Roy Harris and Talbot J. Taylor. *Landmarks in Linguistic Thought: The Western Tradition from Socrates to Saussure*. London: Routledge, 1989. Pp. xviii + 199.

The tendency in linguistics in the twentieth century has been to focus attention and effort on the development of functional theories of language design and use that will ultimately provide a "window" on the nature of the language faculty in the human mind. Rarely have linguists traced, or even been interested in, the history of ideas about language, even though it is becoming increasingly apparent that many of the most interesting of the modern linguistic views have a long and intriguing history. It is primarily through books like the one by Harris and Talbot that this awareness has finally started to penetrate the mindset of linguists. In *Landmarks in Linguistic Thought* these two internationally-acclaimed scholars have shown how certain basic and influential ideas about language originated in the era of the Greeks and Romans and have survived, virtually intact, into the present century. This book is particularly relevant to Italian linguistics, since many of the theories developed within Italy about language in general are, in effect, traceable to the people and ideas that Harris and Talbot have chosen to highlight in their critical historiography.

The ideological "landmarks" that the authors have revisited are those which have existed since the dawn of civilization, but which have really never been configured into an appropriate "map." Their point of departure is, logically enough, the ancient world (1–19), where they trace first what is perhaps the earliest extended debate on language in Western culture, namely the discussion between Socrates and his interlocutors in Plato's *Cratylus* on the origin of naming. In Socrates' argument that the names given to objects and people do not constitute acts of individual volition, Plato seems to be claiming that "it does not matter whether language is conventional or mimetic" because "we are driven in the end to realize that language reaches both beyond our opinions and beyond itself" (19).

Harris and Talbot's attention turns next to Aristotle (20–34), the Bible (35–45), Varro (46–58) and Quintilian (59–74). Aristotle's concept that the essence of metaphor inheres in the transference of a name to something else has traditionally provided the basis upon which to view figurative language. But as Giambattista Vico persuasively argued in his *New Science* (1744), this view fails to see that the metaphorical capacity reveals a fundamental form of human cognition that is grounded in analogy. Harris and Talbot's comparison of the biblical story of language origins in Chapter II of Genesis to the account given by Plato in *Cratylus* is an extremely interesting and insightful one, providing, perhaps for the first time, a plausible rationale to the reconstruction movement in the nineteenth century as "a serious pursuit of the Adamic myth minus Adam" (45). The attempt of the great Roman grammarian Varro to reconcile regularity in language (*analogia*) with anomaly (*anomalìa*) is seen by Harris and Talbot as the first distinction between what Saussure came to call *langue* and *parole* at the start of the present century. And in the writings of the rhetorician Quintilian, the authors see the first concise statement in Western culture on the vital importance of literacy as the cornerstone of learning and education.

In the next two chapters, Harris and Talbot turn their attention to linguistic ideologies in the medieval and early Renaissance world through the writings of Thomas of Erfurt (75–85), in the late thirteenth century, and of the first English printer, William Caxton (86–93), in the fifteenth century. The work of Thomas of Erfurt, which marks

the highest achievement of the so-called *modistae*, or speculative grammarians, is important for its clear enunciation of what has come to be known as the universalist hypothesis—the view that “the world as comprehended by human understanding is the same for all human observers” (85). Caxton’s work is of particular significance to Italian linguistics, which has traditionally been nurtured by insights drawn from the study of language variation. Caxton’s ideas, like those of Dante in the *De vulgari eloquentia* (1305) and of Speroni in his *Dialogo delle lingue* (1542), point to an important feature of Renaissance thought: namely, the growing insistence on establishing the legitimacy of one’s own “vernacular language” as a viable means for oral and written communication.

In the next six chapters, Harris and Talbot delineate the essential background to the advent of modern linguistics—which is normally traced to the publication of Saussure’s *Cours de linguistique générale* in 1916—in the writings of the Port-Royal grammarians Arnauld and Lancelot (94–107) and John Locke (108–119) in the seventeenth century, of Condillac (121–135) and John Horne Tooke (136–150) in the eighteenth century, and of Wilhelm von Humboldt (151–164) and Friedrich Max Müller (165–175) in the nineteenth century. The work of the Port-Royal grammarians has become well-known primarily through the efforts of Noam Chomsky, who saw in their writings the historical roots to his own universalist and rationalist perspective. As is well known, Locke had a similar kind of influence on the thought of subsequent generations: “To linguistic thought he bequeathed not only a more detailed and explicit version of the mentalist conception of language that had originated with Aristotle, but also serious, explicitly reasoned worries about the capacity of language to serve as an adequate vehicle for the telemental communication of ideas” (119). The work of Condillac and Tooke is reflective of the eighteenth century’s profound interest in the origin of language as the key to understanding the human mind. The nineteenth-century, which many have called the “Darwinian century,” saw the first attempts to forge a science of language evolution and of its relation to the phylogenesis of thought. The writings of Humboldt focused on the latter—i.e. on the ways in which language and mentality interact and shape each other—thus preparing the way for the intriguing work of Sapir and Whorf in this century; whereas the writings of Müller epitomized the first attempts “to graft a Darwinian concept of evolution on to a Cartesian linguistic stock” (175).

The final chapter of Harris and Talbot’s intriguing and in-depth look into the origins of modern linguistic thought ends, appropriately enough, with the beginnings of linguistics as a so-called science in the thought of Ferdinand De Saussure (176–190). All those concepts that today constitute the backbone of linguistic theorizing especially in Europe, and more specifically in Italy—*langue*, *parole*, system, code, structure, synchrony, diachrony etc.—are, of course, first described extensively in Saussure’s *Cours*. But the point that Harris and Talbot perceptively make is that Saussure could not have possibly come up with these notions in the absence of the historical background that they have outlined in their book. And this, to conclude, is what makes Landmarks such an important book. It maps the ideological terrain out of which an autonomous science of language has sprouted in this century.

MARCEL DANESI

University of Toronto