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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 erschöpfende Lösung war ohne eine weitere Verselbständigung und Verfeinerung der linguistischen Methodologie unmöglich (Jakobson [1936] 1971, p. 23).

Jakobson’s rendering can 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 are welcome. For this workshop, we invite abstracts for 20-minute communications (400 words max.) before 1 December 2019. Abstracts can be sent to cigana.lorenzo@gmail.com

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ABSTRACTS

“Sense and sensibility”. The structuralistic debate on the logical or affective nature of grammatical categories

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At the very core of the structuralistic program for general grammar lies what Jakobson called the “quest for *Gesamtbedeutungen*”, a research trend which became central in European linguistics around 1930. The main task of this research trend was to semantically motivate grammatical categories, in conformity to the hypothesis according to which these categories reflect (or mold) the intellectual organisation of human mind. In its later formulation – due mostly to Humboldt, Hamann, Herder and Herbart – such hypothesis updates the long-lasting issue concerning the link between language and thought, by introducing a new element of discussion: how can linguistic categories be defined on a gnoseological level? Do they function as pure forms or rather as schemes? Do they have a representational (propositional) content, or rather an appreciative (phenomenological) one? Does such content reflect a universal panchronic structure or is rather specific of particular languages? Do they stem from a logical patterning or from an affective organisation of the surrounding world? It is essential to acknowledge the multidisciplinary background of structural semantics in order to appreciate the kind of paradox that lies on its ground: the effort of establishing a proper “linguistic” semantics was rooted in a heterogenous milieu of ideas, trends and models. The very terminology used to carry out this debate was grounded on philosophy and early German psychology, on anthropology (Josselin de Jong, Boas, Sapir) and psycholinguistic (Delacroix, Ribot, van Ginneken, Guillaume).

We will focus on some of those authors trying to pinpoint the conceptual ground behind a spectrum of notions such as “collective representations”, “*Gesamtbedeutungen*”, “sematemes”, “appreciations”, “adhesions”. We will use this corpus to gauge the debate on the logical vs. affective organisation of language.

Analyse et logique de la signification : une analyse épistémologique de la notion structuraliste de *Gesamtbedeutung*

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Cette communication s'efforcerait de caractériser la problématique dans laquelle s'inscrit la notion structuraliste de *Gesamtbedeutung*, à travers une analyse comparée de textes de Jakobson, Hjelmslev, Guillaume et Benveniste. En dépit de différences non négligeables, les élaborations des trois premiers sont fondamentalement comparables. En regard, l'élaboration benvenistienne est dotée d'une remarquable singularité. Cette différence, qui rompt l'unité du structuralisme européen, pourtant caractérisé par une communauté décisive de problématique, et qui, par ailleurs, inscrit le structuralisme dans un ensemble plus large, incluant donc par exemple le guillaumisme, soulève deux questions importantes et remarquablement corrélatives : celle du métalangage et celle de la signification. Elle jette en outre un jour nouveau sur la distinction langue/parole, qui a fait et fait l'objet de tant de malentendus.

Feelings and the making of the statement as a meaningful linguistic structure. Revisiting Gomperz's psycho-affective theory of language

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A major figure of the early 20th-century language sciences, Heinrich Gomperz (1873-1942) became known for his *Semasiologie*, a psycholinguistic model that he expounded in the second volume of his *Weltanschauungslehre* (1908). The aim of Gomperz's semasiology was to refound the study of language, especially that of semantics and semiotics, on the psychological concept of feeling (*Gefühl*). The here proposed presentation aims to revisit Gomperz's psychoaffective theory of the statement (*Aussage*), by insisting on how he conceived the role of feelings in the making of logical statements as meaningful linguistic units. More specifically, my intention is to show how the various categories of affective states identified by Gomperz contribute, in his view, to both formally and semantically unifying language at various levels of organization.

First, I intend to briefly discuss German-speaking psychological research on feelings and its impact on language theorists between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, by showing that Gomperz's semasiology marked the epitome of the "psychoaffective" turn that affected contemporary language sciences.

Second, I aim to discuss Gomperz's "affective semantics," the radical view according to which the statement content (*Aussageinhalt*) – what underpins the sense (Sinn) of the statement – is a psychological entity of a purely affective nature. Here I will deal with material logical feelings (*logische Materialgefühle*), the category of feelings that are supposed to determine "the semasiological matter", that is, conceptual meaning (word stems and logical definitions). Material logical feelings, as we will see, are, in Gomperz's view, what makes logical statements both general and typical and that, by being associated with both the "statement substrate" (*Aussagegrundlage*) – the factual, representational-based aspect of the signified – and the "statement sound" (*Aussagelaut*) – the perceptual dimension of the signifier – results in the emergence of meaning (*Bedeutung*).

Third, my intention is to discuss Gomperz's developments on formal logical feelings (*logische Formalgefühle*), the category of feelings that are supposed to determine "the semasiological form", that is, grammatical meaning. As I will emphasize, Gomperz distinguished between two different subcategories of formal logical feelings: (a) the noetic formal feelings, which underpin the syncategorematic parts of speech, and (b) the non-noetic formal feelings, which Gomperz regarded as the basis of morphology.

Fourth, I will discuss Gomperz's view on how affective states involved in the making of linguistic meaning – which he collectively referred to as "semantic feelings" (*Bedeutungsgefühle*) – interact with each other in order to make statements unified meaningful structures, at various degrees of semantic-syntactic complexity (from single words to highly elaborated forms of speech). Fifth, I would like to say a word about that kind of feeling that Gomperz regarded as instrumental in the "semiotization" of the

statement. Here I will discuss his view that the statement becomes a linguistic sign only insofar as the signifier is accompanied by a feeling of mediacy (*Mittelbarkeitsgefühl*), the affective state by which it is experienced, not per se, but as something that represents (*vertritt, repräsentiert*) or means (*meint*) something else, namely, the signified. As a conclusion, I aim to reassess the place of Gomperz's feeling-based semantics and semiotics in the psycholinguistic genealogy of the formalist and structuralist traditions. In particular, I would like to show how his concept of "logisches Formalgefühl" pertains to the multifaceted research program on formal feeling/form feeling, which developed between the mid-19th century and the 1930s and dealt with the role of affective states in the structuring and unification of experience. More generally speaking, the proposed talk is intended to reinstate the centrality of the psychoaffective paradigm of language in the early 20th century, which, besides Gomperz, was epitomized by theorists such as Van Ginneken.

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The dispute about the nature of content-figurae in the structural semantics: Hjelmslev and Eco

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At the dawn of its disciplinary affirmation, semiotics found in structural semantics one of his main discussion topics. Although very different in purpose and method, two of the auroral works of the semiotic “movement” were dedicated to this domain of research, on the one hand linguistic and on the other philosophical: *Sémantique structurale* (Greimas), and *La struttura assente* (Eco). Those two works, in different ways, and with odd importance and effects, have then innervated, even with significant evolutions and even breaks, the contribution of semiotics to the study of meaning, and in particular of the general sense of content-units. In that debate, and in those contributions, a relevant importance, if not fundamental, is reserved for the diatribe about the nature, or foundation, of the (distinctive) traits on which the semantic analysis is based. The controversy obviously precedes the semiotic epiphany and is inserted, at least, in the treatment dedicated to (structural) semantics offered by Hjelmslev in his *Prolegomena*. At least this is the capital foothold on which semiotics has exercised its exegetical activity. Specifically, the question can be reduced to the debate on the nature of the content-figurae and their role in the analysis by distinctive traits of the “word-contents”. Eco, for instance, interpret these “figures” as “semantic primitives”, and on that basis their gnoseological foundation and methodological effectiveness are refuted. This point, although less explicitly themed, is also central to the evolution of Greimas’ analytical work, which (also) in a new way of understanding the nature of the distinctive traits (of the content-units) bases the transition from structural semantics to semiotics.

The hypothesis is that, in both cases (even if with far unequal intensity), having eradicated Hjelmslev's proposal from its exquisitely linguistic tradition has undermined its rational core. This rationale resides (I) in an attempt to renew the “semantic” tradition, but still remaining anchored in it, and (II) in the peculiar definition of sign formulated by him (which sees in the isomorphism between the expression plane and content plane one of its cornerstones; a point that, in the case of Eco for example, is explicitly rejected). In that horizon, the content-figurae are not semantic primitives, but relational units, and the general meaning is a properly syntactic fact and resides in the relations, paradigmatic and syntagmatic, of which the “word- content” (denomination convertible into definition) is a manifestation.

Grammar before logic: Émile Benveniste's reflections on linguistic categories in the inter-war period

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In the question of intellectual contacts between Émile Benveniste and the Linguistic Circle of Copenhagen, the debate on the arbitrariness of linguistic sign, held in the first issues of *Acta Linguistica*, comes to mind. Nonetheless, previous discussions and reflexions about the foundation of grammatical meaning are also to be noticed.

In our presentation, we will focus on the few existing records of theoretical thinking of É. Benveniste before 1939: protocols from the séances of the *Société de linguistique de Paris*, introductions to his books, other occasional communications. Our aim will be to reconstruct the main lines of Benveniste's thinking in the period and to put it into connection with the possible contacts with R. Jakobson and L. Hjelmslev.

In the post war period, Émile Benveniste displays a profound sympathy for an anti-universalist, almost typological point of view in the question of genesis of grammatical meanings (see for example "*Tendances récentes en linguistique générale*" in Benveniste 1966, p. 5-6). Surprisingly, his attitude is often (sometimes within the same paragraph) mixed with an expression of a linguistic universalism (see *idem*, p. 6). It is our hypothesis that this oscillation is a testimony of the inter-war debates that gave birth to Benveniste's profound theoretical reflection on the nature of language. Our examination of the documents of the same period should throw more light on the content of the possible debate and the role representatives of Prague and Copenhagen structuralism had in it.

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The role of Finnish in Louis Hjelmslev's *Catégorie des cas* (1935-37)

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In an interview to a Finnish newspaper from 1950, Hjelmslev (1899-1965) told that already as a university student, he had an interest in Finnish. His teacher was Ferdinand Orth, a pupil of Vilhelm Thomsen, the famous Danish scholar in Finnish. Later, Hjelmslev, as a professor of comparative linguistics at the University of Copenhagen (from 1937), was the prime mover in changing the curriculum for comparative linguistics, opening up the possibility for the students to specialize in the Finno-Ugrian languages as an alternative to the usual specialization in an Indo-European subject. After the Second World War, Hjelmslev also visited Finland several times. In the work on case (1935), Hjelmslev presents Rasmus Rask's version of the Finnish case system; Hjelmslev makes use of Rask's analysis to introduce the dimension *degré d'intimité* on which he elaborates further in the book. Otto Jespersen (1937) refers to the Hjelmslev exposition on Finnish; this gives rise to a correspondence between Hjelmslev and his former teacher in Finnish, Orth, who had also assisted Jespersen concerning Finnish in the 1937 book. Hjelmslev does not publish his own integral analysis of the Finnish case system, but you find sketches of it in the Hjelmslev archive at the Royal Danish Library. The presentation will be based on these questions:

1. Why does Hjelmslev introduce the Finnish case system in his exposition?
2. How does he use it in the further elaboration in the case study?
3. How does he react to Jespersen's and Orth's comments on his presentation of the Finnish system in the case book?
4. How to frame the importance of the Finno-Ugrian languages in the Hjelmslev linguistics?

The paper is related to "Infrastructuralism", a project in progress whose aim is to publish and comment central parts of Hjelmslev's correspondence in a digital form.

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Viggo Brøndal's Theory of Categories between Philosophy and Linguistics

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In the preface of his 1928 book *Ordkasserne. Partes orationis. Studier over de sproglige Kategorier* (French translation *Les parties du discours. Partes orationis. Études sur le catégories linguistiques*) Viggo Brøndal writes that his methodological insights will probably sound too philosophical for the philologists and too philological for the philosophers; in so doing, the Danish linguist actually opens up a somehow hybrid scientific field in-between philosophy and linguistics. The aim of the paper is thus to explore Brøndal's blended approach in relation to his inquiries into the nature of categories, namely into the relationship between the structures of language and the patterns of (human) thought. The desired results of the paper are: 1) to provide an assessment of the value of Brøndal's theory within the history of linguistic thought; 2) to offer an estimation of the usefulness of a methodological approach that combines philosophical and linguistic insights for the analysis of specific scientific problems.

Saussure and Brøndal. What did Brøndal learn from Saussure?

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Although generally classified as 'structuralists' both of them, Saussure and Brøndal seem to fit into very different categories in their linguistic approach. Saussure's great effort is at recast the experiences from the Neo-grammarians into a socio-semiotic system and pave the road for an approach to signs as arbitrary, with some interesting reservations concerning the way language is handed down from generation to generation.

Brøndal, on the other hand, seems to have no real conception of signs. Meaning to him comes out of seemingly pan-chronic concepts founded through a complex reflexive recasting of different aspects of philosophical and logical thinking. Nevertheless, he always refers back to Saussure and claims to be in the line of heritage.

In my contribution, I will try to trace down what Brøndal learned from Saussure and in what ways he belongs to the structuralistic tradition.