

Contents

Preface	ix
1 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO EXPLAIN SOMETHING?	1
1.1 The historical mode: prologue	1
1.2 Preliminary pessimism	3
1.3 Definitions and contexts	4
1.4 Explanation and understanding	7
1.5 Deductive-Nomological explanations	9
1.6 Probabilistic explanations	12
1.7 The asymmetry between explanation and prediction	13
2 WHY 'NATURALNESS' DOES NOT EXPLAIN ANYTHING	15
2.1 On 'natural' sound changes: generalities	15
2.2 An attempt at a phonetic explanation	17
2.3 On the status of probabilistic explanations	20
2.4 Further epistemological considerations: the 'stochastic factor'	24
2.5 The status of exceptions, 1: the null strategy problem	29
2.6 The status of exceptions, 2: Optimization and null strategy	32
2.7 Multiple strategies and a 'law of assimilation'	35
2.8 Is there a distinction between markedness and naturalness?	42
APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 2: NATURALNESS, 'UNIFORMITARIANISM', AND RECONSTRUCTION	45
1 The problem of historical knowledge	45
2 The central paradox	49
3 Uniformitarianism and historical truth	53
4 An example and some objections	58
5 Two closing reflections	61
3 THE TELEOLOGY PROBLEM: CAN LANGUAGE CHANGE BE 'FUNCTIONAL'?	64
3.1 Introductory	64
3.2 Ground-clearing: function and the 'how else?' strategy	66
3.3 Functional explanation, 1: preservation of contrast	69

3.4	Functional explanation, 2: minimization of allomorphy	71
3.5	Functional explanation, 3: avoidance of homophony	75
3.6	'Teleology of function' and 'teleology of purpose'	81
3.7	How do we define a function? 'Survival' and 'fitness'	83
3.8	'Paradigmatic natural goods' and the problem of 'dysfunction'	86
3.9	A note on teleology and the system concept	88
3.10	Some preliminary conclusions	89

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 3:

FOUR PROBLEMS RELATED TO THE QUESTION OF FUNCTION

1	Functional load	91
2	Variation and function	93
3	Locating functions: the unobservability paradox	94
4	Are functions individual or collective?	96

4	CAUSALITY AND 'THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE'	98
4.1	Where do we go from here?	98
4.2	Some implications of the positivist view	100
4.3	Causality in living systems	103
4.4	Preliminary implications of Mayr's analysis	108
4.5	Excursus: Scriven on non-predictive explanation	109
4.6	Some reasons why language change ought to be indeterministic (Saussure)	114
4.7	A radical autonomy thesis	119
4.8	Explaining change in an autonomous theory	126
4.9	What really bothered Saussure	129
4.10	Functionalism in a cultural perspective	133
4.11	Historical uniqueness, emergence, and 'reducibility'	137

5	CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS: THE LIMITS OF DEDUCTIVISM AND SOME ALTERNATIVES	143
5.1	Prospective summary	143
5.2	Some criticisms of positivist rationality	147
5.3	Different kinds of 'knowing': private, community and public rationality	151
5.4	Intelligibility: non-'scientific' components	156
5.5	Non-explanatory insight: empirical and rational components	160
5.6	In conclusion: new hope for the Laodiceans	169

	REFERENCES	173
--	------------	-----

	INDEX	182
--	-------	-----