Hjelmslev's semiotic model of language: An exegesis

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Abstract

This paper offers a detailed exploration of four types of differentiations on which Hjelmslev's semiotic model of language, developed in his *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language* (1963/1943), is built: *content–expression*; *form–substance–purport*; *system–process* and *paradigm–syntagm*. Each of these distinctions is explored in turn, and in this exploration it becomes clear how Hjelmslev defines his most important distinctions, viz. content–expression and form–substance–purport, which form the corner stones of his stratified model of language, on different levels of abstraction. It is only by carefully considering his most abstract level of description, that the interaction between the different dimensions, and the nature of the 'sign', which is explained by Hjelmslev as lying at the centre of cross-cutting dimensions of differentiations, can be fully understood.

The specific nature of Hjelmslev's theory is further fleshed out by relating his distinctions to de Saussure's theory of language; and by further contextualizing his model, historiographically, in the framework of (1) the earlier study of the phonic

side of language in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and (2) Barthes's later re-interpretation of one of Hjelmslev's most innovative concepts, viz. the connotative semiotic.

Keywords

1   Introduction[1]

Hjelmslev's semiotic theory, led out in his magnum opus, *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language* (1963/1943), is built around a number of distinctions which have originally been formulated by de Saussure: *content–expression, form–substance–purport, system–process* and *syntagm–paradigm*. I will refer to each of these as **differentiating dimensions**: each of them specifies a specific semiotic dimension along which distinctions are made to think about language, or, by extension, any semiotic system. Many 20th century linguists interested in the theoretical design of a linguistic model have incorporated and/or explicitly referred to Hjelmslevian-Saussurean structuralist concepts in defining components of language and linguistics, such as 'linguistic form', 'meaning' or 'semantics', 'connotation', and so forth.

The principal aim of Hjelmslev's magnum opus, *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language* (1963/1943), is to construct a theoretical model for analysing language, which is based on a limited number of precisely defined terms (distinctions), premises and procedural methods (cf. Hjelmslev 1963/1943: 15ff.). Such a theory is

regarded as 'a calculation from the fewest and most general possible premisses' (ibid.: 15), or an 'algebra' (ibid.: 80), and called *glossematics* ('to mark its difference from previous kinds of linguistics' (ibid.: 80)).[2] As will be made clear below, the particular theoretical aim of his work leads Hjelmslev to characterize the original Saussurean distinctions in a more abstract way, and to indicate further semiotic features of the differentiations which follow logically from his abstract, theoretical framework.[3]

This paper offers a detailed exploration of Hjelmslev's semiotic model of language. Looking at each differentiating dimension in turn, we will reconstruct how Hjelmslev builds up his intricate theory: stepwise, often taking an initial definition to a further level of abstraction in a second move, and refining basic concepts (such as the sign) in relation to newly defined distinctions. It will be shown how the distinctions intricately interact with one another and how Hjelmslev's concept of the 'sign' (or to use his more complete technical term, 'sign function') lies at the centre of this semiotic model.

2   Content–expression

2.1 Basic definition

The major Hjelmslevian distinction is that between **content** and **expression**, which is parallel to the Saussurean contrast between *signifié* and *signifiant*. The distinction refers to the two sides of the linguistic sign: 'the sign is an entity generated by the connexion between an expression and a content' (Hjelmslev 1963/1943: 47). The content and expression sides of language in general are referred to as *planes* (ibid.:

59). Apart from being characterized as two reciprocal dimensions of the linguistic sign, 'content' and 'expression', as such, are not explicitly defined as technical terms in Hjelmslev's theory.[4] It is a characteristic of these two concepts, as is emphasized by Hjelmslev, that they can only be defined in relation to one another:

> The terms *expression plane* and *content plane* and, for that matter, *expression* and *content* are chosen in conformity with established notions and are quite arbitrary. Their functional definition provides no justification for calling one, and not the other, of these entities *expression*, or one, and not the other, *content*. They are defined only by their mutual solidarity,[5] and neither of them can be identified otherwise. They are each defined only oppositively and relatively, as mutually opposed functives of one and the same function. (Hjelmslev 1963/1943: 60)

It is this 'reciprocal' characterization of content and expression which lies at the basis of the notion of a connotative semiotic, as we will see below.

In order to come to an understanding of the content–expression relation, which is the primary division line in Hjelmslev's theory, the contrast will be further explored here at two levels:

(1) on a primary level, the content–expression contrast refers to the *linguistic sign* as such;

(2) on a more abstract level, content and expression refer to two general dimensions of *semiosis* (whether in language or in other semiotic systems). It is this more abstract vision which leads to the concept of a connotative semiotic (and also that of a 'metasemiotic', as we will see) as a 'second-order' semiotic.

I will refer to these two types of descriptions, which differ only in their levels of abstraction, as Hjelmslev's **primary** and **second-order**[6] characterizations of the content–expression distinction.

2.2 Hjelmslev's primary interpretation of the content–expression diad

On a primary level, content and expression can be characterized – in a non-technical glossing of the concepts – as 'thought' and 'speech', or 'concept' and 'sound'. This interpretation is clear from the following passage:[7]

> there can be no content without an expression, or expressionless content; neither can there be an expression without a content, or content-less expression. If we *think* without speaking, the *thought* is not a linguistic *content* and not a functive for a sign function. If we *speak* without thinking, and in the form of a *series of sounds* to which no content can be attached by any listener, such speech is an abracadabra, not a linguistic *expression* and not a functive for a sign function. (Hjelmslev 1963/1943: 49; emphasis MT)

Hence, whereas the notions of content and expression as such are abstract, mutually defining aspects of language which recur throughout the linguistic system (as we will see below), in *explaining* the nature of the linguistic sign, Hjelmslev makes a primary distinction between a layer of thought and a layer of sound, which is completely parallel to de Saussure's conception of the sign. In a thorough re-analysis of de Saussure, Thibault refers to these two dimensions as semiotic 'orders' and calls them 'conceptual' (content) and 'phonic' (expression) (Thibault 1997: 59). Table 1 gives an overview of the content–expression contrast as it is viewed Hjelmslev and by de Saussure, together with further explanations, offered by Thibault (1997), of the distinction as it was originally introduced by de Saussure.[8]

Hjelmslev		de Saussure		Thibault (1997): further explanation of de Saussure
terms	paraphrase	terms	paraphrase	
content	'thought'	*signifié*	le plan (…) des idées	conceptual order
expression	'speech', 'sound'	*signifiant*	celui (le plan) (…) des sons	phonic order

Table 1: Hjelmslev's content–expression distinction
in relation to de Saussure's *signifié–signifiant*

2.3 Hjelmslev's second-order interpretation of the content–expression diad

On a more abstract level, the interaction between content and expression, and hence the emergence of 'signs', does not only refer to the relationship between thought and sound. Rather, it is a relationship which can recur, at various levels of abstraction, throughout various types of semiotic systems, including language. Hjelmslev's most unique contribution to our understanding of semiosis is his conception of the possibility of a semiotic to have multiple sign layers, which he theorized in terms of a distinction between denotative semiotic, connotative semiotic and metalinguistic semiotic.[9]

A **connotative semiotic** is a semiotic whose expression plane is itself a semiotic, i.e. whose expression plane consists of a content layer and an expression layer. A simple semiotic, whose expression plane cannot be analysed as a content–expression constellation, is termed, in contrast, **denotative semiotic** (cf. Hjelmslev 1963/1943: 114ff.). The counterpart of a connotative semiotic is called a **metasemiotic**: a metasemiotic is a semiotic system whose content plane is a semiotic, i.e. it is a scientific semiotic (for example linguistics) which has another semiotic (for example language, or any other type of semiotic) as its object of study.[10] In this framework as a whole, a *denotative semiotic* is defined as a semiotic system neither of whose planes is a semiotic (cf. Hjelmslev 1963/1943: 114). The *layered* nature of the two types of non-denotative semiotic systems can be visualized as in Figure 1.
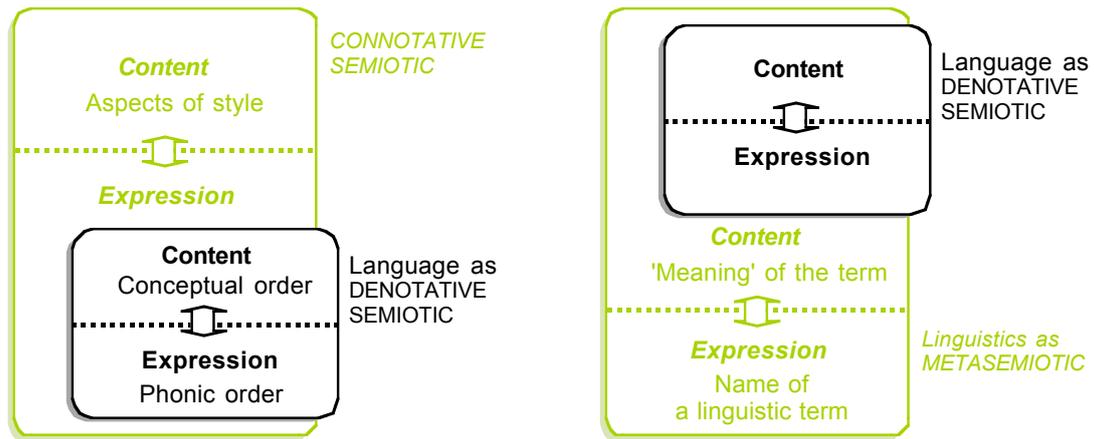
Figure 1: The layered nature of a Hjelmslevian connotative semiotic and metasemiotic

Taking language as the basic, denotative semiotic on which further semiotic systems can be built (the systems indicated in black in Figure 1), Hjelmslev explains the metasemiotic and connotative semiotic systems which are thus formed as follows. A linguistic metasemiotic (a metalanguage, or a linguistics) is a semiotic that treats language as a semiotic system (Hjelmslev 1963/1943: 119–120). It is a system which has as its expression plane a metalinguistic term, and as its content plane the semiotic system of language itself.

A linguistic connotative semiotic is a semiotic in which the expression plane is a language (i.e. a language system), a linguistic sign, or a particular linguistic usage, and in which the content plane consists of aspects pertaining to different types of styles, tones, and/or varieties of language. The aspects of a connotative content plane which Hjelmslev distinguishes are outlined in Table 2.

Aspects of a connotative content plane		Examples
Stylistic forms		verse; prose
Styles		creative style; imitative 'normal' style
Value-styles		higher value-style; neutral value-style; lower value-style ('vernacular')
Media		speech; writing; gesture; flag code; etc.
Tones		angry; joyful; etc.
Idioms	Vernaculars	the common language of a community; jargons of various cliques or professions
	National languages	
	Regional languages	standard language; local dialect; etc.
	Physiognomies	idiom characterizing one person's use of language (idiolect)

Table 2: Aspects of the content plane in a connotative semiotic recognized by Hjelmslev

Besides studying language as a denotative semiotic, it is claimed, the task of an exhaustive linguistic study[11] is also to analyse geographical, historical, political, social, psychological and other related aspects which are connoted by language. In order to do so, linguistics must take into account contributions made by '(m)any special sciences, in the first place, presumably, sociology, ethnology and psychology' (Hjelmslev 1963/1943: 125). Any sign of denotative language (specific utterances, or a denotative language as a whole system) must be characterized in relation to the various connotative aspects (cf. Table 2), which often interact. In this way, the linguist can define *connotators*, such as 'jargon' (creative style that is neither a higher nor a lower value-style), 'pulpit style', 'chancery style'.

Hjelmslev himself, who, in his *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*, is mainly concerned with forming a theoretical framework for analysing language, does not investigate the possibilities of a connotative semiotic in further detail.

2.4 Historiographic excursion:
    Barthes's re-interpretation of the connotative semiotic system

The notion of a connotative semiotic has been further explored by the French semiotician Barthes, who applies it to other types of semiotic systems beyond language, including visual communication, clothing (fashion systems), furniture and architecture. In extending Hjelmslev's language-based notion of a connotative semiotic to other areas, Barthes arrives at a more concrete view of connotation.

Barthes's theory is founded on the Hjelmslevian layered conception of a connotative semiotic in terms of content–expression. A connotative semiotic is characterized as '*a second-order semiological system*': it is 'a peculiar system, in that it is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it' (Barthes 1957: 114). However, due to the widening of application, the connotative content (i.e. what is connoted) is no longer limited to an aspect of style connoted by a linguistic denotative semiotic. Rather, what is signified in a connotative semiotic is more broadly viewed as 'a fragment of ideology' (Barthes 1957: 151).

Barthes refers to content and expression as **concept** and **form**: a concept is a signified in general, a form is a signifier.[12] **Meaning** is the term used to refer to the association of a concept and a form in general, and, in particular, it is reserved for a first-order (i.e. denotative) semiotic. In his early work (esp. Barthes 1957), connotative systems are regarded as *mythologies*: second-order, hidden 'meanings'

which are connoted by a text (or any sign) are regarded as 'myths'. In semiotic terms, the myth, or the 'meaning' arising from a connotative sign is termed **signification**. Barthes's terminology is summarized in Figure 2 (compare Hjelmslev's notions in Figure 1 above).
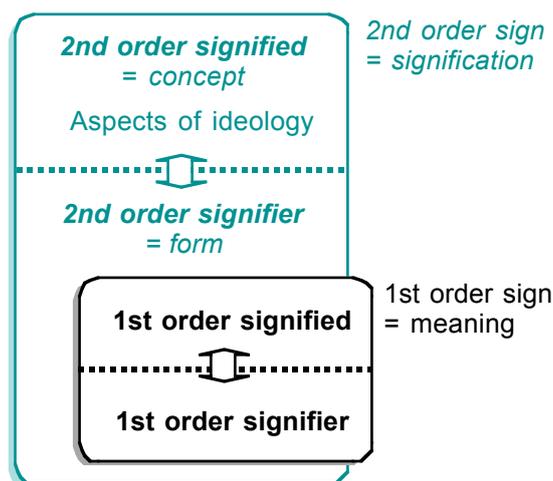
Figure 2: The layered structure of a connotative semiotic in Barthes's semiotic theory

A connotative meaning (signification) is characterized by Barthes as a second-order sign which arises *in a particular situation,* and which further builds upon a (first-order) sign defined in a denotative system. One of the examples he gives in *Mythologies* is a picture on the cover of a French magazine (the example should be read in the context of France in the 1950s):

> I am at the barber's, and a copy of *Paris-Match* is offered to me. On the cover, a young Negro in a French uniform is saluting, with his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the tricolour. All this is the *meaning* of the picture. But, whether naively or not, I see very well what it signifies to me: that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors. I am therefore again faced with a greater semiological system: there is a signifier, itself already formed with a previous system (*a black soldier is giving the French salute*); there is a signified (it is here a purposeful

mixture of Frenchness and militariness); finally, there is a presence of the signified through the signifier. (Barthes 1957: 116, emphasis RB)

Three features of a connotative signified (a concept) should be emphasized:

(1) As this illustration shows, the connotative signified (or the concept) 'is filled with a *situation*' (Barthes 1957: 119) and a *history*. In the present example, the concept is linked to such aspects as the history of France, its colonial past, its present image in relation to this past, and so forth. The signification which arises from a connotative sign is based on associations contained in its concept.

(2) Because it is based on associations, the concept of a myth is *open-ended*.

(3) The connotative signified is also described as *intentional* and is characterized in relation to 'functioning' in a *context*. The concept is the motivation behind the myth (Barthes 1957: 118), it is 'a formless, unstable, nebulous condensation, whose unity and coherence are above all due to its function' (ibid.: 199). This function, in turn, depends on a context. Barthes refers to this feature of myth as appropriation:

> the fundamental character of the mythical concept is to be *appropriated*: (…) French imperiality must appeal to such and such group of readers and not another. The concept closely corresponds to a function, it is defined as a tendency. (Barthes 1957: 119)

By way of concluding this section, it is useful to compare Hjelmslev's and Barthes's approaches to connotative semiotic systems. As hinted at above, the major difference between the two frameworks lies in their focus and their degree of abstraction. Hjelmslev's *Prolegomena* is first and foremost a *theory* of language. Since his major aim is to provide the necessary and sufficient theoretical tools (the

'calculus') on the basis of which language can be studied in a systematic way, his conception of language is embedded and linked to a more abstract view of semiosis in general. His conception of non-denotative semiotic systems (i.e. connotative systems and metalanguage) then, is based on a logical extension[13] of the basic content–expression relationship which inheres in the linguistic sign.

Barthes's starting point, by contrast, is signs in general – as they *occur* in language, but also in a wide range of other semiotic systems. Hence, he *applies* the content–expression relationship to other semiotics apart from language. Due to his widening of focus and his interest in the application of a theory of signs to different types of semiotics, Barthes arrives at a more concrete view of the content–expression relation. Barthes's conception of a connotative semiotic focusses on the 'sign' as such in its relation to secondary 'meanings' which arise in *different possible situations*. The latter specification is crucial in Barthes's framework, and indicates an important contrast with Hjelmslev's theory: while both Hjelmslev and Barthes define connotative 'meaning' in relation to factors which are psychological, social, geographical, cultural, and so forth, only Barthes specifies the connotative type of sign as being tied to the particularity of a specific situation and a specific history.

In Barthes's theory, connotative meaning, in general, is a second-order meaning arising in a particular situation, in addition to a first-order meaning. The distinguishing feature of a connotative meaning is its contingency on an individual, particular situation. In this view, a connotative meaning contrasts to a denotative (basic, first-order) meaning (i.e. meaning proper, in his terminology), which refers to what is general or common to various situations, what is 'standardized'. In

Hjelmslev's theory, a connotative semiotic is defined, purely in abstract terms which follow from the theoretical framework itself, on the basis of the relation between an expression plane and a content plane as the different orders of abstraction making up a sign. A connotative semiotic, as a sign whose expression plane is another semiotic system, is the logical counterpart of a metalanguage. Most crucially, *the notion of situation-specificity is not relevant in Hjelmslev's definition of a connotative sign*. In other words, in Hjelmslev's view, a connotative content by itself is not necessarily dependent on a specific situation, although, if one does take into account particularities pertaining to the specific situation, situational factors can play a role in connotative content, just as well as they can feature in each of the planes of a denotative sign. In Hjelmslev's theory, the distinction between, on the one hand, 'general' or 'standardized' aspects of signs, and on the other hand, more specific aspects arising in specific situations, is regarded as constituting a separate semiotic dimension which interacts with the content–expression dimension, viz. the distinction *form–substance–purport*, which will be dealt with in the next section.

3 Form–substance–purport

3.1 Basic definition

In Hjelmslev's theory of language, the major distinction defining the linguistic sign is that between content and expression: it is the relation between two orders of abstraction (conceptual and phonic), the interaction between a content plane and an expression plane, which constitutes a sign. However, this distinction is cross-cut by another differentiation, viz. between form, substance and purport.

Both content and expression can be further analysed into form, substance and purport. Hjelmslev's conception of **form** and **substance** reiterates de Saussure's earlier distinction (*forme–substance*). The third term in the threefold differentiation, **purport**, corresponds to de Saussure's unformed *pensée* and *son*. By using a general term 'purport' and in this way highlighting the general nature of the form–substance–purport differentiation as pertinent to both content and expression, Hjelmslev offers a more abstract semiotic view compared to de Saussure.

Hjelmslev's triad form–substance–purport will be explained here in two steps, which correspond to two different levels of abstraction at which Hjelmslev defines his concepts:

(1) First, the basic nature of the three concepts will be described as they appear, on a primary level, in the two planes of a sign, content and expression.

(2) After that, Hjelmslev's more abstract characterization of the triad will be looked into.

As with our exploration of the definition of Hjelmslev's content–expression contrast above (§2), I will use different terms to refer to two characterizations of the differentiation between form–substance–purport (which again only differ in terms of their levels of abstraction) which will be distinguished: they will be called Hjelmslev's **primary** and **secondary** interpretations of the form–substance–purport triad.[14]

3.2 Hjelmslev's primary interpretation of the form–substance–purport triad

Within the content plane, purport refers to unformed and unanalyzed thought.[15] **Content-purport** (de Saussure's unformed *pensée*) is an amorphous thought-mass.[16]

In an a priori characterization constructed for the sake of the argument, Hjelmslev describes content-purport as that factor of the content of a sign which is common to different languages: content-purport can provisionally be seen as a type of 'meaning'[17] which can be taken as a basis for comparing different signs in different languages. Hjelmslev gives the following example:

(1) a. *jeg véd det ikke* (Danish)
     b. *I do not know* (English)
     c. *je ne sais pas* (French)
     d. *en tiedä* (Finnish)
     e. *naluvara* (Eskimo) (Hjelmslev 1963/1943: 50)

The content-purport in these expressions, is the meaning factor they have in common, i.e. 'the thought itself' (ibid.: 50). In another illustration, Hjelmslev refers to colour terms:[18] for English *green*, French *vert* and Welsh *glas*, the content-purport is the colour itself which is referred to by the different words in the three languages.

In an initial characterization, then, in these two illustrations, it is possible to 'extract' an unformed purport from the different ranges of expressions. However, further contemplating the examples, it can be seen that this 'purport' *in itself* cannot be labelled: as soon as such a labelling is attempted, for instance by saying that in the examples, the purport is the meaning 'I don't know', or 'green', the purport is being *formed* in one way or another, and in this way it is viewed from the perspective of a particular language, it is viewed as a **content-substance**. Content-substance is purport viewed from a language: a content-substance is an area of purport which appears, qua area, as the result of the specific way in which a particular language carves up or 'forms' this purport. Hence, a content-substance is

dependent on a 'forming' process in a language.[19] Hjelmslev emphasizes this feature of content-substance by defining it *in relation to* a **content-form**:

> the substance depends on the form to such a degree that it lives exclusively by its favor and can in no sense be said to have independent existence. (Hjelmslev 1963/1943: 51)

The content-form can be defined only in relation to the sign function (ibid.: 54) as characterized above in terms of the interaction between a content and an expression. In other words, the *content*-form is that which, together with an *expression*-form, constitutes a unit which functions as a sign in a language. From the point of view of the purport, a content-form is arbitrary.

The concepts of content-substance and content-form can be further explained by returning to the two sets of examples cited above. In the first illustration, the content-substance, in English, is 'I do not know', as a specific meaning in a particular occurrence of the sign *I do not know*. This substance appears only as a substance for a content-form: it appears as a significant content by being linked to a content-form. The content-form is the *'content'* which is *expressed* in the construction consisting of four words *I do not know* and which is defined in terms of the formation principles of the English language. This assembled (in this case, the sign is constructional, as opposed to elemental) content can be analyzed in terms of different parameters, such as a first person pronoun 'I', a negative particle 'not', a lexical verb 'know', a periphrastic auxiliary used to construct the content 'negative', and so forth. Each of these aspects of the content-form are defined through their functioning, together with an expression level (the distinct words), as signs, in the

English language: the content of the sign expressed as *I* is defined in relation to the contents of other signs, expressed, for example, in *you* or *they*, or *my*.

In the second illustration featuring colour terms, the content-substance, in English, is 'green'. This substance refers to that area of the whole colour spectrum (the purport), which, in English, is delimited as a major colour, 'green'. The content-form is the content 'green', purely defined in opposition to other content-forms, expressed for example in *yellow, blue* or *red*. Although a 'thought' of the same colour, as a non-linguistic entity which can be visually perceived, can be seen as extractable from the expressions *green* in English and *glas* in Welsh (i.e. they can be regarded as having a common purport), the two expressions have different content-substances, because English and Welsh carve up the colour spectrum in different ways. Welsh has another sign to refer to another shade of what is referred to as *green* in English (viz. *gwyrdd*), whereas what is called *glas* in Welsh is expressed in English as either *green, blue* or *grey*.

A similar differentiation between form, substance and purport can be made *within* the expression plane, i.e. in the phonic order of semiosis. **Expression-purport** is defined, parallel to content-purport, as an amorphous, unanalyzed sequence of sounds, a 'vocalic continuum' (Hjelmslev 1963/1943: 52). Through the existence of an expression-form (which exists by virtue of being connected with a content-form in a linguistic sign), the expression-purport is formed into an expression-substance. An **expression-substance**, then, is a sound sequence pronounced in a particular language, by an individual person, hic et nunc, for example, the sound [ˈrɪŋ]. An expression-substance, i.e. a particular pronunciation

by an individual person, only exists qua substance by virtue of its relationship to an expression-form, i.e. by being the substance for a form. An **expression-form**, finally, is a sound sequence, which is interpreted, within a particular language, in terms of the phonemes by which this language carves up and selects from the complete range of possible human vocalizations.[20] The phonemic (formal) nature of sound is in turn determined by its being linked to a content. In other words, also in the expression plane, 'form' is characterized in relation to the sign function: an *expression*-form is defined by forming a connection with a *content*-form and in this way constituting a sign (in the example referred to above: the sign *ring*). Within the expression plane, the distinction between form and substance conforms to the contrast between phonology and phonetics.

The primary characterization of the form–substance–purport triad within the two semiotic planes of content and expression is summarized in Table 3. It should be emphasized that the three notions in the differentiation form–substance–purport are intrinsically defined in relation to one another. Their interrelationships are captured in the following characterization: purport provides the substance for a form (cf. Hjelmslev 1963/1943: 52). None of the three aspects has any 'existence' (or a 'relevance' to linguistic analysis) except through its role in relation to the other two. Purport is only relevant in linguistics, insofar as it is substance for a form. Conversely, the existence of a substance is entirely dependent on a form being 'projected' onto the purport, 'just as an open net casts its shadow down an undivided surface' (ibid.: 57).[21]

	Form	Substance	Purport
Content plane	*Content-form:* Aspects of content defined in relation to other elements of content within one language, and in relation to an expression plane	*Content-substance:* The 'meaning' of a sign in a particular context (*Semantics*)	*Content-purport:* Amorphous, unformed thought mass
Expression plane	*Expression-form:* *Phonology* Phonemes: sound-expressions defined in relation to other sound-expressions within one language, and in relation to a content plane	*Expression-substance:* *Phonetics* The pronunciation of a sound sequence by a particular person, hic et nunc	*Expression-purport:* Amorphous, unformed sound sequence

Table 3: The significance of the form–substance–purport differentiation within the content and expression planes of a linguistic sign

Only form has an extra defining facet. The role of form in the form–substance–purport triad is defined in relation to the sign function: both content-form and expression-form exist by interacting with a form on a reverse plane (an expression-form or a content-form, respectively), and by constituting a linguistic sign together with it. In other words, a content-form serves to 'form' an area of conceptual purport into a content-substance by virtue of being linked to a content–expression in a particular language. The same is true for expression-form: an expression-form serves to 'form' an area of phonic purport into an expression-substance by virtue of being linked to a content-form in a language.

Consequently, it is 'form' which has a privileged status with regard to the linguistic sign as defined in terms of content and expression. The special relationship between 'form' and the linguistic sign, enables Hjelmslev to refine his definition of the sign in relation to his primary interpretation of the form–substance–purport triad, as we will see in §3.3.

3.3 Historiographic excursion:
Late 19th C – early 20th C advances in the study of the phonic side of language

As has been cursorily noted above, the study of the phonic side of language in the
late 19th and early 20th centuries has played an important role in inspiring new
insights about the nature of language in general, especially at a theoretical level, in
relation to defining different components of language, and concomitant with this,
different sub-disciplines within linguistics. (The study of linguistic sound had
received a new impetus in the latter half of the 19th century through technological
innovations, and had an eminent place in both European and North-American
structuralist schools – in the latter also through the analysis of 'exotic' languages
without a tradition of writing.) The framework of the study of sounds has been
important in relation to at least three dimensions which are crucial in Hjelmslev's
framework:

(1) the coding relationship between content and expression;

(2) the differentiation between form and substance;

(3) further differentiations within substance (types of variants).

With respect to the distinction between form and substance (item 2), which is under
consideration at this point, it is important to recognize, in a theoretical perspective,
that both de Saussure's formulation of this distinction and Hjelmslev's more abstract
reinterpretation of it should be understood against the background of a general
theoretical tendency in linguistics around the turn of the century and in the first half
of the 20th century, in which a distinction between what came to be called phonology
vs. phonetics gradually became more important, and evolved into an 'established'
(albeit not yet completely understood – cf. the quotation from Whorf below) theme

in linguistics around the time when Hjelmslev wrote his *Prolegomena*. In this respect it is useful to note, also, that Hjelmslev explains and illustrates his differentiations most extensively in terms of the phonic plane of language, emphasizing that distinctions which have been noted for this plane should equally be applied to the content plane of language (cf. Hjelmslev 1963/1943: 61–70, esp. 70, 82 – see also notes 20, 21 and 23 below).

According to Jakobson (1966), a precursory version of the phonemic principle occurs in the 1870s, in the (independent) work of two European linguists: (1) Sweet (1877), who distinguished between sound distinctions which 'may correspond to differences of meaning' and those which 'are not significant and cannot alter the meaning' (for the former he devised a system of notation called 'Broad Romic') (Sweet 1877: 103, 182, as quoted in Jakobson 1966: 243), and (2) Baudouin de Courtenay (whose lectures appeared in English in the *Bulletin of Kazan University* (Poland) in the 1870s), who distinguished between phonetics dealing with the physical and physiological dimension of producing sounds, and 'phonetics in the true sense of the word', dealing with 'sounds in connection with word meaning' (quoted in Jakobson 1966: 246). In 1873, the term *phonème* had been proposed by Dufriche-Desgenettes simply as a French translation of the German *Sprachlaut*.

De Saussure (1879) took over the term *phonème* in his reconstruction of Indo-European vowels (cf. Jakobson 1966: 252). According to Hjelmslev (1963/1943: 79), the idea of describing 'categories of the expression plane on a purely non-phonetic basis' was 'clearly and consciously presented' in this early work by de Saussure. In North-America, according to Lee (1996: 46f), the idea of distinctive

speech sounds and 'alternating sounds' had played a role, since the late 1880s, in the work of Boas, and later also Sapir (who conceived of an internal language system as 'points in a pattern') and Whorf (who further explored the 'points in the pattern model' in terms of 'linguistic relativity'). It was Whorf, who, in 1929, coined the term *allophone* to refer to positional variants of sounds (cf. Lee 1996: 46, 88). Later on Whorf emphasized the importance of the 'phonemic principle' in relation to his own conception of relativity in language:

> Discovery of the phonemic principle made a revolution in linguistics comparable to relativity in physics (…) Most linguists unfortunately haven't had a strong physical science education and don't realize that phonemics is a relativity principle. (Whorf 1940: 1–2; as quoted in Lee 1996: 46)

In Europe, the phonemic principle came to be established through work in the two major European schools of phonetics, the London School centring around Jones (cf. 1936) and the Prague School centring around Trubetzkoy (cf. 1939). The terms *phonology* and *phonetics* were introduced by Trubetzkoy in his magnum opus, *Grundzüge der Phonologie* (1939). Hjelmslev (1963/1943: 62–65) explains that these two schools had quite different conceptions (and motivations) of the phonemic principle.

For further work on the phonemic principle which appeared in the 1930s–1940s, see Firth (1934), van Wijk (1939), Martinet (1949a). For further theoretical work on the form–substance–purport distinction in the phonic plane of language, see Coseriu (1975c/1954). (Coseriu's theory of language, which is based on the concept of intermediary norms (in between a language system and individual usages of that system), is a further exploration of Hjelmslev's form–substance–purport distinction (cf. Coseriu 1975b/1952).)

3.4 Hjelmslev's refinement of the notion 'sign' on the basis of his primary interpretation of the form–substance–purport triad

Focussing on the relevance of the form–substance–purport triad in relation to the distinction between content and expression which lies at the basis of semiosis, Hjelmslev refines the definition of a sign:

> (…) the two entities that contract the sign function – expression and content – behave in the same way in relation to it. By virtue of the sign function and only by virtue of it, exist its two functives, *which can now be precisely designated as the content-form and the expression-form.* (Hjelmslev 1963/1943: 57, emphasis MT)

As we have seen above, the interaction between content and expression (as mutually defining sides of a sign function) is the principal characteristic defining the nature of a linguistic sign: 'the sign is an entity generated by the connexion between an expression and a content' (Hjelmslev 1963/1943: 47). The specific relation of *form* to the sign function, and the relationship between form and substance/purport offers an extra perspective for characterizing a sign. Besides being defined as a 'connection' between two semiotic orders, sound and thought, a sign is also a sign *for something* – this 'something' is characterized in Hjelmslev's theory in terms of the form–substance–purport triad:

> The sign is, then – paradoxical as it may seem – *a sign for a content-substance* and *a sign for an expression-substance*. It is in this sense that the sign can be said to be a sign for something. On the other hand, we see no justification for calling the sign a sign merely for the content-substance, or (what nobody has thought of, to be sure) merely for the expression-substance. The sign is a two-sided entity, with a Janus-like perspective in two directions, and with effect in two respects: "outwards" toward the expression-substance and "inwards" toward the content-substance. (Hjelmslev 1963/1943: 58; emphasis MT).

The interaction between the two differentiating dimensions – viz. content–-expression and form–substance–purport – in Hjelmslev's primary characterization of

a sign can be visualized as in Figure 3. Taking into account these two differentiating dimensions, a sign, as a connection between a content and an expression, is also a form for carving up the purport and turning it (forming it) into substance.

Importantly, Hjelmslev's *primary* characterization of the form–substance–purport distinction (i.e. the explanation of this distinction which we have looked at so far), is essentially concerned with defining, in precise terms, that aspect of a sign by which it 'is *a sign for something*'. In other words, on this level, the form–substance–-purport distinction theorizes the semiotic relationship by which the purport, as *'Ding an sich'* and as 'sound as such' can be linked to language, i.e. to linguistic signs or forms.
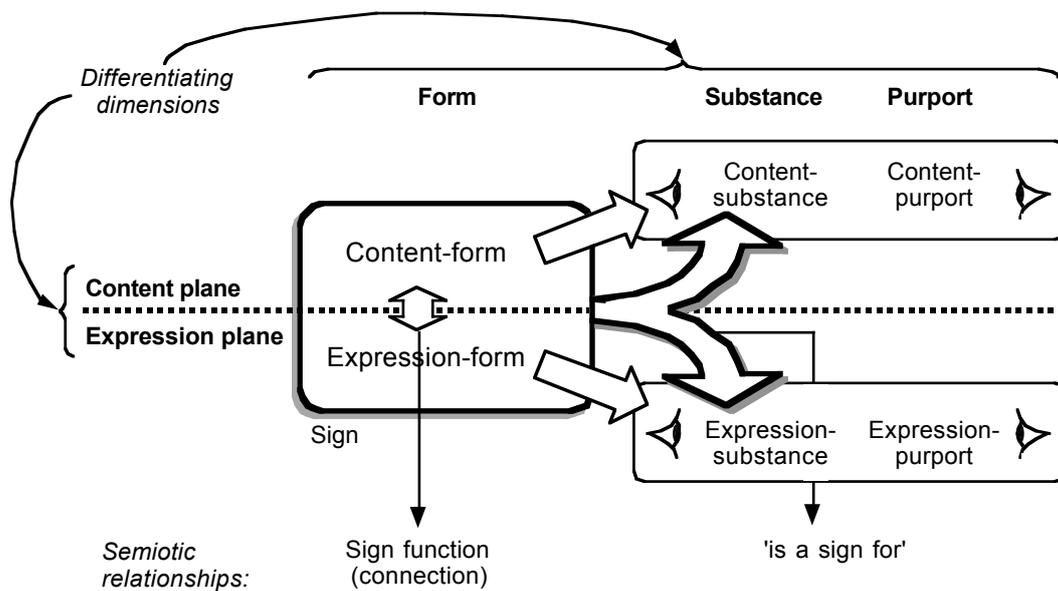
Figure 3: Hjelmslev's primary characterization of the linguistic sign by means of two differentiating dimensions: content–expression, and form–substance–purport

In his article 'La stratification du langage', Hjelmslev refers to the differentiation in terms of his two major dimensions – 'la double distinction entre *forme* et *substance*

et entre *contenu (signifié)* et *expression (signifiant)*' (Hjelmslev 1959/1954: 44) as a *stratification* of language. Hjelmslev's 'double distinction' leading to a differentiation between content-form, expression-form, content-substance(-purport) and expression-substance(-purport) will be referred to as the **Hjelmslevian stratification scheme**.

3.5 Hjelmslev's secondary interpretation of the form–substance–purport triad

Keeping in mind the basic relationship between the form–substance–purport differentiation and the sign (with its expression and content planes), Hjelmslev's more abstract characterization of this differentiation can now be considered. From a more abstract perspective, the differentiation between form and substance[22] indicates a general type of semiotic contrast which recurs along a continuum: '(w)hat from one point of view is "substance" is from another point of view "form"' (Hjelmslev 1963/1943: 81). The type of semiotic relationship which holds between form and substance is termed **manifestation**, and is described as a relationship between a *constant* and a *variable*, or between a **schema** and a **usage**: a linguistic schema (i.e. a sign, a form) is manifested in a usage (i.e. substance). In this framework, the contrast form–substance appears as a distinction which can be used to grasp the relation between language and its sign-forms, and the particular uses which are made of these signs in different situations. A schema is a constant by virtue of the sign relationship, i.e. by virtue of the connection between a content and an expression. Within the content plane as well as the expression plane, this schema (i.e. content-form and expression-form, respectively) is manifested in a particular usage (i.e. a content-substance and expression-substance). Compared to the schema, this usage is

a variable, since one schema (a constant) can be manifested in various possible usages.[23]

Hjelmslev calls the elements which are distinguished in an analysis of form **invariants**, and those which are arrived at in an analysis of substance **variants** (Hjelmslev 1963/1943: 61ff).[24] Later on he distinguishes between two types of variants: **variations** are 'free' variants, which appear independently of their environment, whereas **varieties** are 'bound' variants (termed 'combinatory' variants by Hjelmslev), i.e. variants which appear only in a particular environment of other elements with which they are combined. While he notes that these distinctions should be extended to the content plane,[25] Hjelmslev explains them most extensively with reference to the expression plane (as noted above), where he can build on earlier work in phonetics and phonology. He links the highest-degree *invariant* in the expression plane to the phonological category *phoneme* (ibid.: 62) and the two types of *variants* are equally explained in terms of the phonic side of language: free variants (*variations*) are all the 'possible specimens' of a sound which appear as different in 'a sufficiently sensitive experimental-phonetic registration'; bound variants (*varieties*) are illustrated as follows: 'into the syllable *ta* enter two varieties of two invariants, namely a variety of *t* that can appear only together with *a,* and a variety of *a* that can appear only together with *t*' (ibid.: 82).

Hjelmslev's differentiation between varieties and variations as two types of variants illustrates the very abstract nature of his form–substance (schema–usage) distinction and hence the possible recurrence of this distinction along a continuum. The variety–variation contrast within the area of variants is itself motivated by a re-

application of the form–substance distinction *within substance*: i.e. within the area of variants, which appear as manifestations (substance) of invariants (form) belonging to the language system, a further differentiation is made in terms of schema (varieties) and usage (variations).

Importantly, in a section called 'Variants in the linguistic schema', which occurs about 20 pages later than his 'initial' characterization of the difference between variant and invariant, Hjelmslev argues that this distinction is also relevant *within* the linguistic schema, i.e. within linguistic form: 'Any functive in the linguistic schema can, *within the schema* and without reference to the manifestation, be subjected to an articulation into variants' (Hjelmslev 1963/1943: 81). This argument again shows that the constant–variable relationship is a very abstract kind of differentiation which recurs throughout any of the planes of language: not only is the form–substance contrast an instance of this relationship, the distinction between a constant and a variable is also relevant within both form and substance (i.e. as a distinction between invariant and variant, and between varieties and variations, respectively). It is this interpretation, in which the form–substance–purport triad is linked to a more abstract and recurring relationship between constant and variable, which I call Hjelmslev's *secondary* characterization of this semiotic triad.[26] Table 4 summarizes Hjelmslev's terminology related to his secondary characterization of the form–substance–purport differentiation.

Form		Substance – purport
Constant	$\Longrightarrow$	Variable
Schema	Manifestation	Usage

Table 4: Hjelmslev's form–substance–purport differentiation: terminology

3.6 Hjelmslev's refinement of the notion of connotative semiotic on the basis of his secondary interpretation of the form–substance–purport triad

Having looked at the form–substance–purport dimension in its specific (primary) and more abstract (secondary) characterizations, and its interaction with the content–expression dimension defining the sign function, we can now reconsider non-denotative possibilities of the sign function in their relation to the form–substance–purport differentiation. More specifically, we can now return to the important remark, spelt out above (§2.4), regarding the difference between Barthes's and Hjelmslev's conceptions of a connotative system: it was noted that, in contrast to Barthes's view, the notion of situation-specificity is not relevant in Hjelmslev's definition of a connotative sign, since a relationship between standardized aspects of signs and more specific aspects arising in specific situations is theorized by Hjelmslev in a separate dimension, viz. that of form–substance–purport.

Incorporating the form–substance–purport differentiation in his specification of a connotative semiotic enables Hjelmslev to point out in further detail, and in the systematic-logical way which characterizes his theoretical approach as a whole, the different possible ways in which connotative meanings can arise on the basis of a denotative semiotic. Different types of connotative meanings can be distinguished on the basis of the content–expression and form–substance–purport dimensions as two *interacting* differentiations within the expression plane of the connotative system, as illustrated in Figure 4.
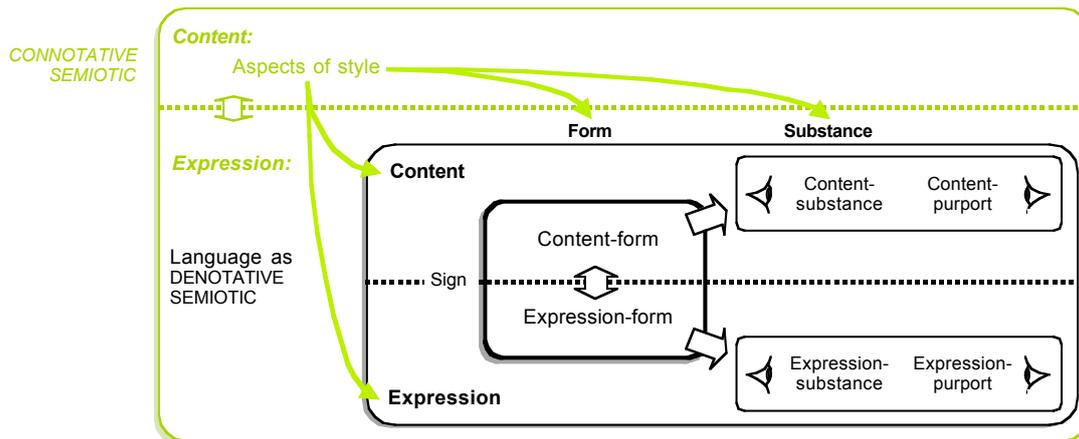
Figure 4: The interaction between the content–expression and the form–substance dimensions in a connotative sign

As Figure 4 shows, meanings in a connotative content plane (i.e. connotative meanings) can pertain to *any* aspect of the denotative semiotic which forms its expression plane, i.e. they can pertain to the content-plane or to the expression-plane of language, or to both, and they can pertain to either or both of its form and substance.[27] For example, 'Danish' is a connotative content (a meaning), which has as its expression the schemata and usages of the Danish language as a whole, as a connection of contents (phonological expressions) and expressions (denotative meanings as defined in the Danish language system). A variant of language (termed 'dialect', 'register', and so forth) may be defined on the basis of phonological features (pertaining to the expression plane), or, for example, on the basis of lexical-semantic features (pertaining to the content plane). Further, a variant of language may be defined in relation to a linguistic schema or in relation to a particular linguistic usage, and since the schema–usage contrast is a differentiation which can recur along a continuum, various types of language varieties can be specified focussing on this dimension: for example, on one end, a relatively general 'standardized' variant (such as a geographical dialect, for instance British), on the

other end, more specific varieties (idiolects), which, in relation to the general schema of a language appear to be based on a more particular usage (an individual person's usage of a language).[28]

4   System–process, paradigm–syntagm

The third and final major theoretical distinction around which Hjelmslev's theory of language is organized is the contrast **system–process**. In its most general sense, this distinction accords with de Saussure's contrast between *langue* and *parole*.

Beyond the general characterization of the system–process contrast (described by Hjelmslev in terms of a difference between language and text), Hjelmslev gives a further specification, which deserves slightly more attention: he explains the contrast by equating it with the relationship between **paradigm** and **syntagm**. On this point, Hjelmslev differs significantly from de Saussure. In his re-construction of de Saussure's theory of language, Thibault (1997: 64–65) emphasizes that, in de Saussure's view, the distinction between *langue* and *parole* should be disentangled from that between paradigm and syntagm. Syntagms are not part of *parole*, rather, they are regular, typical patterns of combination, defined within the system of *langue*.

Two contradictory points should be noted which account for the divergence between Hjelmslev and de Saussure:

(1) On the one hand, there is an 'intuitive' sense in which the distinction between paradigm and syntagm cannot be seen as coinciding with that between system and process. Clearly, paradigms can be set up for individual items, such as lexemes, as

well as for constellations of items, or constructions (i.e. 'syntagms' in Hjelmslev's and de Saussure's sense). In this perspective, 'syntagm' and paradigm do not form a logical opposition, but relate to different dimensions of language: the syntagm is a concept which can only be defined in relation to the notion of a rank scale of constituents (i.e. clause, phrase, word), and the possibilities which are available at each distinct level on a rank scale (whether elemental or constructional, whether simple or complex) can be represented in a paradigm.

(2) On the other hand, there is an equally 'intuitive' sense in which a syntagm is more 'instantial' than a paradigm: a syntagm provides a context in which an option, chosen from a paradigm, is instantiated. In this perspective, clausal syntagms (or phrasal syntagms) serve as a context in which the instantial meaning of a word (its contextual meaning) is further specified vis-à-vis its more schematic lexical meaning as it is defined, in relation to other lexical meanings, in a (lexical) paradigm. When keeping with Hjelmslev's broad view of 'syntagm', which extends the perspective to levels which are larger than the clause (or clause complex) and hence encompasses the level of 'a text', this point becomes even clearer: a text constitutes a con–text in which options selected from paradigms are instantiated.

On the whole, the divergence between Hjelmslev and de Saussure regarding the nature of system vs. text and paradigm vs. syntagm indicates the intricate connection between *instantiation* (defining a text as an instantiation of a system in a particular context), and the notion of *componentiality* as embodied in the rank scale (which defines units of language in terms of constituency, with smaller units regarded as occurring within the syntagmatic environment of larger units).

5 Conclusion

In this paper, four fundamental types of linguistic differentiations have been explored as they have been characterized by Hjelmslev:

(1) content–expression (*signifiant–signifié*);

(2) form–substance–purport, schema–usage;

(3) system–process; and

(4) paradigm–syntagm.

It has been shown that the first two of these distinctions, viz. the content–expression diad, and the form–substance–purport tried, are defined by Hjelmslev in two moves. First an initial characterization is given, and then Hjelmslev turns to a more abstract redefinition, which makes his already very detailed 'algebra' even more intricate, but which also opens up new perspectives for the application of the distinctions to various semiotic phenomena.

We have seen that the distinction between the diverse dimensions of differentiation is not always sharp. This is especially the case with system–process and paradigm–-syntagm. Augmenting this sense of indeterminacy between the different types of dimensions, at this point it can be further noted that 'process', 'usage' and 'connotative content' are quite similar: (1) 'process' refers to the instantiation of a system in particular text chains, (2) 'usage' is the manifestation of a schema in particular contexts, and (3) a 'connotative content' is a secondary content (a content whose expression is a linguistic sign) which arises when a sign receives a further significance in relation to (contextual) factors such as sociology, culture, psychology and so on. In the case of the distinctions of to content–expression, and form–

substance–purport, there is much less indeterminacy. As we have seen above, through a very careful exploration of Hjelmslev's definitions, paying attention to the various levels of abstraction at which his concepts are characterized, and focussing especially on the interaction between the various dimensions, it appears that the different components which he distinguishes, although they are only defined very abstractly, in relation to one another (content–expression), or in relation to relative points on a continuum (form–substance–purport), offer well-delineated categories to think about language. Using a Hjelmslevian metaphor, they are useful categories for carving up 'language' itself into thinkable components.

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Notes

[1]   I wish to thank Kristin Davidse, who has read and commented upon an earlier draft of this paper.

[2]   In view of the further exploration of Hjelmslev's differentiations below, it is useful to note that the new kind of linguistics which is proposed by Hjelmslev is a linguistic theory which concentrates solely on linguistic *form* as such, i.e. a theory which is characterized by a 'basic independence of non-linguistically defined

substance' (Hjelmslev 1963/1943: 80). The categories of this kind of linguistics are 'unnamed entities, i.e., arbitrarily named entities without natural designation' (ibid.: 79), which means that the categories are not *primarily* 'motivated' in relation to semantics or phonetics (and are not 'taken over from' everyday language (ibid.: 122)), but are set up on an internal, formal basis. It is also in this sense that the term 'algebra' is used. The categories of glossematics, which are thus defined in an irreducible way on the basis of such an algebra are called glossemes (ibid.: 80). In his review of Hjelmslev's *Prolegomena*, Martinet (1942-45) has warned against a reduction of linguistics to an algebra of 'unnamed' pure forms which dismisses semantics and phonetic substance. The privileged status of 'form' in Hjelmslev's thinking about how language can be theorized and analyzed will become clear further on in this paper.

3   Hjelmslev's abstract logical framework, or 'algebra', and hence further theorizing of the original Saussurean distinctions, is essentially based on a postulated parallelism between a content-plane and an expression-plane in language. Kuryłowicz (1949: 16) refers to this feature of glossematics as 'isomorphism'. In European as well as North-American linguistics around the middle of the 20th century, an exploration of the isomorphisms between the phonic side and the content side of language was predominant (cf. Bazell 1953, referred to in Matthews 2001).

Martinet has criticized Hjelmslev's conception of the content and expression side of language as being symmetrically organized, proposing an alternative view based on the idea of a 'double articulation' inherent in language (Martinet 1949b, 1977,

1997), and in this way laying the foundation of his own variant of structuralism. Martinet's notion of 'double articulation' corresponds to Hockett's concept 'duality of patterning', which was formulated about a decade later (Hockett 1958) as a distinctive feature of human language, setting it off from other communication systems.

[4]   This is a significant observation, since Hjelmslev takes it as an important aspect of his theory to explicitly define his technical terminology. This defining is described as a semiotic practice itself, and the importance of this task is reflected in the register of defined terms which is presented at the end of the book, and which is set up by the author in order to give an overview of the mutually defining terminology used in his semiotic model. The lack of definitions for 'content' and 'expression' is clear from the main text, but also from this register.

[5]   'Solidarity' is a technical notion in Hjelmslev's framework, referring to the interdependence between terms.

[6]   The use of the term 'second-order' in order to refer to Hjelmslev's second characterization of the content–expression contrast is inspired by Barthes's further study of connotative systems, which we will turn to below.

[7]   The term 'functive' is used by Hjelmslev to refer to either of the two poles of a sign (which is regarded as a sign function).

[8]   It should be noted that Thibault (1997) further explains this distinction as it was originally introduced by de Saussure; i.e. he does not refer to Hjelmslev. However,

at the primary level focussed on at this point, Hjelmslev's content–expression distinction is completely parallel to de Saussure's *signifié–signifiant*, as pointed out above.

9   Hjelmslev himself uses the term *semiotics* instead of *semiotic*. I will use the term *semiotic* to refer to a semiotic system, to indicate the difference with *semiotics*, which is commonly used to refer to the discipline (the study of signs); for the latter, Hjelmslev has the term *semiology* (see also the following note).

10   'Metasemiotic' is a general term which logically contrasts with 'denotative semiotic'. When a metasemiotic has a non-scientific semiotic as its object of study (i.e. as its content plane), it is termed a **semiology**. This term is taken from de Saussure, and is intended to refer to any discipline which studies signs, in the original Saussurean sense (cf. Hjelmslev 1963/1943: 107). With respect to linguistics, in this vein, 'semiology' (the study of signs and sign systems (semiotics) in general) is distinguished from glossematics (the study of linguistic form, i.e. linguistic signs in the narrow sense), in that semiology is broader, since it also comprises de Saussure's 'external linguistics' (which takes into account sociological and psychological aspects of language). On de Saussure's conception of semiology as part of social psychology, see Thibault (1997: 3f, 25ff, 49).

11   Importantly, in Hjelmslev's theory, this is seen as the task of *semiology*, not of glossematics, which is a linguistic theory which concentrates on form: a semiology is a semiotic whose content plane is another semiotic in its totality, and this object

semiotic may be of any type (i.e. possibly a connotative semiotic) (cf. also the previous note).

[12]   It is important to note that Barthes's use of the term 'form' is distinct from Hjelmslev's, as will be indicated below.

[13]   I.e. a 'logical' extension which surfaces naturally within the bounds of the abstract, theoretical calculus set up for language as such, as a denotative semiotic.

[14]   Notice that the terms I use to refer to the more abstract definitions are not parallel: *second-order* in the case of the content–expression contrast, versus *secondary* in the case of the form–substance–purport triad. This has to do with an inherent difference in Hjelmslev's more abstract treatment of his major differentiating dimensions.

[15]   Recall that the content plane in a linguistic sign in general is defined as the side of 'thought', in contrast to the expression plane, the side of 'sounds'.

[16]   Hjelmslev's content-purport corresponds to what Kant has called *noumenon* or '*Ding an sich*' (See Thibault 1997: 168, who describes de Saussure's 'pensée' in relation to Kant's *noumenon*; see also Willems 1994: 40–50, on Husserl's phenomenological re-interpretation of Kant's *noumenon*).

[17]   It is significant, in this respect, that Hjelmslev's original, Danish, term for purport is *'mening'* (cf. Hjelmslev 1963/1943: 153).

[18]   In twentieth century linguistics (and more broadly in cognitive sciences such as cognitive psychology and cognitive anthropology), colour terms are often cited in

discussions of linguistic relativity and proto-typicality, although in such discussions, Hjelmslev is seldom mentioned. This area of language has so frequently been brought up in related types of discussions that its use as an illustration seems superfluous. However, the nature of colour terms will be referred to here, in order to adhere to Hjelmslev's illustrations. The commonality of the illustration, which appears with hindsight from a twenty-first century perspective, can serve as a basis for understanding Hjelmslev's concepts 'content-form', 'content-substance' and 'content-purport', which in themselves are rather difficult to grasp, and which have been interpreted in different ways by different linguists.

[19]   Hjelmslev (1963/1943: 79) refers to content-substance as 'semantics'.

[20]   Another example given by Hjelmslev is the phonemic formation, in different languages, of one and the same name: '*one and the same expression-purport may be formed differently* in different languages. English [bəˈlɪn], German [b̥ɛrˈliːn], Danish [b̥æʁˈliˀn], Japanese [b̥ɛɭuɭinu] represent different formations of one and the same expression-purport (the city-name *Berlin*)' (Hjelmslev 1963/1943: 56).

[21]   As we have seen above, in explaining the form–substance contrast in the expression plane Hjelmslev invokes the established distinction between phonology and phonetics. With respect to the content plane, he refers in a rather inexplicit way (only in drawing a parallel with 'phonetics' in the expression plane (cf. Hjelmslev 1963/1943: 79, 96, 125)) to 'content-substance' as 'semantics' (understood in an ontological/phenomenological sense (p. 79), or in a contextual sense (cf. p. 82: 'contextual meanings'), which is in accordance with the general labelling of

'purport' (i.e. substance looked at from the other end), in the original Danish version, as *mening*. No alternative more familiar term is provided for content-form.

22   Hjelmslev's more abstract characterization of the differentiation between form–substance–purport focusses on the relationship between form and substance. In this respect it may be useful to note that, in this abstract view, 'substance' stands for both substance and purport: within a schema–usage view, both substance and purport are on the side of usage. This ties in with the earlier observation (see the definition of substance above) that substance and purport only differ in terms of the perspective which is taken: *purport* is unformed thought or sound mass, which is susceptible to formation in a particular language; *substance* is purport which serves as the substance for a particular form in a particular language.

23   Hjelmslev's explanation of the factor of 'heterogeneity' (in language in general) by taking recourse (almost exclusively) to illustrations from the expression plane again demonstrates the important theoretical role of studies of the phonic side of language, in late 19th century and early 20th century linguistics, as an inspirational framework for further theorizings about the conceptual side of language. In this vein it should be noted that the differentiation between varieties and variations which is proposed by Hjelmslev is in fact a semiotic generalization (because of its pertinence to the content plane, which is emphasized by Hjelmslev, although it is not worked out in his *Prolegomena*) of Trubetzkoy's (1935, 1939: 41–47) distinction, made a few years before Hjelmslev wrote his magnum opus, between 'fakultative Varianten' and 'kombinatorische Varianten' (Hjelmslev refers to Trubetzkoy's work with

regard to the distinction between phonetics and phonology, but not in relation to the differentiation between varieties and variations). As we have seen above (cf. §3.3), Whorf introduced the term 'allophone' to refer to this type of phonic variant (cf. Lee 1996: 88). Later, under the influence of Bloomfield's 'distributionalism', combinatorial variants (Hjelmslev's varieties) became known as *positional variants* or *distributional variants* (variants which are 'in complementary distribution' (cf. Roach 1991/1983: 38f) – a well-known example is the realization of English non-voiced plosives (p t k) as aspirated or non-aspirated depending on the following sound).

24   Again, this is an initial explanation of the contrast between invariant and variant as linked to the notions of form and substance respectively. As we will see below, later on, Hjelmslev argues that the difference between invariants and variants is also relevant *within* the *form* of language.

25   Cf. Hjelmslev (1963/1943: 82):

> (…) in view of the present situation in linguistics, it is important to emphasize that an
> articulation into variants is just as possible and necessary in the science of the content
> as in the science of the expression.

26   Notice that, although form and substance continue to be seen as aspects of a continuum which also includes purport, in this secondary characterization, the triad is principally looked at from the side of form, and it is mainly *form* and *substance* which are more abstractly reinterpreted in terms of various degrees of schematicity (or, taking the alternative perspective, variability). This characterization contrasts with Hjelmslev's primary definition of the triad, in which, as we have seen above,

the special status of '*purport*' as unnamed thought and sound mass is important in order to characterize the 'be a sign for' relationship.

27   In Hjelmslev's terminology, a connotative meaning which is based on both the content- and expression-planes of the denotative system on which it is built is termed a *connotator*, while a connotative meaning which is based on one of the four aspects of a denotative system (i.e. content-form, content-substance, expression-form, expression-substance) is termed a *signal*.

28   It will be noted that the two dimensions of content–expression and form–substance form a theoretical and systematic basis for distinguishing various types of language varieties, as this done in (socio)linguistics in general. As pointed out by Nöth (1985), the different possibilities of a connotative semiotic have also been further explored, in explicit relation to Hjelmslev, in the area of the theory of literature (for example, in theorizing literal meanings which arise from rhyme and/or rhythm vs. meanings which arise from semantic features, and various mixed types).

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