

## THE 'INTEGRAL' MODEL OF LANGUAGE FUNCTIONING (E. COȘERIU)

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**ABSTRACT.** The paper explores the framework of Coseriu's "integral linguistics", focusing mainly on the three planes of language and their corresponding "linguistics" - the three directions in language investigation that Coseriu postulated. It is argued that, in the panorama of contemporary approaches to language, Coseriu's integral linguistics offers one of the most comprehensive and finely articulated frameworks for investigating the functioning of language in a dynamic perspective.

### 1. INTRODUCTION: THE THREEFOLD STRUCTURE OF "INTEGRAL LINGUISTICS"

There are three types of linguistic content and, as long as we intend to represent the reality of language functioning, in a meaningful and accurate manner, these should be submitted to three wholly different methods of formal treatment: undoubtedly this would be the most important contribution that Integral Linguistics, the theory of language founded and developed by Eugeniu Coseriu beginning with the 5th decade of the 20th century, can bring to any scientific debate concerning Computational Linguistics. Also, the theory of language that will be briefly presented here brings into focus wider, epistemological and philosophical issues concerning, primarily, the very problem of where the general science of Linguistics should be situated within the disciplinary field of sciences seen as a fully articulated ensemble <sup>1</sup>. What follows is an outline of Coseriu's comprehensive model of language functioning, devised by the authors on the basis of numerous Coserian sources, and also drawing upon our own investigations into specific issues within

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<sup>1</sup>Extensive debates on the difference, at the level of the grounding principles, between "integral" linguistics and other theoretical orientations are undertaken in [19], [20], [21], [22], [17], [18]. It should be noted therefore that the term "integral linguistics" is used here as the specific denomination of Coserian linguistics, a denomination explicitly selected and substantiated by Coseriu himself in the later years of his scientific activity

this model. Integral linguistics claims that there is a clear distinction between sciences of nature and sciences of culture and that human language cannot be described and dealt with by using the same apparatus which is used for natural sciences, since the objects of the two types of sciences are governed by different laws: while natural objects belong to the world of necessity, which is governed by causes that produce certain effects, cultural objects, on the other hand, belong to a world that is specific to humanity, namely that of freedom ([6], chapter 3).

| VIEWPOINT   | <b>Activity</b>      | <b>Knowledge</b><br>(Competence) | <b>Product</b>                                    |
|---|----------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| LEVEL   | Energieia            | Dynamis                          | Ergon   |
| <b>Universal</b><br>Speaking in general<br>(universally-human activity) | Speech<br>in general | Elocutional                      | Empirically<br>infinite totality<br>of utterances |
| <b>Historical</b><br>Particular languages<br>(idiomatic traditions)     | Concrete<br>language | Idiomatic                        | Abstract<br>language                              |
| <b>Individual</b><br>Discourse / Text<br>(individual speech)            | Discourse            | Expressive                       | Text  |

The backbone of Coserius outlook on how language works is his well-known triad of language planes or levels of manifestation (Ebenen des Sprachlichen), outlined in what follows. In a definition that appears in the early fundamental study *Determinacin y entorno, el objeto de la lingstica (?ciencia del lenguaje?)* slo puede ser el lenguaje, en todos sus aspectos. Y el lenguaje se da concretamente como actividad, o sea, como hablar [...]. Ms an: slo porque se da como actividad, puede estudiarse tambn como producto?" ([2]: 285-286).

An objectively grounded theory of language will start from two general observations ([2]: 285-287, [3],[13]: 74):

(A) that language is (1) a generally-human activity (Ttigkeit), exerted by individuals (2) as representatives of communitary traditions of speech competence (Sprechen-knnen) (3) at an individual level; (B) that any activity, including the activity of speaking, can be regarded (a) as activity as such (enrgeia), (b) as the knowledge or competence underlying the activity (dynamis), and (c) as the product of that activity (ergon). The two triads (3 levels of manifestation and 3 points of view) delineate nine aspects of language as a creative cultural activity, aspects which can also be found as such in the intuitive knowledge of speakers ([13]: 59, 72, 75).

Integral linguistics posits itself as the epistemic exploration of language in all of these forms <sup>2</sup> and only in these forms (i.e. integral linguistics will not take as its specific object the biological abilities that underlie speech activity, or the external, social-institutional environments of speech): although admitting the fact that human beings' general capacity for expression also comprises 'non-verbal', as well as physiological/neurological aspects, Coseriu restricts the focus of linguistic inquiry to the domain of cultural linguistic competence, comprising the three levels of organization indicated above (cf. cite13: 65). By virtue of its specific object of study, any realistic approach to language structure and functioning, formal approaches included, will therefore fall into one of these nine aspects, and will have to define its goals and methodology accordingly. The speaker is understood to have an intuitive knowledge of three kinds of entities/ procedures, and to be able to convey, simultaneously, within the same act of speech, three kinds of linguistic contents (meaning). The types of meaning corresponding to each level are correlated with peculiar evaluations of adequacy that can be suspended bottom to top <sup>3</sup>. In the end, integral linguistics as a science can be conceived as a threefold system of knowledge:

| level<br>plane of language | type of content | adequacy judgement | science                          |
|----------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| universal                  | designatum      | congruence         | 'designational'<br>linguistics   |
| historical                 | significatum    | correctness        | 'significational'<br>linguistics |
| individual                 | sense           | appropriateness    | linguistics of sense             |

A decisive fact should nevertheless be stressed once again: the most important plane is the individual one - the perpetual generation of sense, which constitutes the actual essence of linguistic activity. Thus, all the components (norms, devices, configurations, units etc.) belonging to the universal and idiomatic planes are taken up in individual speech as raw materials for text-constitution (Textkonstitution) and sense-construction (Aufbau des Sinns).

## 2. THE HISTORICAL LEVEL AND IDIOMATIC COMPETENCE

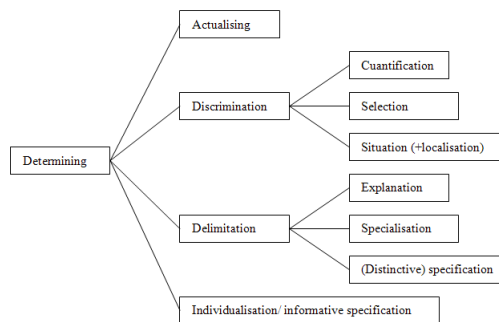
The basic plane of intuitive linguistic knowledge is the historical plane. Idiomatic competence comprises all the possibilities for actual uses of language: these potentialities appear as significata. According to the Romanian linguist, these can be classified into five types: lexical, categorial, instrumental, syntactic

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<sup>2</sup>This is how the phrase "todos sus aspectos" from the passage quoted above should be understood.

<sup>3</sup>For a detailed discussion and references, see [17]: 25-29, 131-133

and ontic significata ([8]: 247-249). Although the term *significatum* may suggest that the linguistic approach to idiomatic knowledge of the speakers should be structural, this is not always the case. Coseriu distinguishes several types of phenomena that should be discussed in 'significational' linguistics, yet cannot be treated by methods specific to structuralism (for an outline of Coseriu's lexematics developed as early as the 1960s, see [15]: 47-55):



Thus, knowledge of things (pertaining to the universal level), meta-linguistic uses of speech, fixed expressions specific to idioms, as well as speakers' intuitive knowledge on the historical evolution of their language cannot be submitted to a structuralist approach<sup>4</sup>. Also, 'historical' language is a mixture of different dialects, socio-cultural idiomatic levels and style traditions and as a 'diatopic', 'diastratic' and 'diaphasic' language, cannot be subjected to rigorous classifications. In the end, only functional language, which is not only synchronic, but also 'syntopic', 'synstratic' and 'synphasic' can be the subject matter of a taxonomic science called grammar<sup>5</sup>. At the level of the functional language, for instance, Coseriu's conception on the *Gestaltung* of lexical significata, manifested in the lexematic structures<sup>6</sup>, remains to this day one of the most coherent and refined semantic models, whose explanatory and descriptive potential is far from being fully exploited.

<sup>4</sup>For the main principles of structuralist linguistics (functionality, opposition, systematicity and neutralising) see [6], esp. chapters VII and VIII

<sup>5</sup>This would comprise what is usually known as phonology, semantics, morphology and syntax (including its 'trans-phrasal' domain).

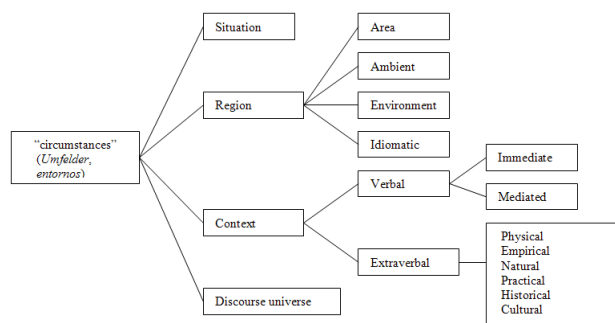
<sup>6</sup>Paradigmatic (oppositional) structures are classified into two subtypes: (a) primary structures (lexical field and lexical class); (b) secondary structures (modification, development, composition). Syntagmatic (combinatorial) structures or "lexical solidarities" comprise three types of relations (affinity, selection, implication).

3. THE UNIVERSAL LEVEL AND ELOCUTIONAL COMPETENCE

The main function of language on its universal level is a cognitive one: the orientation towards 'reality' and the use of idiomatic potentialities and contextual means in order to refer to things in Coseriu's words, a 'designational' task. But we have to understand that designata can be both real objects to which we refer when using language, and objects 'projected' as real by linguistic means. This means that the distinction between 'actual' and 'fictional' things does not affect the status of a designatum: it is rather an intentional object in the phenomenological (Husserlian) sense of the word (cf. [20]: 151). There are two main devices that are used in order to orient language towards the expression of reality.

DETERMINATION

On the one hand, we can 'actualize' words from the language and combine them in order to reduce their conceptual range to particular (or even individual) things or states of affairs. Coseriu ([2]: 291-308) calls this procedure determining and identifies the following means/ categories for nominal determining:



CIRCUMSTANCES (sp. entornos, germ. Umfelder).

On the other hand, we can use the complex circumstances of speech for restraining and fixing the area of designata. Again, it is important to understand that we do not deal here with an 'adaptation' of discourse to reality; on the contrary, it is the data of reality that are used as 'raw' material for the construction of designata. Coseriu ([2]: 310-319) classifies circumstances as follows <sup>7</sup>:

To the universal plane of language corresponds a specific type of intuitive knowledge (elocutional linguistic competence), comprising two dimensions. The first one consists of the universal principles of thought (identity, non

<sup>7</sup>For a later reworking of the concept and subcategorization of the "universe of discourse", see also [14].

contradiction, non-tautology etc. cf. Coseriu [7]: 20-23, [5]: 242-243, [13]: 90-96). The second one is the general knowledge of (the normality of) things (cf. [13]: 97-107).

#### 4. THE TEXTUAL LEVEL AND EXPRESSIVE COMPETENCE

The starting-point tenet of integral text linguistics, i.e. of Textlinguistik als Linguistik des Sinns, is the double semiotic articulation in texts ([10]: 48-51). Put simply, *significata* and *designata* of linguistic signs present or implied<sup>8</sup> in the text become signifiers of the second degree, signifiers for textual sense, by virtue of processes that manifest the functional autonomy of the textual plane. Beyond the simplicity of its straightforward formulation in Coserian sources, this principle has ample consequences, both theoretical and methodological. For one, let us emphasize the following: what is meant is not merely an extension or enhancement of what is actually said; it is also not mere development or explicitation of the implicit. The two are not situated on the same semantic level. What is said is a signifiant for a signifi raised to the power of two: textual sense. Also, in integral linguistics, by textual signifiant (Textkonstitution) we do not understand material units present in the text as such, but semantic functions, devices and strategies. Among the varied functions that form the textual signifiant, we have argued elsewhere ([17]: 124-133) that the highest degree of relevance for recognising the modality of sense-construction in a given text should be attributed to the following three: (1) evocative functions (relations) of signs in the text, (2) textual functions, and (3) forms of suspending (*Aufhebung*) incongruence and incorrectness through the value of appropriateness.

**4.1. Evocative relations.** The main types of evocative functions put forward by Coseriu ([4]: 202, [10]: 68-101, [11]: 25-29) are the following: (a) Relations of the sign to other signs, either taken individually, or as pertaining to certain categories/ groups of signs, or as sign-systems seen holistically; (b) Relations of the sign in the given text with signs from other texts (evocation of well-known texts, which belong to the linguistic and cultural tradition of a community); (c) Relations between signs and things (iconic relationship of the given textual sign with the designated object)<sup>9</sup>; (d) Relations between signs and the knowledge of things, activated when the

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<sup>8</sup>We use the term "implied textual signs" in the sense of the "Ausdruckslecke als Ausdrucksverfahren" (see [12]).

<sup>9</sup>We have in mind something analogous to the peculiar type of formal "imitation" of a Zen principle through the narrative configuration of a literary text, analysed in [16] and [18]: 130-141.

designata themselves are already invested with semiotic (symbolic) value in a certain cultural space, prior to their usage as text-constitutive units in the given text.

**4.2. Textual functions.** Textual functions reflect the purport of speech in a determined situation. A tentative list includes explicit and implicit functions such as assertion, question, insinuation, joke, illustration, denial etc. ([10]: 45-47, 170-174).

**4.3. Suspension of incongruence and incorrectness.** The very distinction between congruent and incongruent utterances, as well as the one between correct and incorrect sentences, can be rendered inactive if the speaker so wishes in order to achieve a defined goal in his/her individual use of language. For instance, the speaker can willingly simplify rules of his/ her language in order to be more easily understood by a foreigner; or he/she can give a give a metaphoric, meta-linguistic or even extravagant sense to the references of his/her text-discourse:

## 5. CONCLUSION

The focal underlying idea of the present paper is that, in the highly heterogeneous panorama of contemporary approaches to language, Coseriu's integral linguistics offers one of, if not the most comprehensive and finely articulated conceptual framework for investigating the structured totality of linguistic phenomena from the standpoint of speech activity. This framework allows for an accurate positioning of each particular investigation in relation to the diverse aspects and levels of linguistic organization, on a unitary basis. At the same time, the conceptual distinctions this framework provides, grounded in the reality of the speakers' intuitive knowledge of language, can prove of interest for the area of formal approaches to language as well.

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