

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.



1. Succession and Systemic Nature of Language

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

1. 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.

2. Double duality in language

- Human language has **two layers of structure**:

1- Meaningless Units (Letters/ Phonemes)

Do NOT carry meaning (e.g., k, æ,)

2- Meaningful Units (Morphemes / Words)

Carry meaning (e.g., cat, dog ...)

3. Glossematics

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

Key principles of Glossematics

- Language is a *self-contained, autonomous* system.
- Linguistic analysis should focus on **relations**
- The basic units (“glossemes”) combine to form all linguistic structures.

Key principles of Glossematics

- Language is made up of two planes:
1) **content** and 2) **expression**, which are interconnected through a system of rules.

Content and expression

Example

- In the word "**cat**":
 1. **Content**: Refers to the **meaning** and **idea** of cat.
 2. **Expression**: Includes the **letters** and **sounds** /k
ae t/

Form and Substance

Within each plane of language, language separates **form** and **substance**.

1. **Form**: structure, organization, relations
2. **Substance**: the material “stuff” that fills that structure

Glossematics

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graph TD; G[Glossematics] --> E[Expression]; G --> C[Content]; E --> EF[Expression form]; E --> ES[Expression substance]; C --> CF[Content form]; C --> CS[Content substance]; EF --- EF_ex["The letters & sounds (Cat /kæt/)"]; ES --- ES_ex["Ink / chalk physical sound waves"]; CF --- CF_ex["The structure of meaning for the word cat (e.g., Cat ≠ dog)"]; CS --- CS_ex["The mental image of a cat (e.g., furry, cute, mammal)"];
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Expression

Content

Expression
form

Expression
substance

Content form

Content
substance

The letters & sounds
(Cat /kæt/)

Ink / chalk
physical sound
waves

The structure of
meaning for the
word cat (e.g., Cat ≠
dog)

The mental image of
a cat (e.g., furry,
cute, mammal)

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 **structure** 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