

Jens Holt – Hjelmlev's connection in Aarhus

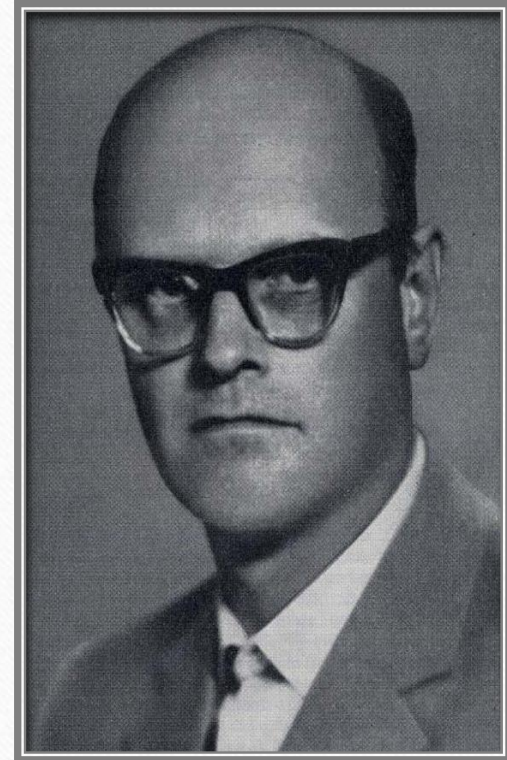
Heidi McGhee

Academic Employee, Project Infrastructuralism

Rebooting Glossematics, 30th November 2022

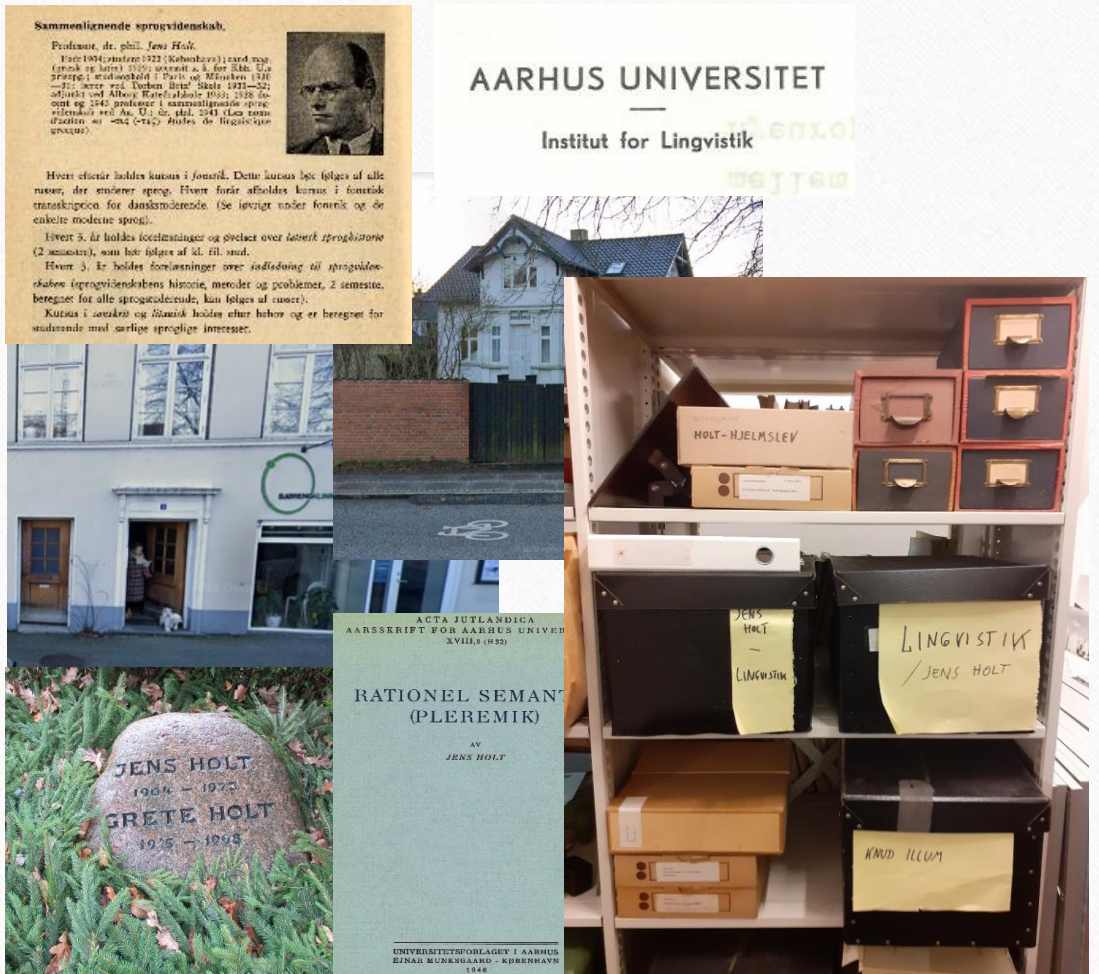
Jens Holt (1904-1973)

- Professor in comparative linguistics at Aarhus University
- Until now, quite anonymous in glossematic discussions, but has proven to be more important than previously thought
- Important to glossematics: Holts collaboration with Hjelmslev in the documented correspondance



Holt's academic life

- Archive of University History in Aarhus
- Academic interests and publications
- Holt had several different academic functions
- Meetings in Glossematisk Udvalg and Lingvistkredsen - who met who, when and where?
- Other connections in Aarhus: Ad. Stender-Petersen and Hans Christian Sørensen



Holt and Hjelmslev

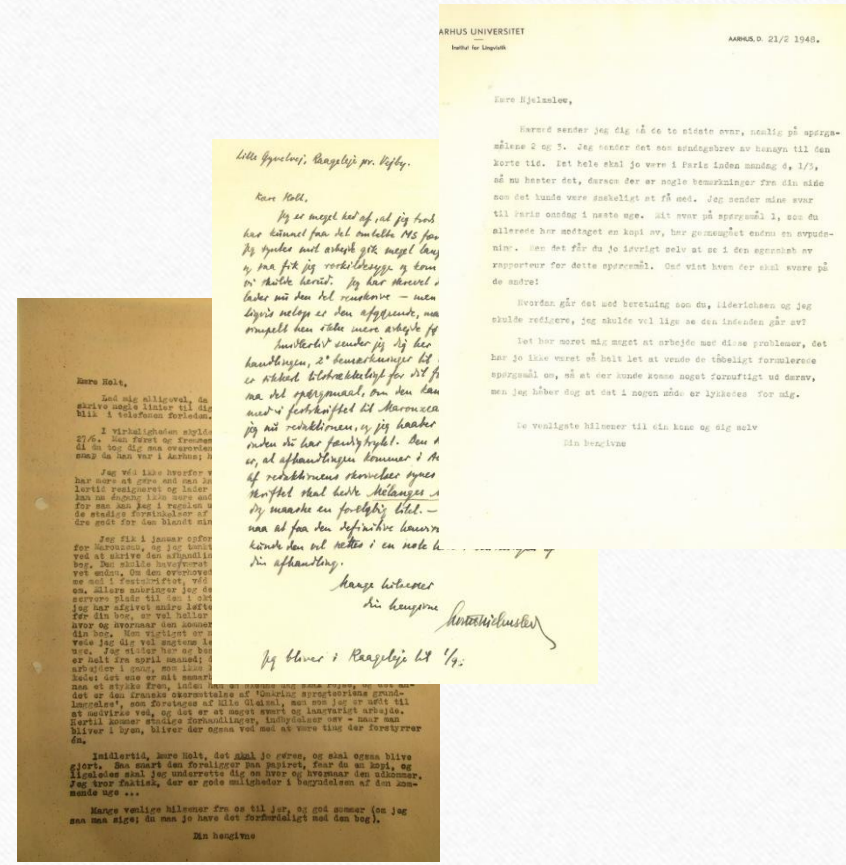
- Originals and carbon copies from the correspondence between Hjelmslev and Holt are from:
 - The Royal Library in Copenhagen
 - Archive of University History in Aarhus
- The earliest knowledge of them meeting was in 1928 at a lecture which Hjelmslev gave
- Correspondance from 1938 and up til Hjelmslev dies in 1965
- Hjelmslev's role as a counsellor and partner for discussion
- Over time a friendship grows



*From the Royal Library in Copenhagen – a small portion of the Hjelmslev archive.
Photo: Lorenzo Cigana.*

What did they discuss?

- University policy
- Structure of linguistics in Copenhagen and Aarhus
- Congresses and meetings
- Glossematics connected to Holt's publications
- War situation in Danmark 1939-1945
- Private issues



Examples from Holt-Hjelmslev correspondance

Kære Holt,

Tak for brevet; lad mig prøve strax at opklare de endnu dunkle punkter i glossematikens labyrint.

1.) “Let me immediately clear up the still obscure points in the labyrinth of glossematics.”

- 27/11-1944: Hjelmslev to Holt

Er det klart nu? Ellers gaar vi videre. Vi maa jo sørge for, at du er rigtig oplyst, naar du oven i købet holder foredrag om "Hjelmslevs sprogteori".

2.) “Is it clear now? [...] We have to make sure that you are properly informed when you on top of it are giving a lecture on ”Hjelmslevs sprogteori”.”

- 27/11-1944: Hjelmslev to Holt

Jeg håber at du har modtaget den litavinske bog. Jeg har nu kunnet genoptage min opde vianing, og der har meldt sig de samme studerende som i efterårssemestret. Jeg fortættter med min semantik. Og det er derfor jeg vil søge dit råd.

Det drejer sig om inddelingen av pleremerne. Jeg deler dem i to grupper: temaer som indeholder derivativ

3.) “I continue working on my semantics. And that is why I seek your advice. [...] Can you give some good advice?”

- 1/3-1945: Holt to Hjelmslev

Forhaabentlig har jeg nu svaret paa det, du ønskede; maaske er jeg ogsaa gaaet langt derudover. Skriv, hvis der er mere, jeg kan hjælpe dig med.

4.) “Hopefully, I have answered what you asked for – maybe I have also gone far beyond. Please write if there is anything else I can help you with.”

- 3/3-1945: Hjelmslev to Holt

A friendship grows

Naar jeg ikke i forordet har nævnt specielt Dem, som vistnok har mere adkomst dertil end nogen anden, har det været dikteret af univeristetspolitiske grunde med henblik paa efteraaret 1938. Jeg tror, det er det klogeste. Hvad De paa det omraade har vist mig - jeg tør vist nok kalde det venskab - er for godt for offentligheden, og bør gemmes til en særlig lejlighed. De kan maaske derigennem blive fri for visse spydigheder fra visse sider.

”When I have not mentioned you specifically in the preface, who probably is more entitled to than anyone else, then it has been dictated by university political reasons regarding Autumn 1938. I think it is the wisest. **What you have shown me in this – I guess I dare call it a friendship – is too good for the public, and should be kept for a special occasion.** Perhaps from this, you can be free from certain snide remarks from certain quarters.”

1/6-1940: Holt to Hjelmslev

A friendship grows

gik ind for. Senere hen finder jeg heller intet særligt at takke mig for; hvis jeg har interesseret mig særlig for Deres disputats, er det jo da ganske naturligt, saasom De er min nærmeste fagkollega. Alle disse, jeg tør sige, rent saglige og egentlig upersonlige motiver forhindrer naturligvis ikke, at der under sagens udvikling er voxet venskabelige følelser frem. - Hvad angaar en ~~eventuel~~ omtale af mig i Deres forord deler jeg ganske Deres betragtninger. De gør ikke blot mig, men sagen en tjeneste ved at holde mig udenfor.

“I do not find anything particular to thank me for; if I have been particularly interested in your dissertation then it is quite natural since you are my closest academic colleague. **All these, I dare say, purely factual and actual impersonal motives naturally do not prevent friendly feelings from having grown during the course of the case.** Regarding a possible mention of me in your preface, I completely share your considerations. You are not only doing me but the case a favour by keeping me out.”

3/6-1940: Hjelmlev to Holt

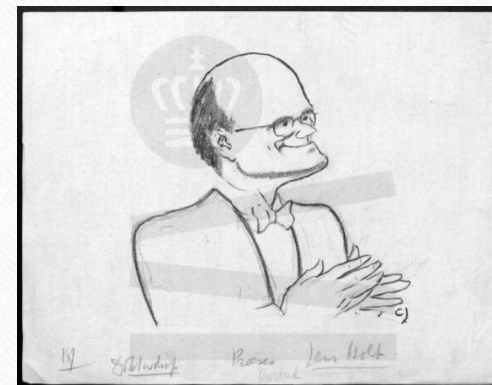
Another example from the correspondance

- Address changes in January 1941
- Holt defends his dissertation 14th of January 1941, Hjelmslev as opponent
- Formal to informal communication – ”at drikke dus med hinanden”
- Hjelmslev did not communicate with many others in this way

Kære Hjelmslev!
Tak for dit lange brev af 23.ds. Det glæder mig at du synes at den 14. januar blev vel overstået. Jeg er selv meget glad ved at kunne tænke tilbage paa den dag uden nogen form for ærgrelse. Du skal endnu engang have tak for din interessante opposition, som virkelig gav noget at tænke over. Det glæder

“Tak for **dit** lange brev af 23.ds. Det glæder mig at **du** synes at den 14. januar blev vel overstået.”

26/1-1941: Holt to Hjelmslev



Summary on the Holt-Hjelmslev correspondance

- Hjelmslev's portrait: mentor, colleague and friend
- Holt challenged Hjelmslev in a collaborative way in glossematic discussions and was loyal to Hjelmslev
- Holt and Hjelmslev – a didactic correspondance in comparison to Uldall and Hjelmslev



From The Royal Library in Copenhagen
Photo: Lorenzo Cigana