

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SEMIOTICS

Paul Bouissac

Editor in Chief

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

New York 1998 Oxford

topics treated by Danish and foreign contributors who took part in the scientific discussion of linguistic problems. The second major event was the Fourth International Congress for Linguists (Copenhagen, 1936), with Otto Jespersen and Brøndal as the main organizers. The third and most important result of the circle's activities was the foundation of the journal *Acta Linguistica* (1939), coedited by Hjelmslev and Brøndal, which immediately reached an international readership. (The journal has been published under the title *Acta Linguistica Hafniensia* since 1966.) The first four issues featured a series of seminal papers critically addressing the debate on the sign in Saussurean and post-Saussurean linguistics, clarifying the structuralist position and opening epistemological, pragmatic, and philosophical perspectives. From the semiotic point of view, this is the turning point of the activities of the circle. Here, linguistics and semiotics become inextricably linked.

After the tenth anniversary of the circle in 1941 and the death of Brøndal in 1942, Hjelmslev became the unchallenged leader of the Copenhagen School. With his *Prolegomena* as the basic text, the glossematic theory defined the basic questions asked by the school and shaped the guiding principles for concrete linguistic investigations. When *Acta Linguistica* resumed publishing when World War II was nearly over, Hjelmslev was the only editor, and he wrote an editorial with a clear glossematic orientation. Also in 1944, the *Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Copenhague* resumed publication. Three volumes are of special importance for semiotics: *Recherches structurales* (vol. 5, 1949), celebrating Hjelmslev's fiftieth birthday, contains a series of substantial Danish and international contributions to the glossematic debate; Henning Spang-Hanssen's *Recent Theories on the Nature of the Language Sign* (vol. 9, 1954) presents a glossematic interpretation of the linguistic sign with respect to competing theories; *Essais linguistiques* (vol. 12, 1959) reprints Hjelmslev's essential articles to honor his sixtieth birthday and shows the development of the glossematic theory from the 1930s. Frans Gregersen (1992) provides the most complete account of the Copenhagen School.

The linguistic and semiotic relevance of the Copenhagen School is based both on the works it published and on the intellectual and scientific agenda it promoted. In spite of their differences, both Brøndal and Hjelmslev envisioned a scientific linguistics that was founded on explicit theoretical

grounds and that reflected explicitly on the constitution of its object, in both the epistemological and methodological senses. In doing so, they distanced themselves from theoretically naive, positivist, and purely philological preoccupations with language.

However, both approaches show basic unsolved linguistic and semiotic problems. Hjelmslev's method-oriented formalism is combined with a somewhat latent knowledge that a complete methodological explicitness is impossible (because indefinables will always interfere) and that nonformal irregularities exist in the very heart of language. Brøndal's philosophy-oriented linguistics has a precise and comprehensive goal but no clear analytical procedures. When the nonlinguistic constitution of the object is a precondition for linguistic analysis, the immanent description is only half of the linguist's legitimate and necessary task. But then, the whole analysis will have to change every time a critical new detail comes to light.

Brøndal and Hjelmslev made the Copenhagen School address all the crucial questions of modern linguistics and gave it a general perspective that opened new theoretical possibilities for semiotics. Through their differences, they showed the range of the very notion of structure in science, from the deep epistemological sense to its more superficial, methodological aspect. Their demonstration of the applicability of the nature of structure to specific problems in linguistics and semiotics—that of the notion of sign among others—proved to be very influential.

[See also Brøndal; Hjelmslev; Prague School; Recent Theories on the Nature of the Language Sign; *Recherches Structurales* 1949.]

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Gregersen, F. *Sociolingvistikens (u)mulighed*, 1–2 (The [Im]possibility of Sociolinguistics). Copenhagen, 1992. This book includes a summary in English and an extensive bibliography.
- Hjelmslev, L. *Essais linguistiques*. Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Copenhague, vol. 12. Copenhagen: Nordisk Sprog- og Kulturforlag, 1959.
- Hjelmslev, L. *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*. Translated by F. J. Whitfield. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961.

—SVEND ERIK LARSEN

COSERIU, EUGEN (b. 1921), Romanian linguist whose work in the history of linguistics and language

theory has contributed significantly to the development of modern semiotics. Most notably, he has clarified the history of semiotic notions and written on innovative distinctions that improve upon structuralist dichotomies and on original perspective in the conception of language as a system.

Born in Mihaileni, Romania, and educated in Iasi, Coseriu was exposed to many cultures. After his doctoral work in language (Rome, 1944) and philosophy (Milan, 1949), he taught at the universities of Montevideo, Coimbra, Bonn, Frankfurt, Strassbourg, and Tübingen. He remained interested throughout his academic career in how languages work. Many of his articles focus on structural-semantic aspects related to Romance languages, (Romanian in particular). The experience of this inquiry was, for those not aware of the complexity of his mother tongue, surprising. Although relatively few in number, articles dealing with words in Romanian (as well as some of the many languages in which Coseriu is fluent) are contributions to one of the most disputed aspects of linguistics, and by extension of semiotics: the relation between words and the things they name. Coseriu is well aware of Cratylus's position in Plato's dialogue of that name, according to which there is a physical relation to be accounted for, but he opts for a very nuanced theory of arbitrariness (1967) in which Hermogenes's position in the dialogue is understood within the Aristotelian conception of language. The notion of sign, as generalization of the word, is derived from a linguistic perspective that dominates Coseriu's entire contribution to semiotics.

Other contributions of his to the history of semiotic ideas have been in the area of understanding the model of language in the works of ancient philosophers; in particular, he has demonstrated that this pre-Peircean model is also triadic. He has also analyzed some of the major contributions to semiotic concepts made by, among others, Christian Wolff (1679–1754), under the influence of G. W. Leibniz (1646–1716), and Johann Heinrich Lambert (1728–1777) as well as some of the relevant linguistic contributions to semiotics by Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835) and Pierre-Nicholas Bonamy (1694–1770).

Witness and participant to the post-Saussurean structuralist attempt to define a language theory, Coseriu tested major anthropological and cultural hypotheses in various linguistic contexts. Hjelmslev's sign theory underwent such a test (1962), and as a result Coseriu advanced a more dynamic definition of the di-

chotomy of form and substance. The same can be said in regard to his differentiation between the Saussurean *signifiant* and *signifié* and even more of his better understanding and use of the dichotomy between synchronism and diachronism. At this juncture, his critical contributions turn into an original perspective.

What in Hjelmslev's work was the complementary dichotomy between system and text becomes in Coseriu's theoretic contributions a dynamic interplay between a revised notion of system and norm. System, in his conception, is more than the sum of all functional structures of language: it contains, in addition, all possible structures that can result from the rules of a language. The potentiality thus introduced ensures its dynamics. The concept of norm reflects precisely the fact that not all that is possible is actually realized. In many ways, Coseriu opens a perspective different from that of Chomsky's dichotomy between competence and performance. Indeed, the norm is a collective instantiation of the system. The individual concrete realization of the norm is the word containing, above and beyond the norm, the expressive originality of speaking individuals. Intent upon reconciling the dichotomy between synchronism and diachronism, Coseriu advances in his model the hypothesis of language functioning synchronically while being constituted diachronically. The result, a coherent structural semantics, markedly different from A. J. Greimas's, is a sort of distillation of historic, methodic, and conceptual contributions.

This original model influenced a number of researchers in fields as diverse as the language of gestures (Meo-Zilio, 1961, acknowledges this influence) and the semiotics of theater (Fischer-Lichte, 1992, distinguishes between theatrical code as a system, norm, and speech). It is likely that more semiotic contributions inspired by Coseriu's writings will be produced in the future.

[See also *Arbitrariness*, *Principle of*; *Hjelmslev*; *Signification*; and *Synchronic and Diachronic*.]

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Coseriu, E. *Sistema, norma, y habla (con un resumen en alemán)*. Montevideo, 1952.
- Coseriu, E. *Sincronía, diacronía, e historia: Il problema del cambio lingüístico*. Montevideo, 1958.
- Coseriu, E. *Teoría del lenguaje y lingüística general*. Madrid, 1962.
- Coseriu, E. "Pour une sémantique structurale." *Travaux de linguistique et de littérature* 2.1 (1964): 139–186.

- Coseriu, E. "L'arbitraire du signe: Zur Spätgeschichte eines aristotelischen Begriffes." *Achiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 204 (1967): 81–112.
- Coseriu, E. *Die Geschichte der Sprachphilosophie von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart: Eine Übersicht*. 2 vols. Tübingen, 1969–1972.
- Fischer-Lichte, E. *The Semiotics of Theater*. Translated by J. Gaines and D. L. Jones. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- Meo-Zilio, G. *El lenguaje de los gestos en el Río de la Plata*. Montevideo: Imprimería Libertad, 1961.

—MIHAI NADIN

COURSE IN GENERAL LINGUISTICS (*Cours de linguistique générale*, 1916). Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) was a professor of Sanskrit and of the comparative grammar of Indo-European languages at the University of Geneva when he agreed in 1906 to succeed Joseph Wertheimer as the chair of general linguistics in the same university. Saussure gave three cycles of lectures on the subject of general linguistics between 1906 and 1911. He did not again return to this subject, and in the remaining two years of his life he dedicated himself to a number of problems in Germanic languages and mythology and to the study of Chinese.

After Saussure's death, Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, with the help of Albert Reidliger, worked on the compilation and the publication of the only source that existed for the texts of the *Cours de linguistique générale* (CLG) as we know it today: the notes taken by the students who followed Saussure's lecture. A first edition was published in Paris in 1916. Rudolf Engler's important critical edition was published in 1967. Engler's edition is a work of textual scholarship that brings together all of the variant source material and systematically compares it with the edition published by Bally and Sechehaye. Another important source of information about the manuscripts on which CLG is based is Robert Godel's *Les sources manuscrites du cours de linguistique générale de F. de Saussure* (1957). Currently, two English-language translations are available: those by Wade Baskin (1959) and Roy Harris (1983). It is doubtful that either of these provide entirely satisfactory solutions for the English reader to the terminological problems documented by Engler and Godel.

The intellectual significance of Saussure's text is often characterized as Copernican. This should not be taken to mean, however, that Saussure alone in-

vented either the field of general linguistics or the concept of the linguistic sign. Eugen Coseriu (1958) pointed out that a number of the key concepts in CLG such as the distinction between *langue* and *parole* are to be found in works by a number of Saussure's contemporaries and predecessors. These include scholars such as Hans Georg Canon von der Gabelentz, Anton Marty, Franz N. Finck, and Wilhelm von Humboldt. Furthermore, the concept of the sign itself has a long history in the Western grammatical tradition, going back to the Sophist's concern with grammar and rhetoric, the linguistic theories of Plato and Aristotle, the post-Aristotelian Stoics, and the medieval grammatical theories of the Modistae. However, with CLG, Saussure is generally credited for having founded twentieth-century structural-functional studies of language and other sign systems.

CLG gives voice to a number of discourses that are woven together and positioned in relation to each other so as to produce the realignment of linguistic theory that Saussure sought to achieve. Saussure's text takes up, responds to, and variously aligns itself with Aristotle's explanation of the sign in terms of *psyche* and *physis*; Jean-Jacques Rousseau's conception of the social contract; Emile Durkheim's sociological theory; the marginalist theory of political economy of the Lausanne school, especially Vilfredo Pareto's separation of the notion of utility from value in that framework; the naturalistic perspective on grammar of the German School of linguistics known as the Neogrammarians; and the nineteenth-century philological tradition of historical comparative linguistics.

Saussure's influence was strong in the first half of the twentieth century. The Soviet semiotician Valentin N. Voloshinov articulated an important critique of Saussure's failure to provide an adequate account of the social determination of sign systems and sign use (1928). Some of the most important early developments of the guidelines Saussure laid down for a structural-functionalist approach to the study of linguistic form and function were elaborated further in the years immediately preceding and following Saussure's death. Vilém Mathesius, an important early exponent of the Prague School of linguistics, articulated a powerful deconstruction of the Saussurean notion of a static synchronic linguistics in his paper "On the Potentiality of the Phenomena of Language" (1911). Mathesius argues that Saussure's notion of synchrony is unable to account for variability, or what Mathesius calls "static oscillation" or "instabil-