HAYWARD KENISTON (1883–1970)

Hayward Keniston, President of the Linguistic Society of America in 1948, died 9 August 1970 at the age of eighty-seven. His passing removes from the American scene one of the last scholars of the generation of Leonard Bloomfield, Edward Sapir, and C. C. Fries, together with whom he strove to render linguistics a truly scientific endeavor.

A New Englander by birth and education, Keniston received his A.B. at Harvard in 1904, and his Ph.D. in 1911. His teaching-career began in New England (Harvard, Colby College, Hotchkiss School) and continued—with interruptions before and during the First World War—at Cornell (1914–25), Chicago (1925–40), and Michigan (1940–52). He was also Dean of the Cornell Graduate School in 1923–25 and of the College of Arts and Sciences at Michigan in 1945–52. He remained active in research and publication long after his retirement.

Keniston's chief scholarly interest was in Hispanic culture and the history and description of the Spanish language. His publications were restricted almost wholly to this field, whether they were editions of mediaeval and Renaissance texts, literary studies, reference-books, text-books and frequency-lists, or descriptive and historical studies of Spanish. (For extensive discussion, based almost wholly on his published work, see Malkiel 1971.) In his teaching, however, he ranged considerably farther afield, covering Romance philology and comparative linguistics as a whole, and giving such courses as Introduction to Romance Philology, Old Provençal, and Old Italian. As a teacher, he was highly inspiring, combining an ability to talk interestingly and exhaustively on philology and linguistics with a lively, somewhat dry New England sense of humor and a strong belief in the desirability of a scientific approach to the study of language. One of his favorite remarks was that, if Americans had anything special to contribute to linguistics, it was an aptitude for developing and applying objective methods. He considered the comparative method as scientific in nature, and advocated its application to Romance as Bloomfield and Sapir had applied it to American Indian languages.

His own brand of scientific method involved statistical analysis of the frequency of occurrence, not only of sounds and forms, but of syntactic constructions. In this field, his magnum opus was to have been a multi-volume statistical study on historical Spanish syntax, of which, however, only one volume—originally intended to be the second of a series—ever appeared (Keniston 1937). Most reviews of this volume were favorable (e.g. Brett 1938). One, however (Spitzer 1938), was disastrous in its effect. This incredibly uncomprehending and yet violent, slashing condemnation, unworthy of a gentleman or a scholar, was a major factor in Keniston's discouragement and failure to continue with the project. His colleague Algernon Coleman told me how deeply hurt Keniston had been by Spitzer's criticisms, skewed and largely irrelevant, but appealing to all the antiscientific prejudices inherent in our culture. In later years, Keniston

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would speak admiringly of Spitzer's success in convincing one, against one's will, with his stylistic extravaganzas (Keniston's term, used in personal conversation with me)—but it was the admiration, weary and bitter, of a defeated man for his unworthy but victorious antagonist. Our field was thus deprived of what would truly have been a *monumentum aere perennius*—a tragedy, not only for Keniston personally, but for Romance and general linguistics as a whole.

Yet Keniston's basic contributions to the tradition of linguistics in America remain alive and fruitful. His students learned from him to value objectivity, to base their conclusions on observable data combined with judicious extrapolation, and to pay attention to considerations of frequency. Keniston's position as a leading member of what might be called 'the first scientific generation' of American linguists is secure.

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