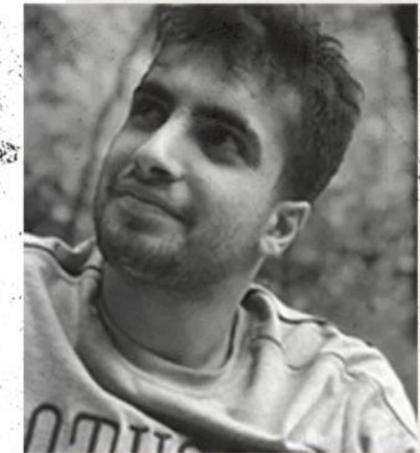


Rebooting Glossematics
Symposium
Copenhagen
November 29-30, 2022

Last Glossematic Conference: A Rich Source of Comparison with American Structural Linguistics

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WOMEN
 زندگی
LIFE
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FREEDOM

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 #mahaamini
 FREE IRAN FROM DICTATORSHIP



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SYNOPSIS

- Presentation of the Source(s)
- Certain Limits of Comparison
- Affinities with Some American Structuralistic Ideas
- Essential Critique on American Structural Theories
 - distributionalism,
 - syntax as a separate branch,
 - dismissal of content-form,
 - problem of substance

PRESENTATION OF THE SOURCE(S)

- January-February 1961
Austin (US)
University of Texas (Dep. Germanic Languages)

“Glossematics and Contemporary Linguistic Theory”

HA: Kps. 52 (28/48 II) – *transcription*

Kps. 115 (5/61) – *Hj's manuscript*



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PRESENTATION OF THE SOURCE(S)

- **Nine crucial points of Glossematics in comparison with other theories:**

- 1° Analytical Procedure,
- 2° Functions,
- 3° Commutation and Substitution. Two Planes,
- 4° Form and Substance,
- 5° Exhaustive Description,
- 6° Synchronic and Genetic Linguistics,
- 7° General Typological Calculus,
- 8° Denotation and Connotation,
- 9° Metasemiotics.

(HA, Kps.115: p.23)

CERTAIN LIMITS OF COMPARISON

- “modern linguistics has experienced some difficulty even in defining *structuralism*. <Ultimately,> one is tempted to define structural linguistics as explicit scientific linguistics, since this is what one arrives at in search of common denominator for all the various theories of structural linguistics. But it *is* true that this statement would be likely to strike adherents of older views as much too arrogant. The trouble is that in the very moment we try to define the term ‘**scientific**’ ” (Kps.115: pp.8-9)

- « Toute description scientifique présuppose que l’objet de la description soit conçu comme une structure [...] ou comme faisant partie d’une structure [...] »
(« Pour une sémantique structurale » [1957] 1959:96–112)

Scientific = Structural (Kps.52: p.75): According to ^{Carnap}~~Katne~~, all the scientific statements must be structural statements, in this sense of the word, that is to say, formal and functional statements. A scientific statement must always be a statement about relations, what I call functions without involving a knowledge or a description of the relator itself.

CERTAIN LIMITS OF COMPARISON

- Df 41. A **SCIENTIFIC SEMIOTIC** is a Semiotic that is an Op. (RTL:14)
 - Df 40. An OPERATION (symbol: Op) is a description that is in agreement with Pr 1. (ibid.)
 - Pr 1 (the **empirical principle**): The description shall be free of contradiction, exhaustive, and as simple as possible. The requirement of freedom from contradiction takes precedence over the requirement of exhaustive description. The requirement of exhaustive description takes precedence over the requirement of simplicity. (RTL:1)
- “It is, then, by its own “empirical principle” and by it alone that linguistic theory must be tested”. (PTL:18)
- (For more discussion, see: Badir, 2014, *Épistémologie sémiotique*: § V.)
- **Criterion**: what is recognized as *scientific* or *structural* in Glossematics.

CERTAIN LIMITS OF COMPARISON

× **American Linguistics (and/or American Structuralism)**

- “I have hardly, if at all, made any use of the ready-made and too easy label ‘American Linguistics’. < ‘American Linguistics’ just as unjustified as ‘European Linguistics’.> ” (Kps. 115:91)
- “as far as ignorance is concerned, one is just as good as the other.” (ibid.:92)
- “On both sides, theories are constructed and applied, and indigenists are performing their taste. Both parts know more and more of each other, and a mutual debate and mutual understanding is gaining ground. The initiative to such a cooperation is pathing ‘on the pace, is gathering way, is fetching headway. We are now on our way to one joint approach to one common problem, vital to humanity as well as to science.” (ibid.:93)

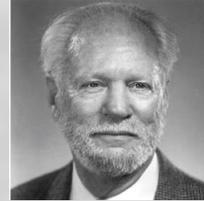
- Comparison of **Glossematics** with **theories and ideas of certain *American Linguists***

AMERICAN LINGUISTS

(referred to in Texas lectures)



➤ **Leonard Bloomfield**



➤ Charles F. Hockett



➤ Edward Sapir



➤ Benjamin L. Whorf



➤ Kenneth L. Pike



➤ **Rulon S. Wells**

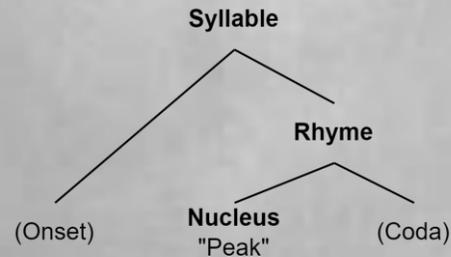


➤ **Zellig S. Harris**

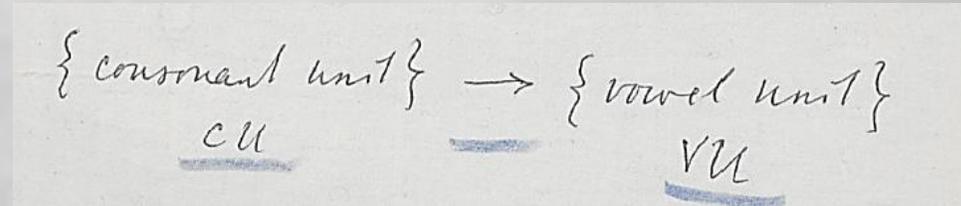
➤ *No Chomsky!*

AFFINITIES WITH SOME AMERICAN STRUCTURALISTIC IDEAS

- “some aspects of recent reflexions by **Hockett**” [in Phonology] (Kps.115:89-90)



(cf. Hockett 1955)



Marginal (variable) → "Central" (constant)

Hjelmslev (Kps.115:38)

- some aspects of **Pike**'s work "(particularly concerning the clear distinction between Phonetics, as the theory of the E[xpression] Purport, and "*Phonemics*")" (Kps.115:90)
- "important contribution to the theory of **Content** and, in general, to theoretical Linguistics, given by **Benjamin Lee Whorf**" (Kps.115:90)
- **Bloomfield**: "not in an equal level" (Kps.115:91) → Exclusion of **meaning** (Content-substance) + purely **phonic** features (Expression-substance) of "structural pattern" (**Chapter 8** in Bloomfield, *Language*, 1933) (Kps.52:33)

AFFINITIES WITH SOME AMERICAN STRUCTURALISTIC IDEAS

- (1) **Practical Discovery Procedure** (Kps. 115:29-30; Kps.52:9):
 - ✓ Theory *does not* involve a practical discovery procedure.
 - × Practical discovery procedure *presupposes* the Theory: “The theory gives general [principles and] rules from which the practical procedure can be logically deduced”
 - ✓ “The actual practical procedure of the language describer must always be one of trial and error”.
 - ✓ It concerns the “procedure of *control* rather than prescriptions for the procedure to be followed during actual field-work”
- “I'm happy to see that this seems also to be the view held by Zellig Harris in the introduction to his book *Methods in Structural Linguistics.*” (Kps.52:9)

- × **Procedure** of research consists of “the operations which the linguist may carry out in the course of his investigations, rather than a **theory** of the structural analyses which results from these investigations.” (Harris 1951:1)

➤ Analytical Procedure of Glossematics

AFFINITIES WITH SOME AMERICAN STRUCTURALISTIC IDEAS

- (2) **Immediate Constituent** (Kps. 115:15, 24, 57, 61; Kps.52:4, 35, 37):
 - ❖ [Wundt] -- [Bloomfield] – **Rulon Wells'** “Immediate Constituents” (1947) – Generative grammar & Dependency grammar
 - ✓ “First and foremost aspect” Glossematics shares with American Linguistics. (Kps. 115: 24)
 - Requirement of IC →

{	1° Analytical Procedure,
	5° Exhaustive Description,

“the analysis should pass through as many stages as possible. [...] Each time the elements resulting from the analysis should be the largest that can be conceived, i.e. [...] of the smallest possible number.” (Kps.115: 15)

× **Glossematics:**

IC is a *general* requirement for *all semiotic analysis*, not a specific one merely treating certain syntactic relations in sentence structure.

ESSENTIAL CRITIQUE ON AMERICAN STRUCTURAL THEORIES

- (1) **Distributionalism**

- ❖ **Distribution:**

[Sapir] – [Bloomfield] – Morris Swadesh (1934) – **Harris** (1947, 1951) -- ...

- **Harris** (1951: 15-16):

“The DISTRIBUTION of an element is the total of all environments in which it occurs, i.e. the sum of all the (different) positions (or occurrences) of an element relative to the occurrence of other elements”

Hjelmslev:

Ladies and Gentlemen, there is no such thing as “distribution.”

(Kps.52: 10)

ESSENTIAL CRITIQUE ON AMERICAN STRUCTURAL THEORIES

- In distributionalist approach, it seems that the *elements* come “straight down from heaven”!

(vs. Distribution! (straight down from heaven)) (Kps.115: 17)

- (Cf. Kps. 52: 10, 12-13; Kps. 115: 17, 29-33)

- Hjelmslev’s intervention in Distribution Plenary Session in ICL8 (1957:196-7):

“The theory of *distribution* does not make it clear whether the units *are* distributed by the language or *have to be* distributed by the linguist. In neither sense does the term 'distribution' convey anything which is not already covered by conventional structural analysis. The condition would be that we were told *what* to distribute and *where* to distribute it. The two questions amount to the same since distinctive units can only be distinctive within a frame: linguistic units, e.g. the so-called phonemes, do not come straight down from heaven; the units constitute an inventory within a category and can only be found within this category; the category is in its turn defined by possible syntagmatic relations. This means that distributional classification of, say, phonemes is superfluous as being a mere repetition of what has already been stated during the registration of the phonemes (or units in general).”

- Analytical Procedure of Glossematics (Deduction)

- × *Distribution* =><= *Immediate Constituent*

ESSENTIAL CRITIQUE ON AMERICAN STRUCTURAL THEORIES

- (2) **Syntax as a separate branch**

- (Cf. Kps.52:4-5; Kps. 115: 15, 24-6, 89)

- ❖ Classical Grammars – American linguistics – Syntacticism – Generative Grammar – Etc.

glossematics differs from most other theories by the fact that it does not recognize syntax, even in a revised form, as a separate branch of linguistics, (Kps.52: 4)

- ✓ In Glossematics, **syntax** is simply understood as

“an *interlude*, as an intermediate stage, through which the total analysis of the entire corpus must pass on its way from units of maximal extent (larger than one complex clause) down to glossemes or minimal elements. Thus the stages which, according to conventional use would belong to syntax, are imbedded in the whole analysis, and have no characteristics of their own” (Kps.52: 4-5).

- **Continuous Analysis → Comprehensive Description**

- **Uniformity of Analysis**

New Testament → Jewish Bible

(*Intertextual stage*)

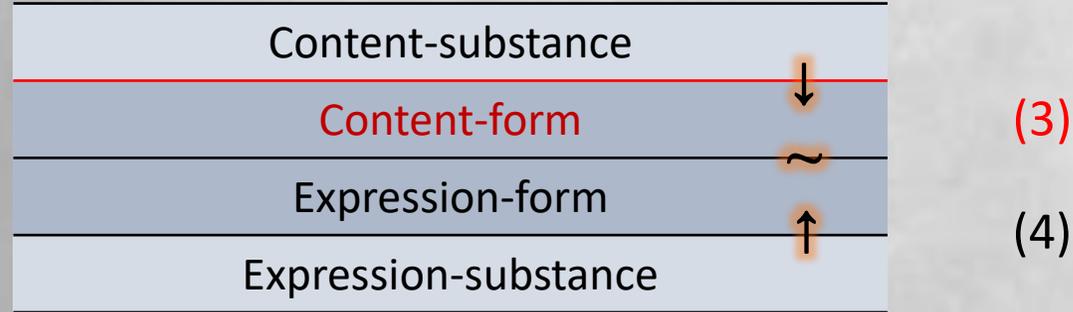
{Subordinate Clause} → {Principal Clause}

(*syntactical stage*)

{Consonant unit} → {Vowel unit}

(*syllabematic stage*)

ESSENTIAL CRITIQUE ON AMERICAN STRUCTURAL THEORIES



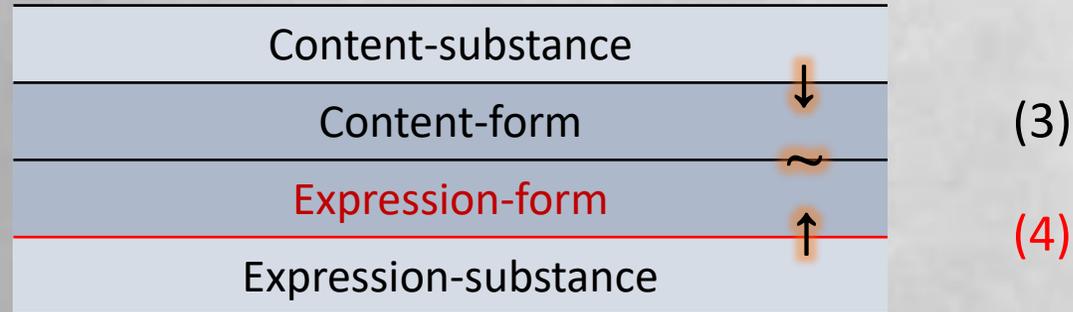
• (3) Dismissal of Content-Form

- ❖ “Bloomfield and his followers” (Kps.115: 17); “[...] from Leonard Bloomfield to Zellig Harris” (Kps.115: 53)
- “Most distant [theories from Glossematics] seem to be [...] the theories which are inclined to renounce semantics, or fail to recognize Content Form as a subject worthy of attention and a field within Linguistics.” (Kps.115: 89)
- Conventional view: **Form/Content** vs. Saussurianism: Form (**Expression/Content**) [*signifiant/signifié*]

Commutation (Kps.52: 50, 74)

Semantics (study of content-substance) → **Plerematics** (study of content-form) ~ **Cenematics** (study of expression-form)

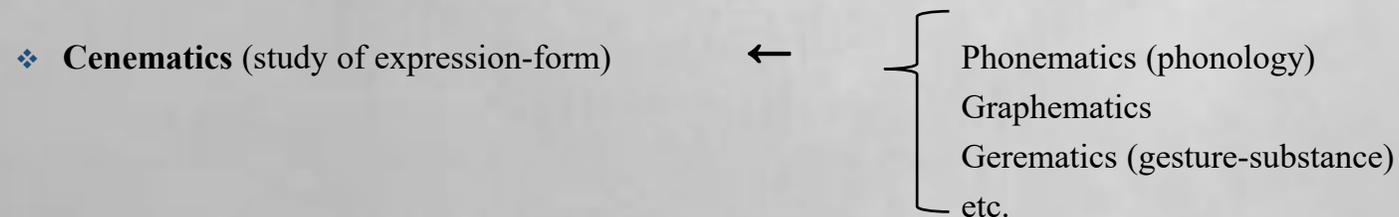
ESSENTIAL CRITIQUE ON AMERICAN STRUCTURAL THEORIES



- **(4) Problem of Substance: Phonological Definition of Expression-Form** (Kps.52: 32-4; Kps.115: 53-6)

- ❖ ... [Saussure] – [Phonology of Prague] – American Linguists – etc.

- “I have the feeling that a good many linguists not only in America, but also elsewhere, are shocked by my contention that the units of the linguistic expression are not definable in phonological terms.” (Kps.52: 32)



- ? Bloomfield (§8 in *Language*): **Structural Pattern** vs. Pronunciations ✗ “structural pattern of the *speech-form*” (1933: 136).

ESSENTIAL CRITIQUE ON AMERICAN STRUCTURAL THEORIES

Misunderstanding about form-substance distinction in Glossematics:

according to glossematics, form and substance should be separated. It does not follow that we would exclude the substances from linguistics as a whole. It is a common misunderstanding. I don't know why this misunderstanding has come up that glossematics would exclude semantics, phonetics, phonology and so on, from the linguistic description. Glossematics is simply assigning to substance its proper place within the entire hierarchy. And glossematics claims an exhaustive description and an exhaustive description would of course comprise not only a description of the presupposed constants, the form, but also of the various, presupposing, variants or substances.

(Kps.52: 33-4)

CONCLUSION

- Comparison between Glossematics and other theories:

Theory → Epistemology and/or Methodology

Glossematics is still a young child

(Kps.115: p. 5)

THANK YOU!

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