

Titel: BREV TIL: Louis Hjelmslev FRA: Charles Ernest Bazell

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Anvendt udgave: Louis Hjelmslev og hans kreds

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Basell, C. B., 6

(May 1944)

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Fineikli,
Istanbul.

Dear Dr. Hjelmslev,

Many thanks for the off-prints. I hope that your book, of which the long since ordered copy has not yet been reported as sent by my booksellers, will remove any remaining scepticism about the superiority of the structural over the classical interpretations. For instance in "le contenu de -um comporte ... indifféremment singulier, neutre et degré positif"

then the -um of optimum must have a smaller content than that of magnum or else have its "positivity" is neutralised by the superlative stem. The classical theory by which gratius contained four morphemes but gratum only three, or even the pseudo-classical theory of a zero-formative in the positive are surely more economic. Anyway if -um in gratum serves to distinguish it from gratius gratō and grata so does it also from gratō and grator. One could write a book (and one day some American will) on the distinctive functions of one formative in an I-E. language. The classical theory, though probably never expounded, was to give the minimum content. It took distinctions as unidirectional, and did not conclude from the fact that gratius is distinguished from gratum, that gratum was distinguished from gratius.

Thus to your remark that "dans un cas ~~spécifique~~ tel que Rōma venir rien n'empêche de concevoir l'ablatif comme contractant un rapport de réaction avec le verbe" it would doubtless have answered "indeed not, only the relation has already been disposed of more economically under another rubric."

I heard only a year ago that Jespersen was dead. Your necrologie naturally gives only a minimum of criticism. It is surprising that a theory so imperfect as that of the three ranks should have won such general admiration; Jespersen not only never troubled to define junction and nexus, he never even showed curiosity about the special relations of this distinction to his second rank; he has practically nothing to say about the assumed "primariness" of the object-noun, and what he does say shows he confused the noun-semantic with the semantic combined with the object-morpheme, a confusion facilitated by his refusal to recognise positional formatives in Danish or English; he has nothing to say of subordination, the rank-theory being rather a theory of determination (in your sense?) applied to semantemes. Even in the limits of junction, where determination and subordination correspond, he seems often to have forgotten that the adverb is not so much the determiner of a determinator as the determinator within a determinator — and here any schoolboy could have put him right. Had he been content as an "ambassador of another age" to represent the classical theory (so far as defensible) against the excesses of the newer schools we might have had more useful work which under the domination of fashion will now wait a long time to be done.

Is there anyone working on early Germanic in Copenhagen now? I've not heard of or from Hammerich but he seems to have turned more to Eskimo...

Yours sincerely

C. B. Byzell

L. H. Journ. N. 119

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