

Titel: BREV TIL: Eli Fischer-Jørgensen FRA: Charles Ernest Bazell (1955-02-09)

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Anvendt udgave: Louis Hjelmslev og hans kreds

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Istanbul 9/2/55

Dear Miss Fischer-Jørgensen,
 Many thanks for your letter. You have very well overcome the obscurities of my note, for which I apologise. There are no serious misunderstandings.

As for details

(i) As you say, "intrinsic similarity" and "composition" may often come to the same thing. This is so if we confine ourselves to a given medium. We say that two sounds are intrinsically similar, as to say that they are similarly composed. But even here there is some difference of usage. One might say that English and Danish *h* were intrinsically similar, without committing oneself to saying that either could be decomposed at all. And a unit that cannot be decomposed is not usually said to have any composition. But of course, two intrinsically similar units, if they can be split into parts, must have the same composition.

Now I had not noticed when writing the paper, that I had implied that Jakobson's "minimal units" are not, for him, really minimal units. His substantial terms, such as *nasal*, can of course be taken as minimal, but a formal term such as *compact*, since it is not a matter of distributional form, must be a matter of composition. Compactness refers to a relation (let us say "nearness") between the parts of a unit; it presupposes therefore that the unit has parts. But of course it is only when one takes the terms at their face value that this holds. Actually, the term *compact* is a formal label for a phonetic characteristic, not just "nearness of parts", but "nearness of acoustic formants", this "nearness" in its turn being at a lower level of analysis than feature-analysis in Jakobson's sense, whereby it is the effect of the relations, taken globally, that is treated as minimal.

(ii) By functional and non-functional I meant, as you suspected, "having" and "not having", a distinctive function. I would have done better just to use the word *distinctive*. But this, I think, is a common use as illustrated by Martinet's "Phonemics as functional phonetics". (My use in "Linguistic Form" is quite different; but not many readers would be likely to know this booklet.)

(iii) You give a very fair account of what I mean by form and substance. I was content to repeat the usual definition of "having the same form" (isomorphism) without entering into the question of what would be meant by "having the same substance". I just took it that a phonetic text is par excellence the substance investigated by the linguist. Anything similar from the linguist's point of view (e.g. a graphic text) is substantial in the same way.

But "situations" are not substantial in the same way. A linguist may examine phonetic facts to find out how far they are relevant, but he never examines the facts of a situation in order to find out whether these are relevant. One is tempted to say that the linguist "picks out" certain phonetic facts in the speech-continuum, and also "picks out" certain facts from the flux of events like a child who grasps approximately what is intended by the word *walk*, in answer to the question "what are you doing?". But this is almost like comparing "picking a flower" and "picking the captain of a team". There is no captain, until he has been "picked". True, neither the linguist nor the child create the situation, but they participate in it; it is not the same situation without them. One does not start from things, in the same way as one starts from sounds, in a linguistic analysis. When one tries to start from things, in linguistic analysis, one very soon finds that one is really starting, not from things, but from a different language.

Perhaps I may send some more remarks; but meanwhile I hasten to send the original, in case I spill red wine on it and am hence only able to send a copy!

Best wishes

