

Titel: BREV TIL: Charles Ernest Bazell FRA: Eli Fischer-Jørgensen (1953-01-07)

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Anvendt udgave: Louis Hjelmslev og hans kreds

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January 7, 1953

Dear professor Bazell,

One of my good intentions for the new year is to answer letters, so now I start with you.

Thank you for your card from 18/12/52 (it seems to be a new habit of yours to date and even sign your letters -- if you proceed along these lines, I should propose as the next step to write on your off-prints -- or have it printed -- from which periodical (and which year) they are taken, that would make it possible for other people to quote you -- e.g. what about "Glossematic definitions", "Structural Notes", review of Togeby ?).

I wonder that you could read my article three times without noticing that we agree completely on the point you mentioned in your card. ~~xxxx~~ I said explicitly that this article was not glossematic, but phonemic in a traditional sense, particularly in the sense of identifying by substance e.g. p. 11. This of course also holds for position (explicitly said on p. 25 -- "Position is here considered as a phonetic feature") --. But from a strict glossematic point of view this should of course not be done. And it is evident that (phonetically) initial consonants in two different languages may be differently defined formally, e.g. ~~xxxx~~ final cons. in one language like initial cs. in another, this has been said on p. 13-14. But it might of course have been exemplified somewhat more. On the whole much has been left out in the final version, above all some long discussions of glossematic method (criticism of the syllabeme, and of the functions etc.), the article was too long, and it would be ~~xxxx~~ too difficult to understand for most readers. -- in some of his articles (e.g. language et parle in Cahiers D.E.) Hjelmslev seems to have mixed up "initial" and "final" in a substantial and in a formal sense, but in his complete theory, there are different terms for it, "initial" and "final" are here terms belonging to the substance, and are not the basis for categories. -

Now some comments to your later articles;

I am somewhat in doubt about your often repeated dogma about the converging criteria. Perhaps this is the most practical final analysis, particularly if one wants to compare with "psychophonemes" and the like; but it may be dangerous to jump to this sort of analysis, better first to try single criteria of different sorts and compare the results.

In your review of Togeby you talk about a vicious circle in the commutation; we cannot know whether p and b in pa,ba are different phonemes before knowing whether the contents of pa and ba are formally different (and vice versa). -- But there is no circle if it is kept in mind that ~~xxxx~~ whereas the commutation as a function may be said to apply to formal units, the commutation test cannot be said to concern form; it is only through this test that we find out what is distinctive, and the differences with which we operate are substantial. We substitute one sound for another and state whether this entails a new meaning and vice versa. -- If it does, then we ~~xxxx~~ can decide that both the two sounds and the two meanings are manifestations of formally different units. The problem how small substantial differences should be considered conclusive is rarely of practical importance due to the lack of conformity between expression and content in the sign. Generally a small difference in the expression may convey an evident difference in the content and vice versa, e.g. there is probably a minimal difference of content between "sister" and "brother", but an evident combination of differences in the expression, and vice versa for e.g. hat-cat. -- There is only one domain where the problem arises: in intonation and emphasis because here we find conformity: x the lower the pitch the more finality; etc. -- And this makes the commutation dubious in this field. -

... the same review you give the example that commutation between bild -
blit would suffice to prove commutation in spild-spilt though the latter
pair do not happen to be distinguished in content". But this is not cor-
rect. If you mean that spild-spilt occur with the same meaning, then
glossematics would formulate it so that there is ~~xxxxxxx~~ overlapping
(suspension of commutation) between d and t, in certain cases, - if the
meaning is that one of these words does not exist in English, Hjelmslev
would not talk of commutation either. - In the corresponding case from
the content: light (un-heavy and un-dark) the glossematic formulation
would probably be overlapping (syncretism) between heavy and dark domi-
nated by un. -

Whether the units are simultaneous or not would not be of any impor-
tance for a glossematic analysis, cp. that η is analysed as ng in Danish
etc. -

I have been very interested in your "structural notes". Particularly
what you said about immediate constituents and the mixture of the cri-
teria of cohesion and juncture was very convincing, but I do not under-
stand how the "relevancy"-criterion η can be said to be glossematic.

In the chapter about sememics I think you are ~~xxxxx~~ right in reproach-
ing η for sometimes describing sign-contents instead of describing
the content system as such, but this criticism does not apply to the same
extent to Hjelmslev; on the whole you identify too often η with glos-
sematics, - and by the way, such phenomena as singular plural, present
tense etc. are probably minimal content units (which may have, but often
do not have, a separate expression, just as some phonemes may have a se-
parate content (e.g. a in English)). -

What you say about zero is very difficult to understand, and I have
not succeeded in finding out whether you ~~xxx~~ call the feature of an un-
marked member of an opposition zero. - And the Danish examples on p.
14 are completely enigmatic to me. - In $asa-taa$ the aspiration is said
to be opposed to a variety of consonants (after dentals probably only to
 r), in $haar-saar$ is said to be commutable with nasality (how?) and
perhaps spirantality (?) beside with zero. There are lots of consonants
before $-aar$, but no nasality or spirantality as such.

I think that you are right that paradigmatic and syntagmatic func-
tions are not simple logical correlates, but ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ on the other
hand it is clear that it is of interest to know about a phoneme partly
with which other phonemes it has commutation, partly with which it can
be combined.

I am sending you some offprints soon, I am only waiting for the
offprints of an article in JASA in order to send the whole bunch together.

I have not done much this autumn. I was very tired after my stay
in America. But I hope to finish various, most phonetic, things in the
coming year.

Phonetically there was much to learn in America, particularly at
the Haskins laboratory in New York. Phonemically there was not much
to learn, except what has been published, and the same is true about gene-
ral linguistics on the whole. But I was glad to meet Pike personally and
see how his group works. He is intelligent and charming and sufficiently
crazy to be interesting from other points of view than the phonemical one.
(Did you know that Pike managed to unite the religious and linguistic
aspects of his activity by considering the trinity as a phoneme with three
allophones?).

Yours sincerely

PS. I do not bother about titles and the sort and let people call me
whatever they like, (Mr. included), but now you have written "dr." so many
times that I think I have better tell you that I am not a "dr.", at any
rate only in the German or American sense of the word. I do not like writ-
ting big books, - but I have still not quite given up the hope that
on day I might pull myself together and do it.