Lesson 05: Copenhagen School of Linguistics

Second year (L2) - Linguistics and Phonetics - Term 3

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Creation of the Copenhagen School

- **Founded**: In 1931 by **Louis Hjelmslev** and **Viggo Brøndal** in Copenhagen.

- **Objective**: Develop a formal and coherent linguistic framework.

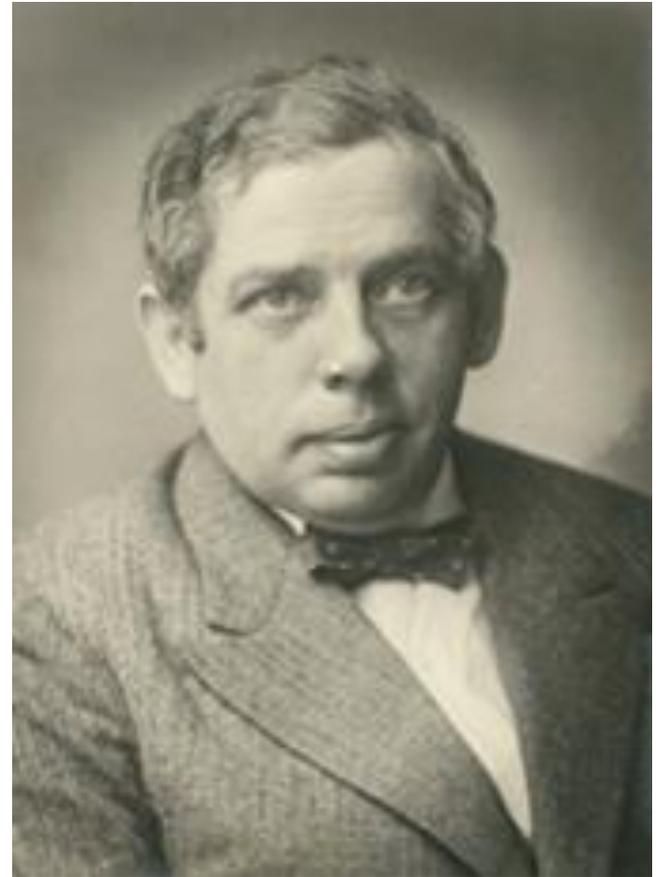- **Key Influence**: Inspired by Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralism.

Louis Hjelmslev

- **Who**: A Danish linguist (1899–1965) and key figure in structural linguistics.

- **Main Contribution**: Founder of the Copenhagen School and developer of **glossematics**, a formal theory analyzing language as a system of interrelated signs.

- **Legacy**: Expanded Ferdinand de Saussure's ideas, emphasizing the distinction between form and substance in linguistic analysis.

Viggo Brøndal

• **Who**: A Danish linguist (1887–1942) and co-founder of the Copenhagen School.

• **Main Contribution**: Advocated for separating the **formal properties** of language systems from their substance, emphasizing logical and philosophical aspects of linguistics.

• **Legacy**: Played a pivotal role in shaping early structuralist ideas within the Copenhagen Linguistic Circle.

Glossematics

Glossematics is a theory that analyzes language by breaking it down into its smallest meaningful units, called **glossemes**, focusing on the structure and relationships within language.

1. Content and expression

- Language is made up of **content** and **expression**, which are interconnected through a system of rules.

1. Content and expression

Example

- In the word **"cats"**:

1. **Content**: Refers to the **idea** of multiple felines.

2. **Expression**: Includes the **letters** and **sounds** /**k ae t**/ and the plural suffix /**s**/ which adds meaning.

2. Form and Substance

- Language separates **form** and **substance**.

2. Form and Substance

- **Example**:
  In the sentence **"Cats are playful"**:

1. **Form**: The grammatical structure (subject + verb + complement).

2. **Substance**: The spoken sounds or written letters.

• **Double duality in language**

- Language is not just about words or sounds but about the structured relationship between meaning and form.

- The concept that language consists of two layers of duality: ***content, expression, form, and substance***.

• **Double duality in language**

Example:
In the word **"tree"**:

1. **Content**: The idea or concept of a tree.
2. **Expression**: The sound "t-r-ee" or the written word "tree."

3. **Form**: The phonetic pattern or grammatical structure.
4. **Substance**: The actual sound waves or ink on paper.

4. Succession and Systemic Nature of Language

- The meaning of language arises from both the order of elements (**Succession**) and their grammatical relationships (**Systemic Nature**).

4. Succession and Systemic Nature of Language

- **Example**:
  In **"The cat chased the mouse"**:

- **Succession**: Words follow a specific order to convey meaning (subject-verb-object).

- **Systemic Nature**: Grammar rules define relationships, like subject-verb agreement and word roles.

Contributions of the Copenhagen School

1. Introduced Danish functional Linguistics

2. Advanced the study of **semiotics**

1. Danish Functional Linguistics

- A linguistic approach combining insights from cognitive linguistics and functionalism to study how language serves communication.

- Language is analyzed based on its **practical use** and role in conveying meaning.

1. Danish Functional Linguistics

Example:

- In a sentence like:

"Can you open the window?"

- Danish Functional Linguistics examines not just the **structur**e but also the **pragmatic function** (a polite request).

2. The study of semiotics

- The Copenhagen School advanced the study of semiotics—the theory of signs and symbols.

- They viewed language not as an isolated system but as one of many communication systems that function through signs (signifiers and signified) to convey meaning

2. The study of semiotics

- **Example:**

- In the Copenhagen School's view, a **traffic light** is a system of signs:

- The **red light** (signifier) signals "stop" (signified).

- This sign is part of a broader communication system, similar to how words function in a language.

QUESTIONS