

Hjelmslev and his semiotic legacy

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Abstract. The paper is about the reception of Louis Hjelmslev's work by semioticians, from the 1960s to today. I emphasize the 'French connection', through which semioticians have inscribed Hjelmslev's thought within the broader tradition of 'saussurism', a tradition which structuralism extends to other fields than Linguistics. This reception turned Hjelmslev's work into a legacy, to be maintained (by publications), to be enhanced (by critical works) and to be developed through new theoretical perspectives and applications to objects other than languages. Hjelmslevian concepts promote a semantic analysis that differs from traditional lexicological study. Furthermore, they raise the level of abstraction of semiotic discourse and give it an 'epistemological style', as exemplified by Hjelmslev's Prolegomena to a Theory of Language.

Keywords: Hjelmslev, semiotics, semantic analysis, style of thinking, legacy

1. Legacy vs. transmission

This paper focuses on the reception of Louis Hjelmslev's (1899–1965) work by semioticians from the early 1960s to today. Indeed, Hjelmslev has been cited over the past decades by semioticians more frequently than any other author, and the influence of Hjelmslev's thought on Semiotics is still potent compared to its impact on other fields.

I have chosen to refer to the relationship between Hjelmslev and his reception in semiotics in terms of 'heritage' and 'legacy', rather than 'transmission' and 'descendants' (i.e. 'disciples'). Transmission, in the narrow sense, would have implied a straightforward relationship, either through teaching or by means of correspondence, in any case while Hjelmslev was still alive. This could have happened. Hjelmslev died in 1965, and semioticians had already

been active at that time. Furthermore, Hjelmslev had been in close contact with French linguists, such as André Martinet (1908–1999) and Émile Benveniste (1902–1976), who were also close, intellectually speaking, to French semioticians. However, these conditions proved insufficient. Adverse circumstances prevailed, so that the relationship between Hjelmslev and the semioticians followed a winding road, almost like a spiral. There are four main reasons for this shift in direction:

- 1) Hjelmslev suffered from cerebral palsy from the early 1950s; he had been lacking intellectual strength and was unable to maintain his contacts with foreign scholars as much as he might have liked.
- 2) In the Circle of Copenhagen, there were no semioticians; or, if there were any, which is beyond my knowledge,¹⁸⁸ they certainly did not contribute to the international semiotic movement to any significant extent. Semioticians were to be found outside of Denmark and speaking another language than Danish. As it has become clearer over the course of time, it was from France that the relationship between Hjelmslev's work and semioticians was established, although it was after Hjelmslev's death that most of his work was translated into French.

These are contingent reasons and, if they had been different, transmission might still have happened. The following two factors, in contrast, reveal epistemic shifts:

- 3) Change of purpose. Hjelmslev was interested in natural languages as *systems*. Semioticians, or at least French semioticians, deal with *discourse* (the *manifestation* of a system, according to Hjelmslev); first, with literary discourse; then, with other types of social discourses, such as the written press and advertising;

188. In the issue of *Langages* devoted to Hjelmslev's legacy in Denmark and edited by Knud Togeby (1967), the contributions deal with topics in general linguistics, synchronic linguistics, diachronic linguistics and philosophy, but none of them evoke semiotic applications.

finally, with types of social discourses that are non-verbal, such as images and music. Hjelmslev had only made allusive (although very fruitful) remarks on those objects.

- 4) Change of writing practice and, consequently, change of scholarly milieu. Throughout his life, Hjelmslev was able to have many scholarly connections in addition to linguists, but those connections did not exert a decisive influence on the way he conceived his work and wrote it. Linguistics had always been his intellectual concern. Quite differently, semioticians are used to discussing their research subjects at length with scholars from other academic fields, namely with those who work on documents (i.e. pieces of cultural interest), including historians, anthropologists and literary scholars. Linguistic issues are only part of their concerns.

Legacy, considered in the context of science, entails (1) a *close reading* of Hjelmslev's work, which is the proper inheritance step of the process: a thought to be interpreted; (2) a *reworking* of concepts, using them in a way that is different from the way Hjelmslev used them; (3) the addition of *symbolic values* correlated to the renewed uses of Hjelmslevian concepts – these symbolic values such as the guarantee of quality (concepts have, so to say, a 'pedigree'), claims of authority (conceptual reworking is assumed to be legitimate, and perhaps even the only appropriate way of use) and self-justification (conceptual reworking is fruitful).

2. A history of Semiotics as a legacy

Tracing the whole process of this legacy is likely to form a history of Semiotics. I will present it in eight stages. Yet there is more to be expected. A legacy also has an impact on the way we might consider the targeted readership of Hjelmslev's work itself. Indeed, it could be considered that the French scholarly tradition was part

of it since the beginning.¹⁸⁹ As early as *Principles of General Grammar*, Hjelmslev referred to Saussure, with the enthusiasm of great intellectual discoveries.¹⁹⁰ In his *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*, he explicitly established his theory on a Saussurean basis: “One linguistic theoretician should be singled out as an obvious pioneer: the Swiss, Ferdinand de Saussure” (Hjelmslev [1943] 1961, 7). At the same time or a little later, Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics* (from now on, *CGL*) was the trigger for structuralism, hence for an interdisciplinary relationship among French scholars, especially in the Humanities. That is why the semiotician A.J. Greimas (1956) was able to speak of structuralism as ‘Saussurism’. The Saussurean legacy enabled the heritage of Hjelmslev’s work to become part of the French tradition, in which it is related to the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) and Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009, cf. Hastrup, this volume), who were also readers of the *CGL*.

This being said, one could consider that French semiotics has a history distinct from structuralism precisely because of the book that it places at the core of its project: not the *CGL*, but the *Prolegomena*. The reading of this book has inspired a certain register of discourse and supplied the foundations of semiotic concepts. Here are the various stages through which this legacy has developed.

(1) As is well known, the two main figures at the origin of French semiotics were Roland Barthes (1915–1980) and Algirdas Julien Greimas (1917–1992). The two men met in 1949, when their academic careers were still uncertain, in Alexandria, where they had just taken teaching posts, Barthes in the university and Greimas at a girls’ boarding school. It is interesting to collect their accounts of that period. Greimas, asked about his career during a conference devoted to his work in the summer of 1983 in Cerisy-la-Salle, confessed this:¹⁹¹

189. This was also the opinion of Firth, who wrote as early as 1957: “Glossematics is clearly French in inspiration – if French in this connection can be taken to include the Geneva School” (Firth [1957] 1968, 127; quoted by Léon 2019, 287).

190. As Tullio De Mauro (1998, 4) notes: “Hjelmslev already started with the *Course in General Linguistic* this profound and enlightening dialogue that was to accompany him (and us) throughout his scientific and intellectual life”.

191. Louis-Jean Calvet’s report offers a somewhat romanticized version of the exchange, quoted in François Dosse’s *History of structuralism* (1991, 94): “Greimas sug-

I will address Michel Arrivé's third question: "the date and modalities of the first reading of Hjelmslev, Martinet's paper, Danish text or English translation". ... I can't remember my encounter with Hjelmslev. I don't know whether it was Barthes who told me it was important or whether it was me who told Barthes. At that time we worked together and we shared everything that seemed to be important to us, everything that could help us to get a grip on analysis and start to analyse (Greimas 1987, 303).

What Greimas and Barthes had read of Hjelmslev at that time is not clear. It could hardly be *Prolegomena*, since neither of them knew Danish; and the English translation had not been published yet (the first edition is from 1953).

(2) About the French translation of *Prolegomena*: the publication followed a sinuous path. We owe an early manuscript to Togeby's pen, although Togeby belatedly denied this by attributing the work to a "Frenchwoman from Copenhagen, Ms France Gleizal" (the following shows why).¹⁹² In 1953, the proofs having been so copiously corrected by André Martinet,¹⁹³ both on language points and more strictly on terminological issues, Hjelmslev abandoned the project for this French publication since the English version was on the verge of being published. About ten years later, on 31 August 1964, Hjelmslev signed a contract with Larousse for an imminent publication. Revisions of the existing translation were made in 1965 and 1966 by Greimas, himself using annotations made by Y. Gentilhomme (then preparing a thesis on Hjelmslev), and again by Togeby. Finally, when the text was already composed, Larousse ceded the translation rights of *Prolegomena* to Éditions de Minuit (where *Language* [*Le Langage*] had already been published in 1966).

gested that Barthes, who had come to Egypt at the same time, read Saussure and Hjelmslev. For his part, Barthes had Greimas read the beginning of the manuscript that was to become his *Michelet by Himself*. "It's very good," commented Greimas, "but you could use Saussure." "Who is Saussure?" asked Barthes. "But one cannot not know Saussure," answered Greimas, peremptorily" (Eng. tr. in Dosse 1997, 68).
192. Letter from Togeby to Greimas, 2.9.1971 (Hjelmslev's Archive at the Royal Danish Library: file 111; from now on, abbreviated "HA, 111").

193. This version of *Prolegomena* on proofs can be found in HA, 118.

Greimas brought the typescript to the publisher Jérôme Lindon, who, considering that the translation was “cumbersome and even incorrect”, introduced corrections penned by Anne-Marie Léonard (a linguist close to O. Ducrot). The first French edition was finally published at the end of 1968, translated by “a team of linguists and revised by A-M. Léonard”.¹⁹⁴ This translation was severely criticized (see for example Mounin 1970, 95–102), in particular by Vibeke Hjelmslev, Louis’s widow, who then proposed that a new translation prepared by a “Danish pupil of Louis Hjelmslev” (*Foreword* in Hjelmslev 1971, 7), Una Canger, with the collaboration of a Frenchwoman, Annick Wewer, should be published as soon as possible, as the first edition was quickly sold out. This new translation was published in the first half of 1971.

I have reported the editorial history of this translation in detail for those interested. For the present argument, there is only one thing to remember: Greimas was directly involved in the dissemination of Hjelmslev’s work in France.

(3) Barthes wrote his *Elements of Semiology* in 1964. First published in the journal *Communications*, the text was reprinted in book form the following year. These *Elements* seem to follow the *CGL* closely: Chapter 1 is entitled “Language and Speech” (*Langue et parole*); Chapter 2, “Signified and Signifier”; Chapter 3, “Syntagm and System”. It is only in the fourth and final chapter that some Hjelmslevian concepts clearly emerge: “Denotation and Connotation”. But appearances are deceptive here. In fact, it is essentially the doctrine of *Prolegomena* that Barthes followed throughout the book. He admitted it before his students: Barthes read Saussure *after* Hjelmslev.¹⁹⁵

194. Ablali found in Hjelmslev’s Archives the names of the Danes who are supposed to have been the members of this “team”: Gunnar Bech, Eli Fischer-Jørgensen, Jens Holt, Michel Holger, Sten Sørensen and Jane Rønke (Ablali & Arrivé 2001, 44 n. 11) [should be: Gunnar Bech, Eli Fischer-Jørgensen, Michel Olsen, Holger Sten Sørensen and Jane Rønke, Eds.’s comment].

195. As evidenced by a note from the 1962–63 seminar at École Pratique des Hautes Études (Roland Barthes’ Manuscripts at the French National Library). There is no need for this note to be interpreted in a purely factual sense.

(4) 1979: Greimas (with J. Courtés) published *Semiotics and Language: An Analytical Dictionary*. The work has been recognised as a fundamental one, well beyond the circle of French semioticians.¹⁹⁶ ‘Analytical’ (French: *raisonné*) means that the work puts forward a coherent theory. This entire semiotic theory is infused with Hjelmslev’s work, but Greimas and Courtés develop the concepts with a view to identifying new objects to analyze.

In this respect, the ‘Text’ entry is very indicative (Greimas & Courtés 1979: 389–390).¹⁹⁷ It consists of six sections, each of which is devoted to a conceptual use of the word. Section 1 reports on linguistic usage, already contrasting the Jakobsonian with the Hjelmslevian conception. Section 2 sets out the reformulation and contextualisation of this first use in Semiotics. Clearly, the Hjelmslevian conception prevails: “a ritual, a ballet may be considered as text or as discourse”. Next, section 3 further develops the theoretical conception of the text according to Hjelmslev. While section 4, shorter than any other, admits that ‘text’ can sometimes be an equivalent of ‘corpus’, section 5 devotes the application of Hjelmslev’s conception to semiotic analysis: “a text is made up only of those semiotic elements fitting the theoretical goal of the description”. Section 6, finally, anticipates and announces the concept of ‘Textualization’ which derives from the semiotic application described in the previous section. As a whole, the argument is edifying because it neglects all the philological questions related to text and instead focuses on what a strictly linguistic and formal definition can imply for the analysis of objects as disparate (and as foreign to Linguistics) as a ritual or a ballet.

196. Here are some excerpts from American reviews: “The most ambitious attempt to date to provide a comprehensive lexicon as well as a coherent theoretical framework for the study of semiotics” (Brown 1985, 377); “An extremely useful overview of semiotics as a discipline” (Duvall 1984, 195); more nuanced: “If the *Analytical Dictionary* will not create the kind of coherent and homogeneous metalanguage both its authors and its translators hope for, it will create at least the locus of common denomination – the ‘common ground’ the authors speak of – which will aid understanding in important ways” (Schleifer 1983, 267).

197. The two short quotations below are taken from the English translation (Greimas & Courtés 1982, 340).

(5) Meanwhile, in the entourage of Greimas, the next generation of semioticians published Hjelmslev's other publications in France, sometimes in their own translations:

- *Essais linguistiques*, in 1971, edited and prefaced by F. Rastier;¹⁹⁸
- *Nouveaux essais*, in 1985, edited and introduced by F. Rastier, including seven papers from *Essais linguistiques II*,¹⁹⁹ and a partial translation of the *Résumé* by C. & E. Zilberberg, as well as two commentary essays, the first by A. Martinet, the second, commenting on the first, by M. Arrivé.

(6) François Rastier and Claude Zilberberg (1938–2018) were, moreover, the designers of new semiotic theories, and each of these theories bears the hallmark of Hjelmslev's thought. In Rastier's interpretative semantics (1987), conceptual developments in narrative semiotics find closer links with Hjelmslev's theory of language. In Zilberberg's tensive semiotics (2002; 2006), the Hjelmslevian concepts of 'intensive' *vs.* 'extensive' govern the entire theoretical framework.

(7) A series of critical writings by these second-generation French semioticians on Hjelmslev's work and its semiotic reception were then published. In addition to Rastier's prefaces to the French editions of Hjelmslev's work, the following should be noted in particular:

- “Knowledge of Hjelmslev (Prague or Copenhagen?)”, “Saussure's 'Memoirs' read by L. Hjelmslev”, “Description of description”, and “An uncertain continuity: Saussure, Hjelmslev, Greimas”, by Claude Zilberberg (1985; 1986; 1993; 1997);

198. The French edition is identical to the original edition published in Denmark except for the texts written in English, which are presented in translation.

199. Either as is (originally written and published in French) or translated into French.

- “Peirce and Hjelmslev: the Two Semiotics”, “Prehistory, structure and topicality of Hjelmslev’s theory of cases”, by Herman Parret (1984; 1995);
- and, the chapter entitled “L. Hjelmslev, or How to concretise through abstraction” in *History of Semiotics* by Anne Hénault (1992, 55–77).

(8) Subsequent generations of semioticians also contributed to deepening the critical reception of Hjelmslev’s thought and its semiotic application. Some researchers are now considered specialists in his work. This is the case of Alessandro Zinna, who edited three collections of critical essays on Hjelmslev (1986; 1997; 2017 with L. Cigana), Driss Ablali (several papers, including: 2001; 2002; 2003; 2021) and myself (two books: Badir 2000; 2014; and a journal issue: Badir & Cigana eds. 2013).

The reason why I distinguish between generations²⁰⁰ is to show that Hjelmslev’s legacy among semioticians is not localised in time (as is the case, for example, with René Thom’s (1923–2002) thought), but that it is, on the contrary, a linking factor between researchers of different ages.

Since its emergence, buoyed by the wave of structuralism, French semiotics has had a certain influence outside its borders (mostly in Belgium, Italy, and Latin America), so that it has become, to a certain extent, semiotics written in French²⁰¹, or even French-style semiotics. For all semioticians influenced or inspired by French semiotics, the reading of Hjelmslev has become unavoidable, if only through secondary literature.

Furthermore, Hjelmslev’s specialist semioticians in Italy encountered a distinct, albeit close, tradition of critical reception, mainly

200. Barthes and Greimas were born in the 1910s; Hénault, Rastier, and Zilberberg, between 1935 and 1945; younger researchers, after 1955.

201. It is worth noting that Greimas himself is of Lithuanian origin, just as Kristeva and Todorov are of Bulgarian origin.

gathered around the linguist Romeo Galassi.²⁰² Particularly noteworthy in this respect is the work of Cosimo Caputo, *Hjelmslev and Semiotics* (2010).

3. Conceptual heritage

I would now like to turn to the substantive issues. What is Hjelmslev's legacy for Semiotics in conceptual terms? It is both quite limited and a lot.

Limited, because, apart from the semioticians specializing in his work, it is nearly always the same few pairs of opposing concepts that are used:

- expression plane *vs.* content plane;
- form *vs.* substance;
- syntagmatic *vs.* paradigmatic;
- denotation *vs.* connotation;
- language *vs.* metalanguage.

None of these concepts is completely original, even if Hjelmslev gave them a formal definition that is specific to his theory of language. Semioticians use these technical terms in reference to Hjelmslev's theoretical conception, but not without being influenced by the logicist and philosophical traditions that preceded it. For example, the concept of substance is often equated with the *hyle* of phenomenologists; and I have shown (Badir 2000, 161–188) how Roland Barthes or Umberto Eco depended on Frege's conception as it was conveyed by Ogden & Richards (1923) for their use of denotation, despite their claims that they adopted Hjelmslev's concept.

202. One could object, for instance, that Alessandro Zinna is rather a part of this Italian movement, since all the works he edited were published in Italy (with a large number of papers in Italian). I decided to count him among the 'French' semioticians because he has been teaching Semiotics in France for more than twenty years and runs a centre called "Semiotic Mediations" at the University of Toulouse.

Yet, in many ways, this heritage is considerable. Until the 1960s, in France as in the rest of the world, linguistics still followed the grammatical tradition. The study of form predominated over meaning, both in synchronic and diachronic linguistics. In the words of Anscombe (1998: 38), “the grammatical tradition has always made semantics the poor relation of Linguistics”.²⁰³ Hjelmslev’s thought, however, paved the way for a semantic analysis that went far beyond existing descriptions, which were mainly concerned with lexicology (semasiological as well as onomasiological).

Greimas’ intellectual career is exemplary in this respect. He defended a thesis in 1948 which was in the field of historical lexicology (the thesis was a description of fashion vocabulary in the French magazines of 1830).²⁰⁴ But later he repudiated this work. And he did so, one might argue, for reasons that have more to do with Semiotics than with Linguistics. In the interview in which he looked back on his research career, already quoted above, Greimas (1987, 302–303) said:

Indeed, I started research that I now dare not call ‘research’ but which was within the conception of linguists, let’s say around 1940–1950. I believe that the function of my foray into lexicology is the stimulating function of failure. It is because I saw, after five or six years of work, that lexicology led nowhere – that the units, lexemes or signs, did not lead to any analysis, did not allow for the structuring, the global understanding of phenomena – that I understood that it is ‘under’ the signs that things happen.

Semiotics as Greimas saw it was born out of this refusal of lexicology, which considers only signs.²⁰⁵

203. An assertion that has become commonly held in France. Anscombe’s statement is almost word for word a phrase by Greimas: “It must be recognised that semantics has always been the poor relation of Linguistics” (1966, 6). By quoting Anscombe, I only want to show that this judgment is shared by linguists of all persuasions.

204. This thesis was edited, posthumously, by T.F. Broden & F. Ravaux-Kirkpatrick (see Greimas 2000).

205. Naturally, the split is partly rhetorical, and one can see, as Broden (2017) tried to make clear, that Greimasian semiotics is not as detached from the lexicological

Let us put it this way, at the risk of sounding cavalier: the Hjelmslevian concepts mentioned above seemed almost banal among structuralist linguists when applied to the phonological, morphological and morphosyntactical study of languages. They take on their full significance when they are applied to the content plane, according to the dual hypothesis of the isomorphism of the planes and the non-conformity of their analysis.

(1) Analysis of meaning registers units that solely belong to the content plane; these units are formal invariants, in the same way as units of the expression plane ('phonemes', one might say).

The isomorphism between the planes is explicitly established by Greimas (1966, 22). The analysis in minimal units ('semes') in the content plane is the condition for the constitution of the concept of 'isotopy' (*id.* 53), as it allows a renewed description of the interpretation of texts.

(2) The description of meaning depends not only on denotation analysis but also on connotation analysis. It is not even true that the semantic 'system' of a language supports the varieties of that language. On the contrary, it must be considered that it is the deduction of connotative variants that makes it possible to analyse denotative invariants (cf. Cigana, this volume).

The concept of connotation was used by Barthes (1957) to account for 'mythical' meanings conveyed in the media discourse in contemporary France (that of the 1950s), far beyond what these discourses claim to say. But it is Christian Metz (1931–1993) who has best perceived, through its application to the analysis of film language, the scope of the Hjelmslevian concept of connotation: "In conclusion, we will define *film language* as a set of all the particular and general film codes, as long as we temporarily neglect the differences that separate them, and treat their common core, by fiction, as a unitary real system" (Metz [1971] 1977, 51).

(3) There is an (original) correlation to be made between connotative analysis and metalinguistic analysis. Both operate with variants that need to be deduced.

This correlation takes on its full meaning in the description of

research as it claims.

elaborate texts such as literary texts and scientific or philosophical writings, for which ‘reflexivity’ is frequently a specific feature of their linguistic variety. In his paper, “The Relevance of Saussurism”, Greimas made the connection between the Hjelmslevian concepts and Barthes’ *Writing Degree Zero* (1953): “Thus, according to Hjelmslev’s fertile suggestion, starting from a clearly structured set of signifiers: literature, popular language, mythology, one is allowed to construct a semiological system whose structures, revealed by analysis, would have an autonomous global meaning. The application of this postulate to the description of literary metalanguage, which we owe to Barthes, will make it possible to better show its significance” (Greimas 1956: 198).

(4) Text is not only the object given to analysis. It is also its result as a syntagmatic.

With regard to the expression plane, it may seem obvious (or necessary) that the analysis is capable of ‘restoring’ the given object in all its components. On the content plane, the consequences of this equivalence or ambivalence between the two statuses of the text are more delicate to grasp. As Rastier (1987, 94) showed, Greimas ‘paradigmatized’ isotopy by making it the simple recurrence of a minimal unit in a text. In order to give the text its full syntagmatic functionality, it is necessary to define isotopy as a building path (an ‘*itération*’) in the text, and consequently to view analysis as interpretation. This is why for Rastier semantics is by essence interpretative.

(5) Finally, it must be contemplated that Hjelmslevian concepts, although presented in pairs of opposites, are not in a symmetrical ratio. For each pair, one is governed (a constant) and the other is governing (a variable). Content governs expression, substance governs form, syntagmatic governs paradigmatic, denotation governs connotation, and metalanguage governs language. In other words, the governed concept is a necessary condition for the syntagmatic presence of the governing concept.

I could not say that the latter proposition is common knowledge among semioticians, or even among Hjelmslev’s readers. But Claude Zilberberg found in it the starting point for his tensive semiotics. In spite of a symmetrical presentation due to the conventions of description, every unit of meaning is analysed according to its ten-

sivity and thus becomes governed ('concentrated') or governing ('extended').²⁰⁶

Hjelmslev's theoretical propositions are of great significance for semioticians because they concern not only the analysis of natural languages but also of other socio-cultural productions. Formal languages, music, diagrams, images, films or perhaps even social practices in their broadest sense are subject to analysis in terms of expression / content, form / substance, syntagmatic / paradigmatic, denotation / connotation, and language / metalanguage. Moreover, Hjelmslev, wary of the ambivalence of the English word *language* (applicable to both natural and formal languages), decided to use the term *semiotic* in the English translation of the *Prolegomena*, so that a "denotative language" became a "denotative semiotic". It is the latter formulation that is also found in the 1971 revised French translation. As a result, the theory of language gave semioticians a solid pretext for federation: whatever the objects under study, a terminological and conceptual basis was available for their analysis.

4. Inheritance of a style of thinking

From Hjelmslev, semioticians did not only inherit concepts. They also found inspiration for a certain style of thinking and writing. This style can be perceived above all in the *Prolegomena*.

I found, in the handwritten notes of the series of lectures Hjelmslev gave at the University of Texas at Austin in January-February 1961,²⁰⁷ a quite surprising presentation of the *Prolegomena*, about twenty years after its publication: "Intended as a general orientation for readers of a high academic standard, not for specialists of linguistics. As matters stand, <provisionally,> and until *Outline II* and/or *Treatise* will appear, it is the most systematic statement so far, and can be taken as a textbook, though not without reservations". The *Prolegomena* as a 'textbook'? This is a delightful perspective,

206. See Zilberberg (2006, 55). With the additional problem that Zilberberg, in his reading of Hjelmslev, assimilated (wrongly in my opinion) the governed term to a variable and the governing term to a constant.

207. AH, 115.

but one that is very unlikely. I have never met anyone who has not been impressed by the difficulty of the book. However, even if the book might well only be addressed to the happy few, placing its horizon at the level of ‘a general orientation’ is a good fit. What can be a general orientation for a theory of language? I assume that it is something like a philosophy of language; more precisely, a philosophy of language from a linguistic point of view.

That a linguist should be able to conceive a philosophy of language from his or her own point of view is what several commentators have been arguing for some twenty-five years now. This was first put forward in favour of Saussure, especially since the publication of *Writings in General Linguistics* (2002), by philosophers such as Arild Utaker (2002) and Patrice Maniglier (2006). The argument was then extended to the work of Hjelmslev, by myself (Badir 2014) and Waldir Beividas (2017).

In a forerunner paper, Ivan Almeida (1997) exposed some penetrating views about the style of thinking of *Prolegomena*. He qualified it as an “epistemological style”, taking advantage of the use Gilles-Gaston Granger (1920–2016) made of this formula to designate personal standpoints about the general conditions of science. Two of Hjelmslev’s standpoints are highlighted: a gambling on form, excluding any reference that would give meaning to formal deduction; and a gambling on immanence, which forbids theory to be anything other than a part of its very object. Almeida saw in this a strong originality of thought that he did not find among semioticians, whose “neo-Hjelmslevism” therefore must be distinguished from Hjelmslev’s thought. I am quite convinced by this diagnosis. However, I cannot help but see that the radicalism and dynamism at work in the theory of language which, according to Almeida, results from these standpoints can also be found in semiotic theory, in comparison with competing theories in Linguistics and, more broadly, with most theories in the social sciences and Humanities. Critical bias, reflexivity and, at the same time, neutrality and radical relativism make an intellectual alloy that can only be found in the style of thinking of semioticians. See, for example, the opening chapter of *Semiotics of Passions*, devoted to an “Epistemology of Passions” (Greimas & Fontanille 1991), which is much more radical

and dynamic than Spinoza! The semiotic way of thinking, or its “epistemological style”, often clashes with scholars from other disciplines. Is this also a kind of legacy from Hjelmslev? I believe so.

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This legacy thus consisted of a patrimony to be maintained (through publications), developed (as a theory), illustrated (far beyond the fields of application foreseen by Hjelmslev) and defended (from an epistemological point of view). Objectively speaking, semiotics is quite far removed from Hjelmslev’s linguistic preoccupations. However, from a symbolic point of view, Hjelmslev left a very significant mark on Semiotics: firstly, a terminology around which semioticians can congregate; secondly, a project to be pursued; thirdly, a theoretical and critical style. In truth, without Hjelmslev, French semiotics would no longer exist, or indeed might never have coalesced: it would probably have dispersed.

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