

# Historiography as an exemplification of structural monism

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# The idea of Structural Monism

- 1) Every **belief** (like 'London is the capital of England') has a bipartite structure A&B: A = concept vs. B = exemplification. A is non-temporal whereas B occurs in time; A is impersonal whereas B is tied to individual persons); A participates in conceptual/logical relations whereas B participates in associative/causal relations (cf. Collingwood, Edgley, von Wright)
- 2) The bipartite structure has to be **generalized** to all **sciences** (which is just common sense, given that sciences qualify as **belief**-systems). This gives rise to a huge interdisciplinary **analogy**.
- 3) The generalization has already been applied to the following **nine sciences**: linguistics, psychology, sociology, physics, chemistry, biology, evolutionary theory, logic, and philosophy, namely in Itkonen (2025).

# continued

- It is the purpose of this talk to add one more, or the **10th**, item, to this interdisciplinary list. It is **historiography**, primarily interpreted according to Reinhart Koselleck (1979) = *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*, Suhrkamp (in English: *Futures past. On the semantics of historical time*, New York: Columbia UP, 2004).

# Historiography, according to Koselleck (1979) and others

- There are two basic time-concepts, namely **physical** time (= T-1) and **historical** time (= T-2). It is T-2, an element of human life, which is the subject matter of **Historiography** (= **H**). T2 is divided into semantics (= H-S) and pragmatics (H-P). H-S constitutes the **invariant** framework whereas H-P deals with the **variation** within this framework.
- Terminological note: *Semantics/Pragmatics* = both the (linguistic) description and its object (= language).

# Semantics of historical time (= H-S)

- H-S:

PAST	↔	Memory	( <i>Erinnerung</i> )
PRESENT	↔	Observation	( <i>Wahrnehmung</i> )
Future	↔	Expectation	( <i>Erwartung</i> )

Due to the ephemeral nature of the present moment, Memory and Observation merge into the Space of Experience (*Erfahrungsraum*), as opposed to the Horizon of Expectation (*Erwartunghorizont*).

H-S imposes the following structure upon the outside world: a) the irreversibility of events (*die Irreversibilität von Ereignissen*); b) the repeatability of events (*die Wiederholbarkeit von Ereignissen*); c) the simultaneity of non-simultaneous events (*die Gleichzeitigkeit der Ungleichzeitigen*; in Finnish: 'eriaikaisten samanaikaisuus').

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- Items a) and b) are self-explanatory, except that a) is a property of event-**tokens**, whereas b) is a property of event-**types** (like recurrent holidays). Item c) is exemplified by the **apparent-time** method, employed in variationist sociolinguistics:

# The apparent time method

- For instance, if we start to investigate in 2026 the speech of 20-year-old-speakers in some community, then "it is assumed that the speech of 40-year-old speakers today [in 2026] reflects the language used by 20-year-old speakers in the community 20 years ago [in 2006], whereas the speech of 60-year-old speakers today [in 2026] reflects the language used in the community by 20-year-old speakers 40 years ago [in 1986]" (Laasanen 2026).
- Notice that here we literally **see** (the numbers for) the different years (= 1986, 2006, 2026) side by side, or simultaneously, exactly as required by the axiom of *Gleichzeitigkeit der Ungleichzeitigen*.

# Pragmatics of historical time (= H-P)

- H-P:
- Depending on the historical context, time may be experienced differently. In general, **acceleration** (*Beschleunigung*) of time correlates with the emergence of the notion of **progress** (*Fortschritt*). At the same time, the idea of **future** changes accordingly: the fearful waiting for the last judgment is replaced by an eager anticipation of the benefits promised by progress. According to Koselleck (1979), the medieval **time** was **slow**, as compared to the modern time. On the other hand, Huizinga (1922) claims that the medieval **life** was more **intense** than the modern life.

# Continued

- Historiography is characterized by **diversity**, both at the level of historical material and at the level of description. This raises the problem of **relativism** (or **subjectivism**). This is Koselleck's (1979) answer at the former level:
- "Let us grant that the essence of the historical world is change: By means of understanding (*Verstehen*), it is possible to re-enact each unique situation, even the alien and the far-away one; by means of empathy, it becomes possible to re-enact, to translate, and hence to know an alien past" (p. 177).
- Thus, the answer is to invoke the **hermeneutic** method (cf. Itkonen 2019, Lopez Serena 2026): *Verstehen*, as the core of hermeneutics, is identical with (controlled) **empathy**, which in turn is the cornerstone of **rational explanation** (= RE) (cf. Möttönen 2026). Contemporary theoretical/cognitive linguistics has largely neglected the very idea of empathy.

# Continued

- Solving the problem of **relativism** entails that the method of *Verstehen* is applied not only to the historical material, but also – at the meta-level, as it were – to the community of historians:
- “The question that critical history raises, is: ‘How shall the critical historian correct his ideas so that they are not merely subjective and idiosyncratic?’ The answer, as I see it, is to deepen and expand the fundamental notion already present in critical history: the history of history. The historian must place subjective notions of interpretation in a framework of other historians’ thoughts” (O’Brien 1975:

# Conclusion: Back to Structural Monism

non-causal autonomous linguistics\* : causal psycho- & sociolinguistics,  
conversation analysis = protophysics : ordinary physics = semantics of  
historical time : pragmatics of historical time

\*see Kac (2026), Nikanne (2026)

# Postscript: Two Historical Parallels

## I) Structural Monism

A vs. B = *scientia rationalis* vs. *scientia realis* (William Occam, 1280-1347) = **Wesenswissenschaft** vs. **Tatsachenwissenschaft** (Edmund Husserl, 1859-1938).

## II) Physical vs. historical time

Henri Bergson (1859-1941): *temps physique* vs. *temps vécu* (or *durée*). The latter represents the **genuine** time. The former is **measurable** because it is based on the misleading metaphor 'Time is space'. H.B. summarized his entire philosophy by claiming "Time is **not** space". – The 495-item name index of Koselleck (1979) does not contain H.B., although (or because?) he said the same thing (only better).

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