Hjelmslev and structural linguistics in Italy

Giorgio Graffi
University of Verona

Abstract. *The essay investigates the changing attitudes of Italian linguists towards Hjelmslev's thoughts. Three phases can be distinguished: an initial one (approximately, up to the late 1950s), when they were mainly rejected; then a phase of enthusiasm about them (until the early 1970s); finally, an era of growing disinterest (roughly, from the mid-1970s onwards). The early, unfavorable, attitude (typical of Italian linguists born between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) is accounted for by their distrust of any abstract model in linguistics, which was mainly due to the influence of Benedetto Croce's philosophy of language. Such attitude was reversed during the second phase, when Croce's philosophy was gradually abandoned and some scholars (especially T. De Mauro, G.C. Lepschy and L. Rosiello) began to focus on the foundations of structural linguistics, finding Hjelmslev's theories especially stimulating. Shortly after this new phase, generative grammar began to spread in Italy. Initially, some young (at the time) linguists were interested in both theoretical frameworks. Generative grammar, however, quickly became their favorite research paradigm, because it appeared much more promising than glossematics from the empirical-descriptive point of view. Hence, the interest in Hjelmslev's ideas and analyses considerably diminished: however, their importance in the development of Italian theoretical linguistics remains indisputable.*

Keywords: Hjelmslev, Croce, linguistic theory, structural linguistics, generative grammar

1. Introduction

Among structuralist linguists, Louis Hjelmslev (1899–1965) is possibly the one in whom Italian researchers are most interested, with the obvious exception of Saussure (1857–1913) (who, on the other

hand, cannot be labeled as structuralist without some qualification; see below). This is witnessed, among other things, by the activity of the "Circolo glossematico" of Padua, established and headed by Romeo Galassi, as well as by the several publications devoted to the work of the Danish scholar which appeared regularly over the last few decades (see, a. o., Bondì 2012; Caputo 1993, 2010; Caputo & Galassi 1985; Cigana [2014] 2022; Galassi & De Michiel 2001; Zinna 1986; Zinna & Cigana 2017). The following passage can be found in the introduction to the last one, which was published a few years ago:

> Together with Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson, the linguist Louis Hjelmslev is recognized as one of the noble fathers of European structuralism [omitted footnote]. His works have long remained a resource for the studies of language and theories of meaning. If semioticians and linguists generously drew on the vast conceptual and terminological repertoire of the Danish researcher, at the beginning of the 1970s the resonance of his work took a back seat due to the attention paid to the linguistic theories of Noam Chomsky (Zinna 2017, i).[208]

This quotation can serve as a good starting point for our paper: since at least the 1960s, semioticians have shown an unbroken interest in Hjelmslev's work, which, on the contrary, has been rather neglected by linguists, with the obvious exception of specialists in this field (like those quoted above) and, more generally, of historians of linguistics. We therefore intend to outline the ways in which

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208. "Insieme a Ferdinand de Saussure e Roman Jakobson, il linguista Louis Hjelmslev è riconosciuto come uno dei padri nobili dello strutturalismo europeo. I suoi lavori sono rimasti a lungo una risorsa per gli studi del linguaggio e le teorie del senso. Se semiologi e linguisti hanno attinto generosamente al vasto repertorio concettuale e terminologico del ricercatore danese, all'inizio degli anni '60 la risonanza della sua opera è passata in secondo piano per l'attenzione rivolta alle teorie linguistiche di Noam Chomsky". As can be seen, I have corrected the original "1960s" with "1970s", since the former seems to be a misprint, as the content of the present essay shows. – When a published translation of the works quoted in the present paper exists, I only report that one; when a translation has not been published in English, I report my own translation, with the original text in the footnotes.

Hjelmslev's thoughts were interpreted and assessed by the Italian linguists during the period spanning from the end of the Second World War to the early 1970s. This outline will show us that, after an initial stage when the views of the Danish linguist were substantially rejected, there ensued a new phase of enthusiasm about them, followed in turn by the abandonment referred to above. We will also attempt a historical explanation of this process, which concerns not only Hjelmslev's linguistic theory, but structural linguistics in general. Hjelmslev's views on language and linguistic theory were rather deeply discussed by Italian linguists from the early 1960s to the early 1970s, and they had not been ignored even in previous times, as we will see in section 2. In section 3, we will deal with the early Italian studies devoted to or worked out in the framework of structural linguistics, especially those that explicitly referred to Hjelmslevian ideas. In section 4, we will present the first Italian studies wholly devoted to Hjelmslev and sketch a comparison between glossematics and generative linguistics, with the aim of explaining why the focus of attention switched from the former linguistic theory to the latter after the early 1970s.

2. Italian linguistics and structuralism up to the end of the 1950s

In order to make our story more clearly understandable to readers who are not especially versed in the history of Italian linguistic studies, we will firstly sketch the main features of Italian linguistics and philosophy of language during the first half of the 20th century. In that epoch, the philosophical system hegemonic in Italian culture was the so-called "neo-idealism", whose leaders were Benedetto Croce (1866–1952) and Giovanni Gentile (1875–1944). Croce's and Gentile's positions were rather different both from a political point of view (the former was an anti-fascist while the latter strongly supported Fascism) and a philosophical point of view, but they converged on one point: scientific knowledge is by its own nature inferior to philosophical knowledge, and this automatically implies that a description of language according to the methods of exact

sciences is untenable.[209] Given these premises, it may sound rather strange that the book which first gave great fame to Croce was entitled "Aesthetic as science of expression and general linguistics" (Croce 1902 [1909]): actually, for Croce both the terms 'aesthetic' and 'general linguistics' have a rather different meaning from the standard one. For him, the former is not just the doctrine of artwork and of the value judgment about it, but "the first moment of the spirit", namely that of "intuitive knowledge" or "knowledge of the individual"; it is followed by the moment of "logical knowledge", or "knowledge of the universal", whose science is logic in Croce's sense. "The cognitive spirit has no form other than these two. Expression and concept exhaust it completely. The whole speculative life of man is spent in passing from one to the other and back again" (Croce 1902, English translation: 43–44).[210] In Croce's view, aesthetic and logic, to which history must be added, are the only sciences in the proper sense of the term, while the other disciplines commonly called "sciences", such as mathematics or natural sciences, are not "perfect sciences":

> These explications have firmly established that the pure or fundamental forms of knowledge are two: the intuition and the concept – Art, and Science or Philosophy. With these are to be included History, which is, as it were, the product of intuition placed in contact with the concept, that is, of art receiving in itself philosophic distinctions, while remaining concrete and individual. All the other forms (natural sciences and mathematics) are impure, being mingled with extraneous elements of practical origin (Croce 1902, English translation, 51–52).

This last quotation also explains why Croce's doctrine is often labeled as 'historicism'.

Now, we will see why Croce qualifies aesthetic as "science of expression and general linguistics". First of all, we have to remark

209. The present paragraph and the following two ones are mainly drawn from Graffi (2010, 167–174).
210. I replaced 'intellect' in the English translation with 'spirit' (It. spirito), which seems to fit Croce's philosophical system better.

that 'intuition' in Croce's sense does not mean anything obscure or confused, but, on the contrary, it refers to something well determined, which is identified with expression: "That which does not objectify itself in expression is not intuition or representation, but sensation and naturality. The spirit does not obtain intuitions, otherwise than by making, forming, expressing. He who separates intuition from expression never succeeds in reuniting them" (Croce 1902, English translation, 12). Expression is not only of the verbal kind, but "there exist also non-verbal expressions, such as those of line, colour, and sound" (id. 13), and even intuition of geometrical entities cannot be given if one cannot express it by means of a drawing. However, Croce ends up dealing mainly with linguistic expression. This brings him to the conclusion already stated in the title of the book, namely that general linguistics coincides with aesthetic. "*Philosophy of language and philosophy of art are the same thing*" (id. 234; original emphasis): both are one and the same science, "science of expression". By so doing, the Italian philosopher could also dismiss all controversies about the nature of linguistics, namely whether it belongs to natural or to historical-social sciences, which had characterized a good deal of 19th century linguistics (think of the dispute between Max Müller and Whitney, or between the Neogrammarians and Schuchardt): the only really scientific linguistics was identical to aesthetic, hence it was the first 'science of the spirit', while all the other alleged kinds of 'linguistics' were not true sciences. Furthermore, Croce maintained, in perfect coherence with his idea of the absolute individuality and unrepeatability of every single expression, that the concept itself of language is an abstraction and that "languages have no reality beyond the propositions and complexes of propositions really written and pronounced by given peoples for definite periods" (id. 241). If we tried to translate these statements into Saussure's terminology, we could say that, according to Croce, no *langue* exists, but only *actes de parole*.

What was the attitude of Italian 'professional' (i.e., academic) linguists towards these philosophical assumptions, which, as we have said, were dominant throughout Italian culture throughout the first half of the 20th century? First of all, we have to keep in mind that Croce (who was politically a liberal and was not an aca-

demic: he did not even have an academic degree) had no intention of chasing away professors of linguistics from their chairs, nor any other professor who was not a philosopher or a historian: he saved all other sciences by simply qualifying them as 'practical', namely useful, if not indispensable, for ordinary life, but essentially devoid of any theoretical content: "it never crossed my mind to deny the legitimacy of linguists' work, but I investigated its nature and thus its theoretical justification";[211] "extra-aesthetic study is no longer the study of language but of things, i.e., of practical facts"[212] (Croce 1941, 175).

This assessment and qualification of 'practical' did not apply only to linguistics, but also to mathematics and natural sciences. In this situation, Italian linguists were not especially unhappy: they had no problem in doing their research, be it 'practical' or of any other kind. In fact, they were mainly involved in developing the research paths opened by the founder of the Italian school of linguistics, Graziadio Isaia Ascoli (1829–1907), whose prestige was very high also outside of Italy, as is witnessed by the fact that some of his publications were translated into German (e.g., Ascoli 1878, 1887). Ascoli was the author of many important publications in the field of comparative linguistics, both in the Indo-European and in the Romance domains (especially, in the research on Italian dialects). Such domains remained, in practice, the only ones that interested most Italian linguists after him, until the middle of the 20th century and even later. We have to add that, according to their statements of principle, Italian linguists were apparently split into different fields: the 'Neogrammarians' and the 'Neolinguists', as the two groups labeled themselves. The first group referred to the homonymous German school; the second one presented itself as a radical alternative to the former. The oddness lies in the fact that both professed

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211. "Non mi passò neppure un attimo per la mente di negare il diritto all'opera dei linguisti, ma ne ricercai la natura e con ciò la giustificazione teorica".
212. "lo studio extraestetico non è più studio di linguaggio ma di cose, cioè di fatti pratici".

to be Ascoli's legitimate heirs (cf. Benincà 1994, 581–585).[213] This was possible because their domains of research were the same as Ascoli's, on which their different theoretical principles had little or no impact (actually, some Neolinguists attempted to reconcile their investigations, especially in the Romance field, with Croce's principles, but the effect of such attempts was rather ridiculous). The general outcome of this situation was that most Italian linguists, during the first half of the 20th century issued much serious work in the several fields of historical-comparative linguistics (mainly Indo-European and Romance, but also Indo-Aryan, Germanic, Celtic, Anatolian, among others), while only a few of them faced the theoretical issues raised by linguistic structuralism; and when they did, it was rather automatic for them to adopt assumptions echoing Croce's ideas (with one significant exception, as will be seen in a moment).[214]

In fact, Saussure's *Cours de linguistique Générale* (Saussure 1916 [1972]) did not fail to attract the attention of some outstanding Italian linguists from its first edition: Benvenuto A. Terracini (1886–1968) reviewed it (Terracini 1919; cf. Venier 2016), and some of Saussure's ideas were also discussed by other Italian linguists, such as Giacomo Devoto (1897–1974), cf. Devoto (1928), and, later, Giovanni Nencioni (1911–2008), cf. Nencioni (1946). In general, all these scholars (with different nuances) were skeptical about Saussure's concept of *langue*, which "was read, elaborated, but, for the

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213. Timpanaro (2011, 396–399; the original version of this essay dates back to 1961–62) convincingly argues for an interpretation of Ascoli's ideas as rather close to the Neogrammarians' ideas (although explicitly opposing them on various points) and as essentially different from Neolinguistic tenets.

214. One word of caution has to be said about the label 'structuralism', which it should be more appropriate to decline in the plural (see De Palo 2016), since there are big differences across 'structuralist' schools (Geneva, Prague, Copenhagen, not to mention American structural linguistics), both from the point of view of general assumptions and of analytical procedures. Furthermore, we should always keep in mind that the term 'structure' itself very rarely occurs in Saussure's writings. It is a fact, anyway, that structural linguistics was seen, during the 20th century, as a trend that shared some basic assumptions, both by its followers (see Lepschy 1966) and by its opponents (like Timpanaro 1970, ch. 4).

most part, misrepresented, as if it were an unreal abstractness or, worse still, a revival of the Schleicherian ghost of language as an organism foreign to speakers" (Mancini 2014: 24).[215] An important exception was represented by Antonino Pagliaro (1898–1973), who attempted to frame Saussure's views in a historicist framework, which was however different from Croce's.[216] The Prague school also gained some attention in Italy: for example, an article by Jakobson (1933) appeared in the journal *La Cultura*.

The first Italian linguist to deal with Hjelmslev was probably Piero Meriggi (1899–1982), in a review of the first part of Hjelmslev (1935–37), see Meriggi (1937). Meriggi (1937: 65) declares his approval of Hjelmslev's "general attitude" (*allgemeine Einstellung*), which "is based on Saussure".[217] Furthermore, Meriggi stresses that he and his Danish colleague agree "on the most important point", namely the need to adopt an "immanent" and "inductive" method. On the other hand, Meriggi neatly disagrees with Hjelmslev on two points: 1) the statement that cases are not a "conglomerate", but they form a well-structured system. Actually, they are a conglomerate, which can be accounted for only by means of historical-comparative grammar, which is far from being "no grammar", as Hjelmslev (following Saussure's paths, according to Meriggi) would suggest (cf. Meriggi 1937, 66). 2) The 'localistic' approach to the explanation of grammatical cases taken by Hjelmslev is untenable, since several cases are not explainable in localistic terms (cf. id. 67).[218]

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215. "fu […] letta, elaborata, ma, per lo più, travisata, quasi si trattasse di un'astrattezza irreale, o, peggio ancora, di una riproposizione del fantasma schleicheriano della lingua in quanto organismo estraneo ai parlanti".

216. I refer to Mancini's (2014) well documented essay for many other aspects of the reception of Saussure by the Italian linguistic milieu, especially concerning the unique position held by Pagliaro.

217. "bei der die Grundlage die von De Saussure ist".

218. Meriggi again referred to these topics in a paper about thirty years later, where he wrote that he and Hjelmslev began to work out a general theory of cases "in the same spirit". "Our paths parted" ("Später trennten sich aber unsere Wege"), says Meriggi, since Hjelmslev eventually opted for an aprioristic approach, while he was convinced that general grammar should be "free from any philosophical influence" ("frei von jedem philosophischen Einfluss") and "inductively based on the

At the time, Meriggi was Italian only by virtue of his passport, since he held a position at Hamburg University from 1922 until 1939, when he lost his job for political reasons (since he had failed to join the Italian Fascist party, the Italian Fascist government asked the German Nazi government to dismiss him). At any rate, the Italian linguistic milieu was not totally isolated: several Italian linguists attended the International Congresses of Linguists, where they had the opportunity to get in touch with the most important representatives of the different European structuralist schools (cf. also Mancini 2014, 20–21; Sornicola 2018, 60–71). In effect, a common ground between the former and the latter group of scholars was not lacking. Like their Italian colleagues, the first structuralists were well versed in historical linguistics: consider, for example, Slavic studies by Trubetzkoy or by Jakobson, or the fact that Hjelmslev's doctoral dissertation (Hjelmslev 1932) was on the history of Baltic languages.

The first one of the international congresses of linguists, as is well known, was held in 1928 in The Hague; the following ones took place in Geneva (1931), Rome (1933), Copenhagen (1936) and Brussels (1939). The first congress after the war was held in Paris (1948). In an overview of linguistic research between the middle of the 1930s and the early 1950s, published in 1953, the Italian linguist Vittore Pisani (1899–1990) showed a considerable acquaintance with structuralism and in particular with Hjelmslev's work (see Pisani

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investigation of the different language types" ["rein induktiv von der Untersuchung der einzelnen Sprachtypen auszugehen hatte") (Meriggi 1966, 13). This position is restated in the notes taken from Meriggi's class lectures (presumably dating back to the years between the late 1960s and the early 1970s, where he also hinted at an exchange of letters between Hjelmslev and himself at the time of his review): "we both wanted to start from the concrete study of languages to inductively discover the general laws that govern them. ... I think that we then both went through the same crisis. ... Discouraged, we left this task for the future and I focused on Anatolian, while Hjelmslev concentrated on logical-philosophical linguistics, under the influence previously mentioned [that of Brøndal, G.G.]" ("volevamo tutt'e due partire dallo studio concreto delle lingue per risalire induttivamente alle leggi generali che le governano. [...] Penso che poi abbiamo attraversato tutt'e due la stessa crisi. [...] Sconfortati, abbiamo lasciato questo compito al futuro e io mi sono dedicato all'anatolico, mentre lo Hjelmslev si è dato, sotto l'influsso accennato, a una linguistica logico-filosofica").

1953): he quotes, besides *La catégorie des cas* (Hjelmslev 1935–37) and *Omkring Sprogteoriens Grundlæggelse* (Hjelmslev 1943a), no fewer than eleven papers by the Danish linguist,[219] some of which were scarcely known even to the circle of Hjelmslev specialists, such as Hjelmslev (1938a) or Hjelmslev (1949), which is not listed in the bibliography of Hjelmslev's writings at the end of Hjelmslev (1959).

The first few pages of Pisani's overview (Pisani 1953, 9–17) are devoted to structuralism, and the opening paragraphs just deal with "Brøndal's[220] and Hjelmslev's structuralism", which is qualified as "a universalistic emanation of phonology" (*eine universalistische Ausstrahlung der Phonologie*), where 'phonology' plainly refers to the Prague school (id. 9). A couple of pages later (id. 11), structuralism (of which Brøndal is called "the main representative") is said "to have preceded glossematics".[221] Pisani, therefore, seems to consider glossematics as a trend of structuralism at times, and as a development of it at others. These terminological inconsistencies are, however, of little or no importance; Pisani's assessment of structuralism is more significant: "Schleicher's conception of language as an organism affects Saussure's system and the doctrines developed from it; furthermore, Schleicher's influence in the theory and practice of today's linguistics is far greater than one might think" (Pisani 1953, 17).[222] Hence Pisani criticizes structuralism for being essentially "naturalistic", as Schleicher's view of language was. In his view, linguistics is a historical science, and glossematics, under this respect, is especially wanting. This lack of "historical sense" is especially reproached to glossematics: "one must strongly emphasize

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219. In this order: Hjelmslev 1938c; 1937a; 1939a; 1939b; 1943b; 1948; 1949; Hjelmslev & Uldall 1936; Hjelmslev 1938a; 1938b; 1939c.

220. Pisani always spells this name "Bröndal", possibly because of typographical problems with the Danish ø.

221. "Der Glossematik Hjelmslevs war der Strukturalismus voraufgegangen, dessen Hauptvertreter der Däne Brøndal angesehen werden kann".

222. "[...] Schleichers Auffassung der Sprache als Organismus sich in De Saussures System und in den daraus entwickelten Lehren auswirkt; weiter ist Schleichers Einfluss in Theorie und Praxis der heutigen Sprachwissenschaft weit grösser als man denken möchte". On this interpretation of Saussure as a "disguised Schleicherian" cf. the remarks by Mancini quoted above.

that glossematics does not exhaust linguistics: it can give us a means of understanding the phenomenon 'language', but it does not tell us how this activity of people takes place, why languages change, what their relationships to other human activities are, etc." (Pisani 1953, 11).[223] Pisani's views, therefore, seem rather close to Croce's historicism. This is even clearer when one considers that he insists on the wholly individual character of linguistic phenomena, which means that for him, as for Croce, only *actes de parole* really exist: "the system contained in one speech act cannot be completely identical with that contained in another, even in the same individual" (ibid.).[224] This implicitly denies the legitimacy of a concept like Saussure's *langue*.

Pisani's attitude towards structuralism in general and Hjelmslev in particular is therefore one of total dissent, although always expressed in a polite way. We can find a rather different approach in a linguist slightly younger than Pisani, namely Luigi Heilmann (1911–1988), who published, two years after Pisani's overview, a paper devoted to "Structural tendencies in linguistic inquiry" (Heilmann 1955a).[225] This paper considers American structuralism, which was scarcely examined (if not completely ignored) in Pisani's. Heilmann (1955a, 141) distinguishes three directions within structural linguistics: American behaviorism, glossematics

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223. "Man muss jedenfalls kräftig unterstreichen, dass die Glossematik die Sprachwissenschaft nicht ausschöpft: sie kann uns ein Mittel zur Auffassung der Erscheinung 'Sprache' geben, sagt sie uns aber nicht, wie diese Tätigkeit der Menschen stattfindet, warum Sprachen sich verändern, welches ihre Beziehungen zu den anderen menschlichen Tätigkeiten sind usw.".

224. "das in einem Sprechakt enthaltene System mit demjenigen in einem anderen, sogar desselben Individuum enthaltenen, keineswegs völlig identisch sein kann". – The assumption that language is primarily an individual and only derivatively a social phenomenon was held not only by Croce, but by other scholars as well, among whom Hermann Paul (1846–1921; on these topics cf. Graffi 1995). It is difficult to establish to what extent Paul's work was known by Italian linguists, with the exception of Meriggi, who always referred to Paul (1920) as a masterwork.

225. As is standard for the proceedings of many scientific Academies, papers indicate, besides the name of their author, also the name of the member of the Academy that "presents" them: in the case of Heilmann (1955a), this member was Pagliaro (see above, 327).

and phonematics – the last direction "going back to the Prague school" (as can be seen, Prague contribution to structural linguistics is found in phonology only; this assessment would last for several years, as we will see later, fn. 29). Despite their differences, American behaviourism and glossematics are said to share, "in the practice of linguistic analysis" and at different degrees, an attitude which is "antisubstantialistic" and "immanent" (id. 142). On the contrary, Prague phonology "developing Saussurean principles perhaps with less consequentialism than glossematics, but certainly with a livelier sense of the sociality of the language, places linguistically organized substance at the center of its study".[226] Heilmann (id. 144) goes on by stating that "by defining *function* and *structure* in terms of substance, it seems easier to establish a relationship between the statics of the system and the dynamics of individual realizations".[227] The Praguian approach, according to Heilmann, therefore allows the linguist to solve "the problem of the relationship between the traditional historical method and the structuralist method", by "overcoming the Saussurean antinomies between diachrony and synchrony, and between *langue* and *parole*" (id. 138).[228] Like Pisani, Heilmann mainly wants to preserve the approach to linguistic phenomena typical of the historical method, but, while the former scholar thought it was completely incompatible with the structuralist method, the latter (and younger) scholar sees a potential agreement in the structuralist approach typical of the Prague school, which he applied to his own research on the Moena dialect (Heilmann 1955b). On the other hand, the refusal of the 'formalistic' method of the other structuralist trends, and especially of glossematics, is a feature common to both Pisani

226. "svolgendo i principi saussuriani forse con minore consequenzialismo dei glossematici, ma certo con più vivo senso della socialità della lingua, pone al centro del proprio studio la sostanza organizzata linguisticamente".
227. "Definendo in termini di sostanza la funzione e la struttura, appare più facile stabilire un rapporto tra la statica del sistema e la dinamica delle realizzazioni individuali".
228. "Il problema del rapporto tra metodo storico tradizionale e quello strutturalistico [...] si risolve nel superamento delle antinomie saussuriane tra diacronia e sincronia, tra lingua e parola".

and Heilmann, and, probably, to all Italian linguists of their generation.[229]

3. The 1960s: the 'golden age' of structural linguistics in Italy

Despite all its limits and reservations, Heilmann's work surely contributed to the introduction of structuralism into Italian linguistics. More generally, Italian human sciences began to experience a profound change in the same years, namely between the 1950s and the 1960s: Croce's doctrines and historicism in general were in a crisis and the spreading of the structuralist approach to several fields of the humanities besides linguistics, such as sociology, cultural anthropology and literary criticism, offered a radical alternative to them. It is therefore not surprising that the first person to refer to Hjelmslev's work in order to develop his own ideas was a philosopher, Galvano Della Volpe (1895–1968), in a book about aesthetics (Della Volpe 1960). Even in his preface, Della Volpe wrote:

> My predominant use in this study of the essential features of the theory of glossematics is not a matter of chance, nor is it due to any personal inclination of my own for the laborious subtleties of Hjelmslev's 'algebra' of language. The reason is simply that glossematics, the structural linguistics of the Copenhagen school, represents the most coherent and complete development of modern scientific (Saussurian) linguistics, and hence the most general language-theory. My use of it is intended to firmly establish the semantic bases of poetry and literature, before

229. Besides those presented in the present section, other Italian linguists discussed Hjelmslev's theory, more or less occasionally. A reference to them can be found in the short chronicle by Devoto (1951). Bolelli (1953, 8) labels the doctrines of the Copenhagen school as an "abstraction orgy"; this assessment is restated in the introductory note to the Italian translation of Brøndal (1939): see Bolelli (1965, 518–520). Bolelli's attitude is similar to Tagliavini's (1963, 314–315), who qualifies Hjelmslev (1943) as "a masterpiece of a hermeticism that is reduced to jargon for initiates and is far from linguistic reality" ("capolavoro di un ermetismo che si esaurisce in vocabolario per iniziati e che si distacca dalla realtà linguistica"). Actually, on the subsequent pages Tagliavini (1963, 315–321) gives a rather detailed presentation of glossematics, basing himself, however, not directly on Hjelmslev (1943), but on Alarcos Llorach (1951).

going on to sketch a general aesthetic semiotics (Della Volpe 1960, English translation, 12).

As remarked by Lepschy (1968, xx-xxi), Della Volpe's use of Hjelmslev's 'algebra' (a term put into quotation marks by him, not by Hjelmslev) was not free of inaccuracies and misunderstandings: it had however the merit of putting Italian philosophical culture in contact with a line of thought previously wholly extraneous to it.

More or less in the same years, a new generation of linguists emerged who became deeply interested in structural linguistics. Among them, I will quote the three scholars who first held a University chair of General Linguistics, from the end of the 1960s (earlier, no chairs with this label existed, but only chairs of 'Glottologia', a term coined by Ascoli to render the German *Sprachwissenschaft*): Tullio De Mauro (1932–2017), Giulio C. Lepschy (b. 1935)[230] and Luigi Rosiello (1930–1993). As can be seen, all three were born between the very late 1920s and the middle of the 1930s, hence they were about a generation younger than Pisani or Heilmann. Rosiello was one of Heilmann's pupils at the University of Bologna and De Mauro was one of Pagliaro's at the University of Rome. However, De Mauro very often mentions Mario Lucidi (1913–1961), who was an assistant at Pagliaro's chair, as his most influential teacher in the domain of contemporary linguistics: "I owe him [i.e., Lucidi] my first readings of the School of Prague, of Harris and Bloomfield, of Hjelmslev: an uncommon set of readings both in Europe and in the United States" (De Mauro 1998: 34). Lepschy's teacher was Tristano Bolelli (1913–2001), an Indo-Europeanist with some interest in linguistic theory and especially in the history of linguistics.[231] It is almost needless to quote De Mauro's and Lepschy's works from the 1960s that made them world-famous: for the first, the monumental commentary to his Italian translation of Saussure's *Cours de*

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230. Actually, Lepschy obtained the professorship, but he never occupied the chair, preferring to remain in England, where he had already lived for several years; he became a professor at the University of Reading.

231. He was the editor of two anthologies collecting papers of linguists of the 19th and the 20th century: Bolelli (1965) and Bolelli (1971). See also fn. 22.

linguistique Générale (De Mauro 1967), which, since 1972, has also accompanied the original French version; for Lepschy, his survey of structural linguistics (Lepschy 1966), which first appeared in Italian and was subsequently translated into English and several other languages. Rosiello's most lasting contributions of the period were to the history of linguistics, especially of the 17th and the 18th century (Rosiello 1967), but he was also the author of the first Italian book that expressly assumed structural linguistics as its conceptual framework (Rosiello 1965).

These three scholars were structuralists, each of them in his own perspective. I will now try to briefly outline their profile. Lepschy, besides his theoretical interventions, such as his 1966 volume and several essays to which we will return below, investigated phonology and morphology of standard Italian and of some Italian dialects in a structuralist framework (essentially, the Prague one); see, e.g., Lepschy (1962a; 1963; 1964; 1965a). De Mauro (1965; 1967) proposed, among other things, an interpretation of Saussure's structuralism that made it compatible with historicism, developing some insights of Pagliaro's (see § 2, above). Rosiello was equally worried about pursuing a structuralist view that was not detached from historical and sociological considerations: this is shown by his focusing on the language functions (in a Praguian, not glossematic sense) and on the notion of 'language use'. Despite such partially different orientations and interests, all three held Hjelmslev's views in high esteem and resorted to some of his insights to deal with some problems in their own research. I will give some examples, to which several others could be added.

Hjelmslev's (1943a) theory holds an important space in Lepschy's study dealing with the debate about the nature of the linguistic sign after Saussure (Lepschy 1962b). For example, Lepschy (id. 77) writes: "starting from the notion of sign as formulated in the *Cours*, it is difficult to see how one can avoid reaching the glossematic notion of sign: this in fact derives directly from the three Saussurean formulations of *a*) sign as a relationship, *b*) *langue* as a system of

signs, *c) langue* as a form and not as a substance".[232] Hjelmslev is also quoted in a paper by Lepschy of the same year (Lepschy 1962c), a very long and detailed review article of a reader devoted to the meanings and the usage of the word 'structure', where the history from Antiquity of the concerned term is investigated. This time, Hjelmslev is m entioned just once, but in a key passage, which states the unavoidability of assuming a structural point of view in linguistics (id. 195): "in reality, any linguistic study is necessarily based on the fact that language is conceived of as a structural system, and on the fact that speech has its own structure, and presupposes the linguistic system (on the fact that the process determines the system, in Hjelmslev's words)".[233]

Rosiello's (1965) is an interesting attempt at defining the specificity of poetic language (exemplified by an analysis of the lexicon of the Italian poet Eugenio Montale), which expressly abstracts away from any hint of 'literary criticism', i.e., from any assessment value of the concerned work. Rosiello explicitly follows the path traced by Jakobson (1960), but he puts his own research in a larger framework that takes into account, besides Jakobson's and other Praguian scholars' suggestions, also some features of Hjelmslev's linguistic thought, especially the distinction between 'schema', 'norm' and 'usage' presented in Hjelmslev (1943b). Rosiello (1965, 55), while expressing his admiration for "the rigor, the consistency and the clarity"[234] of Hjelmslev's approach, pleads for its revision, both on the terminological and conceptual aspect. From the former point of view, he suggests to replace 'schema' with 'structure'. This term denotes "the plane of paradigmatic relationships, which ... represents the formal organization of the hypothetical potential

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232. "Ma a partire dalla nozione di segno quale è formulata nel Cours riesce difficile vedere come si possa evitare di giungere alla nozione glossematica di segno: questa discende infatti direttamente dalle tre formulazioni saussuriane di a) segno come rapporto, b) langue come sistema di segni, c) langue come forma e non come sostanza".
233. "In realtà qualsiasi studio linguistico si fonda necessariamente sul fatto che la lingua viene concepita come un sistema strutturale, e sul fatto che il discorso ha una sua struttura, e presuppone il sistema linguistico (sul fatto che il processo determina il sistema, per dirla con Hjelmslev)".
234. "il rigore, la coerenza e la lucidità".

of the language",[235] while the plane of syntagmatic relationships is dubbed by him as 'system' (cf. id. 58).[236] By 'usage', Rosiello means a "manifestation of the system" and by 'norm' he means "the institutionalization of usage" (cf. ibid.). Poetic language has to be investigated according to the extent it conforms to norm or deviates from it, in the different authors (cf. id. 108–109). We will not deal with Rosiello's distinctions and definitions any further here, not even with respect to Hjelmslev's ones; it is enough to stress that the former would have not been possible without the latter.

Hjelmslev's doctrine of the linguistic sign also plays a key role in De Mauro's commentary to Saussure (1972), especially in fn. 225 (one of the most important and longest), which refers to Saussure's statement (1972, English translation, 112) that "there are no pre-existing ideas, and nothing is distinct before the appearance of language". To explain it, De Mauro bases himself on the analysis of the linguistic sign contained in Hjelmslev (1943a, 46–51), which he qualifies (loc. cit.) as "the best commentary" to Saussure's passage. It shows how a "common factor", called 'purport' is differently formed in different languages: Hjelmslev's famous example is that of the same purport that is expressed by *jeg véd det ikke* in Danish, *I do not know* in English, *je ne sais pas* in French, *en tiedä* in Finnish and *naluvara* in Eskimo, to which De Mauro adds *non so* (Italian) and *nescio* (Latin). De Mauro extensively quotes Hjelmslev's (1943a, 48) words:

> We thus see that the unformed purport extractable from all these linguistic chains is formed differently in each language. [...] Just as the same sand can be put into different molds, and the same cloud take on ever new shapes, so also the same purport is formed or structured differently in different languages. What determines its form is solely the functions of the language, the sign function and the functions deducible therefrom. Purport remains, each time, substance for a new form, and has no possible existence except through being substance for one form

235. "il piano delle relazioni paradigmatiche, che [...] rappresenta l'organizzazione formale delle potenzialità ipotetiche della lingua".

236. In this discussion, Rosiello also takes into account the terminology and the concepts introduced by Coseriu (1962).

or another. We thus recognize in the linguistic *content*, in its process, a specific *form*, the *content-form*, which is independent of, and stands in arbitrary relation to, the *purport*, and forms it into a *content-substance*.

Today, the above passage is well-known, to any even hasty reader of Hjelmslev, but the situation was very different more than fifty years ago in Italy, and, above all, nobody (to my knowledge at least) had previously considered employing it as "the best commentary" to another of Saussure's statements, occurring a couple of pages later: the combination of thought and sound "*produces a form, not a substance*", (Saussure 1972, English translation, 113, original emphasis).

4. The focus on Hjelmslev's theory

Shortly after Hjelmslev's death in 1965, Aldo Prosdocimi (1941–2016), a former pupil of Devoto, issued a paper which, despite its title ("Ricordo di L. Hjelmslev"; Prosdocimi 1966), is not a simple obituary of the Danish linguist, but also a thoughtful revisiting of his research paths. At the beginning of his essay, Prosdocimi (id. 108) states that "we could entitle our commemoration: L. Hjelmslev or about linguistics".[237] Prosdocimi sketches a scientific profile of Hjelmslev's work that goes from his first book (Hjelmslev 1928) to one of his last published essays (Hjelmslev 1958)[238] and contains several interesting remarks: e.g., he draws attention to the influence on Hjelmslev's thought by Neo-positivism and especially by Carnap (cf. Prosdocimi 1966, 115) (on Carnap's structuralism, see Collin, this volume). Prosdocimi was mainly a historical-comparative linguist, but he did not hesitate to see "a sufficient reason for a resumption of glossematics even in those domains of Italian linguistics that are

237. "Potremmo intitolare la nostra commemorazione: L. Hjelmslev o della linguistica".

238. The other works by Hjelmslev quoted in Prosdocimi (1966) are, in this order: Hjelmslev 1937b; 1932; 1935–37; 1938c; 1939a; 1936; 1937a; 1937b; 1939c; 1943; 1954; 1956a; 1958; 1956b; 1957; 1948.

most distant from it" (Prosdocimi 1966, 114).[239] He also recalled the attempts by Heilmann, Lepschy, De Mauro and Rosiello to make Italian linguists better acquainted with Hjelmslev's linguistic theory (cf. ibid.). His conclusion was that "one cannot deny – whether or not one accepts its orthodoxy – the centrality of Hjelmslev's doctrine and the function of his effort for consistency and autonomy in a science that has often sinned due to myopia and inability to identify its position among the other sciences" (id. 116).[240]

Although Prosdocimi's wish for glossematics to receive more attention even from Italian linguists who were further away from it largely did not come true, it cannot be doubted that his paper showed that Hjelmslev's ideas were gaining a wider interest. This interest was further strengthened by Lepschy's presentation of glossematics in ch. 4 of his survey of structural linguistics (Lepschy 1966), and, especially, by his translation of Hjelmslev (1943a), preceded by a long, insightful introduction, from which I quote this passage which I consider to be especially important:

> Glossematics established itself [...] as one of the three main trends in structural linguistics, alongside the Prague school and the American Bloomfield school [*omitted footnote*]. Structural linguistics had gradually been established, within the context of historical and comparative linguistics, due to the need to clarify certain ambiguities implicit in the traditional method. Common to the various trends in structural linguistics are 1) the distinction (which does not necessarily mean absolute separation) of synchrony and diachrony [...]; 2) the identification of linguistic elements as they perform their functions within a structured ... system of reciprocal relationships, both syntagmatic ... and paradigmatic .... Glossematics can be considered the most structural of the various trends of structuralism; it [...] rigorously develops both notions indicated by the term *structure*: systems of elements that depend on each

239. "una ragione sufficiente per un recupero della glossematica anche in quelle posizioni della linguistica italiana che ne sono più lontane".

240. "non si può disconoscere – se ne accetti o no l'ortodossia – la centralità della dottrina di Hjelmslev e la funzione dello sforzo di coerenza e autonomia in una scienza che ha spesso peccato di miopia e di incapacità di individuare la propria posizione tra le altre scienze".

other (structure as organization), and that of formal system underlying concrete manifestations (structure as abstraction) (Lepschy 1968, ix-x; original emphasis).[241]

A few pages later, Lepschy (id. xviii) writes that "one of the most striking aspects that distinguish glossematics from other structuralist trends is the rigor with which it advocates a quadripartition resulting from two dichotomies, that of form and substance and that of expression and content".[242] In his view, "two notions … present […] a most stimulating interest in Hjelmslev's theory: that of substance, and that of form of content"[243] (id. xxiii). On the latter topic, Lepschy (id. xxvii) writes: "It is necessary to identify those 'atoms' of meaning (which generative grammar is also looking for) [*omitted footnote*] which should be limited in number, but should be able to constitute a very large number of sign meanings, when combined with each other".[244] As can be seen, Lepschy also refers to generative grammar here, which he was one of the first scholars

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241. "La glossematica si è affermata […] come una delle tre tendenze principali della linguistica strutturale, accanto alla scuola di Praga e alla scuola americana di Bloomfield. La linguistica strutturale si era gradualmente costituita, nel seno della linguistica storica e comparativa, per l'esigenza di chiarire certe ambiguità implicite nel metodo tradizionale. Comuni alle diverse tendenze della linguistica strutturale sono 1) la distinzione (che non significa necessariamente separazione assoluta) di sincronia e diacronia […]; 2) l'identificazione degli elementi linguistici in quanto esercitano le loro funzioni all'interno di un sistema […] strutturato di rapporti reciproci, sia sintagmatici […] che paradigmatici […]. La glossematica si può considerare, fra le varie correnti dello strutturalismo, quella più strutturale; essa […] sviluppa con rigore entrambe le nozioni indicate dal termine struttura: quella di sistemi di elementi che dipendono gli uni dagli altri (struttura come organizzazione), e quella di sistema formale soggiacente alle concrete manifestazioni (struttura come astrazione)".
242. "Uno degli aspetti più vistosi che distinguono la glossematica da altre correnti strutturalistiche è il rigore con cui essa propugna una quadripartizione risultante da due dicotomie, quella di forma e sostanza e quella di espressione e contenuto".
243. "due nozioni […] presentano, secondo chi scrive, un interesse più stimolante nella teoria di Hjelmslev: quella di sostanza, e quella di forma del contenuto".
244. "Bisogna identificare quegli 'atomi' del significato (alla cui ricerca si è messa anche la grammatica generativa) che dovrebbero essere in numero limitato, ma che dovrebbero poter costituire, combinandosi tra loro, un numero altissimo di significati di segni".

to introduce to Italian linguistic culture (see, e.g., Lepschy 1965b; 1966, chap. 8).

The appearance of Lepschy's translation and introduction undoubtedly brought the key notions of Hjelmslev's work to the attention of some (at the time) young scholars. Simone (1969) takes as his starting point a comparison between Saussure's *langue* vs. *parole* and Hjelmslev's 'system' vs. 'process' pairs: while the former could be labeled (in Hjelmslev's terms) as an 'interdependence' relation, the latter is explicitly defined as a 'determination': "*the process determines the system*" (Hjelmslev 1943a: 36; original emphasis). This implies that "systems without processes" may exist (hence the title of Simone's article). This is the basis upon which Simone attempts to define the conditions under which an abstract system can or cannot be implemented by a process.

Muraro (1971–72) investigates the way in which Hjelmslev interprets and develops Saussure's well-known statement that the combination of thought and sound "produit une forme, non une substance" (Saussure 1972, 157; cf. Hjelmslev 1943a: 46 ff.; Hjelmslev 1943b). She maintains that, despite verbal coincidences, the opposition 'form' vs. 'substance' has a rather different meaning for the two scholars.

In those years, some other linguists devoted themselves to Hjelmslev's linguistic theory as a whole, namely not only to some of its specific points, as was essentially the case with the scholars quoted so far. Thus, the general methodological tenets of glossematics became the focus of discussion (Antinucci 1969; Graffi 1971), as well as the quadripartition between form and content of the expression and form and substance of the content (Galassi 1972; Graffi 1974).

In particular, one of the first Italian generativists, Francesco Antinucci, one year after the appearance of the translation of Hjelmslev (1943a), issued an article entitled "Methodological remarks on Hjelmslevian theory" (Antinucci 1969). It mainly dealt with the "two factors" of 'arbitrariness' and 'adequacy', that, according to Hjelmslev (1943a, 14), "it seems necessary [...] to consider in the preparation of a theory". Antinucci attempts to clarify them by referring to a book by Carnap (1958), which introduced a fundamental

distinction between 'deductive calculus' and 'interpreted system'. According to Antinucci (1969, 237), "arbitrariness immediately arises from the deductive nature of the theory",[245] namely from its aspect of calculus, while "the concept of adequacy … makes sense only from the point of view of any applications of the theory: it therefore presupposes the moment of interpretation."[246] Antinucci's short, but very insightful, essay opened the way to a "reading of Hjelmslev through Carnap", which seemed (and still seems to me) fully legitimate: as stated above, Prosdocimi (1966) and Lepschy (1968, xiii) had already suggested that Hjelmslev's theoretical attitude was influenced by Carnap, and Neopositivism in general. This is also the line I followed in my first published paper (Graffi 1971), with some conclusions that partly differed from Antinucci's, but in an essentially analogous perspective. In a footnote to my paper (id. 468), I also reported Eli Fischer-Jørgensen's opinion:[247] "Hjelmslev was not especially influenced by the philosophers of science contemporary to him, neither through personal contacts nor by means of readings; rather, he independently reached his conclusions and only subsequently remarked how they were close to their ideas, on many points". Today, I am inclined to think that Fischer-Jørgensen was right: Hjelmslev was essentially autonomous in his theoretical reflections. Nevertheless, his conception of linguistic theory has many parallels with Carnap's ideas about the nature of empirical theories; hence it is not illegitimate to resort to the latter scholar to achieve a better understanding of the former.

Antinucci also tried to interpret some aspects of the Hjelmslevian theory by means of some notions introduced by Chomsky. The MIT linguist quoted the Copenhagen scholar in the methodological chapter of his first published book (Chomsky 1957, 49–60): after stating that "every grammar will have to meet certain *external conditions of adequacy*" and that "in addition, we pose a *condition of generality* on grammar", he writes in a footnote that, presumably, "these

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245. "l'arbitrarietà scaturisce immediatamente dal carattere deduttivo della teoria".
246. "il concetto di adeguatezza […] ha senso solo dal punto di vista delle eventuali applicazioni della teoria: esso presuppone, dunque, il momento dell'interpretazione".
247. Personal communication, Copenhagen, August 1971.

two conditions are similar to what Hjelmslev has in mind when he speaks of *appropriateness* and *arbitrariness* of linguistic theory" (id. 49–50; all emphases in the original). Antinucci does not dwell on this passage by Chomsky, but rather attempts to frame Hjelmslev's theory in the classification of linguistic theories developed in the immediately following pages of Chomsky (1957), namely according to their aim of bringing about a 'discovery procedure', a 'decision procedure' or an 'evaluation procedure'. According to Antinucci, Hjelmslev's theory belongs to the last kind of theories, which is, by the way, the only "reasonable" one, as Chomsky (1957, 52) states.[248]

Glossematics and structuralism in general then began to be compared with generative grammar. The outcome of this comparison was sketched by Zinna (2017) in the quotation reported at the beginning of the present paper, namely that many Italian linguists abandoned the former approach to embrace the latter; we can now attempt to give an explanation for this. To this end, it may be useful to present in some more detail the atmosphere of Italian linguistics in the decade between about 1965 and 1975, dubbed by Rosiello (1977) "the age of translations". During this decade, about 130 books of general or applied linguistics were translated into Italian from English, French, German and other languages, hence an average of 8 to 12 books each month. This hectic activity, due to the poor knowledge of foreign languages that characterized Italian culture at the time, had the very beneficial effect of spreading knowledge of structural linguistics also outside the restricted circles of specialists. This was possible even despite the chronological disorder of the appearance of such translations and the considerable differences in editorial accuracy between them (cf. Rosiello 1977, 35–36). For example, the translation of Bally (1944) appeared in 1963, four years before the translation of Saussure (1916); the translation of Jakobson (1963; a collection of essays ranging from 1949 to 1961) in 1966, five years before the translation of Trubetzkoy (1939).

Returning to our topic, the translations of both Chomsky (1957) and Chomsky (1965) appeared only two years later than the translation of Hjelmslev (1943a): hence, one could say that glossematics

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248. Antinucci's interpretation is shared by Galassi (1972, 541).

(as well as structural linguistics in general) and generative (or 'trans-formational', as was said more commonly at that epoch) grammar came into Italian linguistics[249] almost at the same time.

What was the impact of this almost simultaneous arrival of theories that had been developed over half a century? Lepschy (1965c, 221–222) had already taken a well-balanced position at the beginning of this rather tumultuous period:

> From what follows ... it should emerge that the present writer sees a continuity between structural linguistics and transformational grammar, and between traditional linguistics and structural linguistics, without diminishing the originality of the innovations (in the methods and in the general vision of linguistic phenomena) introduced by structural linguistics with respect to traditional linguistics, and by transformational grammar with respect to structural linguistics.[250]

Unfortunately, this thoughtful position held by Lepschy was not shared by many of his Italian colleagues. As many 'traditional' linguists had firmly rejected structuralism, so many linguists who had been fascinated by structural linguistics became strong adversaries of generative grammar. (It would be interesting to discuss the reasons for such an attitude, which, by the way, was not limited to Italy, but this would lead us too far afield). On the other hand, neophytes in generative linguistics often had a dismissive attitude toward any previous theory, including structural linguistics.

We will now come back to the question we asked above, namely which reasons diverted several linguists from glossematics to gen-

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249. It would be better to say: a large part of Italian linguistics. We have seen in section 2, above, that scholars such as Pagliaro, Pisani, Heilmann and others were quite well acquainted with European structural linguistics, although they were in total or partial disagreement with it.

250. "Da quanto segue dovrebbe [...] emergere come chi scrive veda una continuità fra linguistica strutturale e grammatica trasformazionale, e fra linguistica tradizionale e linguistica strutturale, senza diminuire con questo l'originalità delle innovazioni (nei metodi e nella visione generale dei fenomeni linguistici) introdotte dalla linguistica strutturale rispetto alla linguistica tradizionale, e dalla grammatica trasformazionale rispetto alla linguistica strutturale".

erative grammar. We may ask, first of all, how the historical and theoretical relationships between structural linguistics and generative grammar are to be conceived. Lepschy, in his "assessment of structuralism", holds a position which echoes his own from almost twenty years earlier:

> [...] I don't think there are many linguists today who consider or declare themselves to be structuralists. ... A first preliminary observation concerns the scope of the term. We have at least two very different positions: a) according to a restrictive definition, advocated by generativists ..., structural linguistics is typically represented by the Bloomfieldian tendencies that dominated the scene in the United States in the 40s and 50s. ... b) According to a more comprehensive definition (and in my opinion more appropriate, more theoretically coherent and more historically exact), structuralism characterizes many trends of twentieth-century linguistics that can be traced back to Saussure and take place in the groups of Geneva, Prague, Copenhagen, and in America draw inspiration from Bloomfield and Sapir. From this point of view, generative theories are part of structuralism in the broad sense, and indeed constitute one of its most stimulating developments (Lepschy 1983, 47–48).[251]

Shortly after, Lepschy (id. 49) writes:

> A characterization of linguistic structuralism should highlight at least the following aspects: a) an interest in theory [...]; this is a philosoph-

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251. "non credo che siano molti, oggi, i linguisti che si considerano o si dichiarano strutturalisti. [...] Una prima osservazione preliminare riguarda l'ambito di riferimento del termine. Abbiamo almeno due posizioni molto diverse: a) secondo una definizione restrittiva, caldeggiata dai generativisti [...], la linguistica strutturale è rappresentata tipicamente dalle tendenze bloomfieldiane che dominarono la scena negli Stati Uniti negli '40 e '50. [...] b) Secondo una definizione più comprensiva (e a mio parere più appropriata, più coerente teoricamente e più esatta storicamente) lo strutturalismo caratterizza molte correnti della linguistica del Novecento che si possono far risalire a Saussure e si svolgono nei gruppi di Ginevra, di Praga, di Copenaghen, e che in America si richiamano a Bloomfield e a Sapir. Da questo punto di vista le teorie generative sono parte dello strutturalismo in senso lato, e ne costituiscono anzi uno degli sviluppi più stimolanti".

ical, or logical, propensity characteristic of a large part of modern linguistics; b) the hypothesis that more general and abstract elements can and should be sought behind the variety and singularity of individual linguistic phenomena …; it is a question of what we could call the Galilean attitude that pervades modern science; c) the tendency to emphasize the relational aspect of phenomena …; this perspective corresponds to the systematic interest, characteristic of many disciplines in our century.[252]

As can be seen, the content of this last quotation by Lepschy largely coincides with his picture of structuralism drawn in his introduction to the translation of Hjelmslev (1943a), reported above: point b) refers to what Lepschy calls 'structure as abstraction' (a "formal system underlying concrete manifestations") and point c) to 'structure as organization' (a "system of elements that depend on each other"). A further feature is ascribed to structuralism (point a): the concern for the theory and for its logical and philosophical foundations. Both points a) and b) also characterize generative grammar. Chomsky's propensity to discuss the foundations of linguistic theory has been well known, since his early publications: chap. 2 of Chomsky (1955 [1975]), entitled "The nature of linguistic theory", is devoted to methodological problems; his quotation of Hjelmslev in chap. 6 of *Syntactic Structures* (Chomsky 1957), referred to above, is also significant in this sense.

Concerning point b), the need for abstraction equally characterizes the generative approach from its very beginnings. Consider, for example, how Chomsky (1975, 31) describes the first steps of his research work: "investigation led to more abstract underlying struc-

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252. "Una caratterizzazione dello strutturalismo linguistico dovrebbe mettere in luce almeno gli aspetti seguenti: a) un interesse per la teoria […]; questa è una propensione filosofica, o logica, caratteristica di molta linguistica moderna; b) l'ipotesi che dietro la varietà e la singolarità dei singoli fenomeni linguistici si possano e si debbano ricercare degli elementi più generali e astratti […]; si tratta di quello che potremmo chiamare l'atteggiamento galileiano che pervade la scienza moderna; c) la tendenza a sottolineare l'aspetto relazionale dei fenomeni […]; questa prospettiva corrisponde all'interesse di tipo sistematico, caratteristico di molte discipline nel nostro secolo".

tures that were far removed from anything that might be obtained by systematic application of procedures of analysis of the sort that I was investigating". Needless to say, notions such as 'deep structure', or 'level of representation' in general, which are so crucial in Chomsky's theory, are justified only if one considers abstraction "la rançon de toute analyse scientifique", as Hjelmslev (1959 [1954], 48) wrote during the years in which Chomsky was working out his first model of generative grammar (Chomsky 1955 [1975]). Furthermore, the distinction between competence and performance is conceivable only if one is willing to pay "the price of abstraction". De Mauro, in one of his most important footnotes to Saussure (1972, fn. 70), argued in a decisive way that Saussure, while not using the term "abstract", which at his time still had a negative connotation, actually considered *langue* as an "abstract" entity (that Saussure's *langue* only partially coincides with Chomsky's 'competence' is another matter, of course). One could also add that there are numerous references to the "Galilean style" of research throughout Chomsky's publications. Hence, I find that, under both points a) and b) of Lepschy's characterization, an essential continuity cannot be denied between structuralism (and especially glossematics), on the one hand, and generative grammar, on the other. On the contrary, there is an essential gap between the two linguistic schools regarding "structure as organization". This idea is, in fact, quite extraneous to generative grammar, whose goal is not to describe the language system as a network of relations, on the basis of which the minimal elements ("the irreducible variants"; cf. Hjelmslev 1943a, 72) are individuated and defined. In generative grammar, this idea would be labeled as "proceduralism" and therefore rejected.[253] Furthermore, while structural linguistics, and especially glossematics, views language as an autonomous entity and hence pleads for an "immanent understanding of language as a self-subsistent, specific structure" (id. 19), the basic assumption of generative linguistics is that language is a cognitive capacity. Antinucci (1972, 60) very clearly summa-

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253. The most rigorous and detailed analysis of a specific language according to the principles of glossematics (Togeby 1965) is clearly procedural; for some remarks on this topic, see Graffi (2001, 293–295).

rized the criticism, on both points, of generative linguistics towards structuralism:[254]

> The proceduralism of structuralism finds its origin not so much in a distorted vision of scientific methodology, as – I would say – it is the fruit of general theoretical ideas on the nature of language. ... the fundamental concept is that of *langue* understood, on the one hand, as an autonomous entity, that is, detached from its location within the cognitive system, in the mind ...; and, on the other hand, understood as a closed system, as a system in which *tout se tient*, in which ... the established theoretical entities have no other reality than *opposing*, *negative*, *differential*, to all levels (original emphasis).

Another factor that lessened the appeal of glossematics, while at the same time increasing that of generative grammar, lay in the field of their respective applications to concrete linguistic descriptions. To quote Lepschy (1983, 57) once more:

> Despite the great effort of systematicity and explicitness, and the great clarity and subtlety that have been invested in the elaboration of the methods of glossematics, it cannot be said that the results have been particularly enlightening in the description of single languages, beyond the examples, often brilliantly analyzed, during general theoretical expositions.[255]

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254. "il proceduralismo dello strutturalismo trova la sua origine non tanto in una visione distorta della metodologia scientifica, quanto – direi – è il frutto delle idee teoriche generali sulla natura del linguaggio. [...] il concetto fondamentale è quello di langue intesa, da una parte, come entità autonoma, cioè avulsa dalla sua collocazione nell'ambito del sistema cognitivo, nella mente [...]; e, dall'altra parte, intesa come un sistema chiuso, come un sistema in cui tout se tient, in cui [...] le entità teoriche stabilite non hanno alcuna altra realtà che oppositiva, negativa, differenziale, a tutti i livelli".

255. "Nonostante il grande sforzo di sistematicità e di esplicitezza, e la grande lucidità e sottigliezza che sono state investite nell'elaborazione dei metodi della glossematica, non si può dire che i risultati siano stati particolarmente illuminanti nella descrizione di singole lingue, al di là degli esempi, spesso analizzati in maniera brillante, nel corso di esposizioni teoriche generali".

As a matter of fact, there were very few glossematic analyses of natural languages, especially in the domain of syntax (the only noticeable exception being Togeby 1965). Besides, the tumultuous arrival of many different linguistic theories in Italy at the same time had the effect "of highlighting the self-styled 'theoretical' aspect rather than the empirical-descriptive one" (Cinque 1977, 174).[256] On the contrary, the techniques of generative grammar (especially in the 'standard' version of Chomsky 1965) appeared to be easily applicable to several languages, among which Italian itself, as is witnessed by the colloquium of the Italian Linguistic Society held in 1969 explicitly devoted to the "transformational grammar of Italian" (Medici & Simone 1971; of course, the empirical adequacy of many such studies can be put into doubt, but this is not the question that concerns us here).

These were further reasons why some young scholars (as I was at the time, for example) diverted their research interest from glossematics to the generative framework. On the other hand, Hjelmslev's theory began to attract more and more interest by semioticians, more or less in the same years (the first important works in this direction were possibly Garroni 1972 and Eco 1973), and this interest is still alive, as is witnessed by the numerous papers that have been published. It is however undeniable that, as far as linguistics is concerned, and especially the Italian linguistic milieu, the knowledge of structural linguistics, and of Hjelmslev in particular, were essential steps towards a much more mature awareness of what is required for linguistics to become a science.

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256. "mettere in luce il sedicente aspetto 'teorico' più che quello empirico-descrittivo". – It was often maintained that European structural linguistics in general paid scarce attention to syntax, only focusing on phonology and, to a less extent, morphology. This was the standard opinion in the epoch we are discussing here, but it is not quite correct: think, first of all, of the important research studies carried out by Mathesius and other Prague linguists on the structure of the sentence, and on other topics as well. Syntax was also practiced by several other European scholars, especially by Tesnière, but his work was largely neglected until the end of the 1960s, when it was rediscovered by Fillmore. For more information about syntactic research in the age of structural linguistics, see e.g. Graffi (2001, part II).

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Author: Giorgio Graffi, Emeritus Professor of Linguistics at the University of Verona. Among his many books *200 years of Syntax* (2001) may be singled out. E-mail: giorgio.graffi@univr.it