

Titel: BREV TIL: Charles Ernest Bazell FRA: Eli Fischer-Jørgensen (1956-01-08)

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Anvendt udgave: Louis Hjelmslev og hans kreds

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Louis Hjelmslev og hans kreds,

8 Jan. 1955

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Dear Bazell,

(Isn't it time to drop the professor-tit&é?). - Thank you for sending the manuscript and for your Letter from November last year (dated 1st/9 2 • ^ was glad to get the ms., for in the mean time I had to give-up finishing the planned article on tense and sonor • vowels, and instead I decided to use the paper on commutation. This I have not finished either, but it will not take so long. I first wanted to have a look at Hockett's new Manual of Phonology and a few other things. Hockett's book is quite interesting, above all by showing the convergent development of phonemic theory in different parts of the world, but also from other points of view, but it is rather loose in the definitions a lot of conclusions on units/which he does not deal with (peak and coda of a syllable). —As for the Commutation; test with special reference to the content I agree with you to a certain point: - It is evident that there is a lack of parallelism between expression and content substance, since the expression starts from a speech act, whereas the content has to start from content, we have to start from "things" or ideas known to us from other languages, and to go from these through content substance (in the sense of meaning attached to precise definite sign expressions by the speakers of the language) to expression, I do not agree that these ideas or things should necessarily have a name in a language known to the investigator; as I mentioned the possibility of pointing to various flowers asking for their names, and you answered that some flowers at any rate must have different names in our own language. But how far would you go in abstracting to larger groups? Would it not be enough to have names for different plants, or living organisms etc.? - his can not really be relevant. X might notice some curious things of which I did not know with the names nor use and ask for their names. - This is the way a small child learns a good deal of his language. But of course it would be silly trying to learn a new language only by this method. And the investigator

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facing an unknown lang.

would of course only ask

for the names of things which he assumes to have different, names in the given language, i.e. often things belonging to that particular culture, and not known to his own culture, but definitely not things or ideas which he knows well but does not expect to find. I would not ask members of a negro community in the middle of Africa what in their language would be the names for "glosser" and "commutation" (even if I could point to those things!). - Pike's monolingual approach starts with pointing to things, but of course he does not continue this way.

Expression fortunately has a physical manifestation, and therefore we need not start making funny sounds and asking whether these have a meaning • e.g. you distinguish pile and tie and what do these words mean. This would of course be an endless and rather impossible task. Here we can simply observe what people say, and compare these sound sequences, and normally this will be the best way also to content. Words or sentences are taken down with meanings, and then compared, and perhaps tested directly. Of course Hjelmslev has never meant that in field work one should start first with expression and make all the commutations from this aspect and then with content and make all commutations

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from the aspect. This would really be absurd. When he talks about analysing expression and content (and making commutations) separately, he thinks of a controlled analysis, where all expressions and content or the language have been found by trial and error and set up in a provisional hierarchy. - Here one might test whether each separate content unit listed has a corresponding separate expression unit. Yours sincerely

Louis Hjelmslev og hans kreds,

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