Louis Hjelmslev's theory of morphology

Its history and its relevance for the present; implications for research and teaching

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30th of November 2022
REBOOTING GLOSSEMATICS

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Il reste à faire un grand travail

Louis Hjelmslev, several places

Overview

- *Essai d'une théorie des morphèmes*: origin and history
- The distinction between extense ('verbal') and intense ('nominal') morphemes and the entire system as presented in the paper
- What are the original insights?
- PD on the theory of morphemes
- What could it mean to adopt a Hjelmslevian view today?

Louis Hjelmslev's
Essai d'une théorie des morphèmes

Origin and history

The 4ᵗʰ Congress of Linguists Copenhagen 1936

- The Congresses of linguists had proven to be the obvious arena for the battles surrounding new paradigms

- At the first and second Congresses, the structuralists had emerged victorious *vis à vis* the Indo-European comparativists

- Now in 1936 the time had come to present the Danish version of structuralism

- Hjelmslev and Uldall had worked assiduously to prepare their theory of language, glossematics, but in the end had to settle for an 8 page pamphlet outlining the theory and exemplifying some of the central operations

- So much more essential was it for Hjelmslev (LH) to present to the congress a paper of substance

The place of the Essai in LH's oeuvre

- *Principes*, the first major book (1928), is about the pronoun BUT also contains sketches of a more all-encompassing theory of language

- The great discovery of LH's life was that he (and his brother in arms Uldall) could analyse both content and expression according to the same principles

- This is the backdrop for the *Essai* as well as for the rest of his contributions.

- The *Essai* is thus a paper where both the grammatical system, and by implication the expression system as well, is analysed according to the same principles

- So, for each grammatical morpheme *there is a parallel expression unit.* This is theoretically important – but not for now and not for my present purposes

The theory of morphemes according to the Essai

Extense and intense morphemes

The eight morpheme categories

*The **pairs** of morphemes:*

- Case + Person and diathesis

- Comparison + Emphasis

- Number/gender + Tense/aspect

- Determination (article) + Mood *are ordered as follows:*

Intense/ objective	Extense/subjective
Case	Person and diathesis
Comparison	Emphasis
Number/gender	Aspect/tense
Determination	Mood

Tableau synoptique		Catégories intenses, objectives	Catégories extenses, subjectives
Relation (direction nexique homonexuelle ; catégorie dynamique)	1re dim. (dynamique) : direction (rapprochement – éloignement) 2me dim. (statique) : cohérence – incohérence 3me dim. (subjective) : subjectivité – objectivité	*cas*	*personne et* *diathèse*
Intensité (direction nexique hétéronexuelle ; catégorie statique)	Dimension : intensité forte – intensité faible	*comparaison*	*emphase*
Consistance (direction nexique homonexuelle et hétéronexuelle ; catégorie statique)	1re dim. (statique) : état discret – état compact 2me dim. (dynamique) : expansion – concentration 3me dim. (subjective) : massif – ponctuel	*nombre et* *genre*	*aspect* (temps y compris)
Réalité (direction nexique homonexuelle ou hétéronexuelle ; catégorie ni statique ni dynamique)	1re dim. (statique) : non-réalité – réalité 2me dim. (subjective) : réalisation désirée – négation de réalisation désirée 3me dim. (dynamique) : non-réalisation – réalisation	*article*	*mode*

The semantic substance formed

- The left hand side of the table specifies what semantic substance is formed by the morpheme category

- If we e.g. look at Number/Gender and Aspect/tense we find that their common semantic substance is given as: 'Consistance' and that the category may be both homo- and heteronexual. These two ways of defining the categories are notable since the semantic substance formed is a reflection of the traditional notional definition system whereas the homo- and heteronexual way of defining the categories is purely formal – given the fact the nexuality is taken care of elsewhere in the system of definitions

- This duality nicely captures *the affinity* which according to glosematics rules in the relationship between form and substance

RECAP: What are the original insights?

Intense and extense morphemes

- The original insight (of the entire classical tradition cf Diderichsen) that the morphemes which characterize verbal themes are relevant for the entire proposition whereas the morphemes which characterize nominal themes are in fact only relevant for the nominal syntagm tended to get lost in translation. It should be featured as a fundamental difference between these two (universal?) 'word classes'

- The parallelism of expression and content should be seen as a suggestive challenge: What is the inner and revealing connection between modulations and extense morphemes? This was the basic question which led to the colloquia held by Eli Fischer-Jørgensen, Paul Diderichsen and Anders Bjerrum et al in order to dig deeper into the possibilities of a glossematic analysis

Conversion

- The insight that a particular content substance may be formed BOTH as a dependent category (a fundamental morpheme) and as a free form (a converted morpheme) makes it possible to see that *there are content relations which are obscured by the word classes* (obvious in the relationship between case and prepositions)

- We shall come back to this in a short while

Paul Diderichsen
on the theory of morphemes

Paul Diderichsen's contribution to Recherches

- In 1949 LH would turn 50 and the active group around him decided to invite contributions for a festschrift: *Recherches structurales*

- A number of international stars (Jakobson, Martinet, Benveniste, Lotz) were invited to participate but the bulk of the volume were Danish contributions

- Paul Diderichsen who had previously worked on number and who had recently finished (the first edition of) his Danish grammar (1946), chose to entitle his contribution *Morpheme Categories in Modern Danish*

- As such it is simultaneously an application of the glossematic theory of morphemes, referring to the *Essai* as the centerpiece, and an assessment of its applicability and fruitfulness for the analysis of modern Danish

Diderichsen's critical points

- The definitions according to dependency do not work very well in all cases

- Emphasis is not a morpheme category

- The relationship between case and diathesis is not obvious and probably does not belong in the theory of morphemes at all (but in syntax)

- Number-gender and determination are intertwined in Danish

- Nexual relationships are not the only ones, it is also necessary to include junction

- Negation and yes/no may be a (new) morpheme in Danish

- Defectivation/Neutralization is a key to analyzing the Danish system, e.g. the neutralization of gender

A Hjelmslevian morphology for the present

Implications for research and teaching

On number and gender in Danish

- In a system where number (singular vs plural) and gender (neutrum vs utrum) are two separate categories what does it buy us to see them as intertwined (i. as in principle ONE category)?

- Semantically *countable* vs *non countable* is related to utrum and neuter respectively: Generic uses of the plural

- Defective systems: Plural non-determined neutralizes gender

- But what about the obvious connection between DETERMINATION and NUMBER/GENDER?

Har du noget (neuter) *musik? Skru ned, musikken* (utrum) *er for høj*

- And WHAT is the relationship between NUMBER/GENDER and TENSE/ASPECT in Danish if any?

Conversion is the key

- What the glossematic analysis enables us to do is to explode the word classes, especially the prepositions and the adverbs

- If we take into account what semantic substance is formed, the prepositions/adverbs fall into at least three classes of converted morphemes: **particles** (stressed), **prepositions** (unstressed) and **modal adverbs** (placed close to the verb viz. *sentential adverbs*)

- The **modal verbs** are in any case converted *modes*

- The **degree adverbs** may be seen as converted *comparisons*

- The **adverbs of time** are converted *tenses*

- The **adverbs of place** are converted *cases*

Neutralization is the other key

- Following Diderichsen we should envisage number/gender and determination as one category in Danish

- Gender is neutralized both in the plural and in the determined complex DP

- *Det grønne hus* (vs.: *huset er grønt*); *Den blå bold* (vs.: *bolden er blå*)

- 'The green house' (the house is green); 'The blue ball' (the ball is blue)

- *Grønne huse* – *de grønne huse* ; *blå bolde* – *de blå bolde*

- 'Green houses – the green houses'; 'blue balls – the blue balls'

- This leaves us with only one fundamental morpheme and that is gender/determination in the singular

- *Huset* 'the house' vs. *Bolden* 'the ball' BUT note that no content unit may on its own be distinguished as to gender/determination

- *Thus* gender/determination seems to be a **classifier** and not a proper intense (fundamental) morpheme

Case in Danish

- Genitive in Danish is not a case but a means to create syntagms, i.e. a derivation

- The genitive formant is – as has been shown from Jespersen and onwards – not an intense morpheme but an attachment to the syntagm or a means to create a syntagm

To commemorate Per Anker Jensen

- *Annes bog* 'Anne's book': i.e. The book that Anne produced, edited, wrote, owned, painted, bound··· or all of the above

Making sense of emphasis

- Emphasis may be seen as the place where morphematic theory meets pragmatics

- Emphasis in expression has to do with topic - comment

- Emphasis in syntax has to do with sentence constructions such as

- *Det var **Krustjof** som forhindrede tredje verdenskrig under Cuba-krisen*

- 'It was Krustjof who prevented the third world war during the Cuba crisis'

- Emphasis may also be the category which explains (as in the original paper) the difference between pronoun use and pro-drop in pro-drop languages such as

- *Ego amo* versus *Amo* or *Yo estoy acqui* versus *Estoy acqui*

The special nature of Danish (in memory of Lisbeth Falster J)

- Danish seems to make extensive use of the same means of expression for a number of different purposes

- Schwa [ə] /-e/ is used for plural, as an infinitive marker, as a neutralization of gender (in plural and complex DPs) and as a signal of complex word formation

- [ɒ] /-er/ is used for present tense, agentive and plural

- [t] /-t/ is used for neuter gender, past participle and adverbialization

- This calls for a highly reflective discussion of expression and content when teaching Danish as an L2

The Sentence scheme and Hjelmslevian morphology

- The sentence scheme presupposes when teaching Danish syntax that pupils are able to find syntagms, i.e. it presupposes hierarchically structured cores with their respective modifiers

- An obvious problem is discontinuous syntagms

- *Han skrev kontrakten under* vs *Han underskrev kontrakten*

- 'He signed the contract'

- If pupils are able to find syntagms, they will indeed get AHA experiences when they find out that their ordering is dependent on the finite verb

- BUT this could only be a starting point and actually too often (in my teaching experience) became the end point of teaching

- A whole new world is opened if we ALSO allow ourselves and the pupils to discuss *where which semantic information is expressed and how*, not only because it is fruitful for Danish but because it is fruitful for a general linguistics

References

- Louis Hjelmslev: Essai d'une théorie des morphèmes, first printed in the Actes of the 4ᵗʰ Congress of linguists (1938), reprinted in Hjelmslev's *Essais linguistiques* (I) TCLC XII, 1959, available from the infrastructure and from the webpages of the Linguistic Circle of Copenhagen

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