FOREWORD

In our opinion, the SIGN-CONCEPT should be considered to be the most important issue in linguistic theories. Bloomfieldian linguistics, as well as European (Saussurian and Prague) linguistics were based on it, and all the important theories that were in the main stream of these two directions, implicitly or explicitly have made use of it. Although it did not employ the term 'sign', Bloomfield's theory of the 'linguistic form' was basically a sign-theory, and Bloomfieldian linguistics differs from European linguistics in the first place insofar as the concept 'linguistic form' differed from that of the Saussurian *'signe linguistique'*.

A theory of the linguistic sign not only determines the form and content of 'grammar' and 'phonology', but that of 'semantics' as well. It pervades and determines every area of linguistics, including that of 'phonetics'. If it is a powerful theory, it may lead to a powerful linguistics. If it harbours inconsistencies, these inconsistencies will be perpetuated throughout the whole of the linguistic theory. Theories that lack some sort of a sign-theory (such as Traditional Grammar and some recent, mainly psycholinguistic, theories), are theories without a backbone, and the activities of the adherents of such a theory are confined to nibbling at the surface, while the linguists concerned are doomed to live with gratuitous and often far-fetched assumptions, or with circularities and inconsistencies.

It is some time ago now that de Saussure, Bloomfield, and Hjelmslev, the most important theoreticians of the linguistic sign in this century, stated their theories. These were very interesting and im-

portant theories at the time. Looked upon as stages in the history
of linguistics, they are still very important, and Hjelmslev's theory
is even nowadays intrinsically important. From our present level
of sophistication — linguistics has gone a long way since de
Saussure and Bloomfield — it is easy to condemn Bloomfield's
theory as hopelessly inconsistent. The correctness of this judgement
will be immediately seen by anybody with a feeling for logic, who
carefully reads through Bloomfield's "A set of postulates for the
science of language", *Language* 2 (1926), and who compares some
statements made in that article and in his book *Language* (1933)
e.g. "... a form is a recurrent vocal feature which has meaning, and
a meaning is a recurrent stimulus-reaction feature which corres-
ponds to a form" (1926), "... each linguistic form has a constant
and specific meaning" (1933), "Every form is made up wholly of
phonemes" (1926), "Different forms which are alike as to pho-
nemes are homonyms" (1926). For a discussion of some of the incon-
sistencies in Bloomfield's views, see Mulder's "On the art of
definition, the double articulation of language, and some of the
consequences", *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, V, 2 (April
1969). The Saussurian sign-concept was not inconsistent in itself,
but it could hardly be, as it remained primitive and exemplification
was limited to easy and straightforward cases. It was mentalistic
in an unacceptable way, just as his notion 'opposition' was, but
the remnants of an outdated type of psychology, which also typified
the early days of the Prague-school, can be easily stripped off
without affecting the usefulness of the notions. For contemporary
functionalists, '*signifiant*' and '*signifié*', in English linguistic litera-
ture usually called 'expression' and 'content', are no longer
intrinsically psychologistic concepts, and nor is the notion 'oppo-
sition'. But functionalists have not done much to develop de
Saussure's sign-concept any further. They have rather conveniently
made use — or should we call it misuse — of its inherent vagueness.
Reference to this vagueness is not meant as a criticism of de Saussu-
re. At the moment of its introduction his sign-concept was a most
brilliant and powerful concept, and, had de Saussure lived longer,
he would almost certainly have developed and expanded it himself.

It was Hjelmslev who presented one of the various possible interpretations of de Saussure's sign, and who developed it into a precise and consistent notion within his theory. This is not the place for going into any of the details; it is enough to say that his interpretation, or rather the theory it led to — consistent and rigorous though it was — was not acceptable to linguists of other schools. For some this was because the problems glossematicians managed to solve with their system did not exactly coincide with theirs, or there were differences of emphasis upon, and importance attached to, different aspects of linguistic description. The non-acceptance, or, at least, the lack of full acceptance, by functionalists of Hjelmslev's sign-concept is mainly due to the fact that this concept does not leave room for "the double articulation" which, for functionalists, is THE defining property of language.

But there is at least one respect in which we believe that Hjelmslev should be followed, namely the notion 'sign' should be defined in terms of 'relations' rather than solely as a certain type of entity. For Hjelmslev, 'language' implicity, it seems to us, is a 'structure', an abstract and theoretical 'construct', not to be 'discovered' by the linguist, but to be 'established' by him. It is a means of 'accounting' for speech-phenomena, and not to be 'found' in the speech-phenomena themselves. Its only relation to the speech-phenomena is that it describes and explains them, unlike some other structures that may be set up, which do not. It cannot, however, be demonstrated that there could not be other, quite different, structures that can account for the same phenomena (though perhaps not for exactly the same aspects of those phenomena) equally well. THEREFORE, ONE MAY NOT CONCLUDE FROM THE APPLICABILITY OF A STRUCTURE TO THE PHENOMENA THAT THIS IS THE STRUCTURE OF THE PHENOMENA THEMSELVES. In some straight-forward cases, for instance in the description of a motor-car, we may perhaps reasonably assume
  (a) that the motor-car has a certain structure[1]; and
  (b) that we can set up a theoretical structure that is in all relevant respects isomorphic with that structure.

[1] If only because motor-cars are intentionally CONSTRUCTED.

With respect to speech-phenomena, we would not even go so far as to make the former type of assumption (though we do not wish to assume the contrary either), let alone the latter.

It is in this spirit, and along the lines of AXIOMATIC FUNCTION-ALISM — which is based upon the two premises that only functional features (i.e. features that are significantly opposed to their absence) are to be considered, and that 'language' (the hypothetical, or rather theoretical, entity) has a double articulation (Mulder 1968, p. 10) — that the present *Theory of the Linguistic Sign* has been evolved.

The earliest statements about some of the essentials of this theory are to be found in Mulder's Oxford D. Phil. thesis (1966), which was revised and published in 1968 as *Sets and Relations in Phonology; an axiomatic approach to the description of Speech*. The actual 'sign-concept' in this book was further elaborated in his "On the art of definition, the double articulation of language, and some of the consequences", *Forum for Modern Languages Studies* V, 2 (1969). Further refinements were introduced, and some of the consequences were drawn, in "Linguistic Sign, Word and Gramma-teme", *La Linguistique*, 1 (1971). In the meantime, Hervey was developing a Theory of Semantics based on the premises of Mulder's axiomatic linguistic theory, in that way adding a vital component to that theory. This work has now been completed, and in 1970 it was submitted as an Oxford D. Phil. thesis, entitled *Functional Semantics; a linguistic theory with application to Pe-kingese*. It is hoped that a revised version of that thesis under the title *Axiomatic Semantics* will soon be published. Most of Mulder's work on Linguistic Theory, and on Grammar, since 1968, has been influenced by the fact that he was Hervey's supervisor, which involved him deeply in semantic theory. During that period of close collaboration, extreme care was taken to avoid that statements made by the one should be inconsistent with statements made by the other. There has especially been some concern, when Hervey had to develop a different sign-concept, because Mulder's concept, though more suitable with respect to grammar, phonology, and even phonetics, was not sufficiently equipped to deal with semantic

facts. It has, however, turned out to be possible to develop the relevant notions in such a way that they are non-identical (in fact they are quite different) but still equivalent, because the one implies the other, and *vice versa*. As Mulder's linguistic theory is firmly embedded into SEMIOTICS, it goes without saying that also the sign-concept must be consistent with a general semiotic theory. Its link with semiotics is presented in a joint article by Mulder and Hervey entitled "Index and Signum", *Semiotica* (1971), an article that is itself an attempt to supplement and elaborate upon the discussion of various types of semiotic system to be found in Mulder's *Sets and Relations in Phonology*, whilst incorporating some ideas that derive from Hervey's semantic studies.

The first chapter of the present work, bearing the same title as the article just referred to, has partly the same content, but it is for the rest independent from that article. Chapter II deals with "Semiotic Systems" in a more elaborate fashion than this is done in *Sets and Relations in Phonology*. Chapter III introduces Mulder's version of the linguistic sign, and Chapter IV Hervey's. Chapter III pursues the consequences of this notion, via grammar and phonology, into phonetics. Chapter IV deals, among other things, with such notions as 'denotation', 'reference', 'synonymy', 'hyperonymy', 'hyponymy', and with the hypothetical nature of 'sign-identity' assumptions. Chapter V clarifies some controversies that may arise because of a difference in the use of the term 'denotation' by philosophers and linguists.

In our desire to apply the utmost rigour to our linguistic ventures, we had — in the absence of a theory that could fully meet our requirements — to develop such a theory ourselves as a *sine qua non*. The essentials of this theory are presented in this work in, as much as possible, an informal fashion. Optimistic as we are with regard to the possibility that our readers — even if they may not consider this theory useful for their own purposes — may find many points in it that are of interest to them, we have added a detailed index at the end.

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