

## Between form and meaning: the structural quest for “Gesamtbedeutungen”

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In 1936, Roman Jakobson qualified the “quest for general meanings” as a specific trend in structural linguistics aiming to motivate each morphological category (such as gender, number or case) by associating it to an abstract content or to a possibly closed inventory of semantic traits. According to him, such trend was of paramount importance in the establishment of a general grammar, and characterized it as follows:

Die Frage der *Gesamtbedeutungen* der grammatischen Formen bildet naturgemäß die Grundlage der Lehre von dem grammatischen System der Sprache. Die Wichtigkeit dieser Frage war grundsätzlich jenem linguistischen Denken klar, das mit den ganzheitlichen philosophischen Strömungen der ersten Hälfte des vorigen Jahrhunderts verknüpft ist, aber eine erschöpfenden Lösung war ohne eine weitere Verselbständigung und Verfeinerung der linguistischen Methodologie unmöglich (Jakobson [1936] 1971, p. 23).

Jakobson’s rendering can thus be understood as a true manifesto for this research-trend, which was inherited and further developed by structural linguistics during the Thirties and beyond, and whose most important figures included internationally acknowledged names such as A. Potebnja (p. 23) and A. Peškovskij, as a representative of Fortunatov’s school (p. 24), but also the Danes V. Brøndal and L. Hjelmslev (p. 26). The latter, on his own turn, had already pointed out the influence of scholars belonging to the German neokantian tradition, such as F. von Bernhardi, F. Wüllner and G.-M. Roth (Hjelmslev 1935-1937), who ushered the transcendental philosophy to a “linguistic turn” (Benes, p. 46).

However, the full extension of the “quest for *Gesamtbedeutungen*”, which clearly exceeds the domain of structural linguistics, still remain to be explored. Thus, aim of this workshop is

- 1) to map the constellation of scholars afferent to this “quest”, by identifying the sources rooted not just in early days of linguistics as such but also in some ground-trends of 19th century philosophy, psychology and anthropology;
- 2) to discuss the *Voraussetzungen* that form its epistemological ground, such as the idea that the semantic *continuum* is carved out in patterns that correspond *grosso modo* to linguistic forms and more specifically to sub-lexical categories;
- 3) to explore the links between this approach and alternative models, such as G. Guillaume’s description of the systems of articles (1919) and of time and aspect categories (1929), Benveniste’s analyses (1956, 1958, 1959), J. van Ginneken’s psycholinguistic models (1907), and others. Yet this perspective does include also more recent trends in the domain of linguistic science: indeed, the “quest for *Gesamtbedeutungen*” constitutes a first formulation for insights and principles that were further developed by cognitive linguistics (see for instance Langacker 1985 or Fillmore 1968 and later writings), by prototype theory or by more recently developed methods of mapping the relationship between grammatical form and functions, such as the semantic maps model.

All contributions\* focusing on the topic of the “motivated” or “iconic” nature of morphological categories (Kirsner 1985) within the domain of structural theories and their possible legacy are welcome.

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\* 20 minutes speech + 10 minutes debate

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