Stativeness and Directionality
in System and Text*

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The article aims at exploring the essence of the distinction between the two fundamental forms of language which the Danish linguist Louis Hjelmslev designated as system and text. After discussing and rejecting Hjelmslev's own characterizations of this distinction as that between either-or- and both-and-relations as well as several distinctions used by Roman Jakobson to characterize that distinction, the article proposes to consider the possibility to regard as the defining characteristic of the system stativeness and as that of the text directionality. On closer inspection, however, it turns out that these characteristics are only the dominant ones of the two forms of language, the system also displaying phenomena of directionality and the text phenomena of stativeness. These, however, play, within the respective forms of language, only a subordinate role. Subordinate directionality in the system is to be seen in the internal structure of all complex system-units, such as words as parts of the lexicon, and even between some of these units, namely numerals, themselves. Subordinate stativeness in the text, on the other hand, is displayed by enumerative coordinations, the concept of coordination comprising not only the coordinations of traditional grammar, but also a certain higher-level type of coordination, a type which I call macro-coordination.

1.

The opposition between system and text (or process) is, as is widely

known, one of the most fundamental structural oppositions in language, and as such it has received much attention from structural linguists — partly, however, under different terms, terms like 'langue' and 'parole' (used by Ferdinand de Saussure[1]) or 'code' and 'message' (used by Roman Jakobson[2]). In particular, structural linguists have made great efforts to find convincing clear-cut characterizations of this opposition, but, to my knowledge, wholly convincing clear-cut characterizations of this opposition have not been found.

Consider some of them. Louis Hjelmslev, who has introduced the terms 'system' and 'text' (or 'process'), has characterized these two forms of language by the relation of either-or and the relation of both-and, respectively. He writes :

"(...) in the process, in the text, is present a both-and, a conjunction or coexistence between the functives entering therein ; in the system is present an either-or, a disjunction or alternation between the functives entering therein",

and he explains this characterization by adding :

"Consider the (graphemic) example

$$p \quad e \quad t$$
$$m \quad a \quad n$$

By interchanging p and m, e and a, t and n, respectively, we obtain different words, namely, *pet, pen, pat, pan, met, men, mat, man*. These entities are chains that enter into the linguistic process (text); on the other hand, p and m together, e and a together, t and n together produce paradigms, which enter into the linguistic system. In *pet* there is conjunction, or coexistence, between p and e and t : we have "in fact" before our eyes p and e and t ; in the same way there is conjunction or coexistence between m and a and n in *man*. But between p and m there is disjunction, or alternation, what we "in fact" have before our eyes is either p or m ; in the same way there is disjunction, or alternation, between t and n."[3]

This Hjelmslevian characterization of the system on the one hand and the

[1] Cf. F. de Saussure 1916/1955.
[2] Cf. R. Jakobson 1956 : 58 ff.
[3] L. Hjelmslev 1943/1953 :22.

text on the other is, however, by no means conclusive. It may be justified only from the point of view of the text. As to the system, there is, viewed from within the system, no either-or, but only a both-and between its elements, and what regards the elements of the text, there is, if they are viewed from the system, no both-and, but only an either-or. Thus, both forms of language may be characterized by both relations. What is decisive, is the perspective : the perspective from within on the one hand and the perspective from without on the other. If we look at the system from within the system or at the text from within the text, there is a both-and, and if we look at the system from the point of view of the text or at the text from the point of view of the system, there is an either-or.

This lack of distinctiveness of Hjelmslev's characterizations of system and text by means of the relations of both-and and either-or cannot be removed, even if we try to specify the notions of system and text by further parameters, such as the kind of their physical manifestation, i.e. writtenness or oralness, or the kind of their mental or perceptional status, i.e. their status of stored tacit knowledge or actual perceptional data. True, writtenness and the status of stored tacit knowledge make for both-and relations, whereas oralness and the status of actual perceptional data seem to imply either-or relations, but this again is true both of the system and of the text, phenomena both of which may, though only in part, exist both in a written and in an oral and both in a known and in a perceived form.[4]

The lack of distinctiveness with regard to the opposition between system and text which is characteristic of Hjelmslev's distinction between the both-and and the either-or is also characteristic of a certain distinction favored by Roman Jakobson, namely the distinction between the parameters of selection and combination,[5] and this is by no means surprising, for the distinction between selection and combination is, on closer inspection, nothing but

[4] Examples (of parts) of systems in a written form are grammars and dictionaries, examples of parts of systems in an oral form are inflectional paradigms orally cited by teachers or pupils, examples of (parts of) systems in a known form are the various forms of knowledge of grammatical rules or words which speakers have stored in their brains, and examples of parts of systems in a perceived form are the parts of a system which, as for instance in using a grammar or a dictionary, one is capable of perceiving at a time. As to texts, the written, oral, known and perceived forms are easily imaginable and therefore need not be exemplified.
[5] Cf. R. Jakobson 1956 : 58 ff.

a variant of Hjelmslev's distinction, with selection corresponding to the ei-
ther-or and combination corresponding to the both-and.

But Jakobson uses, in order to characterize the system (or code, as he
says) and the text (or message, as he says), two further distinctions, name-
ly similarity vs. contiguity and simultaneity vs. successivity.[6] At first sight,
these distinctions seem to serve their purpose better : The system of lan-
guage(s) seems to be characterized by similarity and simultaneity of its ele-
ments, and the text by contiguity and successivity of its elements. But on
closer inspection there are exceptions, exceptions both with regard to the
system and with regard to the text, and some of them are pointed out by
Jakobson himself.

As to the first distinction, the one between similarity and contiguity, the
exceptions with regard to the text are anaphorical relations and coordina-
tions, the exceptions with regard to the system the inner structures of most
complex units and certain series of lexical items, especially that of the nu-
merals ; for the anaphorical relations and the coordinations are similarity
relations in the text,[7] and the inner structures of most complex units and
series of lexical items of the kind of the numerals form contiguity relations
in the system. As to the second distinction, the distinction between
simultaneity and successivity, Jakobson himself has pointed to the
simultaneity of the distinctive features of a phoneme as a case of
simultaneity within the text,[8] and we might add to this that there is also
textual simultaneity between the semantic features of a word (or, in anoth-
er terminology, the semes of a sememe[9]). But such features are entities
that have the property of not being citable, and making citability - what
might seem reasonable — a criterion for entities to be taken into account as
units either of the system or of the text, we are entitled to disregard them
and to restrict ourselves to entities that can be cited, i.e. to phonemes,
words, sentences, etc. In actually doing this, we thus ultimately might get

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   [6] Cf. R. Jakobson 1956 : 56 ff. and 1963/1971.
   [7] Cf. R. Jakobson 1963/1971 : 299 f. and 1966/1971 : 317. As to the anaphorical
relations, the degree of similarity they manifest is dependent partly on the type of
the anaphorical relation and partly on the language in which this type occurs. A
survey of different types of anaphorical relations is to be found in R. Harweg
1968/1979 within the framework of my theory of syntagmatic substitution.
   [8] Cf. R. Jakobson 1956 : 59.
   [9] Cf. A. J.Greimas 1966.

rid of such cases of simultaneity relations in the text, and it may seem that, by this device, the distinction between simultaneity and successivity might really emerge as the unequivocal characterization of system and text we are searching for.[10]

But under certain circumstances even this possibility will collapse. Thus, it will collapse, if we again take into account the distinction between written and oral material. For both in the case of the system and in the case of the text, written material is characterized by simultaneousness of its elements and oral material by successivity of its elements.

This state of affairs leads me to the proposal to replace the distinction between simultaneity and successivity by the distinction between stativeness (or lack of directionality) and directionality.[11] This distinction has the advantage of being a semiotical instead of a physical one, and being a semiotical instead of a physical one, it need not care about the distinction between written and oral material, for this is a physical distinction. Being semiotic instead of physical, the distinction between stativeness and directionality is neutral as to the distinction between written and oral material.

2.

The opposition between stativeness and directionality is perhaps the one which is most suited for a distinctive characterization of system and text,[12] but nevertheless the degree of its distinctiveness is not optimal ; for both in the system and in the text there is both stativeness and directionality. To enhance the distinctiveness of this new characterization, we need an additional parameter. As such a parameter we consider and test the relation of dominance between stativeness and directionality.

[10] Cf. Harweg 1981 : 126.

[11] The term 'stativeness' (as the opposite term of 'directionality') might not seem to be the best choice. But a term like 'undirectionalness' (which, just as 'directionalness' instead of 'directionality', might also have been taken into consideration) would have been no better choice. In German, I use the terms 'Ungerichtetheit' (instead of 'stativeness') and 'Gerichtetheit' (instead of 'directionality').

[12] Considering the fact that the notions of stativeness and directionality are notions which easily lend themselves to diachronic interpretations, it has to be stressed that, in this article, they are strictly used in a synchronic sense.

In the system the dominant property is clearly that of stativeness. The re-
lationship between units of the system - if and as long as they are regarded
as such - is always that of stativeness, the relation of directionality obtains
or comes into play only between the syntagmatic parts of these units and
as long as these are considered as such. Considered not as parts of higher
units, but, on a lower level, as parts of the system itself, they also enter
into relations of stativeness. Thus, words as constituents of the lexicon of a
language stand in the relation of stativeness to each other, only the pho-
nemes constituting the words form relations of directionality, whereas the
relations between the phonemes as parts of the phonological (sub)system of
a language are again relations of stativeness.

The same is true of rules. Their inner structure often implies some sort of
syntagmatic directionality, but as parts of a list or set of similar rules they
lack that sort of directionality. Thus, the rule that, in a case-language, a
certain preposition requires a certain case may be said to be directional, but
the corresponding rules of all the prepositions of a language form, as it
were, a stative whole. As to the ordering of rules which we find in genera-
tive grammar, this is not a language-inherent phenomenon, but only a cer-
tain device of language description, and insofar it cannot count as a count-
er-example.

The forms of system-immanent directionality discussed so far are, as it
were, borrowed from the text and manifest thereby a certain interlocking
between system and text, but insofar as they do not apply to the elements
of the system as such, but only to their inner syntagmatic structure, they
are only a subordinate property of the system, a property structurally domi-
nated by stativeness. There are, however, also forms of system-immanent
directionality which are not structurally dominated by stativeness. Perhaps
the best example of this kind of system-immanent directionality is that
formed by the order of numerals. But this kind of directionality is a weak
one, and it is its weakness which, in the last analysis, makes it comply - or
even harmonize - with the overall stativeness which is characteristic of the
system and in particular of the lexicon of which the numerals form part.
The weakness of the directionality of the order of numerals is to be seen
from the fact that their order can be run through in opposite directions and
that single numerals, as, e.g., the numerals *five* or *ten*, can be isolated from
the series in which they are arranged without losing the value they have in
the series.

Like the system, also texts are characterized by both stativeness and
directionality. But in the texts it is stativeness which is the subordinate
property and directionality which is the dominating one. This is particularly
true of the principal dimension of text constitution, the horizontal-linear
one, the one running from the beginning to the end of a text. Try to read a
text from its end to its beginning and you will see what the impact of this
kind of directionality is like. The amount of this impact becomes even more
obvious, if we compare the following three linear phenomena : streets, pieces
of music, and texts. Thus, if you walk through a street first in one direction
and then in the other, what changes is only the perspective, not the street.
If, however, you play or listen to a piece of music first in one direction and
then in the other, what changes is not only the perspective, but the piece of
music itself : you will get a new piece of music. But if, finally, you read a
text first in one and then in the other direction, the change will be so great
as to create a real non-text, i.e. something that, instead of being merely a
new text, is not a text at all.

Whereas the directionality of the horizontal-linear dimension of text con-
stitution thus is a strong one, the directionality of the vertical dimension of
text constitution, the one leading from its abstract kernel or theme to the
concrete unfolded text, is a considerably weaker one. This may be seen
from the fact that its direction may be reversed. Thus, it may not only lead
from top to bottom, i.e. from the abstract kernel or even the title to the con-
crete text, but also from bottom to a kind of top, namely from the concrete
text to its summary.

Despite all their – strong or weak, i.e. unreversible or reversible –
directionality, texts, however, are not, as has already been indicated, wholly
devoid of instances of stativeness, and the dimension in which these in-
stances are found is even the horizontal-linear one, the one where
directionality is unreversible.

The central domain of these instances of stativeness in the text is formed
by enumerative coordinations. Such coordinations are constructions which
obviously play a special role among the diverse devices of sentence building
and text constitution, a fact which was already hinted at by Roman
Jakobson when he – with regard, however, to coordinations in general –
wrote : "Coordinative groups occupy a particular place among syntactic
constructions. They are the only syntactic groups without any internal su

perposition."[13]

The enumeratively coordinated expressions share the property of stativeness or lack of directionality with the expressions forming part of the language system, but whereas in the language system stativeness plays the dominant role, in the text it plays a subordinate role, and just as its dominance in the system, its subordinateness in the text is structurally determined. It is not merely a statistical one.

There are, besides enumerative coordinations, also non-enumerative ones, but coordination-internal stativeness is characteristic only of the former, and only these are - especially if the coordinated expressions are sentences or (what is also possible) whole paragraphs - structurally subordinate. Their subordinateness lies in the fact that they have to be preceded or followed by a sentence forming a frame which comprises and embeds them semantically.[14]

The non-enumerative coordinations - of which we only present a sentential one - consist of merely two members and are not expandable. Furthermore, they are, as a rule, not preceded or followed by a framing sentence. The members of such coordinations are, in addition to their linkage by the coordinations themselves, normally also linked by anaphorical chains, and these create a certain kind of directional linkage. An example of this type of coordination is the immediately preceding coordination itself, i.e. the coordination *The members of such coordinations are (...) normally also linked by anaphorical chains, and these create a certain kind of directional linkage.* It is a coordination whose internal directionality is to be seen from the fact that the order of the coordinated sentences is not reversible.[15]

In contradistinction to such non-enumerative sentence coordinations, enumerative sentence coordinations may consist either of two or more coordinated sentences. Moreover, they are, even if they consist of only two sentences, characterized by a special enumerative intonation and accentuation. A two-sentence enumerative sentence coordination, together with the framing sentence preceding it, is the sentence sequence

Charles and Jane live in different towns. Charles lives in Paris, and Jane lives in London.

The order of the coordinated sentences is reversible, so that the internal

[13] Cf. R. Jakobson 1963/1971 : 300.
[14] Cf. R. Harweg 1989 : 245 ff.
[15] Cf. R. Harweg ibid.

structure of the coordination may be said to be stative.

Enumerative coordinations are not only found among sentential coordina-
tions, they are also found among phrasal coordinations, the coordinations of
words or phrases. Some of these, however, may be interpreted as reductions
of – enumerative – sentential ones and have, like these, a framing sentence
preceding them. As to their intonation contour, these coordinated phrases
are separated from each other by small pauses. An example of such a phra-
sal coordination is, together with the sentence preceding it, the sentence se-
quence

> *Charles leads a very healthful (wholesome) life. He does not smoke,*
> *does not drink alcohol, does not eat too much, walks a lot, and practis-*
> *es some sport.*

It is a phrasal coordination which may be considered a reduction of the sen-
tential coordination

> *He does not smoke, he does not drink alcohol, he does not eat too*
> *much, he walks a lot, and he practises some sport.*

But there are also – enumerative – phrasal coordinations which may not be
interpreted as reductions of sentential coordinations. These seem to lack a
framing sentence preceding them but they nevertheless manifest some kind
of subordinate structure. Their subordinateness lies in the fact that they are
included in the frame of a certain syntactic position or slot, namely that of
the predicate of the sentence ; for unlike the phrasal coordinations which
may be interpreted as reductions of sentential coordinations, they manifest
only one predicate. An example is the four-phrase or, more precisely, the
four-word phrasal coordination

> *He was middle-sized, broad (square), robust, and short-legged.*

In case we converted this coordination into a sentential one, this sentential
coordination would – as is shown by the sentence sequence *He was middle-*
sized, he was broad (square), he was robust, and he was short-legged – suggest
that the properties mentioned in the predicates specify the fulfillment of
some precondition already uttered before and thereby forming a preceding
semantic frame.

Strictly speaking, the reversibility and stativeness which is characteristic

of enumerative coordinations often applies only to the relations between their members as such, not to the morphological devices which actually coordinate these members within the coordinative construction. These devices are often not wholly stative, but, to a certain degree, directional. Thus, in many languages coordinations by means of the conjunction *and* use this conjunction only with the last member, and in coordinations of the *both-and*-type there is, in various languages, a special expression to mark the first member[16] - devices that make for an (admittedly weak) form of directionality.

A kind of directionality marker which is specific for all members of a coordination is found in the structural scheme(s) of a type of coordination which, being unknown to traditional grammar, is marked primarily by series of ordinal numerals. In various languages these numerals occur in two variants : combined with the definite article and combined with the indefinite article. In both variants, such series of ordinal numerals often mark coordinations whose members are not mere sentences, but whole paragraphs and which I therefore call macro-coordinations. They, too, are preceded by a framing sentence.

An example of a macro-coordination whose members (except the first one) are marked by ordinal numerals which are combined with an indefinite article is, together with its framing sentence, namely the sentence *In favor of this (hypo)thesis there are several arguments*, the following sentence sequence :

In favor of this (hypo)thesis there are several arguments.

One argument consists in the presupposition that ... The knowing subject ... The principle that ...

A second argument proceeds from the assertion that ... But ...

There is no ... This is revealed by the fact that ...

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[16] In English, this expression is *both,* in German it is *sowohl.* All the other members of this type of coordination (which, despite the literal meaning of the expression *both,* may be more than two) are marked by one and the same expression, in English by the expression *and* and in German by the expression *als auch.* But there are also languages where, in this type of coordination, all members (including the first one) are (or can be) marked by one and the same expression. To these languages belong, for example, French, Italian, and Russian.

A third argument stresses the fact that ... In order to recognize this, one is to think of the fact...

A fourth and final argument centers around the evidence that ... It leads to the conclusion that ...

In such a macro-coordination, the arguments as such could be arranged in various orders, so that it turns out that there is no directionality between them. As regards the arguments themselves, the macro-coordinations thus are stative, and this is what was to be expected from the fact that they have a framing sentence and are enumerative in nature. But the purely formal structural scheme which is characteristic of these macro-coordinations is not stative. It is directional ; for the order of the numerals cannot be reversed, and the reason for its unreversibility lies in the fact that the positions designated by the ordinal numerals combined with an indefinite article are purely linguistic ones.

An example of a macro-coordination whose members (including the first one) are marked by ordinal numerals combined with the definite article is, again together with a preceding framing sentence, the following sentence sequence :

The opera "Aida" consists of four acts.

The first act begins with a scene in the royal palace at Memphis. The high-priest Ramphis tells Radames, the chief of the royal guards, that the Ethiopians are threatening war. Left alone, Radames, in his great aria "Celeste Aida", gives expression to his hope that he will be elected commander-in-chief of the Egyptian army. (...)

The second act is first laid in the palace of Amneris. There has arrived good news of the end of the war. The king's daughter has herself decorated for the celebration of the victory of the Egyptian army. (...)

The scene of the third act is on the banks of the Nile. It is night. Ramphis leads Amneris to the temple of Isis. Nearby Radames is waiting for Aida. Suddenly, ...

The fourth and final act first is again laid in the royal palace. In a hall from which passages lead to the underground court-room and to the prison where Radames is detained we again meet Amneris. She is torn between rage, pain, and love. She wants to save Radames ...

In this example, the order of the acts is, unlike that of the arguments in the preceding example, already given in advance. The coordination and in particular the order of its numerals does not create that order, it merely reflects it, and interestingly enough, it is this mere order-reflecting property of its numerals (a property which is expressed in their being combined with a definite article) that, under certain conditions, opens the possibility for changing the order of the numerals and thus, as a result of their order-reflecting property, not only the order of the numbers, but also that of the contents of the enumeration forming a macro-coordination. The conditions under which this is possible seem to stipulate that the reflected order, i.e. the order of the contents of the ‚macro-coordinational enumeration, be one of ranks and not, as in the case of our opera example, a chronological one, and if these conditions are fulfilled, the enumerative macro-coordination seems to have, both on the level of the contents and on the level of the numerals, a stative instead of a directional character. If, however, the reflected order is a chronological one, it cannot be changed by the numerals, so that, secondarily, there is also a linguistic order, an order making for directionality in the coordination.

In the case of ranking orders the linguistic order, i.e. the order of telling the ranks, may be reversed or even altered in a still less regular way. So, in presenting international sports news, one could begin by naming the second winner and then continue by naming the first and the third winner of a certain competition. But there should be a motive for this. Such a motive could be the desirability of mixing the national and the international perspectives in presenting the news. Thus, it seems to be justified to name the second winner first, if he is a compatriot and the others are foreigners.

3.

The opposition between stativeness and directionality does not characterize system and text in a sharp and clear-cut way. But it comes near to such a clear-cut characterization if specified by the parameter of dominance, of a kind of dominance which is structural in nature. Thus, in the system the structurally dominating and leading property is stativeness, and in the text the structurally dominant and leading property is directionality. But the structural dominance of stativeness in the system is somewhat weakened

by the fact that there are certain instances of directionality in the system which are not subordinate in a structural sense, instances such as the series of numerals as part of the lexicon. But their weakening effect is weak in itself. It is weak inasmuch as also the kind of directionality such instances as the numerals as part of the lexicon display is weak. On the other hand the weakening of the dominance of stativeness in the system is counterbalanced by a strengthening of the dominance of directionality in the text, so that the overall distance and diversity between system and text is not altered. The strengthening of the dominance of directionality in the text is brought about by the fact that even the main bearers of stativeness in the text, namely enumerative coordinations, are not wholly devoid of markers of internal directionality, not wholly devoid of such markers in addition to the fact that they are constructions which, in the text, are structurally subordinate.

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