob-
ability, of his party duties. This position brought upon him a whole host
of trials and humiliations. The obviously uneducated staff of the new in-
stitution, whose responsibilities included the redistribution of the books
confiscated from church and private libraries during the nationalizations
of 1948, the founding of new libraries and the international exchange of

books, spared no effort in directing malevolent attacks against Telegdi and reporting him regularly to the authorities. The minutes of the party sessions and meetings found amongst Telegdi's papers make appalling reading on account of their distressingly primitive tone and the series of accusations contained therein, lashing out at his alleged "bourgeois" attitudes, rigidity and incompetence as leader. However, an investigation initiated against him in October 1949 goes even further. Its immediate cause was his failure to check the contents of a book parcel sent for the use of Hungarian scholarship holders studying in the Soviet Union. The parcel turned out to include books published before 1945, and officially deemed "Fascist literature" (e.g., *The History of Hungary* by B. Hóman and Gy. Szekfű). Because of this blunder, the then Minister of Religion and Education Gyula Ortutay removed Telegdi from his post on 25th October 1949, only to reinstitute him a month later, having received Telegdi's letter of severe self-criticism—a procedure not uncommon in that era.

In January 1950 Telegdi was appointed director of the Institute of Linguistics. The following year he was replaced by his former professor and supporter Gyula Németh, while Telegdi stayed on as head of a department within the institute. He submitted his application for a position as Reader at the Department of Turkish Philology of Eötvös Loránd (formerly Pázmány Péter) University in 1952. Dean László Bóka appointed him, with additional duties to include lecturing on general linguistics, owing to his "knowledge and erudition in the field of general linguistics". The extensive set of confidential data on him, which, along with many other people, he was probably given access to after 1956, and which accompanied his application as a matter of course, reiterates the critical remarks concerning his "pedantic" and "introverted" conduct, with the new element of the censure of his uncritical acceptance of the linguistic theory of Marrism.

2. To understand the context of this criticism, we need to return to Telegdi's scholarly activities. A quick glance at the chronological list of his publications reveals that he published nothing between 1940 and 1950, a silence that is not difficult to understand in the light of his circumstances. However, a study that appeared in 1950[7] suggests that his interest has turned in a new direction. This paper, no doubt preceded

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[7] Telegdi (1950a).

by several years of study, investigates the nature of verbal phrases, which form a substantial part of the vocabulary of New Persian. He was never to lose interest in this topic, integrated with the historical development of New Persian, and drawing comparisons with the divergent developments in Tajik, the Iranian language most closely related to New Persian. Contemplation of the distinctive forms of periphrastic verbs in Persian and Tajik, and the analysis of comparable examples in Turkic languages, led him to consider various theoretical problems of lexicology, morphology and syntax, etc.

The ambition to address problems on a general and comprehensive level is palpable from his earliest articles on Persian linguistics. In his 1952 application for the position of Reader at the university he identified two fields of enquiry in addition to Persian philology: general linguistics — with special emphasis on the relationship between language and logic, language and thought or the role of language in society — and the integration of the ideas of Marxism into linguistics. The latter purpose seems to dominate his work on general linguistics and the history of linguistics from the late 1940s. The linking of language as a social phenomenon to ideological issues is manifested in an extreme manner — with total acceptance of the current dictates of the party — by his adoption, and subsequent rejection, of Marr's conception of language.[8] I have to add, however, that Telegdi, in his discussion of N. J. Marr's linguistic *œuvre,* would never fail to acknowledge Marr's impressive erudition and achievements in the study of the languages of the Caucasus. It would seem that this attitude was a consistent feature of his scholarly stance: even in the midst of the vulgar and infinitely oversimplified linguistic debates of the Stalinist era he would recognise the outstanding scholarship and accomplishments of his predecessors, for example the exponents of historical linguistics and structuralism. While his criticisms, made with the purpose of establishing Marxist linguistics, and the dominance in his writings of forced ideological considerations as the best guide to the choosing of research topics did not totally disappear from his work in the subsequent years and decades, it took on a different, more technical, form. The significance, first, of the early generations of linguists, later the most recent ones, and their prominent role in the development of linguistics received more and more attention in his studies. In the passage quoted below from the opening paper of a linguistics seminar on

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[8] See Telegdi (1950b; 1951).

the state of theoretical and applied linguistics, held in Debrecen in 1968, he refers to the previous linguistic debates about Marr's theory and the ones linked with Stalin's policies:

> "We have also misunderstood the relationship between philosophy and the various branches of scholarship, believing that a linguistic approach can be assessed, rejected and discarded simply by demonstrating that the philosophy to which it refers is idealist and metaphysical. (Of course, the kind of philosophy underlying a linguistic approach, whether consciously or unconsciously, wholly or partially, is far from irrelevant; nevertheless, its findings will not be deduced solely from that philosophy, therefore the value of those findings can only be established through proper linguistic analysis, and its mistakes can only be refuted convincingly by arguments of this kind. As a Marxist, I can be quite sure that structuralism is wrong in not just separating the static from the dynamic, but even stating that every state ("*toute forme faite*") is merely an ephemeral configuration in the process of dynamic change; yet my argument will not be convincing and fertile unless I can demonstrate this mistake to be a linguistic mistake, too.)"[9]

Here as well as elsewhere, Telegdi speaks of the various schools of linguistics, their autonomy and positional values, with an air of tolerance and the deeply felt affinity of a scholar.[10] All the more surprising is, then, the often aggressive and simplificatory criticism by those responding to his paper, defending the old, established views against the domination of the "new", or calling for linguistics of a more definitely Marxist bent. As his arguments have obviously not been understood fully, he recapitulates his stance in his reply: "[...] Marxism cannot be applied in linguistics directly, in a mechanical way; we cannot deduce from it concrete linguistic statements, nor can such statements be refuted with an appeal to Marxist theory".[11] This view of his, in 1968, is no accident: it is the result of assiduous efforts to assimilate recent developments in linguistics.

By the time of this seminar Telegdi had been the head of the re-established Department of General Linguistics at the university in Budapest for 10 years. From the beginning, he saw it as his duty to establish and expand the study of general questions in linguistics. Initially this

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[9] Imre (1968, 19). Also cf. the almost full text of the introductory address without the comments and responses in Telegdi (1969).

[10] He also discusses the serious consequences for Hungarian linguistic science of the rejection of structuralism. In the course of this discussion, he commemorates Gyula Laziczius, who was superannuated in 1949 for political reasons: "His post remained unfilled, and his departure caused a ten-year gap in the teaching of general linguistics at the university in Budapest" (Telegdi 1969).

[11] See note 9.

was far from successful and attractive to the students, amongst whom I belonged at that time. The first textbook intended to assist this sort of instruction was the product of teamwork. The first, slender, volume was written by Telegdi on problems of general linguistics he considered to be the most important ones, like language and speech, the linguistic sign, language and society, etc. The last-mentioned section, in particular, bore the hallmarks of the era, with its style heavily infused with communist ideology.[12] All these questions, and many others, would be given a more detailed and rigorous treatment — taking account of the positions of both historical and contemporary linguistics — in a comprehensive manual, carefully nurtured over a decade, entitled *Bevezetés az általános nyelvészetbe* [An introduction to general linguistics], published in 1977. By this time, Telegdi had not been head of department for four years, and would soon retire altogether (in 1979), although he continued to hold classes at the university until his death. This could explain why his manual, even though popular among his students and with some linguists, was never given the acknowledgement it deserved in higher education. Conversely, his chrestomathy of thoughtfully compiled scholarly texts for the study of the history of general linguistics has, it seems to me, received wide recognition as a uniquely valuable teaching aid.[13]

3. Telegdi's articles published after the war establish a significant and radically new path in Iranian linguistic studies and also signalling a new phase in his work as a linguist. Whilst his earlier work had proceeded along the well-established tradition of historical linguistics, the new writings offer a fundamentally new conception of theory and historical development of language. The object of his research and the source of the linguistic data are also new: it is the last one thousand years of New Persian, and particularly Modern Persian. The grammatical problems being examined are new too: the syntax of the verb and the noun, the changes of the verbal lexica in successive periods of New Persian and, from the early sixties, the compounds of Indo-European types. The theoretical background of these analyses is at significant variance with the traditional approach in Iranian studies, which presents New Persian as the **result** of its linguistic history. This is basically the viewpoint of linguistic historicism, which holds that the internal relationships of the elements of

[12] Telegdi et al. (1961–1964).

[13] Telegdi (1968).

a given language are determined by their pre-history, and "the present state is only explicable and scientifically explorable on the basis of that (history)". However, this pre-history is, in fact, the proto-history, rather than the history proper, of the language, its history actually beginning with the independent, separate existence of that language: "a language is always, in any phase of its development, a unified, organic whole; the reality of the state of the language [at a given time] must be sought in itself", he writes. These ideas, at least initially, show the obvious influence of Saussure.

A recurrent subject of his studies is the analysis of verbal periphrases in Persian.[14] It was the heterogeneous material of Persian vocabularies, listing the same expressions with opposite meanings,[15] that induced him to scrutinize the changes of the verbal phrases. His book-length study of 1955 investigates the organic constitution of verbal lexica at various stages of the development of the Persian language. The relationship of the two subsets (simple verbs and periphrastic verbs) is one of the characteristic features of a language, he states, and this relationship may change in the course of the historical development of the language. His conclusion is that their distribution in Modern Persian is not an ancient heritage. The opposite situation can be observed in the oldest types of Indo-European languages, including earlier phases of Persian itself: simple verbs predominate over the analytical expression of verbal meanings by combinations of words or word-like elements. These old languages possess methods that enable them to expand their stock of verbs indefinitely (e.g., by secondary word-formation from verb stems, denominative derivation, combinations of verbs and verbal prefixes, etc.). The latter method is especially widespread, not only in old Indo-European languages but in Slavic ones and Hungarian as well. In the era of Classical Persian, its use was still productive, "expression and meaning" corresponded to each other; while in Modern Persian the old method is obsolete, replaced by the lexicalization of syntactic constructions as the new way of expanding the verbal vocabulary. A striking feature of this new method, however, is that verbal phrases, "despite their ostensible stability", can be broken up by the speaker, and re-constructed as juxtapositions of independent words. This growing use of verbal phrases, with the corresponding decrease in the use of the old method, is a tendency (equally) characteristic

[14] See Telegdi (1950a; 1955; 1979).

[15] See *dar âmadan* 1. 'to come out', 2. 'to come in' in Haïm (1985), I, 798.

of Ossetic as well as Hindi, which have not had direct contact with Persian. Telegdi demonstrates the diffusion of this phenomenon as a general tendency with carefully collected, detailed linguistic evidence.

Another group of studies investigates certain types of structural homonymy in Modern Persian and Tajik. The compounds in general, and the so-called *bahuvrihi*-compounds in particular, engaged his attention from the fifties onward, and several studies testify how deeply and thoroughly he tried to expound his views.[16] Recapitulating the relevant points of previous investigations, Telegdi states that certain types of compounds whose forms had been considered "indefinite"[17] can be interpreted clearly by assigning to them their extended, transformed expressions, i.e., their "deep structure" equivalents via formal rules. His ideas on this matter are even further developed in a paper[18] written in Hungarian: the indefinite (surface) structures can become definite only on the basis of their extended forms (in the deep structures) and not vice versa. These ideas—as he remarks more than once—were strongly stimulated by Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen.*

A closer scrutiny reveals how the divergent constructions of Persian and Tajik helped him recognize the relationship between compounds and their sentence equivalents or, in general terms, the universal significance of the Chomskyan notions of "deep" and "surface" structures or transformation.[19]

In Persian, the surface structure and the word class category of these constructions (e.g., *rang.paride* 'colour' (nom.) + 'flown away' (Past Participle intrans.) → 'whose colour is flown away' → 'pale, swallow', *rang.bâxte* 'colour' (acc.) + 'lost' (PP trans.) → who lost his colour → 'faded', *rang.karde* 'colour' (acc.) + 'done' (PP trans.) → 'painted') is the same: they are (compound) adjectives. The speaker, however, interprets them in different ways, deriving them from (underlying) relative clauses, in which differences in grammatical relationships manifest themselves beneath the uniformity of construction. In the course of derivation the sentence is transformed into a compound adjective, which then appears in an **attributive** position within the sentence, attached to one of its

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[16] Telegdi (1962a; 1964; 1965; 1970b; 1971).

[17] See Bühler (1934, 75) Anm. 1, quoted in Telegdi (1964, 238, note 6) [vol. I, p. 352].

[18] Cf. "die ‚vage' syntaktische Anweisung des indoeuropäischen Kompositums" in Telegdi (1965, 205) [vol. II, p. 207].

[19] See Telegdi (1970b; 1971).

nouns. In Persian, a prerequisite of this procedure is that the underlying
sentence must be transformed into a genuine adjective, i.e., one that func-
tions as a single word. Tajik, however, is different: a similar process—
as, for instance, in the syntagm *abrūi mūhoyaš daroz* 'long-haired eye-
brow, des sourcils aux cheveux longs', that is 'the eyebrow whose hair is
long')—will not result in a compound word. Here, the second element,
an attributive (*mūhoyaš daroz*) added to the noun *(abru)* maintains its
original phrase-like character consisting of a noun (*mūho* 'hair' in pl.) fol-
lowed by a possessive suffix (*-aš* 'his, her') and an adjective (*daroz* 'long'):
it does not become a word. This is an innovation of Tajik, in comparison
with Persian, while it is ancient heritage in Turkic languages (Uzbek,
Osmanli, etc.), and its use suggests even wider links, to the Ural-Altaic
languages. It can also be linked to the type of construction *szavahihető*
('trustworthy, veracious', lit. 'whose word can be believed') in Hungar-
ian. Its adoption in Tajik cannot be regarded as mechanical, by contrast
with features that can be observed in loanwords or phonetic borrowings.

A significant precondition of the interpretation described above was
the **abstraction of formal rules** from the linguistic material as separate
entities and their application to another linguistic corpus. Besides, trans-
formation as an "interpretative" procedure—which assigns various deep
structures to homogeneous ("indefinite") surface structures—occurs re-
peatedly in his analyses, even though he does not use this technical term
in the same strict sense as Chomsky had done.

And here we return to Telegdi's theoretical research.

4.   The structuralist approach to language is based on a conception
of language as a unified and organic whole in which, as Telegdi would
repeatedly assert with Saussure, "every moment of the language has an
autonomy: it is a system dependent only on itself, whose parts are in
constant interaction". Or, "a linguistic system is in itself an immobile and
balanced entity, which can only change under outside influence, under the
pressure of accidental events", and therefore "it is not only unnecessary
but also incorrect to seek to describe the interrelations and meanings of
a given linguistic situation outside itself, in some historical antecedents".
This formulation unequivocally points to an awareness of the limits and
shortcomings of structuralism, as well as the juxtaposition of **structure**
and **history**. Telegdi would revisit this all-important issue time and time
again. He writes: "consistent separation of system from changes is an
unfeasible and mistaken endeavour; a description of a language that does

not give an account of future changes inherent in the current state and the direction of future changes as a relevant characteristic of the system itself, is deficient". It must have been his research on transformational relationships that helped him shed new light on the problem that had long occupied him: the relationship between structure and history.

The studies determining the direction of research into syntax in the second half of the century, conducted on the basis of the theory of transformational generative grammar, may have represented a possible attempt to solve the dilemma of the rigid juxtaposition of static and dynamic or state and change. He dealt with these theoretical problems, which at the time were imbued with ideological prejudices, in a group of studies.

1962 saw the publication, in German, of Telegdi's programmatic study on the crucial question of the past century of linguistics, the correlation of **structure/system** and **history** or, in a broader sense, the correlation of **the historical** and **the logical.** The Hungarian version of the study followed soon in the first volume of the journal *Általános Nyelvészeti Tanulmányok* [Studies in General Linguistics], which Telegdi had founded and would continue to edit until his death.[20] It was here that he first outlined his views on Chomsky's theory and its significance in the history of linguistics.[21]

The focus of his attention was the concept of "transformation". At first, he used transformation in its traditional sense *(Umwandlung, Reduktion)* when he dealt with the *bahuvrihi*-Komposita.[22] Having surveyed its historical precedents, Telegdi comes to the key issue:

> "[…] grammar has long been familiar with the phenomenon of "transformation", but has taken it into account only rarely, in isolated cases, with the dominant image of the grammatical structure remaining largely unaffected by this concept. It is only quite recently that we have started to recognize that the transformational relationship permeates the whole edifice of grammar. For this recognition, the credit is first and foremost due to an American scholar, Noam Chomsky."[23]

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[20] See Telegdi (1962b) and, with slight modifications, (1963).

[21] In fact, he dealt with the new vistas in modern linguistics in two short papers. Both were reports of linguistics seminars on evaluating various trends of linguistics from the viewpoint of Marxism. See Telegdi (1961a;b).

[22] See Telegdi (1962a, 328, note 11) [vol. I, p. 327, note 11].

[23] See Telegdi (1963, 302) [vol. II, p. 200].

Telegdi's espousal of Chomsky's theory and his recognition of the latter's significance could be seen as the paradox of the era: the Marxist linguist acknowledges Chomsky as the exponent of the development that supersedes the static conception of language advocated by the structuralists.

> "In dieser neuen, tieferen Konzeption der Grammatik tritt der wahrhaft dynamische Charakter des Sprachzustands deutlich hervor: indem die syntaktischen Formen, die in einer konkreten Gestalt einer Sprache gelten, auf einen Kern von Grundformen zurückgeführt, bzw. von diesen abgeleitet werden, stellt sich diese Gestalt als ein Bewegung dar."[24]

writes Telegdi in 1962 (with the Hungarian version published in 1963), in an atmosphere far from conducive to the espousal of an American linguist's theory.

This last quotation demonstrates clearly that he saw the early Chomsky's importance in (at least) two essential points: the first is the **general** validity of transformation in opposition to the previous practice of employing it instinctively and randomly for connecting related structures;[25] the other is the idea that the transformational relationship is of a logical, rather than a historical, nature yet it creates successivity among simultaneous elements. In terms of the latter notion, however, he found several unsolved problems in Chomsky's early studies.[26]

In addition to the articles that discuss recent developments in general and theoretical linguistics, several of his writings on Persian also demonstrate the depth of his interest in these questions. It seems to me that the theoretical framework and technical tools employed in the comparative studies of compound words and phrasal constructions in Persian and other languages in his articles from the 1960s onwards were based on the new concept of the transformational relationship. In some of them, he actually used the notational conventions of transformational generative grammar for his analysis of grammatical structures.[27] In a Hungarian article, published in 1965, he writes: "It is perhaps superfluous to note that the arguments that follow, though they originate from a somewhat different approach, draw on the studies of N. Chomsky and R. B. Lees

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[24] See Telegdi (1962b, 106) [vol. I, p. 348].

[25] See for instance the well-known practice of deriving passive sentences from their active equivalents which Paul called *Umsetzung,* Telegdi (1961a, 20 note 14) [vol. II, p. 140, note 14].

[26] See Telegdi (1962b, 106–7) [vol. I, pp. 348–9].

[27] See Telegdi (1964).

to a significant degree."[28] Conversely, these linguistic investigations and analyses may well have helped him recognise the significance of that theory. From this time onwards, the demonstration of Chomsky's grammar and, occasionally, the criticism of some of its elements, became a recurrent topic of his lectures and writings. Despite all this, he cannot be considered to be a follower of Chomsky's school of thought. Telegdi was not altogether happy with the new developments of Chomsky's theory from the 1970s, however attractive and full of scintillating changes they might have been.[29] After some hesitation, Telegdi accepted the invitation to hold lectures on linguistic history in the Section of Theoretical Linguistics of the Research Institute for Linguistics, founded in 1990 with his enthusiastic support. In a letter dated 26th February 1991 he writes: "my lectures tracked the history of linguistics from Antiquity to the time of Saussure; an account of subsequent developments should, as a matter of principle, be given by a scholar more knowledgeable than I am in generative grammar".

From the 1970s, apart from some commissioned papers, Telegdi did not write any more about the Persian language, even though he was happy to read texts from classical Persian literature with his students and, in his lectures, share his original, unrecorded ideas on Persian grammar. Most of his time was devoted to his forthcoming manual[30] and the preliminary research required for it. His writings from this period hint at the remarkable depth and breadth of this research. He gave much thought to the theory of signs and the history of their study; he wrote repeatedly about the theory of signs of the Stoic philosophers, the roots of Saussure's ideas in Stoic thought (often criticising his contemporaries for their misjudgements or superficial generalisations)[31] and St. Augustine's

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[28] Telegdi (1965, 206, note 12) [vol. II, p. 207, note 12]; and in a slightly different wording: "Die folgenden Ausführungen verdanken den Arbeiten N. Chomskys und R. B. Lees wesentliche Anregungen" (Telegdi 1964, 239, note 8 [vol. I, p. 353, note 8]).

[29] In 1972 he writes of the concepts of deep structure and surface structure: "The differentiation of the two structures is one of the basic ideas of Chomsky's thought: it is to this differentiation that the precise name of Chomsky's grammar—'transformational generative grammar'—is a reference" (Telegdi 1972, 23 [vol. II, p. 330].

[30] Cf. Telegdi (1977).

[31] See his critical remarks in Telegdi (1976) on Thomas A. Sebeok (p. 271, note 7 [vol. I, p. 478, note 7]), Roman Jakobson (p. 276 [vol. I, p. 484]) and Robert H. Robins (p. 273, note 19 [vol. I, p. 481, note 19]).

theory of signs. The latter constituted the backbone of his inaugural lecture, delivered on 10th February 1978, as an associate member of the Academy of Sciences of Saxony.[32]

Telegdi's main field of interest, however, remained the history of linguistics and the philosophy of language in the 19th century: the *oeuvres* of J. Grimm, H. Paul and, above all, Wilhelm von Humboldt. Humboldt was the subject of his last lectures on the history of linguistics, held initially under the aegis of his former Department of General and Applied Linguistics and later organised by the Department of Iranian Studies which had by then acquired independent status. This series of lectures provided a panoramic view of Telegdi's breadth and depth of knowledge in philosophy, linguistics and literature, his proverbial erudition in a great number of languages and, above all, his thorough acquaintance with Classical Antiquity.

He started publishing articles on Humboldt in German in the mid-sixties. However, the most exhaustive exposition of his ideas on Humboldt's person, times and theory of language is a lengthy study in Hungarian, commissioned by the publishing house Európa Kiadó, as appendix and commentaries to Humboldt (1985).

"Humboldt did not structure the findings of his linguistic investigations into a system [. . .]", Telegdi writes in this study, "Yet his works, even though not totally elaborated and completed, incorporate a profound and rich theory of language".[33] Beyond his meticulous enquiries into particular languages or language families, Humboldt repeatedly examined the great questions of general linguistics: the interaction between humans and language and, in general, the impact of language upon the intellectual development of mankind. From his wide-ranging explorations I will cite here one idea, familiar to us from the works of Saussure and Chomsky, as summarized in the Appendix by Telegdi.

Humboldt argues repeatedly that all the individual languages are the product of a universal human linguistic capacity *(Sprachvermögen* or *Sprachfähigkeit)*. Regarding the speculation about the relationship between speech activity and linguistic system, which postulates the priority of the linguistic system over the speech activity, the views of prominent representatives of general linguistics — from the Neogrammarians to Saussure and Chomsky — are well-known. "Humboldt rejects the no-

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[32] Telegdi (1981).

[33] See the Appendix to Humboldt (1985, 329) [vol. II, p. 417].

tion of such a relationship between system and activity", Telegdi writes, "replacing it with another, more daring and more profound one. He perceives both of them as language, and regards the "living" language— language-as-activity, speech,—as having primacy".[34]

A recognition of the **genius** of Humboldt is all too apparent in this passage. However, Telegdi himself offers an explanation, in agreement with the ideas of H. Steinthal, as to why these ideas of Humboldt, or his other observations like those on the process of language acquisition, did not really become seminal notions for the further progress of general linguistics. The denseness of Humboldt's German style and thought requires persistent efforts on the part of the reader, he observes; "yet whatever was progressive in them will be reproduced [by future generations] through their own efforts and made much better, much more profound and extensive. In the process they will discover that others before them had already known or intuited much the same things".[35]

In his last years Telegdi gave a great deal of thought to the history of Hungarian grammar-writing. He wrote his last two treatises, one in Hungarian and the other in German, about this topic. The text of the former was delivered on the occasion of receiving the "Vilmos Bacher" award in 1989, and the latter was written for the Festschrift of Iván Fónagy, a friend he held in high regard.

5. As I tried to demonstrate, Telegdi applied notions and notational conventions of modern linguistics in expounding his linguistic examples but always with circumspection. This was due, I suspect, partly to his conservative attitude and partly to his life-long affection for to the classical heritage. His thorough knowledge of the history of linguistics provided him with an effective tool for evaluating each new and fashionable trend for its innovations and its shortcomings.

Telegdi's long and work-filled career has bequeathed to us not only the results of a great scholar's work—whose novel thinking is evident in the numerous fields of interest he encompassed, beside which he even

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[34] Humboldt (1985, 334–5) [vol. II, pp. 419–420]. In an earlier paper, Telegdi rejects Chomsky's interpretation of the Humboldtian *Sprachform:* "Soweit ich es jedoch beurteilen kann, dürfte dem hervorragenden Gelehrten ein Irrtum unterlaufen sein, wenn er meint, die Form einer Sprache entspreche nach Humboldt Auffassung 'im wesentlichen dem, was wir mit der heute geläufigen Terminologie als Generative Grammatik bezeichnen könnten' (*Cartesian Linguistics*, 87 [...])" (Telegdi 1970a, 28, note 8 [vol. I, p. 428, note 8]).

[35] See Humboldt (1985, 369–70) [vol. II, p. 436].

found time to translate Plato's *Symposium* to Hungarian — but also teaches us to appreciate the vicissitudes of a human life spent in the 20th century, a very difficult era. His life teaches us about good intentions, modesty and scholarly views that will not change according to how the wind blows. For him, Marx remained a frequently re-read author to the end. Telegdi probably regarded Marx not only as the originator of an ideology that had run aground in the end, but also as an outstanding exponent of the German philosophical tradition, which he held in such high esteem. It is with this in mind that I quote his relevant and thought-provoking words in which he expressed his thanks for the laudation he had received at a ceremony held by the Society of Linguists on his eightieth birthday on 19th December 1989:

> "Dear colleagues, let me express my sincere gratitude and thanks for the words of appreciation I have received. I know they are not to be taken literally. A long life has taught me to see my limitations, deficiencies and shortcomings very clearly. But my long life has also given me an opportunity to witness the great development, deepening, proliferation and diversification of linguistics for half a century, since the 1920s—and I am very grateful for it. I consider it an important task for a future educational reform to secure the proper place for general linguistics in the Hungarian university curriculum: the proper place it well deserves; a position corresponding with its achievements and not with the present position it occupies."

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