

Titel: BREV TIL: Eli Fischer-Jørgensen FRA: Charles Ernest Bazell (1950-10-12)

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Anvendt udgave: Louis Hjelmslev og hans kreds

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Osmenbey,
Rumeli Caddesi 80,
Köseoglu Ap. 3,
Sığılı,
Istanbul 12/10/50

Dear Dr. Fischer-Jørgensen,

Though my two replies already made together almost the length of your letter (a length you describe as "too much"), I prefer to continue, since I find the habit some correspondents have of answering only the criticisms they find it easiest to reply to, a highly irritating one; and will not adopt it.

You agree with the more narrow definition of determination in A.L., but say that my application is too narrow: the vowel determined by a consonant in the same syllable. But I cannot see what is gained by using "determination" here. Once we have said that every syllable has a vowel, we have said all that need be said. In fact, if we wish to use the term at all, it is better to say that a syllable determines a vowel (not of course syntactically, but in the system).

Indeed, even the less pretentious phrasing "There cannot be a consonant in the syllable without a vowel" seems misleading. What could be the point in saying that "there cannot be arms to a chair without legs", when all we mean is that every chair has legs, but not every chair has arms. On the other hand it makes sense to say that no chair has arms without a back, since not every chair (I am including stools) has a back, but when it does and only when it does can it also have arms. The arms determine the back, but the legs do not.

In fact, I do not really think I went far enough in half-suggesting that a given sequence only was necessary. Every relation should be the same. In fact, the expression knows only three relevant relations as a rule (sequence, prominence, and juncture), and all apply to the instances given. (Of course only syntactic relations count, not relations like "shorter than", based on features the phonemes have in themselves).

On the other hand I have to confess that I did ill to choose the term morpheme. Since for other (smaller) categories the whole category is named after the nucleus, it would be logical (since I say that signs are the nuclear members of the morpheme-category) to call them all quite simply "signs". But then I could not have used the word "sign" in the title, since this would have been a gross petitio principii. And the word "sign" in a title always suggests that one is about to be treated to a feast of platitudes based on misunderstandings of de Saussure.

I am sorry not to be able to accept Jakobson's sort of analysis, since I should have a lot of harmless fun if I could. For instance I would propose to distinguish close and loose juncture of simultaneous features; and I should say that l and r had close juncture of consonantality and vocality, since the features are, as it were, merged; and that the nasals had loose juncture of these features, since the aperture is quite separate from the closure. (In Gantieu-Trubetzkoy Jakobson does take nasals as a sort of compromise between consonant and vowel; but it has disappeared from the complex () phonemes later). Of course this would not do for a language with nasal vowels, but one does not see why Serbian should suffer for the fault of French. And anyway one could take the French nasal vowels as combinations of a vowel with a "lsx" nasal, as opposed to the combination an with a tense nasal. The nasals would then participate in the correlation of tensity, and the inventory would be happily reduced. Ingenuity of this sort is only too easy: straight and broad is the path that leads to Hell.

As you say, the footnote in the Prague lecture (p.11) is inaccurate, so far as my general definition of determination is concerned. I first purge determination of those characteristics which make it incomparable to subordination, and then speak as though I had not (as though, in fact, it is still the relation described in the article for A.L., which of course is not the case. I think that the former relation is more useful for the ~~ix~~ content, and the latter for the expression. We never need operate with both).

I think I should abandon the term "reference". Partly it would answer to the loose Hjelmslevian determination criticised, and is unprofitable; partly it could be covered by contradictory constituent analyses. And this, I think, is to have answered the negative side of your letter; there is still much to say on the positive.

Yours sincerely

CBB

Postscriptum: On re-glancing at your letter I notice several more points outstanding. (i) You say that the distinction of neutralisation and syncretism at the end of the note for Arch. Ing. is unclear. Would you regard the nom.-acc. syncretism in Latin as a sort of neutralisation, with Hjelmslev, although agreeing that it is not an affair of the content? One certainly could, ~~but I think that this might have consequences that you would be unable to accept.~~

Firstly we have not here to do with an opposition of marked and unmarked (the content of the nominative is usually unmarked, but then, as you agree, there is no neutralisation in the content).

Secondly, the equivalent of these syncretisms of formative in the content are the syncretisms of what I called "role of phonemes". Now the instances I gave in the Acts may indeed be regarded as neutralisations, since they are motivated (like the use of plural for dual in the Greek first person) by an opposition of marked to unmarked. On the other hand the syncretism of nom. and acc. is not so motivated, as shown by the fact that it is the expression of the marked term (-um neut= acc. masc.) which dominates in the position of syncretism. It resembles rather the syncretism of roles as between e/s in *sitzen/sass*; i.e. the fact that nom. and acc. have the same expression is not motivated by their semantic relation any more than the fact that e and s have the same role (as part of the expression of the content "sit") is motivated by their phonemic relation. And you would certainly not wish to say the opposition e/s is neutralised in this morphological type. We have to do with a mere syncretism in either case (not of course in the Hjelmslevian meaning used in the Acts, which is a form of neutralisation).

(ii) By role I mean the partial or total expression of a content. It is no more illogical to say that a partially expresses the content "sit", than it is to say that the case-meaning is part of the content of -ibus, though one cannot localise the content of s, i, t independently any more than the g/ff expression of case as opposed to number. One could indeed simply substitute "content" for "role", though it sounds much odder to say that a phoneme has a content than it does to say that a case has an expression. (But no doubt merely because the content-unit usually has an isolable expression).

This parallelism was not noted by Hjelmslev, indeed it was not looked for. Linguists still tend to look for superficially similar facts on the two planes rather than converse facts. They are rather like children learning geography, who have understood that an island in marine structure answers to a lake in land-structure, but still think of the surface of the island as answering to the surface of the lake. If asked what corresponds to a mountain on land, they will say there is nothing similar in the sea, or perhaps think of a big wave as the nearest thing! And even when they have grasped that the bottom of the sea answers to the surface of the land, they may still think of the convex rather than concave forms at the seabottom as the equivalent of mountain-sides. Hjelmslev (like others, especially the Prague and Geneva schools, for the latter e.g. Bally and Frei) is like a child looking for the marine equivalent of the mountain, and when he sees a big wave cries ~~out that he has found it!~~

(iii) I am looking forward to your article on the relational definition of phonemes?--do you mean by this the functional definition, like Hjelmslev's of the vowel? It seems to me now that the phonemes should be defined by overt rather than pattern-relations (the overt relations, of course, to be functionally defined). For instance the definition of vowel and consonant should prove easy once one has a definition of prominence. (The same is true of the semantic units, considered quite apart from their expressional form.) The pattern-relations are not very profitably applied in the domain of phonemics, as I noticed from Kurylowicz's attempts to apply them. On the other hand, in the domain of the Janus-faced signs, it is only the pattern-relations which apply, since the overt relations contradict each other on the two planes.

(Kurylowicz' comparisons of sign with phoneme are of course quite illegitimate; I have often been guilty of the same mistake myself (still in the Acts, even while protesting against it) but it is easier to see the mistake when it is made by some other scholar. This is the function of the vast and otherwise valueless Literatur on our subject: it gives an unflattering image of our own imbecilities!)

xxx In your letter. But in your Alsmen Fonetik p. 95 you seem to agree with Hjelmslev.