

Titel: BREV TIL: Eli Fischer-Jørgensen FRA: unsure (1956-01-11)

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Anvendt udgave: Louis Hjelmslev og hans kreds

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Stanke
11/1/56

Dear Miss Fischer-Vorgensen,

I agree that I may have exaggerated. There is of course no precise limit to emancipation from previous linguistic expectations. But it would seem that this is far more gradual than Hjelmslev would seem to suggest.

By the way in a footnote to your last paper for AL you speak in this connection of glossematics in its most recent form (or equivalent words) thus suggesting that Hjelmslev did originally neglect the 'trial-and-error' aspect of linguistic analysis. Also, he hardly stresses this even now. If the criticisms of Martinet and others were from the beginning entirely mistaken in this respect (as Miss Sierstema asserts) why could this not have been made clear as soon as these criticisms were made? It is odd enough that they position here was not made clear before. And even now poor Miss Sierstema seems unable to bring any direct evidence from glossematic writings: her best evidence from publications (as opposed to private conversation) is your footnote referred to, which on account of your reservation about the newest form of glossematics does not fully bear her out.

I am in difficulties now with a review of Sierstema's book. Actually I sent in a review a few months ago but it got lost in the post. Meanwhile I had begun to wonder whether the review was appropriate, so when I got a renewed request for the review I did not send back a copy of the old one.

Really, as the work of a young Dutch linguist, the book impressed me favorably. Its logical standard is without any doubt far superior to that of Cohen's work, which you dealt with so leniently on the grounds that worse might have been expected from Holland. It is also very modestly written, unlike Cohen's which has some quite ridiculous attacks on Martinet, whom he had not taken the trouble to understand. I had therefore written what was (for me!) a very favorable review indeed. And I certainly do not intend to write a negative review now. There are occasions on which one should not be flabert. (?)

However the book is written in quite abominable English, and the fatal influence of Reichling is often too apparent (particularly on the word). There is also something slightly comic about the tone: some perfectly good criticisms are blended with elaborate and irrelevant compliments to Hjelmslev (in particularly bad English -- it is notoriously more easy to be rude than polite in a foreign language). Since it is difficult to say such things in a review, I had just left them out.

But this means that the review gave an unduly favorable impression as compared with others -- it also looks as though I have a grudge against Hjelmslev; and hence want to belittle him. Actually I think that most of his work is extremely perverse and singularly lacking in rigour according to his own standards. But at the same time I think that his wrongness is often more suggestive than other people's rightness. But this is also a difficult thing to say!

I wish J. could have got out of Hjelmslev what he does mean by the 'paradigmatic relations'. I asked Tooby why they were not in his book and he replied that he found them unclear and unprofitable. They are certainly unclear. The only clear meaning one readily gives them is contradicted by the example. One expects them to be relations of commutation, but this is contradicted by the examples (vowel-consonant *and/andé/* being the paradigmatic counterpart of syntagmatic solidarity, which ought to mean that vowel may be invariably commutable with consonant and vice-versa.) As for the syntagmatic relations, Tiertsema is quite right in finding a contradiction. Yet these things are at the very centre of the theory. I suspect that the paradigmatic relations are a hang-over from the period of *La Catégorie des Vowels*, but this does not help much to understand what they mean. (And anyway why is it that the four possible commutational relations, *and* which would answer to the four possible syntagmatic relations, have no place in glossematic theory, where commutation is supposed to be the central principle? I once said jokingly to Hjelmslev that he was not a glossematist, and I am inclined to say it again.)

If you could make any brief remarks to solve these puzzles I'd be grateful. But I must really send the review in within the fortnight.

I have not got Hockett's book yet, though it was ordered from my Oxford bookseller 3 months ago. It would be characteristic of Hockett to fret himself unduly about the definitions of some terms while leaving others completely undefined. He is one of those all-or-none people.

Yours sincerely

Ch

This is not improved by the fact that consonant-vowel also serves as the example par excellence of syntagmatic selection. I should have taken it to be at the same time an example of paradigmatic constellation: vowel being sometimes but not always commutable with consonant and vice-versa. But it is not, and why it is not is, until we've been told, anybody's guess.

Eric Harny writes to say he is arriving in Istanbul on Saturday. He wants to meet you in America. I'm looking forward to seeing him.