

Unit one: Modern linguistics (European structuralism)

Lesson 05: Copenhagen School of Linguistics



Louis Hjelmslev (October 3, 1899, Copenhagen – May 30, 1965, Copenhagen) was a Danish linguist whose ideas formed the basis of the Copenhagen School of linguistics. Hjelmslev's sign model is a development of Saussure's bilateral sign model. Saussure considered a sign as having two sides, signifier and signified, and also distinguished between form and substance.

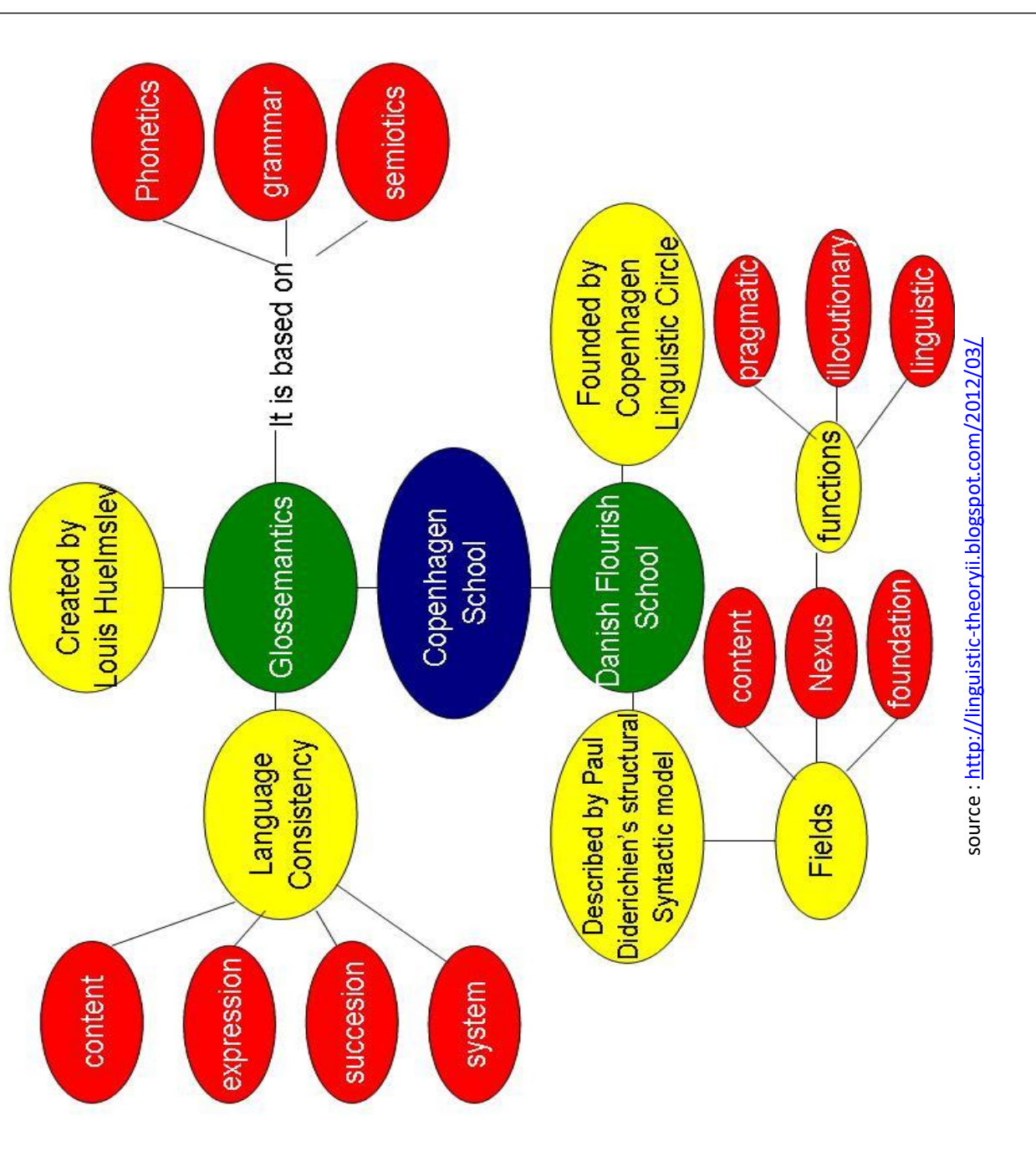
The Copenhagen School of Linguistics evolved around Louis Hjelmslev (1899–1965) and his developing theory of language, glossematics. Together with Viggo Brøndal (1887–1942) founded the *Copenhagen linguistics Circle* in 1931, a group of linguists based on the model of the Prague Linguistic Circle. Within the circle, the ideas of Brøndal and Hjelmslev were not always compatible. Hjelmslev's more formalist approach attracted a group of followers, principal among them Hans Jørgen Uldall and Eli Fischer-Jørgensen, who would strive to apply Hjelmslev's abstract ideas of the nature of language to analyses of actual linguistic data. Hjelmslev's objective was to establish a framework for understanding communication as a formal system, and an important part of this was the development of precise terminology to describe the different parts of linguistic systems and their interrelatedness.

1. The glossematic school

The basic theoretical framework, called "Glossematics" which is an attempt to analyse the expression (phonetics and grammar) and the meaning of a language on a coherent basis. He assumed that language was not the only instrument of communication (i.e. the communication of deaf), and he was interested in a general theory of the signs of communication, semiotics or semiology. However, after Hjelmslev's death in 1965, the group that had formed around Hjelmslev and his glossematic theory dispersed—while the Copenhagen Linguistic Circle continued to exist, it was not really a "school" united by a common theoretical perspectives.

2. Danish functional linguistics

In 1989, a group of members of the Copenhagen Linguistic Circle, inspired by the advances in cognitive linguistics and the functionalist theories of Simon C. Dik founded the School of Danish Functional Grammar aiming to combine the ideas of Hjelmslev and Brøndal, and other important Danish linguists such as Paul Diderichsen and Otto Jespersen with modern functional linguistics. Among the prominent members of this new generation of the Copenhagen School of Linguistics were Peter Harder, Elisabeth Engberg-Pedersen, Frans Gregersen, Una Canger and Michael Fortescue. The basic work of the school is *Dansk Funktionel Grammatik* (Danish Functional Grammar) by Harder (2006). Recent developments in the school include Ole Nedergaard Thomsen's Functional Discourse Pragmatics.



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