

Titel: BREV TIL: Eli Fischer-Jørgensen FRA: Charles Ernest Bazell

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Anvendt udgave: Louis Hjelmslev og hans kreds

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Rumeli Cadde 80/3  
Koseoglu Apt 3,  
Osmanbey  
Istanbul

Dear Dr. Fischer-Jorgensen,

I have just returned from the semantic conference at Nice, from which I had intended to send you my best greetings through Hjelmslev. But our farewell conversation took another turn. Like all the other participants I was delighted at Hjelmslev's part in the conference; there was hardly any question, however seemingly remote from glossematics, in which he did not show a lively interest. His old-fashioned European courtesy was rivalled only by Devoto's (one cannot beat an Italian at this!), and I felt quite ashamed at the manner in which I have occasionally expressed views hostile to glossematics.

Your article for *Recherches* entered into one of many almost interminable arguments with Lotz (limited, in effect, only by the closing-hours of French taverns). On the question of the "unmarked" and "zero" he takes the view, naturally enough from the American standpoint, that it is merely a matter of words. It has to be remembered that the distinction of the arbitrary and motivated plays a negligible part in his system, no part at all in that of most Americans, a subordinate part in yours, while in mine it is the essence of the division langue/parole (the question of relevance deriving all importance from this distinction). To say that there is a "singular" with a "zero-termination", and that this correspondence is motivated, is the same for me as saying that there is no singular, just as to say that a language uses stress, and that this stress is always motivated by the effort to stress some signifié, is the same as saying that in the language concerned there is no stress (qua feature of la langue). It would of course be useless for me to insist on this if it were merely an eccentric use of la langue. But on the contrary, it is the normal use of everybody so long as they do not feel the heavy hand of the pedant (armed with the latest technical nonsense from America) on their shoulders. And the "brute facts" (which I am last of all concerned to deny), have their harmless place where they really belong, and which is not la langue.

It turns out that Jakobson himself would have preferred the zero-interpretation if it had not been that then his  $\bar{t}$ , having no positive features, would be flatly identical with absolute zero! Had he therefore accepted a system in which there were at least one equipollent opposition, we should have heard nothing of negative or unmarked features in his new phoneme-schemes. And had he noticed one small point, we should not have heard of them even within his system. But this small point would need a long elaboration, and here, *sauf erreur*, you are the debtor.

Very sincerely yours

