

## (Reichling on (Bühler on Words))

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### *Abstract*

In 1935 P. Anton J.B.N. Reichling (1898-1986) published his doctoral dissertation on *Het woord, een studie omtrent de grondslag van taal en taalgebruik* ("The word, a study on the foundation of language and linguistic usage/speech"). One year after Karl Bühler's (1879-1963) *Sprachtheorie. Die Darstellungsfunktion der Sprache* ("Theory of Language. The Representational Function of Language"), to which Reichling could refer in his book but which was not published by the time Reichling finished his manuscript. On the basis of fundamental insights into the functional, sematological, interdisciplinary and structural character of language Bühler tried to develop a coherent, i.e. axiomatic, description of language, linguistic usage, and their structures. An essential part of his *Sprachtheorie* consists of an analysis of the role of linguistic signs in a speech community—in agreement with his functional approach to signs.

After it appeared Bühler's work was critically appreciated by Dutch linguists and psychologists. The reason for critique was especially the emphasis Bühler laid on the role of metalinguistic criteria in determining linguistic functions and structures in scientific descriptions. Reichling e.g. reproached Bühler for being a psychologist which was his "strength and his weakness". And this remark led Reichling to even a more problematic statement in his interpretation of Bühler's psychological approach to language: Bühler was a behaviorist and wasn't concerned about language at all!

In my contribution I will try to give a description of Reichling's interpretation of Bühler's "linguistic" studies, his critique, and the reason for his critique according to Reichling's own presuppositions and a misunderstanding of Bühler's (interdisciplinary) principles of linguistic research.

### Reichling on Bühler on Words<sup>1</sup> A case of linguistic criticism

#### 0. *Introductory Remarks*

To give well-founded reasons or even explanations for the increase of linguistic or para-

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<sup>1</sup> In my account of Reichling's criticism on Bühler's methodology and behaviourism I will use the English translation of Bühler's *Sprachtheorie* by Donald F. Goodwin and *Die Axiomatik der Sprachwissenschaften* by Robert E. Innis. I will quote from Reichling's second edition of *Het woord* without mentioning that the translations are mine.

linguistic research and of the increase of publications as results of this research in the 1930s is quite a perilous and problematic undertaking. Even if it should be confirmed that some new -isms (like structuralism or functionalism although these -isms have been taken over by American psychology in the first decade of the 20th century) initiated this linguistic boom a closer look at these studies conceptually reveals a quite traditional field of *linguistic* research (I am referring to linguists, their ways of doing linguistic research and their criticism on linguistic modernism). One could look for institutional reasons to explain a rather conservative way of linguistic research but this will not explain **why** according to these new -isms linguistic research and literature in the 1930s followed new avenues. A more fundamental question then should be whether it is possible to state in such a general way as I just did that there really is an increase in modern *linguistic* research and literature without specifying the concepts of "linguistics", "linguistic literature", "linguistic object" or "linguistic method" and their relations to other relevant domains of research on language and speech. And it also does not explain why new tendencies in linguistic theory came up and what these tendencies were. In general, one might say that linguistic studies became more semantically and pragmatically oriented and were less grammatically or syntactically determined. And this development might be explained by the influence of the progression (i.e. emancipation) of other social sciences like sociology and psychology which created a new functional interest in linguistics. But this statement is only meant to start my contribution on linguistic criticism and its role in the development of linguistic research in the 1930s.

Real innovations in linguistic theory now may be found e.g. in other ways of reasoning (in methodology) which result from an interdisciplinary, e.g. a psychological, sociological description and analysis of linguistic phenomena. These innovations interestingly enough were developed by "non-professionals" in the domain of linguistics or what counts as linguistics in academic linguistic circles. Or by language researchers who were academically trained in more than one subject. We can find this way of reasoning e.g. in the work of the German-Austrian physician, philosopher and psychologist Karl Bühler (1879-1963) who published extensively on topics related to linguistic theory in the 1920s and 1930s. Bühler's research project, however, met a lot of criticism and not only in Germany for several very traditional and "modern" reasons!

The bulk of criticism on Bühler centred on his way of doing research without limiting himself to the specific *linguistic* element in speech and language. The emancipation of linguistic theory, critics would argue, could even be stopped by these large undertakings without acknowledging specific linguistic methods and objects - even if it is uncertain whether there are such things as autonomous linguistic objects or specific linguistic methods (and despite the opinions of Ferdinand de Saussure's (1857-1913) appeal to the autonomy of the object and method of linguistic research). Nevertheless, the problems of the definition of the object and the methods of linguistic research may have led to some larger research projects which transcended traditional theoretical undertakings and may have led away from language-centred research. These "transcendental" projects went even as deep as to what in the German tradition was called "das Wesen der Sprache" or a

metaphysics of language (the essence of language).<sup>2</sup> This urge for definitions may finally have come up from a sort of "Krisenbewußtsein" (a consciousness of crises), analogous to the problems of methodological diversity or plurality in psychological research in the first three or so decades of our century, which almost automatically had to give way to larger synthetical approaches to the specific objects and methods of linguistic research.

In my contribution to this Meeting I will confront two different syntheses of linguistic or perhaps pseudo-linguistic theory and the specific status of linguistics in both works. The first book was written by Karl Bühler during more than ten years, called *Theory of Language. The representational Function of Language*<sup>3</sup>, and it appeared in 1934. The second book was written by Anton Reichling (1898-1986) and appeared one year later in 1935. In the latter book Reichling mentions Karl Bühler's theoretical and methodological work on language next to that of Henri Delacroix (*Le Langage et la Pensée*, 1924) and Edward Sapir (*Language*, 1921) as an important source for his own language theoretical studies.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> It is a remarkable fact that in the 1930s all over the linguistic world traces of theoretical or "foundational" studies on language were published, e.g. Sapir's and Bloomfield's works on "Language", Julius Stenzel's *Philosophie der Sprache*, Lew. S. Vygotsky's *Language and Thought*, Langeveld's *Taal en Denken*, Alan H. Gardiner's *The Theory of Speech and Language* and many, many others.

<sup>3</sup> The translation of the first German edition by D.F. Goodwin was published in 1990. Without, however, the "Geleitwort" by Friedrich Kainz which accompanied Bühler's *Sprachtheorie* since the second edition in 1965. Remarkable is also that the translation of Bühler's *Axiomatik* took Elisabeth Ströker's 1969-edition without Bühler's "Erläuterung des Themas" (A Commentary on the Subject Matter). In this edition the Kantian justification of Bühler's approach is totally left out. It nevertheless is essential to the understanding of Bühler's starting point: the search for principles which underpin the scientific approaches to language and the procedure of axiomatization.

<sup>4</sup> What strikes one's eye in reading Reichling is that in the first chapter on "Methods and Terminology" Reichling only mentions Bühler's *Theory of Language* - he sticks to the articles up to the *Axiomatization of the Language Sciences* and only in later chapters he seems to have read Bühler's work when dealing with the concepts of "inner-" and "surrounding field" (In- und Umfeld) which stem from colour theory and gestalt psychology:

It hardly needs to be emphasized that the influence of 'inner field' (*Infeld*) and the 'surrounding field' is reciprocal. In the several holistic views that are nowadays summarily called *Gestalt* psychology, this insight was expanded and transferred to many other things. It is one of those facts that have never been completely overseen or denied, but which are today much more carefully worked out than previously, namely that sense data usually do not occur in isolation, but are embedded or integrated into various mental processes as encompassing wholes in which they are correspondingly subject to various modifications.

(Bühler 1934: 154)

Although I will not go into Reichling's criticism on Bühler's field theory in this place in detail the essential point made by Reichling is that Bühler in his theory of the deictic and symbolic

## 1. *Linguistic categories and reality*

Fundamental to Bühler's and Reichling's work is the systematic account of linguistic structures and their relation to speech, i.e. their realization in speech. In Bühler's work there is a structural relation between linguistic categories, like phonemes, words and sentences, and their ontological meaning, i.e. the "reality" or realization of these categories in speech. And although Bühler acknowledges the importance of historical-comparative linguistics for some basic developments in linguistics his starting point is not the formal (i.e. morphological) character of language in comparison to formal or typological systems of other languages or language families, but the functional character of the sign<sup>5</sup> and its relation to formal ontological categories which are given phenomenologically in everyday speech (like speakers, hearers, objects, states of affairs and relations between them of which one may legitimately doubt whether they are linguistic categories). The theoretical moments of understanding, immanent objectivity and expression constitute the sign. A sign is always given in relation to objective moments (i.e. not the sign itself or *per se*) which determine its specific intended meaning. A sign only makes sense in one or more of the afore-mentioned possible formal relations. Now it is Bühler's belief, I think, that the relation between signs, sign-givers, sign-takers and the represented world of objects and states of affairs cannot be accounted for without the analysis of the relational (unobservable, i.e. purely formal) dependence of the parts and constituted wholes in Bühler's sign-conception which are represented in his model of language as an organon with its own logico-semantic structures. In concrete speech these underlying structures *essentially* ("wesentlich") constitute the different moments of the speech-continuum. And this is one of the reasons why Bühler's model of the organon of language cannot be called a model of communication in the narrow sense of the word. There is a concrete speech-event but its relevance for Bühler lies in the abstract, logical components of signs which can be used to convey thoughts or appeal to ideas and thoughts of hearers. This revealing of so-called "structural laws" Bühler probably learned from one of his supervisors during a stay in the Berlin Institute for Psychology in 1904-05, Carl Stumpf, and of his lecture of the work of the heirs of Franz Brentano, especially the *Logical Investigations* of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938).<sup>6</sup> What is meant here is that one can discover, by

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field, the embedding of linguistic elements in practical, physical and symbolic surrounding fields, does not account for the role of the meaning of words in the interpretation of linguistic utterances: his statement that "in general terms, the situation and the context are the two sources that in every case contribute to the precise interpretation of utterances" (Bühler 1934: 149), therefore, gives only half the truth.

<sup>5</sup> In fact, this was his starting-point in the *Axiomatization*. In the *Theory of Language* Bühler started with the functions of language according to the traditional accounts, e.g. in Plato's *Cratylus* and in behaviourist theories.

<sup>6</sup> Carl Stumpf (1848-1936) in particular studied the underlying structural laws of spacial relations and e.g. the interdependence of spacial extension and colour: "[structural laws] generally relate to coexistent entities [...] since they (claim to) describe the internal make-up of

abstraction of the concrete given data, lawful relations which are themselves not observable but products of mental activity. These relations must be presupposed to bring order into and to make understandable the observed phenomena. In part IV of his *Theory of Language* e.g., "The Make-Up of Human Speech: Elements and Compositions", Bühler illustrates this principle by differentiating between the sound shape ("Klang-gesicht") and the itemized phonematic description of words ("das phonematische Signale-ment der Wörter"). The first can vary in many ways without losing the possibility of being identified by some itemized description. In fact, it is this description of a "moment of constancy" ("Konstanzmoment"; cf. Bühler 1934: 288f.) which enables hearers to attach a meaning to words. The structurally determined phonemes are therefore nearer to the conceptual (unobservable!) moments or factors in speech than to the visual qualities represented in the sound shape (cf. Bühler 1934: Ch.18):

If a word is imagined to be spoken by a good speaker in several quite different emotional states and laden with expression, the acoustic shape of the word changes, whereas the diacritical itemized description remains intact. Hence, there is in verbal communication ["Sprechverkehr"] *a constancy of the diacritical itemized description through change of the acoustic face of the words*. That is a proposition that will not alienate any expert in the field of modern theory of perception. There are similar [i.e. not totally the same - fv] laws of constancy everywhere; for example, there is the constancy of the size of visible things through change of distance, the constancy of the colour of visible things through change of lighting, and something, we ourselves have discovered and experimentally verified in verbal contact, namely the constancy of the loudness of auditory entities through change of distance [...].(Bühler 1934: 288f.)

But can we conclude from this, as many of Bühler's critics have suggested, that he should only be interested in the "indisputable" dominant representational function of language which constitutes the meaning of words, sentences and other linguistic units.

## 2. Reichling on Bühler's understanding of linguistics and signs

I do not think so. This criticism can only be understood if made by a linguist! Perhaps Anton Reichling's *Het woord*, not written by a linguist *pur sang*, may give us, however, some insights into the reasons why Bühler did not acknowledge this fact and why his *Theory of Language* failed to become a well-balanced synthesis between empirical

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mental and linguistic events" (Barry Smith; in: Vonk 1992: 115). A linguistic structural law is e.g. the duality and correlativity of sentences and words - like e.g. Reichling's supervisor De Vooy's has argued for in his studies on the meaning of words (see note 7). Language is a dual or two-class system in which words and sentences cannot be defined independently (contrary to e.g. the one-class system of flag signs in ocean shipping traffic before the advent of wireless telegraphy; cf. Bühler 1934: 70ff.). Bühler explicitly maintains in the fourth principle of his *Theory of Language*:

anyone who attempts to eliminate the dual factor under discussion from the structure of language is doi

linguistic research and reflections on language.

Anton Reichling, a Dutch Jesuit who left the order in the late 1940s, wrote his doctoral dissertation - in fact, his one and only larger work on language - in the 1930s. This study, a doctoral dissertation on *The word. A study on the foundation of language and the use of language*, was supervised by the Utrecht professor of Dutch language and literature Cornelis Gerrit Nicolaas de Vooyo (1873-1955).<sup>7</sup> In his *Het woord* Reichling shows his admiration of Bühler's linguistic ideas by his criticism which is his one and only aim in his doctoral dissertation. In *Het woord* Reichling develops a theory of the word which focusses upon the notion of "eigenwettelijkheid" or autonomy. We can study the lexical element in speech and language as a linguistic object. The main idea behind Reichling's work is that words do have an observable and an unobservable aspect of which the latter can be reconstructed in actual speech and can be made object of linguistic research. The word is the fundamental moment in the identification (the "itemized element") of meaning in speech.

Now, according to Reichling, Bühler has made an important contribution to the development of linguistic methodology although his point of departure is already wrong, namely "the totality of what is capable of affecting the senses of language researchers" (Bühler 1934: 15). This "totality" is actually "non-linguistic". In fact, this point of criticism lies at the heart of Reichling's criticism on Bühler's research programme: Bühler's three functions of language, "Kundgabe", "Auslösung" and "Darstellung", are distinguished on the basis of sensory perceptions (experience) which are obviously non-linguistic. Linguistic moments, experiences, phenomena etc. can be studied independently from sensory perceptions - of which Bühler himself, however, would say that their relevance in theoretical discourse would mean a "material fallacy" or "the subordination of the semiotic nature of signs under the material nature" (cf. Bühler 1934: 490). But although Reichling's criticism seems to be legitimate it does not take into account what the main objectives of Bühler's were when writing his *Theory of Language*.

Elisabeth Ströker in her "Introduction" to the 1969 edition of Bühler's *Axiomatization of the Language Sciences* describes Bühler's project in terms of a foundation "of all specific directions of research" (Bühler 1933: 85) in relation to the topic "language", i.e. philology, philosophy, psychology, sociology, phonetics, logic, and grammar. But in his research for the principles of the language sciences Bühler did restrict himself to the "conceptual world of the language researcher" (Bühler 1934: 16f.) and he explicitly

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<sup>7</sup> In the 1930s De Vooyo published some articles on the study of the meaning of words in which he dealt with structural problems of the attachment of meaning to words and the shift of meaning. In his 1938 publication *Inleiding tot de studie van de woordbetekenis* and his address at the foundation day of the University of Utrecht in 1933, *De studie van de woordbetekenis*, De Vooyo explicitly refers to relevant studies on this topic in Germany, France, England and Scandinavia. De Vooyo's point is that the meaning of words is constituted by the context, i.e. the sentence in which words are placed and ordered according to a syntactic system. The sentence itself which determines the meaning of a word is itself dependent of the situation which should be more or less familiar in speech.

denies that his project should be called e.g. a "philosophy of language". The principles of his *Theory of Language* were literally taken from the conceptual world of *empirical* linguistic research:

Bühler's attempt is the first and, up to now, the only of its kind that undertakes to penetrate the conceptual world and work method of empirical language researchers with the intention of developing a few theses through which their apparently disparate work is finally brought into unity. (Ströker; in: Innis 1982: 87)

But this does not mean, Ströker rightly asserts, that the presented axioms in Bühler's *Axiomatization* as well as in his *Theory of Language* should be

understood as if the statements of empirical linguistic research were derivable from them in such a way that they could thereby attain the methodical structure of an axiomatic-deductive system, such as exists prototypically, for example, in mathematics and logic. (Ströker; in: Innis 1982: 87)

Now Reichling reproaches Bühler with creating a metaphysics which leads his search for axioms or linguistic research principles (cf. Reichling 1935: 9) and not the empirical work - which, of course, seems to contradict what is just said about Bühler's aim in writing his *Theory of Language*. It is impossible, Reichling maintains, to induce a conception of signs out of the particular sciences. Bühler's determination of signs ignores the fact that the unobservable conceptual world of metaphysics transcends *every* particular science and the observations made in these sciences. Bühler, therefore, seems to be unaware of or seems to avoid the question of the formation and usage of concepts of particular researchers of language which cannot be induced from specific empirical linguistic research. To say that the initial object of linguistics or linguistic research *is* the totality of what affects the senses of linguists precisely misses this point: it cuts off the way to explain the structure of the complex speech-event (my translation for Reichling's "taal-gebeuren"). Bühler places himself with this manoeuvre outside the domain of linguistic research. And with this argument the circle is closed.

In his criticism Reichling too draws on former criticism on Bühler's theoretical programme, e.g. on the fundamental objections of Hellmuth Dempe, made in 1930 in his small book *Was ist Sprache? Eine sprachphilosophische Untersuchung im Anschluß an die Sprachtheorie Karl Bühlers*. Dempe had already stressed the missing unity in Bühler's functional approach to language which can only be regained by making one of the three functions the dominant or essential one in the theory of language, i.e. the representational function:

We now maintain that the primary and only essential function of language and sentences is the representational function, at least, that this function is contained in what Bühler calls representation. Expression and appeal, if they belong to language at all, are only moments of representation and are subordinated to representation.

(Dempe 1930: 41)

But the only argument in favour of this so-called "dominance" of the representational function of language or the sign can be found in the justification of Bühler's research project as a *linguistic* project which was not Bühler's intention at all - as far as one may can understand Bühler's unfinished sematological research project. He even opposes a factual dominance of the representational function in his sematological approach to linguistics:

Rather, each of the two participants [in verbal communication, "Sprechverkehr" - fv] has his own position in the make-up of the speech situation, namely the sender as the agent of the act of speaking, as the *subject* of the speech action ["Sprechhandlung", i.e. as one of the four scientific objects of linguistic research - fv] on the one hand, and the receiver as the one spoken to, as the *addressee* of the speech action on the other hand. They are not simply a part of what the message is about, rather they are the partners in an exchange, and ultimately this is the reason why it is possible that the sound as a medial product has a specific significative relationship to each, to the one and to the other severally. (Bühler 1934: 37f.)

What we see in this quotation is that Bühler distinguishes different *semantic* functions of the speech sign as abstracted from the mediator of significant, i.e. relevant messages. Now it seems that this analysis of sematological factors (or the constitutive components of the sign) is essential to communication (these are almost literally Reichling's words; cf. Reichling 1935: 18). The legitimate but unjust criticism is that we do not find a "side-by-side" of linguistic phenomena but only a "continuum" (cf. Reichling 1935: 19) which can be analysed in terms of a formal hierarchy by our linguistic knowledge of this continuum - I wonder whether Reichling was familiar with Bühler's "Metzgeranalyse"?

Now we have arrived at a very crucial point of criticism in Reichling's work in which Bühler's criticism of psychologism is praised but his concept of the sign is qualified as a product of his biological approach to linguistics. Bühler's theory of the sign is even behaviourist, Reichling tells us. The question, of course, is:

### 3. Was Bühler a behaviourist in linguistic theory?

In the communication of concrete acoustic phenomena (the translation of the German "Schallwellen") these physical entities function as signs. This is, however, Reichling's interpretation of Bühler's sign-conception.

But Reichling could have known from e.g. the *Axiomatization*, but also from Bühler's 1931 contribution to the new linguistic science of phonology, *Phonetik und Phonologie*, that a fundamental sematological distinction in his fourth axiom of the *Axiomatization* or the first principle of the *Theory of Language* is mainly based on Trubetzkoy's distinction of speech sounds and phonemes. In the latter some *langue*-specific aspects of sounds are distinguished from their physical appearance. Reichling's remark that the perceived

(Organon model of  
Bühler and Reichling; taken from resp. the English translation of Bühler's *Theory of Language* (1934: 28) and Reichling's *Het Woord* (1935: 32))

sound functions *as* a sign, i.e. as expressing thoughts or feelings, signalling them to a receiver or representing objects or states of affairs misses the point Bühler makes completely. Why then did not Bühler develop one overall axiom or principle? Probably the functional dimension of language and its semiotic character are two different analytical objects. The principle which rules the semiotic nature of language is the so-called "principle of abstractive relevance". The abstract factors by which sounds become signs is founded in mental activity: interpretation and understanding. Otherwise one would commit a material fallacy (a "Stoffentgleisung") which means that one takes that for which the sign stands as the sign. With the use of (linguistic) signs human beings free themselves from the restricted horizon of joint perceptions, an insight Bühler has taken over from his findings in comparative psychology:

It turns out that the biological source of the *production* of signs can be found at precisely the memory data relevant to the situation which one of the individuals involved in the cooperation effort possesses above and beyond what his fellows have.(Bühler 1934: 46)

And this does not imply that acoustic phenomena which themselves in fact lack the specific conceptual or cognitive moment of the sign can be identified with the sign: "what is given to the senses", Bühler (1934: 28) states in his elucidation of the organon model of language, "always receives an apperceptive complement".

The sound waves themselves are *not* signs but they become signs in their possible interpretation in verbal communication. Reichling's fundamental criticism on Bühler's biologism and behaviourism in his representation of the linguistic sign is that Bühler went astray in choosing as the starting point of language theoretical research, as I have already mentioned, physiologically founded sense perceptions. But Bühler's programme is, of course, at a metatheoretical - even metalinguistic - level which actually does not exclude the mental activities of senders and receivers and which is, in fact, immune to every point of criticism Reichling makes. *If* Bühler should have taken sound waves *as*

signs he would have accused himself of a material fallacy which seems to be unlikely: in this case, Bühler would fall into his own trap. But of course we do hear sound waves in verbal communication but they themselves are not the interpreted sign as the abstractive moment in the relational aspects which can be functionally distinguished in the communication process. As perceived sounds sound waves have no meaning at all. The only function as physical transmitters or bearers of possible meanings which cannot be explained *without* the material basis. Before Bühler e.g. Hermann Paul and Ferdinand the Saussure saw themselves confronted with these problems of scientific division of labour in grasping and describing the process of communication. They were criticized by Bühler for exactly this "butcher's method". Reichling's organon model ignores this important line of reasoning which is, in fact, Bühler's. Although Reichling is right in maintaining that language signals in particular are more complex than e.g. "traffic signs" (cf. Bühler 1933: 164) and that they presuppose a more complex system of social conventions he probably refuses to see that expression and appeal are moments in the process of giving meaning to utterances and should be seen independent from the more linguistic moment of the sign: the representation of objects and states of affairs.<sup>8</sup> With the "philosopher" Dempe the "linguist" Reichling holds that expression and appeal are secondary functions of signification and representation the primary function of linguistic signs. But this, again, would mean a reduction of the semantic dimensions in verbal communication to the linguistic dimension. And reductionism is what the aspectivist Bühler has always abhorred.

One may conclude from this confrontation of Bühler's and Reichling's ideas on the functional and sematological character of language and the methodology of language research that the latter's criticism on Bühler's method in his linguistic theory mainly stems from two sources: First, Bühler was not a professional linguist but a psychologist and second, Bühler's approach to linguistics was interdisciplinary and in this approach Bühler missed the essential linguistic moment in language: the autonomy ("eigenwettelijkheid") of the lexical moment in verbal communication.

#### 4. Conclusion

I will conclude this paper by some more or less rhetorical questions which, in this case and in the discussion, may be answered:

1. Was Bühler a linguist?
2. Did he contribute to linguistics at all?
3. Should he - and did he - bother about e.g. Reichling's (or Dempe's) criticism or about scientists calling him a dilettante or charlatan in the domain of linguistic theory?
4. Can Reichling's way of reasoning and criticism on Bühler's research project be

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<sup>8</sup> This difference in semantic and linguistic dimensions has also been analysed by Pierre Swiggers (1981) in an article in which he distinguishes the communicative and the more linguistic "dimension" of signs.

considered as a fundamental contribution to the development of linguistic theory?

I hope to have drawn your attention first to one of the more interesting but not widely read Dutch linguists and second to an important aspect of the historiography of linguistics: the relevance of linguistic criticism to the development of linguistic theory.

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