



# Copenhagen School of Linguistics

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# Learning objectives

In this lecture, students will be introduced to

- The Copenhagen School of Linguistics
- Its founders
- Its principles
- Its contributions



Louis Hjelmslev

## Introduction



Viggo Brøndal

The **Copenhagen School** was a centre of structural linguistics founded by Louis Hjelmslev (1899-1965) and Viggo Brøndal(1887/1942). The school was one of the most important centres of structuralism together with the Geneva School and the Prague School. The Linguistic Circle of Copenhagen is a local linguistics association of Danish linguists. It was founded in 1931 by Louis Hjelmslev and became soon famous as one of the centres of European structuralism

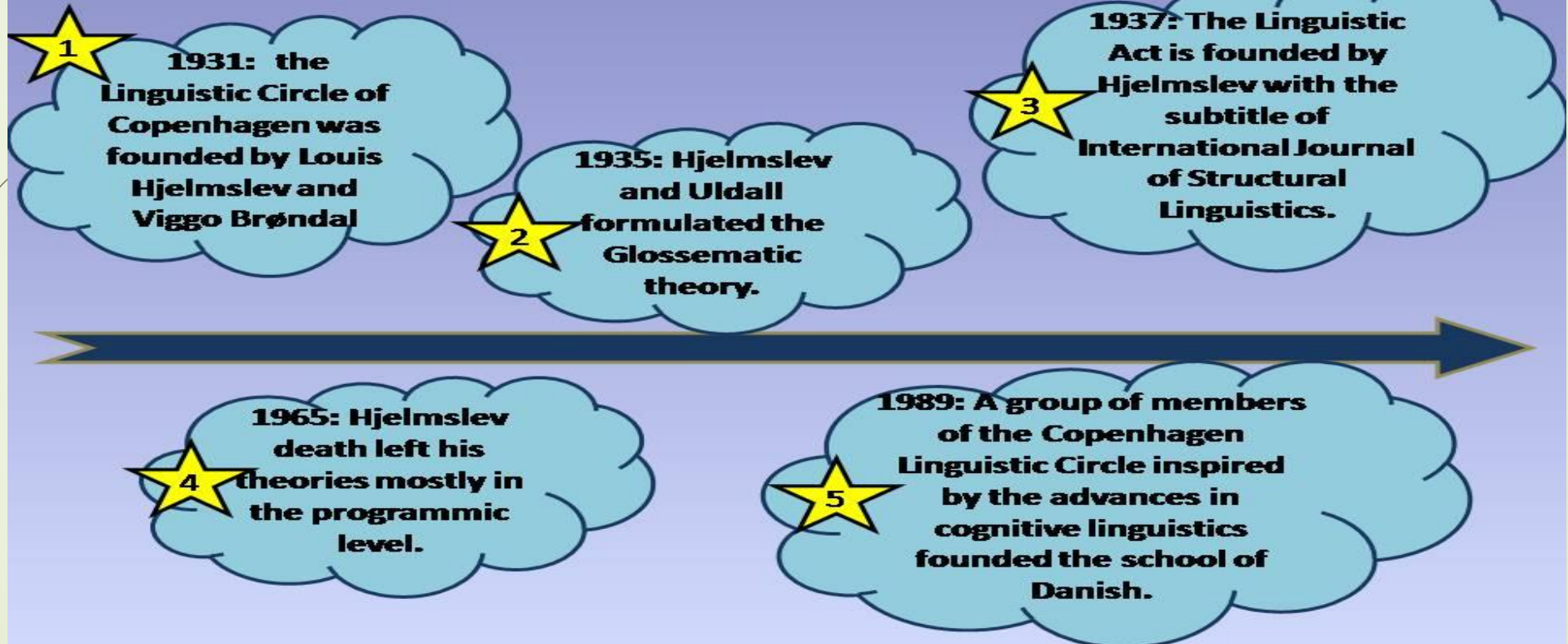
# The Linguistic Circle of Copenhagen


Their main inspiration was the Prague Linguistic Circle.

At the beginning, their main interest was in developing an alternative concept of the phoneme, but developed later into the theory called **glossematics** influenced by structuralism.

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

# Timeline of the Copenhagen School





More than Saussure, the Copenhagen School is interested in the langue rather than parole. It represented in a pure form the idea that language is a form and not a substance. It studied the relational system within the language on a higher level of abstraction.

## Louis Hjelmslev

Hjelmslev (1889-1965) a Danish linguist and semiotician, as the key figure of Copenhagen School in the 1930s, was later known for a theory called **glossematics**. He was interested in a general theory of the signs of communication, semiotics or semiology.

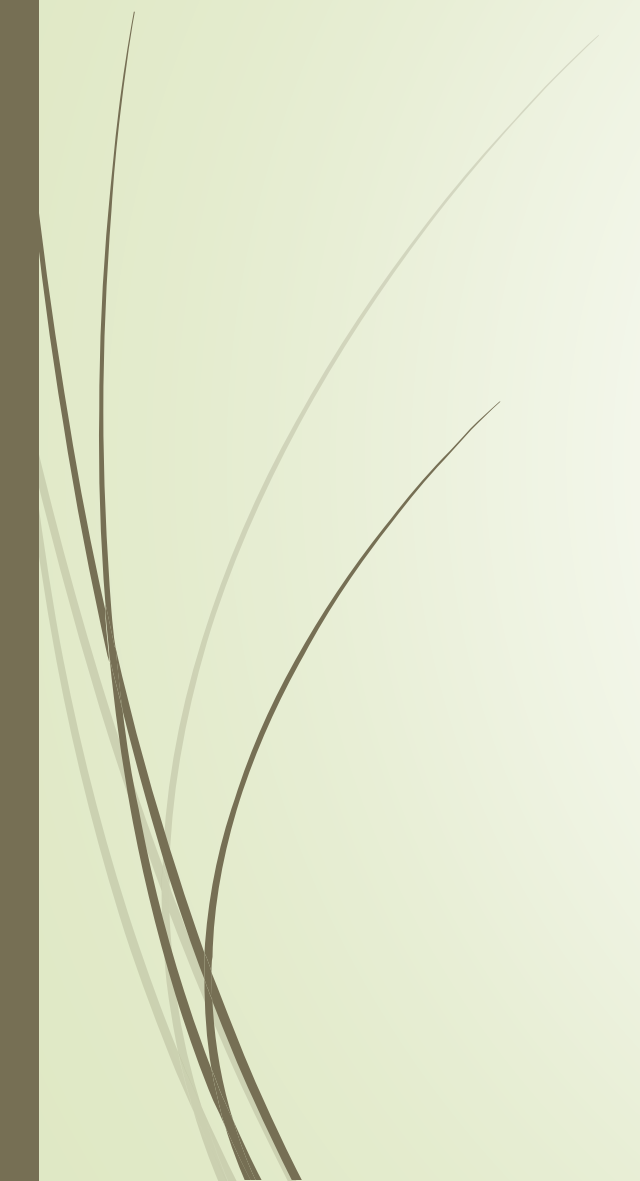

Together with Hans Jørgen Uldall, they attempted to analyze the expression ( phonetics and grammar) and the meaning of language on a coherent basis.



Glossematics defines the **glosseme** as the most basic unit of language.

- ▶ According to Meriam-Webster Dictionary: the **meaning of glossematics** is **linguistic analysis based** on the **distribution** and **interrelationship** of **glossemes**.
- ▶ **A glosseme is the smallest unit** (as a word, a stem, a grammatical element, an intonation, or an order of words) that signals a meaning in a language.





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](#).