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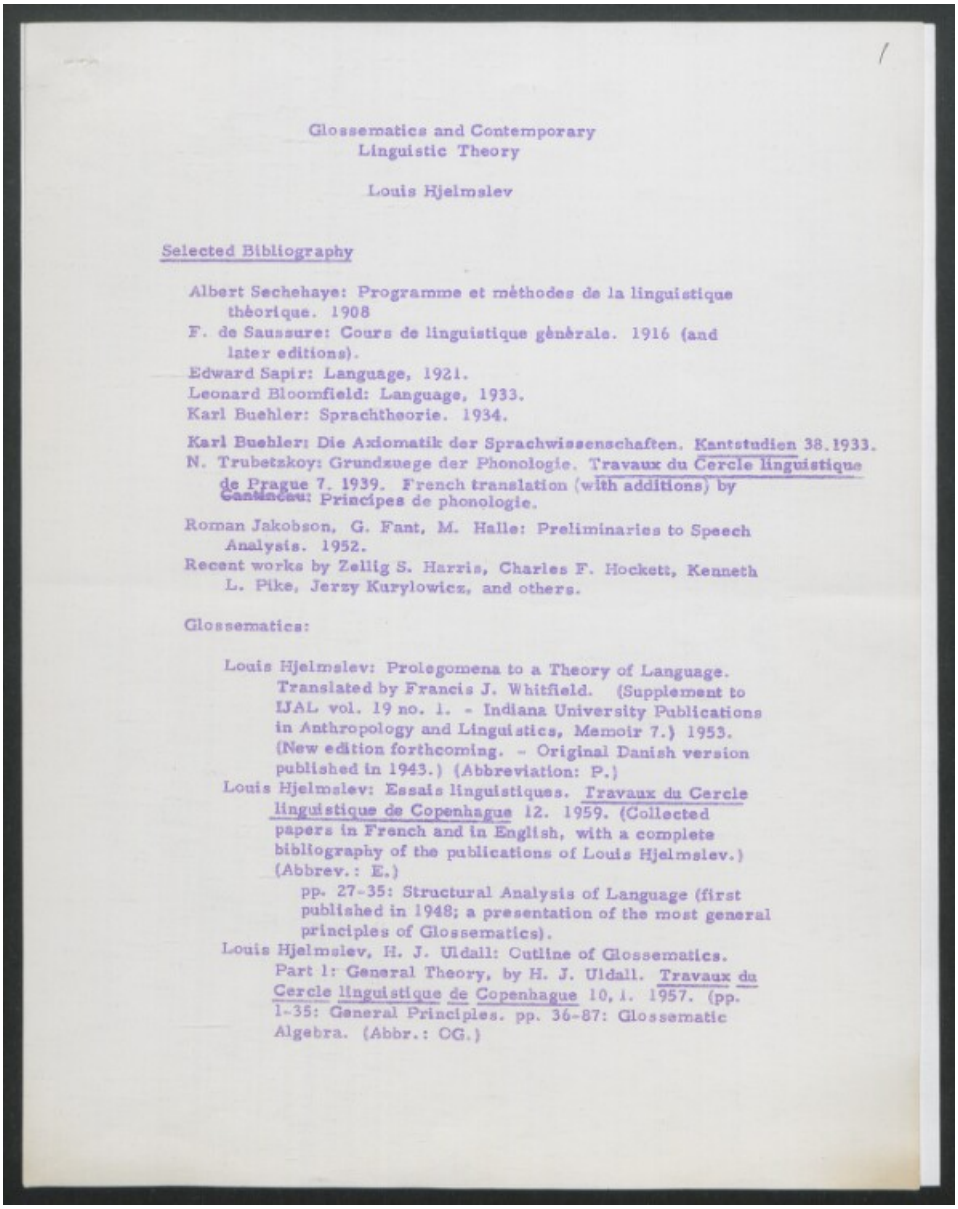

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Glossematics and Contemporary
Linguistic Theory

Louis Hjelmslev

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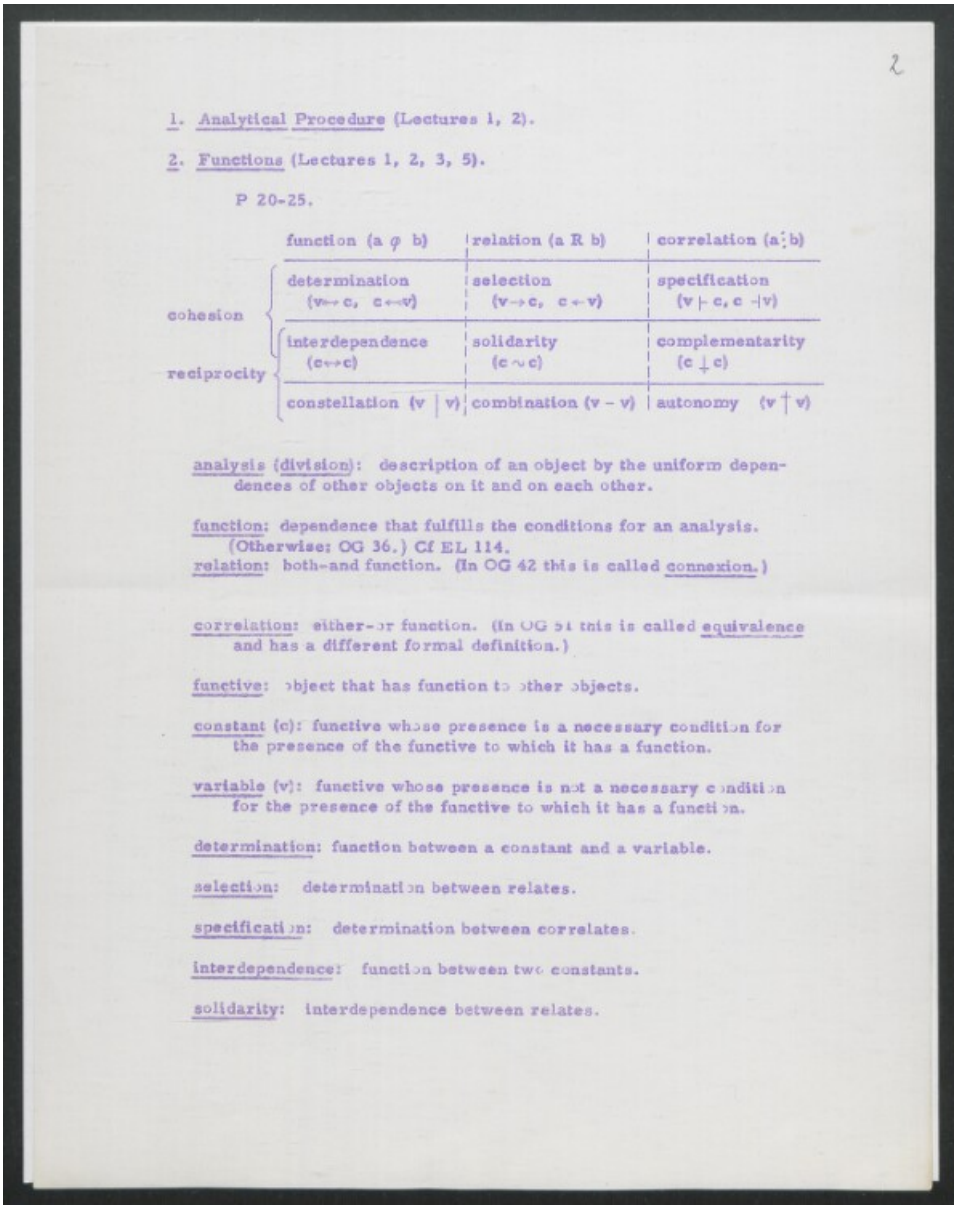

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1. Analytical Procedure (Lectures 1, 2).

2. Functions (Lectures 1, 2, 3, 5).

P 20-25.

	function (a φ b)	relation (a R b)	correlation (a ⁝ b)
cohesion	determination (v← c, c←v)	selection (v→c, c←v)	specification (v ⊢ c, c ⊣v)
reciprocity	interdependence (c↔c)	solidarity (c ∿ c)	complementarity (c ⊥ c)
	constellation (v | v)	combination (v – v)	autonomy (v † v)

analysis (division): description of an object by the uniform dependences of other objects on it and on each other.

function: dependence that fulfills the conditions for an analysis. (Otherwise: OG 36.) Cf EL 114.
relation: both-and function. (In OG 42 this is called connexion.)

correlation: either-or function. (In OG 51 this is called equivalence and has a different formal definition.)

functive: object that has function to other objects.

constant (c): functive whose presence is a necessary condition for the presence of the functive to which it has a function.

variable (v): functive whose presence is not a necessary condition for the presence of the functive to which it has a function.

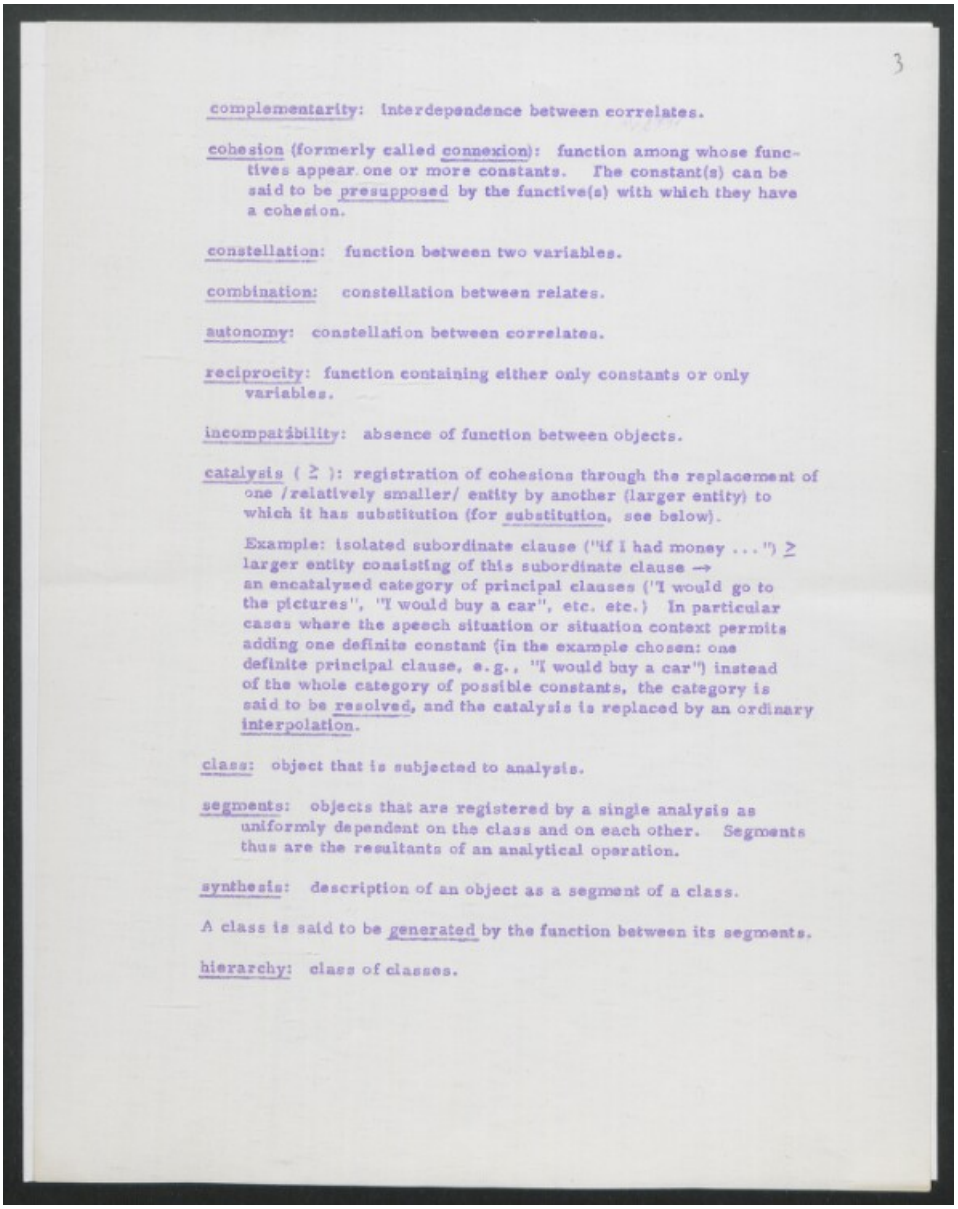
determination: function between a constant and a variable.

selection: determination between relates.

specification: determination between correlates.

interdependence: function between two constants.

solidarity: interdependence between relates.



complementarity: interdependence between correlates.

cohesion (formerly called connexion): function among whose functives appear one or more constants. The constant(s) can be said to be presupposed by the functive(s) with which they have a cohesion.

constellation: function between two variables.

combination: constellation between relates.

autonomy: constellation between correlates.

reciprocity: function containing either only constants or only variables.

incompatibility: absence of function between objects.

catalysis (≥): registration of cohesions through the replacement of one /relatively smaller/ entity by another (larger entity) to which it has substitution (for substitution, see below).

Example: isolated subordinate clause ("if I had money ...") ≥ larger entity consisting of this subordinate clause → an encatalysed category of principal clauses ("I would go to the pictures", "I would buy a car", etc. etc.) In particular cases where the speech situation or situation context permits adding one definite constant (in the example chosen: one definite principal clause, e.g., "I would buy a car") instead of the whole category of possible constants, the category is said to be resolved, and the catalysis is replaced by an ordinary interpolation.

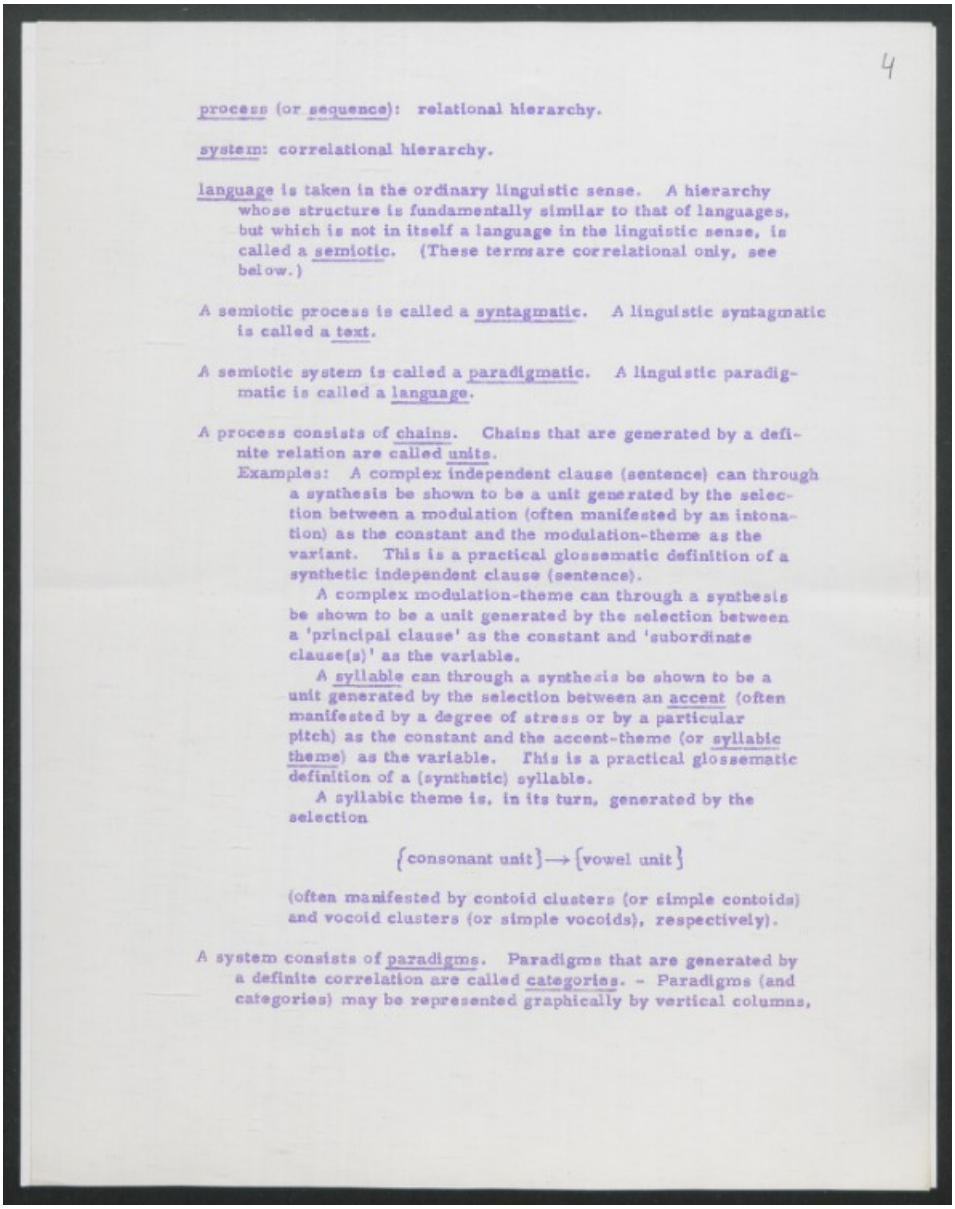
class: object that is subjected to analysis.

segments: objects that are registered by a single analysis as uniformly dependent on the class and on each other. Segments thus are the resultants of an analytical operation.

synthesis: description of an object as a segment of a class.

A class is said to be generated by the function between its segments.

hierarchy: class of classes.



process (or sequence): relational hierarchy.

system: correlational hierarchy.

language is taken in the ordinary linguistic sense. A hierarchy whose structure is fundamentally similar to that of languages, but which is not in itself a language in the linguistic sense, is called a semiotic. (These terms are correlational only, see below.)

A semiotic process is called a syntagmatic. A linguistic syntagmatic is called a text.

A semiotic system is called a paradigmatic. A linguistic paradigmatic is called a language.

A process consists of chains. Chains that are generated by a definite relation are called units.

Examples: A complex independent clause (sentence) can through a synthesis be shown to be a unit generated by the selection between a modulation (often manifested by an intonation) as the constant and the modulation-theme as the variant. This is a practical glossematic definition of a synthetic independent clause (sentence).

A complex modulation-theme can through a synthesis be shown to be a unit generated by the selection between a 'principal clause' as the constant and 'subordinate clause(s)' as the variable.

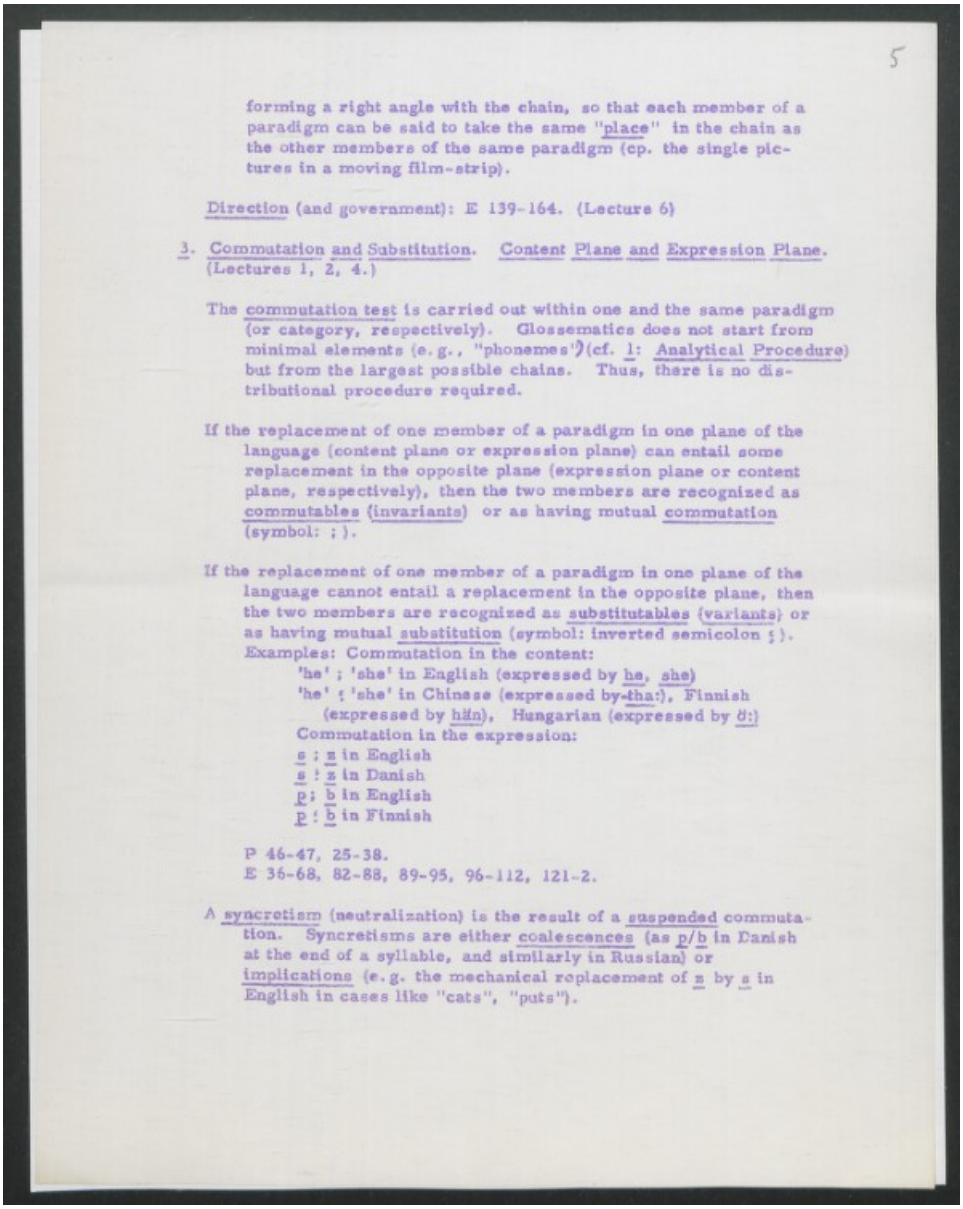
A syllable can through a synthesis be shown to be a unit generated by the selection between an accent (often manifested by a degree of stress or by a particular pitch) as the constant and the accent-theme (or syllabic theme) as the variable. This is a practical glossematic definition of a (synthetic) syllable.

A syllabic theme is, in its turn, generated by the selection

$$\{\text{consonant unit}\} \longrightarrow \{\text{vowel unit}\}$$

(often manifested by contoid clusters (or simple contoids) and vocoid clusters (or simple vocoids), respectively).

A system consists of paradigms. Paradigms that are generated by a definite correlation are called categories. - Paradigms (and categories) may be represented graphically by vertical columns,



forming a right angle with the chain, so that each member of a paradigm can be said to take the same "place" in the chain as the other members of the same paradigm (cp. the single pictures in a moving film-strip).

Direction (and government): E 139-164. (Lecture 6)

3. Commutation and Substitution. Content Plane and Expression Plane. (Lectures 1, 2, 4.)

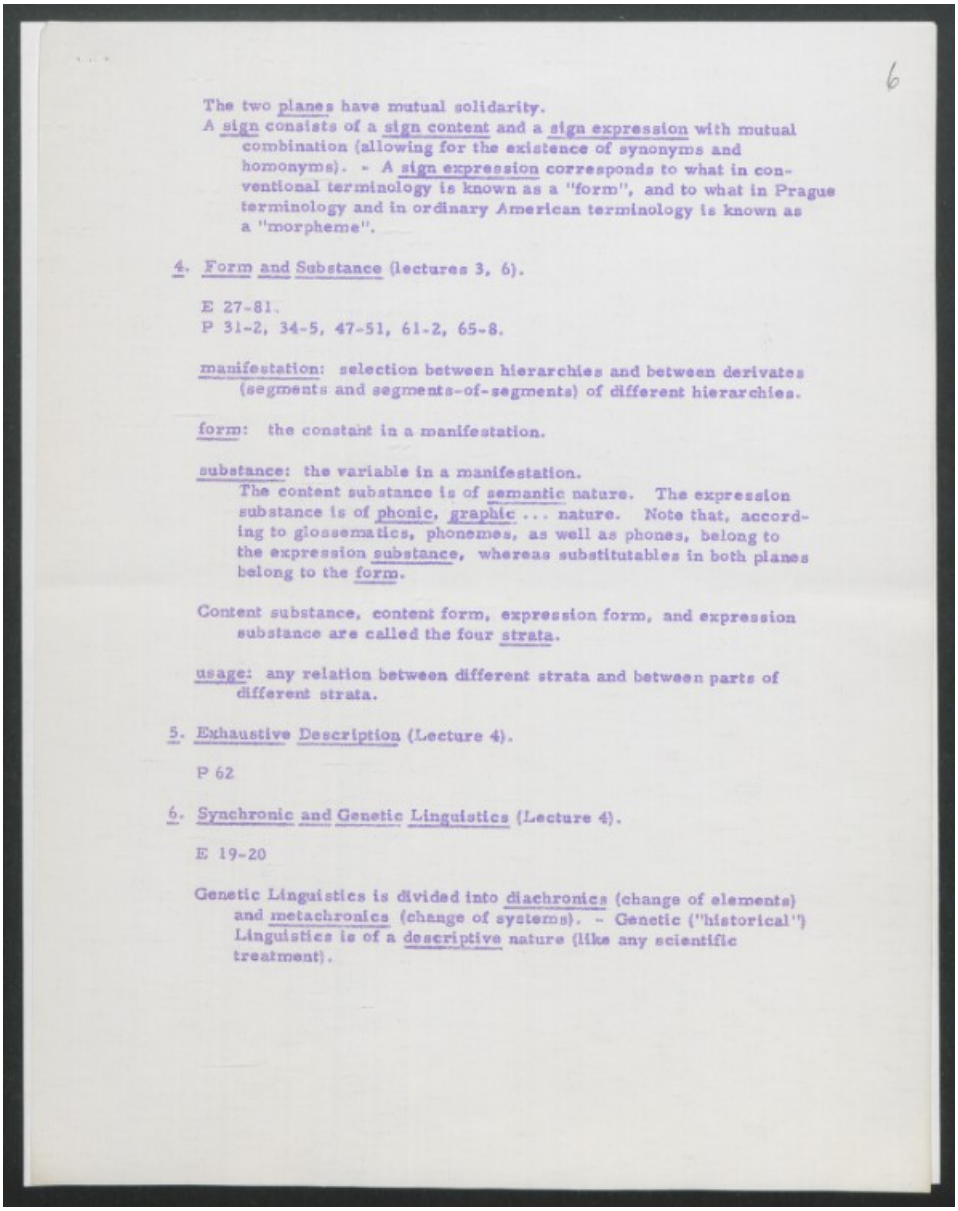
The commutation test is carried out within one and the same paradigm (or category, respectively). Glossematics does not start from minimal elements (e.g., "phonemes") (cf. 1: Analytical Procedure) but from the largest possible chains. Thus, there is no distributional procedure required.

If the replacement of one member of a paradigm in one plane of the language (content plane or expression plane) can entail some replacement in the opposite plane (expression plane or content plane, respectively), then the two members are recognized as commutables (invariants) or as having mutual commutation (symbol: ;).

If the replacement of one member of a paradigm in one plane of the language cannot entail a replacement in the opposite plane, then the two members are recognized as substitutables (variants) or as having mutual substitution (symbol: inverted semicolon ⁏).
Examples: Commutation in the content:
'he' ; 'she' in English (expressed by he, she)
'he' ⁏ 'she' in Chinese (expressed by-tha:), Finnish (expressed by hän), Hungarian (expressed by ö:)
Commutation in the expression:
s ; z in English
s ⁏ z in Danish
p ; b in English
p ⁏ b in Finnish

P 46-47, 25-38.
E 36-68, 82-88, 89-95, 96-112, 121-2.

A syncretism (neutralization) is the result of a suspended commutation. Syncretisms are either coalescences (as p/b in Danish at the end of a syllable, and similarly in Russian) or implications (e.g. the mechanical replacement of z by s in English in cases like "cats", "puts").



The two planes have mutual solidarity.
A sign consists of a sign content and a sign expression with mutual combination (allowing for the existence of synonyms and homonyms). - A sign expression corresponds to what in conventional terminology is known as a "form", and to what in Prague terminology and in ordinary American terminology is known as a "morpheme".

4. Form and Substance (lectures 3, 6).

E 27-81.
P 31-2, 34-5, 47-51, 61-2, 65-8.

manifestation: selection between hierarchies and between derivates (segments and segments-of-segments) of different hierarchies.

form: the constant in a manifestation.

substance: the variable in a manifestation.
The content substance is of semantic nature. The expression substance is of phonic, graphic ... nature. Note that, according to glossematics, phonemes, as well as phones, belong to the expression substance, whereas substitutables in both planes belong to the form.

Content substance, content form, expression form, and expression substance are called the four strata.

usage: any relation between different strata and between parts of different strata.

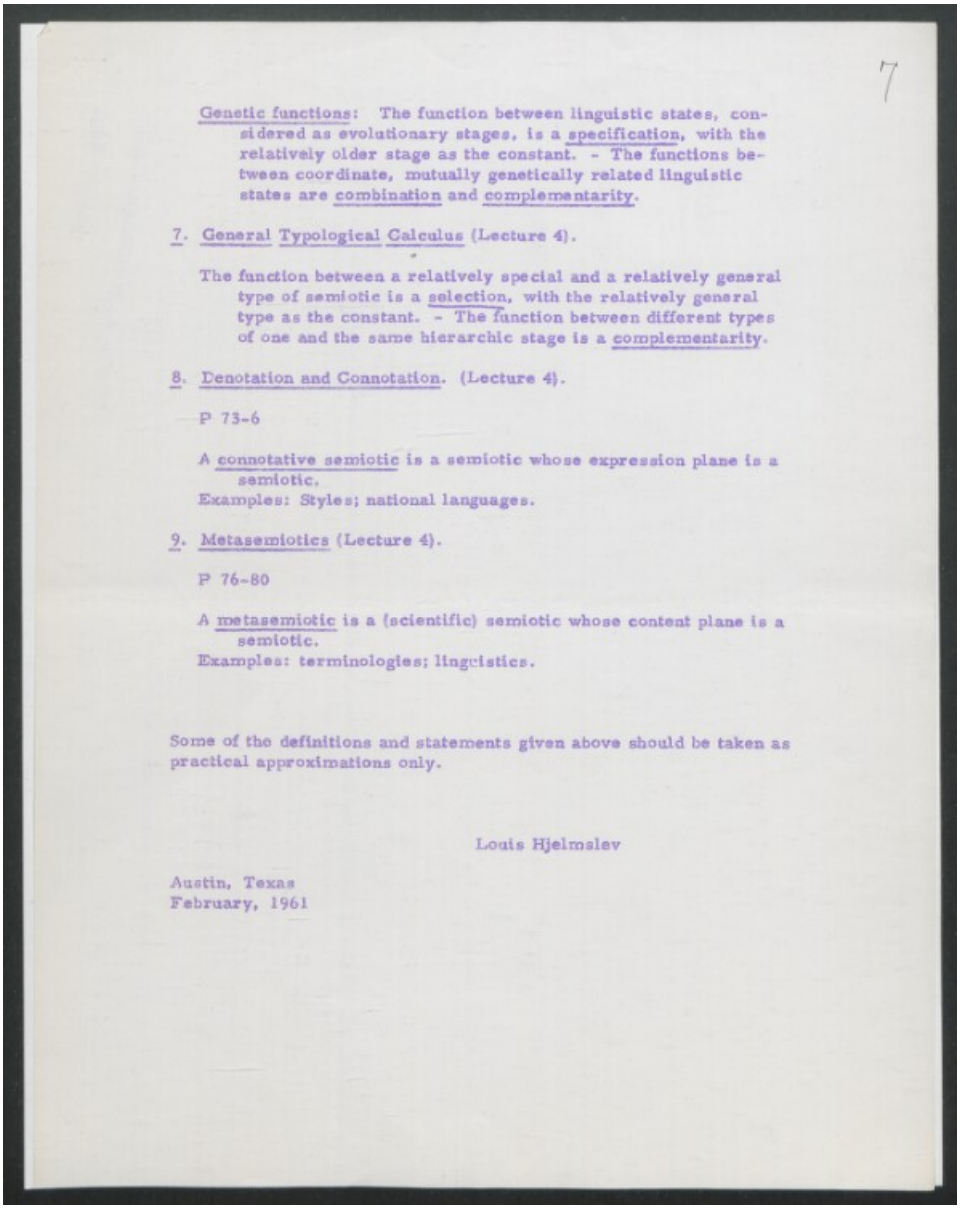
5. Exhaustive Description (Lecture 4).

P 62

6. Synchronic and Genetic Linguistics (Lecture 4).

E 19-20

Genetic Linguistics is divided into diachronics (change of elements) and metachronics (change of systems). - Genetic ("historical") Linguistics is of a descriptive nature (like any scientific treatment).



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Genetic functions: The function between linguistic states, considered as evolutionary stages, is a specification, with the relatively older stage as the constant. - The functions between coordinate, mutually genetically related linguistic states are combination and complementarity.

7. General Typological Calculus (Lecture 4).

The function between a relatively special and a relatively general type of semiotic is a selection, with the relatively general type as the constant. - The function between different types of one and the same hierarchic stage is a complementarity.

8. Denotation and Connotation. (Lecture 4).

P 73-6

A connotative semiotic is a semiotic whose expression plane is a semiotic.
Examples: Styles; national languages.

9. Metasemiotics (Lecture 4).

P 76-80

A metasemiotic is a (scientific) semiotic whose content plane is a semiotic.
Examples: terminologies; linguistics.

Some of the definitions and statements given above should be taken as practical approximations only.

Louis Hjelmslev

Austin, Texas
February, 1961