

Titel: BREV TIL: Eli Fischer-Jørgensen FRA: unsure (1950-09-30)

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Anvendt udgave: Louis Hjelmslev og hans kreds

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Dear Dr. Fischer-Jørgensen,

Your letter reached me only now, since I was on travel.
Please forgive the hasty reply.
Firstly your suggestion that "subordination is a pattern relation and determination is a syntagmatic relation", i.e. determination does not belong together with subordination or cohesion. This is very just in one sense. One can say that A determines B before any sentence has been formed, whereas it would make nonsense to say "A is subordinate to B" outside the context of a sentence. Only by determination, qua pattern relation, I meant the satisfaction, within the phrase, of determination qua syntagmatic relation.

But it must be confessed that this does not bring determination quite down to the level of the other pattern-relations. Various further operations are necessary before it can be made to behave like one. Of these the most important is the rule that any element is determinant if it has a place in the chain normally held by a determinant in the stricter sense. Another is the rule that it only holds within immediate constituents. Such rules are superfluous for subordination and cohesion. In fact one might say that determination is peripheral in the domain of pattern-relations, whereas the others are nuclear. It does not answer to the definition, but it behaves similarly to those relations which do.

From your remark on a plural implying a singular I take it you must agree with Jakobson that nasality implies orality, voice breath, tenseness etc. For me orality, breath, laxness etc. are all the same, namely plain zero, though this zero may (so to speak) take on a different colour according to the direction from which we look at it. (Of course in circumstances the plural or nasality might be unmarked, but then they in turn would be best regarded as zero.). It is true that we may express the fact that we /~~xxxxxx~~/ have substituted zero for nasality (x > 0) by saying that we have substituted orality for nasality, but it is surely rather odd; isn't it really the whole point of neutralisation that a feature is replaced by zero, rather than by another feature (which would represent no economy)? (Which incidentally is one reason why I have to agree that I have overworked the notion of neutralisation to cover cases in which zero is not concerned. Whether "defective distribution" is the best term I do not know; it rather suggests that one would expect to find the phoneme at this point, and I previously used it to describe cases where one would, e.g. "cases vides", and the non-occurrence of gr-
vis-
vis-
al- that I called neutralisation, but rather the absence of ls-
vis-
vis-
al- in a language where they can both occur medially. I should also perhaps have made it clearer that the examples at the beginning of the article have nothing to do with neutralisation, but merely with irrelevance. In fact the title was rather unhappy, since it was only at the end of the article that I remembered again that I had set out to talk about neutralisations and not about syntactic relations in general.

And I am afraid, as you say, that the remarks on order were rather obscure. By phonemic order I meant simply the opposition before/after. The order of phonemes in a given word is not mentioned, since this is a morphological fact like the occurrence of a given phoneme in the word. And if the fact that a phoneme occurs in a word means that we have this phoneme, in presentia, in the word, then the relations in this word are also in presentia. But if "in presentia" implies a text, as it often seems to, then this is untrue, since the order of phonemes in the word is fixed before any text. "Bad dog" is already a bit of text, whereas "bad" may be a bit of text or not. If we contemplate bad as a traditional form, and still say that b, a, d are in presentia, then it is most deceptive to say, as Saussure would have, that "bad dog" shows elements in presentia, since "bad dog" is not part of the language at all. A lot of confusion can be caused by such remarks as Hjelmslev's,

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that elements in praesentia are those we have together, so to speak, before our eyes since we may have either a linguistic form or an utterance (a "text") before our eyes, and the meaning of "before our eyes" is totally different in the two cases.

I suspect that in the use of in absentia resp. praesentia we have a lamentable conflation of several different contrasts, that between system and text, that between the simultaneous and the successive, and that between the substitutable and the combinable. I confess that I am the only linguist who cannot understand what is meant by "in praesentia", and that I ought never to have used the term.

It is very interesting to hear that you also insisted to Hjelmslev that the synchronisms of cases are not synchronisms of content. I think this point was the origin of my article for A.L., since his invitation to contribute arrived just after a letter of mine on this point. It is rather a primitive point perhaps, and one in which Jespersen would have agreed with us. But it is a characteristic of leaders of schools, which Hjelmslev himself has noted in his "post-mortem" on Jespersen for A.L., that they are not liable to accept other views even when these represent a continuation of their own.

So far as the principle of continuing analysis into simultaneous units is concerned, I agree entirely with you and Jakobson. Simultaneity is merely the zero-opposition of succession. But the analysis must be continued in the same way. I will try to prove, in a less hasty letter, that his analysis of the simultaneous units is not strictly parallel. Meanwhile

Yours sincerely

I stop only to catch the last acceptance of air-mail. I will write at greater length, and I hope more lucidly, in about a week's time.

P.S. I was glad to have your general agreement with the views in Archivum. As for the vagueness of the "definition" of morpheme (if it is fair to call it one), this was intentional. There is I think room for two sorts of definition, very vague ones which serve before the system of a given language has been discovered, and very precise ones to describe the structure finally arrived at. It is rather dangerous for a linguist to be quite certain what he is looking for at the beginning of analysis: he is too liable to find it even when it is not there. And it is doubtful if any very precise definition ever would be satisfied in a language for which it had not been devised ad hoc.

The definition in A.L. (would "union" be any better than "association?") would lead to absurdities if applied as a "rule of thumb" from the beginning; and if it were made more precise it would lead to still more absurdities. Definitions should be rather like the rules of a select club, in which the conditions of admission are not made very clear, but nevertheless great care is taken in examining the credentials of each separate candidate for membership; each is considered on his own merits. The good grammarian is like a man who may even have forgotten the rules of the club, but yet can state, when asked, the precise reasons which led him to vote for the admittance of a disputed member.

And just for this reason I quite agree, of course, with the use of morphological criteria in phonemic analysis (as exemplified by Danish u/v you cite). We do not need to remember whether our definition of the phoneme made any provision permitting or prohibiting their use. Having found out that phonetic and morphological identity go normally together, we are quite entitled to make use of the fact (while remaining prepared to find a language in which it would not be true). Some American scholars object to this on the grounds that we shall then never know whether two units correspond, having taken the one already to help us with the other; but the answer is surely that nothing prevents us from asking afterwards whether the result could have been reached without the aid of such secondary criteria, and if it could not have been then the correspondence, in fact, is the result of a generalisation (but none the worse for this, providing the fact is not denied).

Is it true that the more reductions made the less functions differentiated? If Danish p and k are functionally identical, labiality and postalpalatality are not. But I may not have followed you here.

If I understand, you consider the asymmetry of the two planes not to be a matter of principle (in other words one could construct a language in which the same sort of analysis could be undertaken in both). In this I agree. But by the way, why two planes? If there seemed to be a system of three planes A B C, would this make three systems (AB/AC and BC)?

Postscriptum: I have just received Kurylowicz' "Le probleme du classement des cas (Krakow Bultn 1949) which reminds me of a point omitted in the discussion of relations. Kurylowicz remarks (P.38) that it would be sinning against good method to use commutation to establish a case-system, since the cases differ in their syntactic positions. So far so good. But then he goes on to say that case-systems such as Jakobson and Hjelmslev construct (with neuter and positive members of a correlation etc.) are therefore a priori impossible; the cases may make up fragments of systems, but not a system. And here the conclusion, though in practice true, entirely fails to follow from the premisses.

This is shown by the phonological parallel. The oppositions of prominence (stress and accent generally) can also not be established by commutation. We cannot substitute strong for weak stress within the word, but merely strong-weak by weak-strong etc. Now the role which is played by the syllable in phonology is played among the cases by the nominal bases. Latin nom.-us and acc.-um are not commutable: the opposition is not between -us/-um but between X-us, Y-um/ Y-us Xum where X and Y are any nominal bases; of course, with all the reservations as to the propriety of speaking of an opposition when we have only one relation, e.g. "before", "more prominent than" capable of two orientations. But it would, I think, be fair to talk of a permutational opposition as contrasted with a commutational. "Syntagmatic" will hardly do, since it applies to the relations of the terms in praesentia (sit venia termino!) rather than to the orientational opposition that their reversibility illustrates. The permutational opposition is like the commutational a minimal opposition, and it is this fact (rather than any nonsense about "the same place in the chain", which begs the whole question since sequence is also a permutational opposition) which should be the criterion of a paradigm.

I believe that the analogy holds much more closely than may at first sight appear. It must be remembered that we have only a given construction (subject-object) under consideration, not nom. and acc. as a whole, since the latter are not symmetrical to the plane of content and may in other constructions contain different "figures" of content (how little use Hjelmslev makes of figures in the content, in fact almost only in the lexical domain, where they will not work!)

The opposition of subject and object (which is mere "shorthand" for the orientational opposition implied) is itself an opposition of prominence, in the content. The opposition may be neutralised, as with the passive verb (where only the prominent member is permitted; just as in the expression only the stressed syllable is permitted in isolation --which is just to say that an isolated member in each case is prominent in relation to zero).

In my letter I did not bring in the distinction of commutative and permutative relations except incidentally. Juncture is of course commutative like the usual phonemic oppositions, and sequence permutative. Prominence, though typically permutative, may also be commutative, if different degrees of prominence are allowed at one point. The extended system thus runs:

	Equipollent-asymmetric <i>pos. neg. (1)</i>	Privative asymmetric <i>(Neg. neg. (2)</i>	Equip.-symm. <i>(Pos. pos. (0)</i>	Priv.-symm. <i>neg. pos. (1)</i>
Commutation	-----	-----	-----	-----
Permutation	sequence	prominence	-----	-----
		prominence	-----	-----
			-----	-----