From Hjelmslev to Coseriu: On the tripartite division of the language system

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Parallel and divergence in Hjelmslev's and Coseriu's tripartitions

Hjelmslev (1942)	scheme (system, 1935-36)	norm	usage	[*parole* (speech act)]
Coseriu (1952)		system	norm	*parole* (speech act)

Eli Fischer-Jørgensen: Letter to Coseriu (Sept. 4, 1955), (Bank Jensen 2015a)

Dans l'article "Langue et Parole" Cahiers F. de Saussure II, 1942 (qui semble vous être échappé malgré votre lecture étendue) M. Hjelmslev a fait une distinction qui ressemble beaucoup à celle que vous faites sous 3.1:

acte / (hablar),   **(bold = Hjelmslev)**

usage /**usus** (realización normal, norma),

norme / (sistema funcional),

schéma / (schema) –

il y a pourtant une différence de terminologie un peu gênante, comme il ressort de mes rapprochements ci-dessus. C'est d'ailleurs un article assez important.

Hjelmslev: 2nd International Congress of Phonetic Sciences, 1935, London

"In any language you may distinguish three different parts: (1) a central part, which is the *system*; (2) the *norm,* i.e. a set of rules, depending on the system, and fixing the necessary limit of variability of each element; (3) the *usage* adopted by a given language community. These three domains are different from *la parole*, which is the use of language by a single individual." (*Proceedings* (1936: p. 50)

Hjelmslev 1935: *Catégorie des cas* I

The *system* is defined as an abstract and virtual reality. The system immediately reveals itself in the *norm*, which fixes by rules the possible latitude of variations in execution through speech. *Usage*, defined as the execution of the language by the majority of its speakers in a given environment, is different from the norm. Usage constitutes the adopted mode, the set of preferred ways of execution of the language [...]. By making use of these distinctions we can say that **the system is a set of possibilities** among which usage makes a certain choice (my translation & emphasis), pp.88 ff.

Hjelmslev (1942) *Langue et parole* (my translation)

Scheme: A *pure form*, defined independently of its social realization and its material manifestation (p. 32-33);

Norm: a *material form*, defined by a given social realization but still independent of the detail of the manifestation (p. 32-33);

Usage: a simple *set of habits* adopted in a given society, and defined by its observed manifestations (p. 32-33);

Individual *Act* which is the *parole* (p. 38).

Comparison 1 (my translation)

Hjelmslev 1942	Coseriu 1952
Scheme : A *pure form*, defined independently of its social realization and its material manifestation (p. 32-33)	*Scheme* : Coseriu treats also the *scheme* (with a Hjelmslevian term as Coseriu says), and accepts that it is possible to arrive at this abstraction au-delà of the *system*, ignoring completely the phonic substance (p. 60).
Norm:	*System*:
Usage:	*Norm*:
Individual *Act* which is the *parole* (p. 38)	*Discourse/ "habla"* is the individal-concrete realization of the norm (p.58)

Comparison 2 (my translation)

Hjelmslev 1942	Coseriu 1952
Norm: a *material form*, defined by a given social realization but still independent of the detail of the manifestation (p. 32-33).	*System*: presents itself as [...] an abstract entity, a "network of functions" ('un réseau de fonctions') (p.58) [...] *the system* is a set of functional oppositions (p.58), [...] The *system* is a system of possibilities, of coordinates that indicate open paths and closed paths [...] (p.59). Includes substance of the sounds (p.60).
Usage: a simple *set of habits* adopted in a given society, and defined by its observed manifestations (p. 32-33).	*Norm*: the collective realization of the system, which contains the system itself and also the elements which are functionally 'non-pertinent' but normal in the speech in the community (p. 58).

Coseriu (1921-2002)

1921: Born in Romania

1940-50: Stay in Italy, influence from the Benedetto Crocean inspired Italian linguistics with focus on the speech act; Milan 1945-50: Vittore Pisani's "system of isoglosses"

1950-58: Montevideo, Uruguay

1952: First major work with a structuralist inspired approach, trying to connect it with the Pisani approach.

Coseriu's 'structural concepts', 1952

The *system* [is] an abstract entity, a "network of functions" (p.58) […] The *system* is a system of possibilities, of coordinates that indicate open paths and closed paths […] it only requires that the functional conditions of the linguistic instrument are not being affected (Coseriu 1952: p. 59)

The *norm* is the collective realization of the system (p.58) […] The *norm* is […] a system of forced realizations, of social and cultural impositions (Coseriu 1952: p. 59) (my translation)

Hjelmslev's role in Coseriu 1952

- (along with John Lotz) referred for a tripartite division of the Saussurian dichotomy of *langue* / *parole*, i.e. "scheme, established norm, *parole*" (Semantic Conference (organized by Émile Benveniste at Nice 1951) (via Devoto 1951)
- Hjelmslev's distinction between norm and usage (Coserian "system" and "norm") is blurred, because the tripartite division for Hjelmslev is a compromise with the other participants (see e.g. Benveniste 1951: 83).

Coseriu's (1952) own comparison with Hjelmslev (-Lotz)

Coseriu establishes two critical points of difference between his and the Hjelmslev(-Lotz) tripartite divisions.

1) Coseriu conceives the Saussurian concept of langue as a concept related to historical linguistics, and not to theoretical linguistics as it is by Hjelmslev, according to Coseriu (Coseriu 1952: 5).

2) the concept "system" in Coseriu includes the substance of the sounds, differently from the concept "scheme" in Hjelmslev (Coseriu: 1952: 60).

Coseriu (1952): Pisani + Structuralism (see Bank Jensen/Cigana (2023)

We can, therefore, speak of *norm* and *system* referring to a *language [lengua]* (system$_2$ of isoglosses), instead of referring exclusively to *speech* [...] only that the concept of language [...] is a *historical* concept [...] while *system$_1$* and *norm* are *structural* concepts and, for that very reason, *synchronic*. (Coseriu 1952: 62; our translation)

[...] the distinction between *norm* and *system$_1$* allows us to better clarify the functioning of language [lenguaje], the linguistic activity, which is at the same time creation and repetition (re-creation) within, and according to, the coordinates of the functional system (that is, of what is essential for language to fulfil its function); forced movement and free movement, within the possibilities put forward by the system. (Coseriu 1952: 62-63; our translation)

Coseriu's use of Hjelmslev

- Hjelmslev's influence on Coseriu's first major publication *Sistema, norma y habla* (1952) is difficult to assess precisely.

- The 'relocation' of 'possibilities' from the 'schema' level to the 'system' level shows that Coseriu can use Hjelmslev's theory not only as a source of inspiration, but also as a demarcation point for his own theory.

- Everything else is left open to Coseriu's 'Integral Linguistics'.

Coseriu's later (indirect) answers to Fischer-Jørgensen's criticism
(see Bank Jensen 2015a)

1) (Coseriu 1958: p. 150, note 83) Coseriu comments on Hjelmslev (1942) but does not mention the tripartition; while in the same place Coseriu mentions a tripartition: scheme-norm-usage from Hjelmslev 1954, i.e. after Coseriu's 1952-work.

2) (Coseriu 1988: 123) Coseriu "admits" that Hjelmslev's 'norm' is parallel to his own 'system'.

Coseriu on Hjelmslev 1942 (& 1954)

todo lo que no es « forma pura », en el sentido glosemático, no es propiamente "lengua" (*esquema*), sino realización, "habla" (*uso*) ... » ; « Precisamente en este sentido L. Hjelmslev, *Langue et parole*, "Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure", 2, 1942, pp. 32-33, 40, 43, 44, interpreta y corrige la distinción saussureana. Cf. del mismo autor, *Prolegomena*, pp. 51-52, 68; y *La stratification du langage*, "Word", X, 1954, p. 188, donde se distinguen, por un lado, el "esquema" y, por el otro, la "norma", el "uso" y la *parole* propiamente dicha » (COSERIU 1958 : 150, 150 n 83).

Letter from Coseriu to Eli Fischer-Jørgensen, March 24, 1962
(Bank Jensen 2015a, 2021)

- Almost everything I've done so far is related (positively or negatively) to glossematics or has been also said, in one way or another (or denied), by Mr. Hjelmslev (to whom I currently feel closer than ever).

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