
OF EXACTITUDE IN LINGUISTICS

by

BORGE LUIS JORGES

... In that Empire, the craft of Descriptive Linguistics attained such Perfection that the Transcription of a single short Conversation covered the floor of an entire University seminar room, and the Transcription of a Representative Sample of a single Text-Type covered the floor area of a small department to a depth of several feet. In the course of time, especially after the development of narrow phonetic transcription with intonational and proxemic annotation, even these extensive Records were found somehow wanting, and with the advent of fully automatic voice-to-orthography transcription, the weight of the resulting Text Collections threatened severe structural damage to University buildings.

The College of Descriptive Linguists made desperate attempts to reduce the mass of the Data by ever more recondite Quantitative Techniques, but this led to the production of ever more Lists of words and n-grams, Parse Trees, and Diverse Statistics, and only exacerbated the problem. Individual Scholars were lost, presumed suffocated under the mass of paper, and whole University buildings collapsed under the weight of the Printouts.

Succeeding Generations, not without Reason, came to judge Representations of such Magnitude cumbersome, and they abandoned them, not without Irreverence, to the Rigours of Sun and Rain. In the Western Deserts, tattered fragments of the Corpora are still to be found, sheltering an occasional Beast or a Chomskyan, who can be heard muttering "I told you so". In the whole Nation, no other Relic is left of the Discipline of Descriptive Linguistics.

In their Infinite Wisdom, the College of Metalinguists, as they had now renamed themselves, determined to follow a principle of strict isomorphism, thus allowing every utterance to represent itself.