ON THE HISTORY OF EUROPEAN FUNCTIONALISM

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The traditions of linguistic functionalism are manifold. In the course of the twentieth century they branched off in various directions from the mainstream of linguistic disciplines that had developed in Europe in the years spanning the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. Sketching their broad outlines is no easy task, as they evolved in different countries and at different times, often with distinctive features that reflected the more general ideological and cultural characteristics of the contexts in which they arose. The traditions
themselves, moreover, have not always shown a high level of awareness of common intellectual bases. This has been the case especially in recent decades, in which functionalism has become a general theoretico-methodological approach definable as “anti-reductionist”, often lacking the teleological and metaphysical implications of some of the initial theories. This approach has inevitably been interpreted in many different ways by individual scholars.

The history of functionalism reached a crucial juncture in the third decade of the twentieth century with the founding, in 1926, of the Prague Linguistic Circle. It was then that the contributions of numerous individuals from different countries and scholarly backgrounds were welded into a unified programme of research, summarised in the Theses presented by members of the Circle at the First International Congress of Linguists in the Hague in 1928. This programme would continue to serve as a point of reference in the development of many later functionalist models in both Europe and North America. But the fifteen years of the Circle’s activity that preceded the outbreak of the Second World War in many ways represented a unique period in general linguistics, brought about by the convergence of numerous cultural and historico-political developments.

The starting-point for a discussion of these developments must be the state of linguistics in the first two decades of the twentieth century and its relationship to the more general intellectual and cultural climate of the time. New directions of research had, from the end of the nineteenth century, revealed anxieties and dissatisfactions created by the realisation that there was as yet no general theoretico-methodological underpinning for the vast body of philologico-linguistic knowledge that had accumulated over the preceding decades. An awareness of the need for a “refounding” of the linguistic sciences may be seen, with various inflections, in the work of a number of protagonists of early twentieth-century linguistics, the attempts associated with that awareness also reflecting changes in the general panorama of ideas. It should not be forgotten that this same period, from 1900 to 1920, saw the emergence of quantum mechanics and the theory of relativity, and that the concepts of relativism,
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pluralism and experimentalism became central to both philosophy and literature.

Also to be taken into account are the extraordinary historico-political upheavals witnessed by eastern Europe in this period, notably the Russian Revolution and the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The emergence of the state of Czechoslovakia from the ashes of the Empire and the immigration of groups of Russian intellectuals in the wake of the Revolution combined to create in Prague a very particular atmosphere. The optimism and ethical commitment to the common good that characterised the elites of the young Central European republic fused with the Russian intelligentsia’s Romantic view of research as perpetual experimentation and their fervent faith in collective action.

The events that were to mark the history of functionalist ideas and traditions after the 1920s are no less remarkable. Once again, collective and individual destinies are seen to have been intertwined. The tragic death of Trubetzkoy, a leading member of the Prague Circle, in Vienna in 1938, the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1939, Jakobson’s emigration to North America (an experience shared by many intellectuals of the “Old World”), the difficulties of survival and the isolation, both during and after the war, of the linguists of Prague, Brno and other universities of eastern Europe by comparison with their colleagues in the west – all are elements of the dramatic history of Europe in the twentieth century. After the war, linguistic research continued in a number of eastern European universities, with the functionalist tradition maintaining a central role. The isolation in which the exponents of functionalism worked in eastern Europe favoured the preservation and independent development of various ideas that had been fundamental to the first Prague period, especially those deriving ultimately from Mathesius, definable as empirico-historicist and text-oriented. Albeit often from a distance, the scholars of the so-called Second Prague School – Daneš, Fírbas, Hajičová, Sgall, Svoboda, Vachek and others – contributed to the development, consolidation and circulation in western Europe of the functionalist ideas of the early twentieth century. Prague and Brno thus continued to serve as important centres of research, even after the Second World War.
The end of the 1950s and above all the 1960s saw the emergence in western Europe of a broad network of research centres that developed the conceptual heritage of Prague in different ways and in many new directions. Its protagonists included linguists of a generation that had been directly associated with the activities of the Prague Circle, such as A. W. De Groot in the Netherlands and André Martinet and Lucien Tesnière in France, as well as younger scholars who had come into contact with those activities only indirectly, such as Simon Dik, again in the Netherlands, and Michael Halliday in Great Britain. The models devised differ from one another significantly, showing the influence of individual training and the cultural diversity of the countries in question. Interest in the formalisation of functionalist concepts becomes more marked from the 1960s (in the thinking of Halliday and above all of Dik, but also in that of Hajičová and Sgall), perhaps also under the influence of North American linguistics, which was becoming increasingly formalistic in orientation.

In conclusion, then, the history of functionalism is the history of individuals, no less than of cultural and ideological contexts. It should also be remembered that two important lines of linguistic research of the second half of the twentieth century – textual linguistics, originating in the German cultural sphere, and later, from the 1980s, functional-typological linguistics, whose leading representative has been the British Slavist Bernard Comrie – developed models that were permeated in various ways by functionalist principles.

2. PROBLEMS IN DEFINING “EUROPEAN FUNCTIONALISM”

A discussion of “European functionalism” must begin by tackling a number of terminological and conceptual questions. The first and most obvious of these relates to what might be meant by the term functionalism, given that notions of “function”, “functionality” and “functioning” have formed a part of theories and procedures of linguistic analysis that are not only different from one another, but sometimes, in certain historical phases, even explicitly contraposed. The contention of
André Martinet, (2006[1993]: 677) that the concept of “function” should be limited to its “most usual meaning of ‘adapted to achieve some end’” has the obvious advantage of drawing attention to a key idea, one that profoundly influenced the pioneering environment of the Prague Circle, with which the term functionalism has been primarily associated in many studies. If the definition is restricted in this way, however, it becomes difficult to see the connections between the various senses of the term and their historical origins, which might in some ways be less diverse than is sometimes supposed. The complex evolution of functionalist ideas is not merely of historiographical interest, but has implications for the study of contemporary theories, methodologies and analytical practices and for a deeper understanding of the problems they pose.

A second question pertains to chronology. If the true manifestos of functional linguistics were formulated in the late 1920s, in the Theses of the Prague Circle and in the article “Funkční lingvistika” (“Functional linguistics”) by Mathesius, the Circle’s first president, the core elements of the ideas they presented had had a much longer gestation. Indeed, these take us back a number of decades, at least to the 1870s and 1880s, when in various spheres of European linguistics a constellation of concepts opposed to organicism had taken shape, one that pointed to new epistemological horizons, with its ideas of “the centrality of the speaker”, “the centrality of meaning”, “the centrality of the observation of a present reality”. At the other end of the chronological spectrum, as has already been noted, the use of the term functionalism becomes more generalised after the Second World War and above all in the last decades of the twentieth century, losing some of its initial characteristics.

A third and final question concerns spatial delimitation. As various historians have observed, all conceptions of Europe are ideologically rather than geographically determined, and therefore reflect the cultural and political orientations of a particular period and are subject to relative changes. The subject of “European functionalism” provides a particularly interesting example of this historiographical problem. Long-term historico-cultural factors certainly play a part in its definition,
such as the notable differences between the various centres of the Slavic area, particularly as regards their attitude towards western Europe. (Warsaw and Prague always played an active part in a Central European cultural bloc, while St Petersburg and Moscow were capitals of a distant empire, whose destiny had always followed a different course from that of western European countries.) The picture has nevertheless been complicated by a number of contingent historical factors that contributed to the convergence and divergence of ideas, examples including the flight of Russian intellectuals to Vienna, Prague and Paris after the October Revolution, and, as mentioned above, the isolation of the countries of eastern Europe after the Second World War and the emigration to North America of some of functionalism’s leading exponents. The Europe of the linguists who continued to work, in the Prague tradition, on the other side of the Iron Curtain was a Europe of the imagination, no less than that which Roman Jakobson took with him into the universities of the United States. After the Prague years, Jakobson’s personal conception of functionalism, which had been profoundly influenced by the Moscow and St Petersburg circles in which he had been trained, took a new turn, marked by his introduction to the formalising climate of North America and his exposure to the emerging models of the mathematical theory of communication. But in the centres of Slavonic and general linguistic research at Harvard and Bloomington, to which Jakobson made an important contribution, some of the functionalist ideas of the Old World continued to exist under a different guise.

Such differing cultural contexts also seem to have been at least partly responsible for the formation of certain rifts within the various functionalist traditions, and even within the Prague Circle itself. If Prague of the 1920s can be regarded as one of the liveliest and most cosmopolitan cultural centres of Central Europe, the “European” character of St Petersburg and Moscow in the early years of the twentieth century, and to an even greater extent in the aftermath of the Revolution, cannot be so easily taken for granted. It is true that the intelligentsia active in those cities from the third and fourth decades of the nineteenth century had been
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profundely influenced by the ideas of German Romanticism, in particular by Hegelianism, even if in a way that some have seen as lacking in conceptual originality (see Berlin, 2008: especially 130–154, 155–169, 240–272). Yet the transplantation of such ideas to Russian soil had revealed a number of highly distinctive features, tending towards radicalism and a marked (and sometimes extreme) non-conformism – features that would persist up to the pre-Revolution period (Toman, 2006: 7–69). These features may to some extent be observed in the circles in which Jakobson and Trubetzkoy were trained, which were characterised by rejection of an overly rigid academic orthodoxy and of any form of intellectual authoritarianism, by an openness to the ideas of the literary avant-garde, and, more generally, by a restless exploration of new theoretical and methodological paths (Toman, 2006: 7–69). Such characteristics were often combined with the ideological leanings of individual scholars, intent on postulating a specifically Russian identity as something quite distinct from the European. Some of Trubetzkoy’s writings on Russian culture from the 1920s and 1930s (now collected in Trubetzkoy 2005) are illuminating in this respect, emphasising its Asiatic roots and its problematic relations with Western Europe (Toman, 2006: 185–215). An awareness of national identity also emerges in a number of autobiographical references by Jakobson, such as when he describes himself as “a Russian philologist” (Holenstein, 1987: 15). More generally, an ideology of the difference of the Slavic world is evident, perhaps with traces of Panslavism, in the pride with which Jakobson refers to Cyril and Methodius as the first true great linguists (Matejka, 1987: 307–308).

For all these considerable differences in cultural background, it would be difficult to deny that the linguistic circles of St Petersburg and Moscow were an integral part of the history of functionalism, not merely because certain of

1. Berlin (2008: 141) has argued, “What there was, was mostly imported from abroad – scarcely one single political and social idea to be found in Russia in the nineteenth century was born on native soil […] but, in general, I do not think that Russia has contributed a single new social or political idea: nothing that was not traceable, not merely to some ultimate Western root, but to some doctrine discoverable in the West eight or ten or twelve years earlier than its first appearance in Russia.”
their representatives were later to figure among the moving spirits of the Prague Circle, but also for the vitality of their intellectual ideas (originally articulated within the context of so-called “Russian formalism”, Erlich : 1981), some of which would become leitmotifs of Prague functionalist theories. More generally, the Russian semiotic tradition significantly enriched the functionalist ideas that were already circulating in Europe.

The “inter-Slavic” character of the semiotic tradition has often been underlined (Prevignano, 1979, Toman, 2006 : 104–133). But the Prague community was less unified than is usually supposed. The unanimity of the stance taken by the Prague Circle in its early years (seen, in particular, in the collective character of the Theses) concealed, below the surface, a number of differences in orientation, interests and “style” among its members, in which it is possible to discern characteristic differences in cultural background and theoretically-methodological approach. One need only compare the various factors that shaped the contribution of the Russian scholars mentioned above with those that influenced the intellectual personality of Mathesius, promoter and tireless organiser of the Prague Circle: the academic tradition of Prague’s Charles University, with its faithful adherence to methods and practices fully accredited by the international scholarly community; the realism and pragmatism of Czech society of the early twentieth century; Protestant ethics; and an interest in and admiration for the social and cultural life of the countries of northern Europe, in particular that of Great Britain (Toman, 2006 : 87–101). And it is worth noting that Mathesius himself, in his retrospective assessment of the first ten years of the Circle (Mathesius 1936–1937), spoke of “other circumstances” in relation to Jakobson’s background, possibly an indirect and discreet allusion to the different roots of the academic traditions in which they had been trained (Toman, 2006 : 43–69). These “other circumstances”

2. These aspects of Mathesius’s cultural background have been discussed by Toman, who has nevertheless interpreted them as a component of the formation of the Prague Circle that would have combined “harmoniously” with the Russian element.
3. Toman has drawn attention to this phrase of Mathesius’s in a comprehensive analysis that attributes a leading role to Jakobson and the Russian component of the Circle.
were reflected in other cultural features of the traditions that the Russian linguists brought with them – at the level of academic discipline, a central interest in folklore, poetry and art, and at the epistemological level, a conception of logic that was dualistic and antithetical. A number of scholars have seen the latter as the legacy of Hegelianism and of Husserlian phenomenology, and more generally as a characteristic of the cultural history of modern Russia, marked by the ideology of binary oppositions (Holenstein, 1987: 16, Lotman & Uspenskii, 1985: 32–35). Also significant is a potential implicit difference between the thinking of Jakobson and Trubetzkoy and that of Mathesius – between the Russians’ idea that the evolution of linguistic systems moves along necessary and teleological lines, and the idea of “potentiality” in systemic development that constitutes an original and central element in Mathesius’s thought. This difference, which has had a fundamental role in the history of ideas about linguistic change, is in the final analysis philosophical in nature, and betrays two very different conceptions of history. It highlights an aspect of the dual identity of functionalism – in part influenced by Hegelian thought, in part by the Humboldtian tradition, with a view of history partly absolutist and partly relativist.

Already evident in the founding phase of the Circle, when the work of the Prague scholars seems most intense and unified, such rifts would persist and indeed deepen in the Prague Circle’s long period of crisis and dispersal, which began with the Second World War. We shall examine them in greater detail later in the article.

3. THE MANY SENSES OF THE TERM FUNCTION

Within the various functionalist traditions, the term *function* has multiple senses, which can be defined in relation to at least five fundamental concepts, some of which are closely related (Daneš, 1987: 9, Sornicola, 1992, Hajičová, 2006). As we shall see, the term can be associated with different theoretical entities: languages and/or linguistic
units, the diachronic development of systems, and methodological procedures.

3.1. Function as “meaning” vs. “end”

3.1.1. The ambivalence of the term function in the Prague tradition

The notion that we may define as “semantic” occurs in the writings of the Prague Circle from the 1920s, but in such a way as to pose a number of interpretative problems. Comparing the “earlier linguistics” with the new linguistics based on the functional principle, Mathesius (1929 [1983: 123]) argues that, while the former “started from ready-made language structures and inquired about their meaning (význam), thus proceeding from form to function”, the latter, founded on the experience of the language of the present, “starts from the needs of expression and inquires what means serve to satisfy these communication needs in the languages being studied”, and therefore “proceeds from function to form”. It is interesting that in this passage the Czech term význam (‘meaning’) is equated with vyjádřovací potřeba (‘expression needs’, rendered in the English translation as ‘communication needs’). A little later, in speaking about the application of the functional principle in phonology, Mathesius (1929: 129 [1982: 33]) asserts that “articulatory deviations that are not reflected in pronunciation lose importance (význam) [emphasis mine], and even in actual pronunciation functional linguistics inquires which elements have functional meaning” (funkční význam). Moreover, “whereas phonetics studies sounds, phonology studies phonemes, i.e. sounds endowed with functional meaning” (význam funkční).

What is perhaps the best-known use of the notion of “functional meaning” is found in Trubetzkoy’s Grundzüge der Phonologie, where it has the specifically semantic value of “the function of differentiating meaning”. In the passage from Mathesius cited above it nevertheless has a certain ambivalence, as indeed does the notion of “meaning” itself: both refer to “significance, sense, interpretation”, but also to a
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pragmatic and “teleonomic” concept expressible through the metaphor whereby a linguistic element “serves as, operates as, a tool useful to an end”\(^4\). In attempting to interpret Mathesius’s thought we might also consider the semantic value of the Czech term \(\text{význam}\), which is both “meaning” and “purport, import, importance”. This ambivalence is found not infrequently in later Prague writings and in other functionalist traditions.

The ambivalence of the term in Mathesius may reflect the layering of concepts deriving from different periods and places that is visible elsewhere in his work. Indeed, \textit{function} as “meaning” is a term that characterises an earlier phase in the history of linguistics. It is found in Bréal ([1866] 1877), and less consistently in Paul’s \textit{Prinzipien}, in which the term \textit{Funktion} often seems to equate with “grammatical meaning”\(^5\). It is not without interest, in any case, that Paul (1889, and again in the edition of 1920 : §146) already speaks of “functional differences” (\textit{Funktionsunterschiede}) that can be preserved by phonetic differences (\textit{lautlichen Differenze}). The coherent formulation of “teleonomic” value seems to be characteristic of a later phase, which sees an increasing interest in the “pragmatic” aspects of languages and their elements. Both are in fact conceived as means that operate, that function, in a particular circumstance and for an end (see the notions discussed in 3.2 and 3.3).

Recourse to these pragmatic metaphors and their presence

\(^{4}\) A more general formulation of this concept has been presented by Daneš (1987 : 7) in his “teleonomic” principle:

“A phenomenon \(x\) is a means for the realization of an end \(F\). The property ‘to have a function \(f\)’ appears to be identical with the property ‘to serve as a means for the end (purpose) \(F\).’” Although the term \textit{teleonomic} is used by Daneš as a synonym of \textit{teleological}, in the present chapter it is reserved for the pragmatic principle just mentioned, whereas \textit{teleological} is used in its familiar diachronic sense.

\(^{5}\) See Paul’s observations (most recently in the edition of 1920) on the function of the Subject and the Predicate (§85) and on the function of the genitive in German (§104). A similar notion is found in §§35 and §294 (in this last paragraph the term alternates with \textit{use} (\textit{Gebrauch}). Sometimes \textit{Funktion} alternates with \textit{Bedeutung}, without any apparent semantic difference (in §103). In §104, however, \textit{Funktion} is set against \textit{Bedeutung} “for the genitive it is not possible to determine any simple meaning (\textit{Bedeutung}) for which the functions (\textit{Funktionen}) that it already has in the original Indo-European language may be immediately understood”. In addition, Paul defines “functional expressions” as those that guarantee the differentiation of grammatical meaning (for example, between the first and third person of a verbal paradigm (§135)). On “meaning” and “use” in nineteenth-century linguistics, see Morpurgo Davies (1998: 311–312).
alongside other representations of languages and their units gives rise to a form of conceptual hybridism. How far is it legitimate to resort to functional metaphors? The problem is one that is fundamental to general linguistics, linking Mathesius to the exponents of a non-functionalist structuralism. Even a theorist as rigorous as Hjelmslev was not immune to it (see 3.1.2).

It is worth noting, however, that both the idea of function as end and teleonomic “process” and that of function as meaning presuppose a change of viewpoint from material systems to abstract ones – those whose interactions require the intervention of the mind. They entail a shift from a representation of function as interdependence between the units of a system to one that focuses on the living beings who use them. With such a shift, the notion of function as relation almost comes to equate with that of “meaning” (Delattre, 1979: 429). This perspective is congruent with the logical and historical centrality attributed to the notion of the “speaking subject” (“sujet parlant”) in functionalist traditions. It had been clearly articulated by a precursor of functionalism, Michel Bréal ([1866] 1877: 265): “Il n’y a pas de langage en dehors de nous […] Les mots n’existent qu’au moment où nous les pensons et les comprenons.”

The importance attributed to semantics and pragmatics respectively seems to differentiate positions and trends within modern functionalism6. It represents a pivotal development within general linguistics in both theoretical and historiographical terms, one that had consequences for all the structuralist theories of the first half of the twentieth century. Attempts to rigorously define the function and functionality of linguistic elements in terms other than those of meaning and use provide a key to the theoretical developments that characterised formalist as distinct from functionalist lines of thought from the 1920s to the 1940s. It will be useful to discuss them briefly here, as they can also help to shed light on the internal subdivisions of functional structuralism. The combinatorial and relational aspect of the concept of function, understood

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6. Within the Prague tradition, for example, Vachek (1966: 30) maintains that function and meaning are equivalent terms, while Skalicka (1948: 139), Helbig (1973: 51) and Daneš (1987: 15, n. 19) have pointed in various ways to the ambivalence of function and the difficulty of interpreting its value.
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particularly in relation to grammar, is underlined in various ways by Bloomfield and Hjelmslev.

3.1.2. A comparison of functionalist and formalist traditions

The definition of function given by Bloomfield is expressed in terms of positional relations and order taxonomies (“The positions in which a form can appear are its functions, or collectively its function. All the forms that can fill a given position thereby constitute a form-class”)8. Every position, moreover, has a “functional meaning” (for example, actor, action, goal), and the set of functional meanings of a particular “form-class” constitutes a “class-meaning” (for example, countable noun, predicative action)9. Bloomfield thus attempts to define in terms of function (position or “same of order”)10 the meaning of the grammatical categories. But while there is no trace of uncertainty in the reasoning of A Set of Postulates (1926), which is presented in the deductive manner of a mathematical theorem, Language reveals doubts and reservations: “Class meanings are not clearly definable units which could serve as a basis for our work, but only vague situational features, undefinable in terms of our science” (Bloomfield, 1933 : 267–268). It is Hjelmslev, in whose writings the concept of function becomes increasingly central, who develops a real theory of function as it relates to form and to substance. Hjelmslev arrives at an abstract representation of function, in terms of dependence between a class and

7. See, for example, Bloomfield (1933 : 273–274), who discusses the combinatorial function of an element in relation to another (for example, fox and e). Hjelmslev (1928 : 123) defines grammatical function as (a) the faculty of combining exclusively with certain given morphemes, and (b) the faculty of combining with other semantics exclusively by means of certain morphemes. A little later (1928 : 127) he nevertheless speaks also of phonetic function as the faculty that has an element of combining exclusively with certain phonemes. But in general function is defined as the faculty that has an element of combining exclusively with others.

8. Bloomfield (1933 : 185). This idea is already present in Bloomfield ([1926] 1970 : 134): “The positions in which a form occurs are its functions” (def. 32); “All forms having the same functions constitute a form-class” (def. 33).

9. For this particular formulation, which differs somewhat from that of Bloomfield (1933), see Bloomfield ([1926] 1970 : 76, def. 33).

10. See Bloomfield ([1926] 1970 : 132, def. 23); “Such recurrent same of order are constructions; the corresponding stimulus-reaction features are constructional meanings.” Bloomfield was well aware that the development of this model was something new in the use of the term meaning (see [1926] 1970 : 132, def. 23).
its components or between the components of the class: “A dependence that fulfils the conditions for an analysis we shall call a function. Thus we say that there is a function between a class and its components (a chain and its parts, or a paradigm and its members), and between the components (parts or members) mutually” (Hjelmslev, [1943] 1961: 33). This definition gives fullest expression to the relational, logico-mathematical concept of function in linguistics. Here, the concern to distinguish function from meaning is absolutely clear: “Si l’on prend le terme de fonction grammaticale dans l’acception traditionnelle plus étendue, il se confond inévitablement avec le terme de signification ou de sens. Selon nous, la fonction grammaticale est, tout au contraire, une espèce de forme [emphasis mine]” (Hjelmslev, 1928 : 127). The existence of units that have meaning but not function is carefully shown. Both semantemes and morphemes have meaning, but only the former can have function (Hjelmslev, 1928 : 123–124). Another important assumption from the theoretical standpoint is that function must be distinct from use (Hjelmslev, 1928: 126, and see here 3.3).

Yet even formalist theories are unable to fully resolve the difficulties posed by the theoretical treatment of the notion of function. Bloomfield (1933 : 265–266) observes that the correspondences between form-class and function can present a complex system, which can lead to irregularities. The unit of English way, which belongs to the form-class of substantive expressions, is the only lexical form that can be the centre of a construction that functions as an adverb of manner (this way, the other way). The notions of “function” and “functioning” are related to the teleonomic idea of “serving in, functioning as”. This use of the term seems to be at variance with the rigorous formal apparatus constructed by Bloomfield for the representation of function.

With greater theoretical clarity, Hjelmslev ([1943] 1961: 33–34) admits to having adopted the term function “in a sense that lies midway between the logico-mathematical and the etymological sense”. He maintains that the latter has had a significant role in various disciplines, including linguistics, and is “in formal respects nearer to the first but not identical with it”. He nevertheless adds,
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It is precisely such an intermediate and combining concept that we need in linguistics. We shall be able to say that an entity within the text (or within the system) has certain functions, and thereby think, first of all with approximation to the logico-mathematical meaning, that the entity functions in a definite way, fulfils a definite role, assumes a definite “position” in a chain. In a way, we can say that the etymological meaning of the word function is its “real” definition [emphasis mine], which we avoid making explicit and introducing into the definition system, because it is based on more premises than the given formal definition and turns out to be reducible to it.

In functionalist traditions, and particularly in that of Prague, etymological value has been the central component of the concept of function. Yet it can seem paradoxical that, until relatively recently, there was no broad epistemological reflection within these traditions on such a concept, which was used rather as a technical criterion, whose status oscillated between a tool that formed part of a method of analysis (as in phonology) and an explanatory model, one that was not always free of ideological implications (as seen in the relationships between function and linguistic change, see 5.3). The historiographers of the second half of the twentieth century nevertheless drew attention to the differences between “meaning” and “function”: the phoneme is a unit that does not have meaning but has function (Helbig, 1973 : 51). This point of view found full expression in the thinking of Martinet (see 5.2).

The versatility of the notion “performing as” has made possible its use for the description of linguistic phenomena belonging to different levels of analysis, such as phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. Study of the layering of concepts such as “the function of differentiating meaning”, “syntactic function” and “semantic function” is without doubt a desideratum of the historiography of functionalism.

3.2. External functions of languages

Another sense of the term function relates to the “use possibilities of linguistic systems”, defined in the double sense of ability and aim of use on the part of speakers. Two aspects are interwoven here – what might be called the “psycholinguistic”, concerning not merely an abstract notion of competence but more particularly speakers’ abilities, understood as “knowing how to
do”, and the pragmatic, relating to the “ends” for which languages are used in human societies. Concepts such as “communicative function”, “expressive function” and “representational function” all refer to both aspects. It might be said that such functions (defined by some scholars as “external functions”) correspond to the primary and general linguistic needs of the individuals who use the languages – that they constitute, so to speak, the universal “practical reasons” for the linguistic activity of human beings. The number and the nature of the functions have been differently conceived within the various theories. Mathesius, for example, postulates two functions (communicative and expressive), Bühler three (expressive, of “appeal” and representational), Jakobson six (referential, expressive, poetic, metalinguistic, conative and phatic) and Halliday three macrofunctions (ideational, interactional and textual).

Corresponding to the functions thus conceived are realisation means, which are the structures or constructions of individual languages. At the theoretical level, the relationship between external functions and linguistic structures can thus be represented in terms of the opposition between potential (virtual) and actual, which has had an important role in the history of modern linguistic thought since Humboldt (see Morpurgo Davies, 1998: 108–110). At the level of the analysis of linguistic structures, a central concern, differently developed in the various functionalist traditions, has been the exploration of the relationship between the types of construction that are proper to individual languages and the different functions they can realise within the text. For example, study of the relations between interrogative structures and interactional function, between exclamatory constructions and expressive function, which were already known to the linguistics of the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries11, has been developed through increasingly refined techniques of syntactic analysis. Further possible relations between constructions and functions have, moreover, been identified, such as those between the passive voice and informational function.

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11. Ideas that could be described as “pragmatic” avant la lettre, concerning the relationship between linguistic structures and functions, may be found in the work of various scholars: see Nerlich (1990: 185–191) and Nerlich and Clarke (1996: 177–183) on Wegener; see Nerlich and Clarke (1996: 109–111 and 175–176) for a discussion of the positions of Reid and Paul.
3.3. Function as the “functioning” of languages or of linguistic units

This “dynamic” conception of function relates both to the functioning of languages, beginning with the processes of their effective use by real speakers and in particular contexts (see Bondarko, 1991), and to the properties that linguistic units come to assume in relation to context. It is a conception that may be defined as “pragmatic” and “processual”, which has been differently formulated in the various functionalist traditions.

In the British tradition of Firth and the neo-Firthians, contextual and pragmatic aspects have been given prominence (“the language token is not a thing with a form and a function. It is a form which functions in context. It has no meaning, but is used to mean” [Monaghan, 1979 : 86])\(^{12}\). In other traditions, however, the pragmatic approach has not precluded recourse to semantics, to the extent that, together with the complex web of subjective and contextual conditions of use, intentionality is

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\(^{12}\) Nerlich (1990 : 145) has drawn attention to the conceptual continuity between this approach and the thinking of Bréal and Wegener.
considered to be central to linguistic dynamics – the speaker’s “I mean”. Similarly, a processual approach can be combined with a systemic one, since all processes relate to a language understood as “a system of expression means suited to an end (First Thesis of the Prague Circle, Theses 7)”. This viewpoint has been interestingly applied in the work of Michael Halliday (1973, 1985). Also of interest is the implication, found in functionalist studies of various kinds, that identical or similar structures can “function” in different ways within a register or style of language or in different languages.

In Mathésius and in the scholars of the Second Prague School the sense of the term function under consideration has a particular relationship to the so-called “actual articulation of the sentence” (in Czech, “aktuální členění větné”), also referred to in English as Functional Sentence Perspective, a key idea in functional grammar (see 5.1.1). More generally, the “actualisation” represents the activating of the linguistic system, an entity that is merely virtual. Such a representation is in many ways similar to that of parole as the “functioning” and actualisation of the langue in the thinking of Charles Bally (1912)\(^{13}\). Differently from the concept of “external function”, mainly expressible in terms of virtuality, the concept of function as “functioning” can be especially associated with the dimension of activity. It would nevertheless be a mistake to equate this model with a simple mechanical realisation, as many reductive interpretations of the Saussurian parole have done. One of the most interesting aspects of the concept of “functioning” is in fact the representation of what Trnka (1948 : 163–164) defined as the “polar tension between linguistic system and experience of the language”.

The treatment of the discrepancy between the form and the grammatical function of linguistic units is another interesting aspect of the problem of functioning. An element may belong to one type of construction and “function” in a manner similar to the elements of another. The English phrase in case, for example, has the form Preposition + Noun, but functions as a subordinating conjunction. The Italian noun mica,

‘breadcrumb; tiny part, small piece of any material’, can in certain constructions assume the function of an adverb that (a) intensifies a negation (= ‘at all, in the least’) when it is placed after the verb in a verbal phrase in which the negation appears (non mi piace mica ‘I do not like it at all’), (b) has negative value when it occurs at the beginning of a sentence and the sentence does not contain another negative adverb (mica sono impazzito ‘of course I’m not mad’), and (c) has the meaning “by chance” in interrogative and dubitative constructions (mica sei andato a casa? ‘have you by chance been home?’). These are phenomena that have been discussed at length in studies of grammaticalisation. They are the result of the normal alterations of meaning that are produced in a particular sentential context in the actual uses of speakers, and in the final analysis involve linguistic functioning understood as a historical process through which the constructions of languages emerge. Within formalist traditions cases such as these have been treated in different ways. Bloomfield (1933 : 269) maintains that the construction in case is an arbitrary or irregular member of the form-class of conjunctions. For Hjelmslev (1928 : 126), “la fonction grammaticale est distincte de l’emploi”. If an adverb is sometimes used as an interjection, “ce fait n’affecte point la fonction grammaticale de l’élément considéré” (1928 : 126). In as much as they are oriented towards functioning in the context of both systems and linguistic units, functionalist models have given ample consideration to meaning and use in the study of discrepancies of form and function. In the twentieth century, studies of the processes of grammaticalisation mostly adopted functionalist approaches, often embracing the principle of analysis “from function to form” (see 3.6). The treatment of these discrepancies continues to be a thorny problem for theories of the form–function relationship and for concrete descriptive practices.

3.4. Function in relation to the functional explanation of linguistic change

The assumption that speakers are the agents in linguistic change can play a part not only in synchronic but also in diachronic analysis. There is a certain ambiguity here between
two distinct notions: (a) the functional system seen in terms of its diachronic developments and (b) the functional nature of the phenomena of diachrony understood as processes in which speakers have an active role. In the first of the Prague Circle’s Theses we read that “La conception de la langue comme système fonctionnel est à envisager également dans l’étude des états de langue passés, qu’il s’agisse de les reconstruire ou d’en constater l’évolution” (Theses : 7). Shortly afterwards, it is asserted that the propagation of the linguistic facts that modify a system “ne s’effectue pas d’une façon mécanique, mais est déterminé par les dispositions des sujets qui les reçoivent, dispositions qui se manifestent en harmonie avec la tendance de l’évolution” (Theses : 9). This conception, which has been influential on North American functionalist thinking especially, poses a number of theoretical problems. One of the most obvious of these would seem to be the question of the relationship between individual speakers and diachronic change in the linguistic system, in that the role of the former belongs to a level of micro-historical activity that is necessarily different from the macro-historical scale on which languages change (Sornicola, 2007).

3.5. Function as a relation of interdependence

Another group of senses of the term function can be related to the logico-mathematical concept of the interdependence of variables, expressible through notions of “relation” or “correlation”. Here we find an interesting complex of ideas that can help to shed light on the relationship between the functionalist traditions of the 1920s and 1930s and the broader development of structuralism. It is first necessary to distinguish the idea of function as a relation of interdependence between the parts or units of a system (or of grammar) from one of interdependence between the linguistic units within a sentence. The former relates principally to the paradigmatic axis (but does not exclude the syntagmatic), while the latter relates specifically to the syntagmatic. The theories relating to the two types of interdependence have separate histories, although these have converged in various contexts and periods.
The idea of interdependence between the parts or units of a system is fundamental to all structuralist thinking of the early twentieth century. A linguistic system is itself a network of differential and oppositional relations. As early as Gabelentz ([1891] 1901 : 481) function is defined as a relation of interdependence between the parts of grammar. Within the Prague Circle, the Saussurian concept of paradigmatic relation is developed in various ways involving representations of interdependence, an example being Trubetzkoy’s model of the different types of relation between the phonological units of a system (bundles of correlations, bilateral relations, multilateral relations, isolated relations, etc.). Such relations, which have no importance from the standpoint of the purely external structure of the phonetic repertoire, become extremely important “from the standpoint of the function of the phonemic system” (Trubetzkoy, 1939a [1969 : 75]). The nature of a phonological opposition (privative, gradual or equipollent) depends on the structure and the functioning of the respective phonemic system14. It should be noted that for Trubetzkoy the theoretical properties of phonemes crucially include the syntagmatic distribution of the phonetic units that represent them (“Any rules that restrict in any way the use of the individual phonemes and their combinations must […] always be carefully stated in the description of the phonological system” ([1939a [1969: 242]]). This functional classification supplements the classification produced by a logical analysis of phonological oppositions (1939a [1969: 242]). Even if Trubetzkoy does not call them functions, his representations of the phonological units refer to a conception that is characteristically functional in the relational sense. It was only with Hjelmslev, however, that the term function would be used explicitly in this respect. As regards representations of interdependence, it is therefore difficult to distinguish between functionalist and structuralist models, as they seem to have had a reciprocal influence on each other. After all, any idea of function understood as

14. This last term refers to “the combination of phonemes permissible in a given language, as well as the rules governing the distinctive force of the individual oppositions” (Trubetzkoy, 1939a : 77).
interdependence refers inherently to the concept of system, and vice versa (see Delattre, 1979).

On the syntagmatic axis, the idea of interdependence pertains rather to the relations between the units of the sentence or utterance, and can be represented through the notion of syntactic function. Here too the representation is an extremely general one, common to all structuralist lines of thought. Moreover, it has different implications within the various functionalist traditions, according to the models in which it is employed. And indeed representations of the parts of a sentence as units placed in a reciprocal relation are already found in the preceding century (see Paul, [1880] 1920: 124).

From the beginning of the twentieth century, the tendency towards relational representations of linguistic phenomena becomes more marked, even if a coherent formulation in logical terms would have to wait until the 1930s and the influence of developments in mathematics and logic, particularly those of the Vienna Circle\(^{15}\). The very emergence of the notion of system can be interpreted as a manifestation of this tendency. In this connection, we should not forget the important epistemological thinking of Cassirer (1910: 292–310), who establishes the primacy of the concept of function (as relation) over the concept of substance, assigning the conceptual representation (Begriff) to the constructions of “order”. The “force of pure ideal relationality”\(^{16}\) gradually gained ground also in the field of linguistics.

### 3.6. The analytical principle “from function to form”

The concepts of function as meaning and end, as external function, as the functioning of systems and of linguistic units, and as functional change have much in common, and form the nucleus of many functionalist theories. These theories are

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15. Graffi (1991) maintains that the new trends in mathematics and logic and their principal representatives are not mentioned in writings on linguistics before the 1930s. Yet the idea of function as “correlation” is central to Tynjanov’s work in the 1920s (see Prevignano, 1979: 39, Ehlers, 1992: 162–179). See also Svoboda (1992) on the relational conception of syntax as a characteristic of the Prague Circle.

often related to another, methodological, postulate, which derives from the centrality attributed to the communicative and expressive needs of speakers. It is the principle whereby linguistic analysis must take such needs as its point of departure, and then study those means in the language in question that satisfy them. In analytical practice this principle is translated into the preliminary individuation of meanings (corresponding to units at the level of the sentence or lower), which are then placed in relation to certain constructions. This direction of analytical procedure is obviously the reverse of that which has been variously described and applied in formalist traditions. One thinks in particular of the drastic formulation of Hjelmslev (1928 : 88–89 passim), according to which the study of grammar should not take meaning as its point of departure and then look for the expression that corresponds to it – an “inadmissible” procedure – but rather consider expression and meaning together, “en partant de l’expression pour chercher la signification”.

The analytical principle “from function to form”, which as we have seen was formulated by Mathesius (1929), has since been put to use many times in the various traditions of functional linguistics. It nevertheless poses a number of problems that show that philosophical principles and good analytical practice do not always go hand in hand. The philosophical assumption of the centrality of the speaker, present in the functionalist paradigms of the early twentieth century, if translated indiscriminately into the methodological approach that starts out from function in order to arrive at form, can give rise to linguistic analyses that are not always clear (Sornicola, 1993). One would at least need to distinguish between the requirements of scientific description and didactic requirements, the approach “from function to form” having long been shown to be valid in relation to the latter. The same principle could, after all, be applied in different ways, according to the typologies of speakers under consideration. As had already been observed by Bally (1912), while native speakers generally have a strong instinctive feeling for the semantic aspects of their language, being capable of perceiving and interpreting an entire range of semantic nuances for lexemes and constructions, non-native speakers tend conversely to emphasise the
formal dimension, showing a natural tendency to distinguish the structural aspects of constructions rather than focus on nuances of meaning (Sornicola, 2001: 84-89).

4. THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY BACKGROUND

The concepts of function discussed in section 3 are already in evidence, both individually and variously combined, in the thinking of a number of philosophers and linguists of the second half of the nineteenth century, and collectively mark a phase of linguistic thought that was profoundly influenced by the development of historicism. Linguists such as Bréal, the Neogrammarians and Wegener were leading exponents of a new scholarly sensibility shaped by the more general cultural climate in Europe, in which man was seen, in the historical reality of his *Erlebnis* (‘experience’), as the mover of history and the keystone of research in the *Geisteswissenschaften*. It was a cultural climate that, within the historical disciplines, signalled a transition from objectivist tendencies, influenced by the natural sciences (and in particular by biology), to an approach that might be defined as “historico-functionalist”. The idea of “function”, in itself already present in the naturalistic paradigms of the nineteenth century, becomes fused with concepts of the “living” individual and of life as “lived”, expressing what is most characteristic about them, namely the capacity of historical subjects to have “ends” and to organise their activities according to plans.

In linguistics this set of viewpoints translates into a new interest in a number of conceptions of the early nineteenth century: (a) the Humboldtian idea whereby the “speaking subject” and his linguistic activity, understood as δύναμις, *energeia*, are the ultimate foundation both of the reality of languages and of their scholarly study; (b) the representation of the expressive and communicative needs of speakers, present in Herder, Rousseau, Schleiermacher and others and now incorporated into a veritable methodological programme for the study of languages; (c) the idea that explanations for change ought to be sought in the activity of speakers and in the characteristics
of their linguistic uses. The first idea, which is so general as to amount almost to an ideological assumption, unites scholars as diverse in theoretical and methodological orientation as Bréal, Paul, Schuchardt, Wegener and the French dialectologists. It should be seen as part of a widespread reaction in the last decades of the nineteenth century against a linguistics founded merely on the “exterior observation of the forms of language” and on the reconstruction of “laws” governing change in sounds, words, inflections and syntax understood as material elements, having no relationship with the individuals who use them (Bréal, [1866] 1877 : 248–249). In a number of linguists, especially Bréal and Wegener, idea (a) is found in association with ideas (b) and (c) (Nerlich, 1990, Nerlich and Clarke, 1996).

In the writings of Bréal the principle of the centrality of the speaker is presented in terms reminiscent of the Enlightenment, the speaker being conceived as an abstract representative of humankind: “Il ne faut pas que la description du langage humain nous fasse oublier l’homme, qui en est à la fois le principe et la fin, puisque tout, dans le langage, procède de lui et s’adresse à lui” (Bréal, [1866] 1877: 249); “la linguistique parle à l’homme de lui-même” (Bréal, 1897 : 2). Only with developments in strictly empirico-experimental methodologies, such as those of dialectology and the phonetic disciplines, would this principle be applied in concrete terms to historically determined individuals.

Whatever specific use individual scholars may have made of the above-mentioned ideas, it is clear that a new air pervaded the thinking of the last decades of the nineteenth century, attention being given to the observation of concrete linguistic realities, to the context for the “live” use of linguistic forms, to dialects and to languages as spoken. Such concerns are also attested by the agenda of the Neogrammarians, according to which “nur derjenige vergleichende sprachforscher, welcher aus dem hypothesesentrüben dunstkreis der werkstätte, in der man die indogermanischen grundformen schmiedet, einmal heraustritt in die klare luft der greifbaren wirklichkeit und gegenwart … nur der kann zu einer richtigen vorstellung von der lebens- und umbil- dungsweise der sprachformen gelangen und diejenigen methodisichen principien gewinnen” (Osthoff & Brugmann, 1878 : ix). It was Bréal himself who gave voice, like Wegener, to the initial
phase of a widespread movement announcing a “pragmatic” and “functionalist” view of languages and their study: the full value of linguistics is to be found in practical objectives, because a human activity such as language begins and develops in relation to a practical end; thus “l'idée de l'utilité ne saurait à aucun moment être absente” (Bréal, 1897 : 2).

In their most developed form these principles would be integrated into a general theory (albeit one that was anything but unified) by the Prague Circle. The constellation of ideas identified in section 3 – function as meaning, external function, the functioning of units, and functional explanations of change – becomes the mark of Prague structural functionalism. Yet this tradition may be seen to have had a dual identity from its very beginnings, encompassing two different conceptions of language – one structuralist, represented primarily by Trubetzkoy and Jakobson, who while making use of functional concepts give prominence to the formalisation of relations between units and the operational procedures that make it possible, and the other historico-functional, its principal exponent being Mathesius, who positions himself explicitly in the Humboldtian tradition of “linguistic individualism” (Sornicola, 1995). In discussing the concept of the “potentiality” of linguistic phenomena in relation to oscillations in a state of a language – that is, the oscillations that occur in speech – Mathesius (1911b) aligns himself in an original way (both theoretically and in terms of his rigorously inductive method) with the functional historicist tradition of the second half of the nineteenth century.

5. ASPECTS OF FUNCTIONALISM

5.1. Syntax

5.1.1. The primary ideas of Prague syntax

Syntax, and in particular the theory of the sentence, constitutes one of the oldest and most fruitful areas of study within the functionalist traditions. It is already in evidence
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in Prague before the formation of the Circle, in Mathesius’s
many works on subjects such as word order in English (1907),
non-verbal predication (1911a), nominal constructions and
passive constructions in modern English (1913, 1915), attri-
butive sentences (1917), the pronominal Subject in colloquial
Czech (1923a), and the function of the Subject in modern
English (1923b). But it is above all in two important works of
the 1920s that Mathesius (1924, 1929) reflects more broadly
on the general theory of the sentence, tackling a number of
problems that the linguistics of the last decades of the nine-
teenth century had bequeathed to the twentieth, such as the
definition of syntax, the definition of the sentence, the nature
of the relation between Subject and Predicate, and the dif-
ferent types of predication, thetic and categorical.

Mathesius’s writings show a profound knowledge of the
grammatical and syntactic research undertaken in various
European centres in the years spanning the end of the nine-
teenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Despite
the many influences in evidence, traceable to Wegener, Sweet,
Jespersen, Brentano and Marty (all duly acknowledged), it is
possible to discern in these writings an original conception, in
which a number of ideas fundamental to the most important
functional theories of syntax of the latter part of the twentieth
century are already seen to be taking shape (see below). The
key points may be summarised as follows:

I. STUDY OF THE SENTENCE IS CENTRAL NOT ONLY TO SYNTACTIC THEORY
   BUT TO LINGUISTICS AS A WHOLE.

      Indeed, Mathesius ([1929] 1983: 123) observes that all
syntax, and in certain cases the whole of linguistics, derives
from the way the sentence is defined. This viewpoint was
still far from common in the 1920s, even if we should note
the interesting similarity to positions taken by Meillet and
Bloomfield (Sornicola, 1992: 37). It would be reaffirmed in

17. The nineteenth-century debate had involved Miklosich and Ries, Delbrück,
Wundt and Paul. For a survey of the problems debated, see Graffi (1992: 119–228),
and 2).
various ways by the syntactic theories that developed from the 1950s onwards.

II. THE LOGICAL CONCEPTION OF THE SENTENCE IS REJECTED AND SUPERSEDED.

The sentence does not correspond to a logical judgement (Mathesius, 1929b: 142). This point of view had already found adherents in Sweet (1875–1876), Ries (1894: 11–12) and Marty (1908: 360–362), and would be reaffirmed within a different conceptual framework by Hjelmslev (1928: 19). The way in which it is argued is nevertheless interesting, making reference to the complex factors that determine the “fluency” of speakers.18

III. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONCEPTION OF THE SENTENCE IS ALSO SUBJECTED TO RIGOROUS CRITICISM.

Mathesius (1923b: 138–139) regards as insufficient the definitions of the sentence given by Wundt and Paul, which are in various ways psychologically based. Indeed, it is not necessary to ask through which mental processes the sentence is created, since these “are very difficult to grasp and [...] are moreover very unstable during speech” (Mathesius, 1923b: 138).19 Seeing the communicative act as a “chain of three rings”, consisting of the whole situation, the linguistic conception of this situation, and the expression of that linguistic conception in articulated sounds, Mathesius emphasises that for linguistics it is the linguistic conception that is of

18. Mathesius observes that the activity of the speaker is not identical with the decision to speak, this being particularly evident, he argues, “when an obstacle appears at some point in speech”. Indeed, “sometimes we know what to say but find it disagreeable and are unable to make up our minds to speak. At other times, we feel like speaking but do not know which position to take” (1923b: 142).

19. At the same time, Mathesius does not altogether rule recourse to psychology in linguistics, but regards the former as a tool that is subordinate or auxiliary to the latter. This standpoint is very different from that of Paul ((1880) 1920: 121), according to whom “der Satz ist der sprachliche Ausdruck, das Symbol dafür, dass sich die Verbindung mehrerer Vorstellungen oder Vorstellungsgruppen in der Seele des Sprechenden vollzogen hat, und das Mittel dazu, die nämliche Verbindung der nämlichen Vorstellungen in der Seele des Hörenden zu erzeugen”. Mathesius (1923b: 138) was critical of this definition, considering it to be too oriented towards the mental processes from which the sentence emerges.
greatest importance, “the middle element in the chain”. This involves a dual procedure, the first part analytical, in which the situation is selectively broken down into “nameable elements”, and the second synthetic, in which these elements are correlated in the act of the formation of the sentence. It is worth noting that, as for the rejection of the sentence understood as a logical judgement, this anti-psychologism finds an echo in Hjelmslev (1928 : 19), seeming to point to the existence of areas of common ground within nascent structuralism. Both anti-logicism and anti-psychologism, moreover, are standpoints whose fortunes fluctuated in twentieth-century thinking about syntax.

IV. FROM THE OBJECTIONS EXPRESSED UNDER II AND III ABOVE, IT FOLLOWS THAT THE SENTENCE MUST BE DEFINED IN PURELY LINGUISTIC TERMS.

Indeed, the primary aim of the sentence is not to represent concepts, but to establish communication between speaker and listener. The functional definition of the sentence begins with its communicative objectives: according to Mathesius (1923b : 144), “The sentence is an elementary communicative utterance, with which the speaker, actively, and in such a way as to leave an impression of familiarity and subjective completeness in formal terms, approaches a particular reality.” In this definition the sentence is assigned three constitutive components: (a) communicative character, (b) the moment of actuality (see v), and (c) completeness understood in the formal, subjective sense, in which intonation plays a crucial part.


This principle concerns the observation of the way “the sentence is inserted into the real context from which it has

20. It is interesting that Mathesius (1923b : 144) regards both parts as being essential for the study of the sentence, even though the sentence is actually created through the second, the correlation of elements, alone.
emerged”, and is in opposition to the principle of “formal articulation”, which concerns “the composition of the sentence in grammatical elements” (Mathesius, 1939 : 181)\textsuperscript{21}. There is in evidence here a dualism between “dynamic” and “static” syntax that has its roots in nineteenth-century linguistic thinking, in the Humboldtian antinomy between energieia, the incessant linguistic activity of the speaker, and ergon, the finished, petrified product of this activity, between “distribution” and “syntax” (Weil, [1844] 1879: 20–21), between the actual “functioning” of language in speech, activated by the individual speaker, and consideration of the abstract logical relations between the components of the sentence. This polarisation derives from the well-known Romantic opposition (found in philosophy before linguistics) between “what is living” and “what is dead”, an opposition that had been given expression by Bréal and Wegener\textsuperscript{22}. In formal articulation the constitutive elements are the grammatical Subject and Predicate, whereas in actual articulation they are the “point of departure” of the utterance, or the “theme” – i.e. that which is known in a particular situation and from which the speaker starts out – and the “nucleus” of the utterance – i.e. that which the speaker asserts in relation to the point of departure (Mathesius, 1939 : 181). The components of formal articulation do not necessarily correspond to those of actual articulation. This potential discrepancy between the functions of Subject and Predicate on the one hand and of point of departure and nucleus of the utterance on the other had already been discussed by Paul, who differentiates, respectively, between “grammatical Subject and Predicate” and “psychological Subject and Predicate” (Paul, [1880] 1920: 124–125)\textsuperscript{23}.

5.1.2. Developments in functional syntax

The above-mentioned discrepancy raises the important theoretical question of how to represent the relations between

\textsuperscript{21} See Mathesius’s criticism (1923b : 141) of Delbrück, Paul, Wundt, Dittrich and Kretschmer, who had defined the sentence fundamentally in terms of formal articulation.


\textsuperscript{23} Mathesius (1939 : 182) nevertheless observes that his notions of point of departure and nucleus do not correspond to Paul’s psychological Subject and Predicate.
functions that pertain to different types of articulation. Debated at length in the principal grammatical theories of the twentieth century, the question was tackled by various exponents of functionalism through the development of models that have become classics, such as those of Daneš (1964), Halliday (1967–1968), Dik (1978), Dik (1980) and Dik (1989). These works present multilayered representations of grammar that postulate the existence of interdependent but autonomous levels – syntactic, semantic and pragmatic (this last corresponding to Functional Sentence Perspective) – for each of which the relative functions are defined. Especially problematic and controversial is the definition of the pragmatic functions of Topic (or in some models, Theme)\(^{24}\). Multilayered functional representations were widely employed in research on syntactic typology in the last decades of the twentieth century. They provided the theoretical frame of reference for many comparative studies of the typological properties of languages, which made reference to Mathesius’s theory (1923b, 1924) of the non-alignment of the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic functions (Comrie, 1981 : 124-137, Dik, 1989 : 209–246), enriching it with an imposing mass of empirical data and developing it into more refined forms (see Van Valin, 2006). And it is worth noting, finally, that from the 1980s multilayered functional models came to be integrated into formal grammatical theories (for example, in generative grammar), which originally regarded the concept of function as deriving from that of structure.

The actual articulation of the sentence is closely related to the “processes” of temporal linguistic organisation, one of the principal manifestations of these processes being the order of constituent elements (see Mathesius, 1941–1942). These concerns also constitute one of the leitmotifs of functional syntax in the so-called “Second Prague School”. Particularly important in this respect are the works of Firbas, who reformulates and develops ideas about the actual articulation of the sentence through the concepts of “communicative dynamism” and of “theme” and “rheme” (Firbas, 1964, 1992, 1999).

Sgall, Hajíčková and Panevová, 1986 & Svoboda, 1981). These concepts would be utilised by other functionalist theories, such as that of Halliday, and by textual linguistics, Halliday (1967–1968) and, in relation to textual linguistics, Dressler (1978), Coseriu (1994), Lepschy (1994 : 484), Antos, Tietz and Heinemann (1997 : 1–43), Sanders and Sanders (2006). They have been applied in the study of various typologies of written and spoken texts, which has often made use of statistical methods (see the many examples provided by the Prague Studies in Mathematical Linguistics). An idea very characteristic of the Prague tradition is that of the sentence (utterance) as a “field of tension” (Spannungsfeld) between functions of distinct though interdependent levels. This tension, seen in the many stylistic and/or typological options for the articulation of the sentence, ultimately reveals the unresolved conflict, to which all speakers are subject, between the structural possibilities of a system and the functioning of language in concrete linguistic activity. This conflict is clearly evident in the thinking of another functionalist, Tesnière, who speaks in his syntactic theory of an “antinomie entre l’ordre structural, qui est à plusieurs dimensions, et l’ordre linéaire, qui est à une dimension”. For Tesnière (1959 : 21), “cette antinomie est la ‘quadrature du cercle’ du langage. Sa résolution est la condition sine qua non de la parole.” The problem of the representation of the sentence as a process – that is, as the linear projection of its elements – has also been tackled by the Dutch functional tradition within a different theoretical framework (Nuyts & de Schutter, 1987, Dik, 1989 : 333–378). It is one of the key ideas of functional syntax.

It should be noted, finally, that the Prague functionalist models, and models that were inspired by Prague, are essentially models of dependence and in their various ways regard properties of constituency as secondary. The models of syntactic functionalism devised by Martinet and Halliday nevertheless attempt to reconcile the two types of representation (Martinet, 1985, Halliday, 1961, 1966, 1985).

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5.2. Phonology

Phonology is probably the level of analysis whose development in Europe has been most influenced by Prague models. Although various scholars of the Prague Circle contributed to the identification of its fundamental principles (Theses, Mathesius, 1929), its definition and its presentation as a systematic theory are attributable to Nikolai Trubetzkoy. It could be argued that, at least in the decades following the Second World War, the creation of a theoretical framework for phonology was of central importance for the development of structuralist and functionalist theories. The reasons for the pre-eminence of phonology in this period are multiple and complex, and can be only briefly summarised here. Some relate to the fact that thinking about the science of sounds, about morphology and about syntax in the decades before and after the war was not equally advanced. Anderson (1985: 316) argues that “structuralist linguistics simply didn’t have a serious ‘theory of syntax’”, and that this was a determining factor in the development of generative syntax, a thesis that has been widely embraced in the United States. While this view might seem rather one-sided, it is clear that there was less interest in the theory of syntax than in phonology in the first half of the twentieth century. Trubetzkoy’s work in this area, brought together in his Grundzüge der Phonologie (published posthumously in 1939), is remarkable for its analytical and logical rigour, and it is easy to understand the appeal it must have had in phases of linguistic research that were influenced by operationalism. But this cannot be the whole explanation. Also to be taken into account are the profound changes brought about by the war itself, with the difficulties of reorganisation that were experienced by European research centres and the emergence of North America as a new international hub of research. In this transition Jakobson functions as a bridge between the cultural heritage of Russia and Prague and the new scholarly stimuli of the New World. The fact that it was through him that the Prague theories were disseminated in the United States was not without consequence, in terms of both the emphasis on phonology and the development of new binary phonological models influenced by the theory of information. Phonology
and more generally the aspect of the signifier had always featured prominently among Jakobson’s own interests, many and wide-ranging as they were. And as noted above, his tendency towards experimentalism would give rise in his American period to research that was ever further removed from the original conceptual centre of the Prague Circle. Jakobson at any rate selected only those aspects of the complex thinking of Prague that suited him, presenting that thinking in a form that was as brilliant as it was personal and that in many contexts would come to be regarded as the most authoritative.

Another interesting question is that of the close relationship between structure and function, a relationship that finds expression in phonological models, to the extent that one might ask whether, at least as far as European phonology is concerned, it is legitimate to distinguish between functional structuralism and other kinds of structuralism. In various works of the late 1920s the idea of there being a difference between phonetics, a discipline that studies sound “comme fait physique objectif”, and phonology, which is concerned with sound “comme élément du système fonctionnel”, is clearly articulated (Theses: 37). Objective facts “n’ont qu’un rapport indirect avec la linguistique”. They correspond to speakers’ subjective acoustic and proprioceptive representations, which in turn “ne sont des éléments d’un système linguistique que dans la mesure où elles remplissent, dans ce système, une fonction différenciatrice de significations” (Theses: 37). Later, in the Grundzüge der Phonologie, Trubetzkoy would observe that the phonologist considers “only that aspect of sound which fulfills a specific function in the system of language [author’s emphasis]”, and that the emphasis on function is thus what clearly distinguishes phonology from phonetics (1939a [1969: 11]). Here too the development of functional ideas has important antecedents in the thinking of the last decades of the nineteenth century, especially in the distinction drawn by Baudouin de Courtenay between “anthropophonetics”, which is concerned with the “conditions of pronunciation and of the phonational-auditory production of language”, and “psychophonetics”, which studies only what exists as psychological representation of sounds, and in the definition of “phoneme” as “the psychological equivalent of physical sound” (Baudouin de Courtenay,
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The close interweaving of functional and structural analysis is clearly evident in the definition of various scholars: phonology is concerned not only with the function that sounds have of differentiating meaning, but also with the systemic relationships between the units that bear such functions, and with the rules that govern their combination, which vary from language to language (Theses, 37–39, Mathesius, 1929, Trubetzkoy, [1939a] 1969: 10-11).

In phonology too, moreover, we encounter the whole spectrum of different senses of the term function (see 3). Function as “functional meaning” appears in Mathesius ([1929] 1983: 129), “phonology analyses phonemes, or sounds endowed with functional meaning”), while a wider range of senses may be found in the Grundzüge der Phonologie, some of which place greater emphasis on the relational interpretation. The concept of “external function”, which following Bühler (1934) is seen as comprising the triad expressive function, function of “appeal” and representational function, is regarded by Trubetzkoy as essential to defining the foundation of phonology in speech. Speech always consists of a triad of components – a speaker, a listener and a topic – and thus every utterance has three aspects: a manifestation (or expression) of the speaker, an appeal to the listener, and a representation of the topic. These functions are associated with distinct characteristics of acoustic impressions, characteristics that belong to three different levels (Trubetzkoy, [1939a] 1969: 14–15). The representational level falls firmly within the bounds of phonology, while the levels of expression and of appeal belong to the related field of phonostylistics ([1939a] 1969: 14-26). Trubetzkoy thus presents an integrated view of the linguistic “values” (Sprachwerte), which belong to all three functional levels and come together in the linguistic system. Even the levels of analysis are seen as being integrated: “The content of an observed sentence can be understood only if its constituent words are related to the lexical and grammatical elements of the system of language; and the signifier aspect of these elements necessarily consists of phonological units” ([1939a] 1969: 15).

26. Trubetzkoy would explicitly criticise the psychological character of this definition (see below).
Like Mathesius, Trubetzkoy maintains that phonology should ask which differences in sounds are related to differences in meaning in a given language, and that such correspondences form part of the characteristic functional dimension of phonology. But this dimension is not constituted only by aspects of semantic function. Indeed, “the signifier of the system of language consists of a number of elements whose essential function is to distinguish themselves from each other. Each word must distinguish itself by some element from all other words of the same language” (Trubetzkoy, [1939a] 1969: 11). This differentiating function of the units of the signifier is realised by a limited number of differentiating elements, whose various combinations make it possible to distinguish all the words in a language’s vocabulary (Trubetzkoy, [1939a] 1969: 11). Later, the French scholar André Martinet (1949, 1960) would present the relationship between phonemes and units of a higher order according to the model of the double articulation of language, which distinguishes units of the first articulation, monemes, endowed with phonetic form and meaning, from phonemes, units of the second articulation, endowed with differentiating function but in themselves devoid of meaning.

The dual representation of differentiating function, at the level of the signified and the level of the signifier, shows the influence of the Saussurian theory of the sign. Moreover, the abstract representation of phonemes as “relations, oppositions, etc., quite intangible things, which can be neither perceived nor studied with the aid of the sense of hearing or touch” (Trubetzkoy, [1939a] 1969: 13) is strikingly similar to the Saussurian theory of “linguistic value” (Saussure, 1916: 155 ff.). It differs from earlier representations in two important respects: it is founded not on psychology\(^{27}\), nor on the correspondences between the phoneme and its phonetic variants (which had anyway been lucidly examined at the methodological level, with the fine-tuning of rules for the definition of phonemes), (Trubetzkoy, [1939a] 1969: 46-51), Matthews, 2001: 44–45), but on Bühler’s notion of abstraktive Relevanz (‘abstract relevancy’) (Trubetzkoy, [1939a] 1969: 42-43), to

\(^{27}\) It should nevertheless be noted that in earlier writings Trubetzkoy had made use of psychologically based definitions of the phoneme.
which should also be attributed the well-known definition of a phoneme as “the sum of all the features that are phonologically relevant” (Trubetzkoy, [1939a] 1969: 36). This notion of abstract relevancy is fundamental to Trubetzkoy’s functional conception of phonology, giving it a marked theoretico-speculative character that was criticised from various positions within American structuralist and generativist scholarship (Anderson, 1985 : 278–303).

An interest in abstract relations represented according to formal schemes is also clearly in evidence in the identification of structural features of the system, such as types of opposition (bilateral, constant, equipollent, gradual, etc.) and of correlation (of tension, intensity, sonority, etc.) and bundles of correlation, and in the development of the theory of markedness (Trubetzkoy, [1939a] 1969: 90-169, Lepschy, 1994: 438-440), which would later be reformulated and re-applied in many different contexts.

Trubetzkoy’s and Jakobson’s conception of the phonological system as a closed and highly structured set of oppositions laid the foundations for a number of teleological developments in diachronic phonology, of which Jakobson and Martinet were the principal exponents. Because changes in the system do not occur blindly, but in conformity with its structure, they serve to restabilise a lost equilibrium (see 5.3; Jakobson, 1931) or reflect a tendency towards the attainment of a new systemic order that optimises the differentiating function of phonemes in accordance with a principle of linguistic economy (Martinet, 1955). While Jakobson conceives change in purely systemic terms, Martinet emphasises the active role of speakers as the concrete (historical) locus of phonological transformations28. This approach is clearly visible in various aspects of his work, such as his careful description of case studies in terms both of their systemic implications and of external history, and especially in his exposition of the two opposing and not easily reconcilable forces that govern linguistic evolution: the need of speakers both to be understood and to reduce to a minimum the physical and mental effort of

28. The differences between the theories of Jakobson and Martinet have been discussed by Matthews (2001 : 55–61).
communication. The differentiating function of phonemes is constantly subject to both forces in inverse proportion. And for Martinet too the logic of systemic relations is central to an understanding of diachronic transformations (as seen in his concept of the attraction exerted by an integrated system containing empty cells on sounds that are not fully integrated: Martinet, 1955: 80–81).

5.3. Representations of synchrony and diachrony

The relationship between synchrony and diachrony is one of the key points of Prague linguistic theory. It is conceived dialectically, without erecting insurmountable barriers between the two dimensions. Diachrony can in fact include areas of stability comparable to synchronic states. At the same time, synchrony can incorporate phenomena proper to the diachronic dimension, for two reasons: it contains myriad oscillations in the way in which linguistic phenomena are realised by speakers; moreover, speakers have an awareness of elements belonging to different temporal layers. The idea of the existence of micro-oscillations was developed by Mathesius (1911b), and is the basis of his model of the “potentiality” of the phenomena that characterise a language. As the δύναμις contained in all its states, potentiality is the force that keeps every language in constant motion, that more or less visibly determines its changes. It is interesting that in the very years in which Saussure was propounding the opposition between synchrony and diachrony in the lectures of his *Cours de linguistique générale* (in terms that were far more complex and problematic than was suggested by Bally and Sechehaye in the posthumous edition of the *Cours* of 1916: see Sornicola, 2007: 20–27), Mathesius was conceiving a distinction between the “statics” and the “dynamics” of language, which emphasised not the temporal factor but the stability or instability with which phenomena are realised. In synchronic statics...

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29. This idea, which was adopted by the Prague scholars in the Theses, was already present in Baudouin de Courtenay and in the French dialectologists.

30. Mathesius ([1911b] 1964: 32, n. 7) claims to have been influenced by Masaryk (1887) in the formulation of this distinction.
there thus exist both stable or constant phenomena and oscillating or variable phenomena. Like linguistic change over time, the latter belong to a dynamic dimension. A key point is the centrality of the observation of “individual languages” in the present. Mathesius ([1911b] 1964: 30–31 passim) believed that “the procedure leading from the static to the dynamic issues is the safest in linguistics”, and that “the dynamic issues can only be solved after a more thorough research in individual languages has firmly established which phenomena can have been regarded in them, at a given time, as constant and which as potential”. Indeed, “only then will one be in a position to ask how long a potential phenomenon $\alpha$ can still have been regarded as basically the same phenomenon, only slightly affected by a shift of its potentiality, and when one must have already admitted the existence of a new phenomenon $\beta$, replacing $\alpha$”.

The primacy of the synchronic method over the diachronic is also put forward as one of the fundamental principles of modern linguistics in the Theses of 1929 (33–34), which had by this stage adopted Saussurian terminology. Yet a further principle is affirmed here, regarding the interchangeability of the diachronic and synchronic laws themselves. In opposition to the Geneva School, the Prague scholars maintain that the representation of the langue as a functional system should be applied to both synchrony and diachrony. They emphasise the need for historical linguistics to move away from a conception of facts that, even if regular, are produced arbitrarily and casually, towards a nomogenetic conception of “enchaînement selon les lois des faits évolutifs” (Theses: 36). Thus linguistic change would not be a destructive force, determined by chance and unsystematically, but would tend to move in the direction of the system, towards its stabilisation and reconstruction (Theses: 34). This idea presupposes that the foundation of both synchronic and diachronic linguistic movements is the speaker understood as participant in and protagonist of the functioning of language. It is an idea that

31. This principle is already affirmed in Baudouin de Courtenay ([1871] 1972: 71): “The laws of one type pass into the laws of the other type: they are mutually related.” Another concept that characterises the Prague Circle, and prior to that the thinking of Baudouin de Courtenay, is that of a law as a statistical tendency.
has had considerable success in recent models of typology and grammaticalisation, which have proposed structural cycles (or laws) of transformation that are clearly indebted conceptually to Prague thinking. Yet the nomogenetic model of diachrony is not free from theoretical difficulty. The actions of speakers in synchronic functioning and the diachronic transformations that pertain to language as a whole relate to dimensions that are incommensurable, the former occurring on a small scale and the latter on a large scale (Herman, 1978: 360). It is difficult to believe that Mathesius, who saw this difference very clearly, was not aware of the problems entailed in the nomogenetic approach. Here as elsewhere the statements of the Theses reveal an imperfect fusion of different ideas.

5.4. Typology vs. characterology

A final dichotomy discernible within the Prague Circle pertains to the theory and methods of linguistic comparison. Against the approach that seeks to delineate the structural taxonomies of linguistic families, represented by the works of Trubetzkoy (1939b) and later Kuryłowicz (1964), may be set the “characterological” conception, concerned with the fundamental “characters” of individual languages and represented by Mathesius (1928). The first approach may be seen as a continuation along structuralist lines of a nineteenth-century tradition that had been influenced by organicism in biology and given an explicit theoretical definition by Gabelentz (1894) (Morpurgo Davies, 1974: 657–683, 1998: 283, Sornicola: 2001, 29–31), while the second draws inspiration from historico-empirical descriptivist traditions, which may be traced back as far as certain grammaticographic endeavours of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Sornicola, 2001: 68–69). The principle affirmed in the Theses (7) whereby “la meilleure façon de connaître l’essence et le caractère d’une langue, c’est l’analyse synchronique des faits actuels, qui offrent seuls des

32. See Mathesius ([1911b] 1964: 1), who actually begins by noting that linguistics “can never do justice” to the difference between the linguistic realities of single individuals and the body of all the linguistic phenomena that are to be found in a community, of whatever size.
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matériaux complets et dont on peut avoir le sentiment direct” is taken up again by Mathesius ([1928] 1964: 59), who defines characterology as the structural study of a language, founded on the notion of “value” and on synchronic relations.

While there is general agreement on this point within the Circle, opinions differ as to the aims and methods of comparative study. In the Theses (8) it is argued that such study should not be directed solely towards genetic problems, but should aim more broadly, so as to “découvrir les lois de structure des systèmes linguistiques et de l’évolution de ceux-ci”. This objective may be realised not only through study of languages that are genetically and structurally different, but also by considering languages of the same family, such as the Slavonic languages, and in such cases the comparative method can reveal the divergences and convergences that arise in relation to a sizable stock of common structures. In line with assumptions about diachrony, the phenomena of divergence and convergence are seen not as being accidental, but as connected by common laws. It is precisely this that makes it possible to assign to linguistic evolution a typology, or “le groupement d’une série de faits mutuellement solidaires en un seul tout” (Theses : 8).

The holistic conception in evidence here is one from which characterology is distinguished in a number of ways. The latter aims to provide a more scientific analysis of a single language, while “all attempts at a systematic linguistic typology are, at the present stage of our knowledge, premature and lead therefore to unnecessary complications of problems only” (Mathesius, [1928] 1964: 59). Such scepticism seems to reflect a phase in the history of linguistics in which a new awareness of the difficulties and limitations of classification – both genetic and morphological – was emerging (Sornicola, 2001). There are, moreover, important links between the characterological viewpoint and stylistics. Like Ries, Mathesius ([1911b] 1964: 22) holds that stylistics and linguistics differ in their aims, but not in their object of study33. The relationship between the two disciplines may be

33. Ries (1894 : 122–123, 126–127) had regarded stylistics not as an another branch of grammar, in addition to phonetics, morphology and syntax, but as a perspective that was parallel and equivalent to the whole of grammar.
defined in terms of the theory of potentiality. Both must take into consideration the phenomena relative to the speech of single individuals, because it is these that reveal “the full extent of the potentiality of the concerned language [sic]” (Mathesius, [1911b] 1964: 22), and therefore its character and its style, terms that are more clearly analogous in Mathesius (1928). In the study of the characters of a language, the epistemological complex related to “thought”, “concept” and “meaning” is abandoned in favour of the new cognitive constellation associated with “function”. This represents a significant break from the nineteenth-century typological tradition.

Characterology thus defined allows for comparative procedures that give rise to a model of typology involving comparison of those functional properties of individual languages that are regarded as idiosyncratic (Mathesius, [1928] 1964: 59). Of relevance here is the debate about the function of the grammatical Subject, of the Subject as agent, and of the thematic Subject in various European languages. By comparison with modern German and the Slavonic languages, modern English tends to make the grammatical Subject correspond to the thematic Subject, and shows a preference for the definite Subject over the indefinite. English tends moreover to keep the same Theme unaltered for relatively long portions of text, unlike German and Czech (Mathesius, [1928] 1964: 72). The tendencies identified demonstrate the importance of synchronic relations in linguistics, in that they are correlated with other characteristic phenomena of English, such as an abundance of passive constructions, through which a thematic Subject may be maintained. The systemic (correlational) view is thus also present in characterology, but it is arrived at through historico-empirical and textual analytical procedures. The resulting models are thus inevitably relative and provisional.

6. PERSPECTIVES OF CURRENT FUNCTIONALIST RESEARCH

Tracing the individual branches of European functionalism to the present day in any detail is beyond the scope of the present article. Such an undertaking would in any case
be difficult, for a number of reasons. First of all, we would need to ask what it was, from the standpoint of the history of ideas, that actually linked the various lines of thought. While there certainly existed, from the end of the nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth, a nucleus of principles and methods characteristic of functionalism (see 4), it would be difficult to speak in terms of a single, unified theory. One need only look at the way the conceptual nucleus has survived throughout different historical phases, shaped in various ways by the environments and personalities by which it has been adopted, as well as its application to fields as different as phonology, morphology, syntax, Indo-European linguistics, dialectology and sociolinguistics, and also to both synchrony and diachrony. A possible explanation for this adaptability is functionalism’s fundamentally historico-empiricist orientation. Indeed, one might extend to all of its manifestations Vardar’s definition (1989: 52–53) of Martinet’s functionalism: “cette linguistique soucieuse des réalités”, whose methodological perspective provides for a “saisie réaliste des phénomènes”, which excludes “tout apriorisme et tout logicisme ainsi que toute finalité métaphysique”, and which “s’interroge sur les langues connues et non sur l’universalité des langues possibles, à partir de procédures de découverte qui donnent le primat à l’observation et à l’interprétation correcte des faits”. Another obvious reason for the applicability of functionalism to so many different spheres is the use of the term function to embrace a whole range of fundamental linguistic concepts. Whatever the explanation, the complexity of the picture does not facilitate a linear examination of the history of functionalism in the last century or a concise summary of the current situation. A second difficulty lies in distinguishing functionalism from other theorectico-methodological approaches and areas of linguistic research. There is, indeed, the question of its relationship with structuralism, given that in many European research contexts of both the first and second halves of the twentieth century – the Prague Circle, the French groups influenced by Martinet, the Dutch scholars of the journal Lingua, the London School of Firth and his students – functionalism and structuralism appear to be inextricably intertwined, to a point where they could be seen as two sides of the
same coin. In the last decades of the twentieth century, when classical structuralism is in crisis and disciplines such as sociolinguistics and pragmatics come more sharply into focus, the ideas constituting the nucleus of functionalism are absorbed into the latter's armoury of principles and methods, offering further proof of their remarkable vitality.

After the Second World War developments in functionalism in the various European contexts mentioned above begin to acquire distinctive and independent characteristics, which would need to be analysed in light of the linguistic and cultural traditions of the countries concerned. Here we can sketch only their broad outlines.

The British tradition represented by Malinowski, Gardiner and Firth, to which Nerlich has given the name “protopragmatics”, has attributed particular importance to the notion of “context of situation”34. Firth’s polysystemic conception of language was developed by Halliday in his theory of structure and system, which appeared first in the model of “scale and category grammar” and then in that of “systemic functional grammar”. This second model has played an important part in clinical practice, in speech analysis, in pedagogic theory and in computational analysis of natural languages (Cummings, 2006).

A conception of the linguistic system that is anti-logical and open to the world of empirical reality also characterises Dutch research in the post-war period, which becomes centred on the journal Lingua. Functionalist concerns with a psychological slant had already been expressed in the first decades of the twentieth century by the Dutch linguist Van Ginneken, professor at the Catholic University in Nijmegen, who held feeling to be “the innermost essence of language” (Noordegraaf, 1996). Refusal to conceive of the system as an abstract set of rules, enclosed within itself and disconnected from the rich extralinguistic universe, is a recurring leitmotif in various essays by Dutch linguists of the post-war years (Reichling, ([1947] 1948: 22), Uhlenbeck (1963: 17). Reichling defines the system

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as “the whole of ordered impulses [...] according to which we act in the use and building of our language products”, a view clearly inspired by pragmatic principles. It thus “has not the absolute validity of a logically constructed system, it only has the value of a practical rule of treatment” ([1947] 1948: 22). An interest in speech and utterance is also prominent in articles published in Lingua in the first decades after the war. Criticising the Saussurian idea whereby language is an object of study that may be directly accessed in the consciousness of speakers, Reichling, ([1947] 1948: 15–16 passim) observes that “the only positive datum at which the linguist can direct his research is speech itself, and the observation of the linguistic forms in the written texts”, and that therefore “the system must be found inductively and that [sic] by a correct analysis of speech, of that which de Saussure calls ‘la parole’”. This viewpoint forms part of a broader conception that tends to reduce the role of psychology within linguistics. The importance of considering utterances in speech and of their analysis in relation to semantics and context is underlined by Uhlenbeck (1963 : 17), who in this connection articulates from an anti-logicist standpoint one of the objections to the Chomsky of Syntactic Structures. Evident in these positions is a continuity with the anti-psychologism and anti-logicism of the functionalist thinking of the first decades of the twentieth century. Another functionalist theme reappears in the interest shown by De Groot (co-editor of Lingua with Reichling and Uhlenbeck) in reflections of subjectivity in linguistic structure and use (Kaldewaij, 1992). Also characteristic of the Dutch context is an interest in grammatical formalisation, which is to be developed, it is argued, along different lines from those of generative grammar (which are useful rather for constructing a model for electronic engineers), in such a way that the characteristics of natural languages are respected (Reichling, 1961 : 17). This requirement was the point of departure for the functionally based formalising approach of Simon Dik.

In France, an important part has been played by the Société Internationale de Linguistique Fonctionnelle (SILF), founded in 1976, in which André Martinet had a central role as both scholar and organiser. The explicit aim of the Société has been to promote regular exchanges between linguists who
have “la même conception de l’étude du fonctionnement des langues”, founded on “une analyse fonctionnelle des langues dans leur développement et leur continuel changement dus aux besoins de la communication liés à l’évolution de la société dont elles sont le véhicule vivant” (Statute of the Société). Martinet’s many students and followers have produced works relating to a wide range of fields and subjects, including phonology, morphology, syntax, contact between languages, and the problems of bi- and multilingualism. The research of Tabouret-Keller, one of the presidents of the Société, and of her group of collaborators represents an important step forward, at both the scholarly and the political level, in the study of multilingualism in Europe.

Is it possible, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, to see what connects the different traditions of functionalism that have developed since the Second World War, besides a common if variously manifested debt to the old nucleus of functionalist ideas? A connection may perhaps be discerned in a general anti-reductionist approach, which may be seen to lie behind certain theoretico-methodological choices in the construction of linguistic models (Abraham, 1998, Noonan, 1998). Some of these choices have long histories, continuing the old functionalist tradition, examples including the empirical commitment to the observation of phenomena, the idea that grammar should be a dynamic representation of the collective linguistic abilities of the speakers of a language, and the assumption that grammar is not a modular system – that is, a collection of autonomous components – but an integrated system of interacting parts. Others have developed in relation to theories by which linguistics has been influenced in the last few decades, an example being the prototypical, non-discrete conception of linguistic categories, developed in relation to the theory of prototypes. A marked interest in metaphorical lexical developments and the processes of grammaticalisation may also be attributed to a more recent period.

What is clear is that the fundamental principles of the early twentieth century have been reabsorbed and reoriented

35. For the importance of Martinet’s role both in France and internationally, see the various contributions to Hommage.
within new formulations, which need to be analysed in terms of the dualism of formal and functional paradigms that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. Within this new framework for research, functionalism has increasingly come to be defined as the antithesis of a collection of theoretico-methodological conceptions determined above all by the American structuralist tradition and subsequently by generative grammar\textsuperscript{36} such as the idea of the independence of grammatical levels and that of the arbitrariness and discreteness of linguistic categories, and the representations of grammar as a static system and of diachrony as a sequence of synchronic states. The fact that functionalism has been contraposed to conceptions characteristic of generative grammar would seem to account especially for its redefinition as an inductive paradigm that explicitly rejects the dichotomy between grammatical knowledge (competence) and use ability (performance) and is oriented towards the quest for cognitive universals that are more general and more profound than those of linguistics. These characteristics are indeed defined in polar opposition to those of the formal paradigm of generative grammar, which is deductive, explicitly embraces the competence/performance dichotomy, and is oriented towards the study of a universal grammar (Abraham, 1998: 58, Noonan, 1998: 24).

In some of its new manifestations, such as the theory of linguistic prototypes and the quest for cognitive universals that determine linguistic universals, as indeed in the cognitivist reformulation of old ideas about metaphorical developments of the lexicon, and in the recourse to the theory of iconism, functionalism has moved a long way away from the antipsychologistic and anti-metaphysical stance of the functional structuralism of the early twentieth century, as have other contemporary linguistic theories. It may indeed run the risk of an anti-empirical and anti-historical drift towards “grand theories” far removed from its roots.

Looking beyond theoretico-methodological choices, however, it is possible to discern in many European functionalist trends of our own day a surviving interest in understanding

\textsuperscript{36} The relationship between American structuralism and generative grammar has been underlined by Matthews (1994).
society and history and a sense of social responsibility, concerns that represented one of the greatest achievements of early twentieth-century Europe, before it was overwhelmed by the Second World War and its political and cultural consequences. These values, which are of course primarily ideological, are still very much alive, and form part of the common heritage of the Old World. Bréal’s idea that linguistics is inherently practical and that this constitutes its true value, because it “parle à l’homme de lui-même”, returns in the 1920s and 1930s in the “golden period” of the Prague Circle, in the thinking of Mathesius. It surfaces again in the inaugural oration given by Anton Reichling on taking up the Chair in General Linguistics at the University of Amsterdam on 12 May 1947, in a Europe that had only just emerged from the devastation of the war. Although “general linguistics is in itself a theoretical science [...] it becomes practical in the extreme” in teaching, and as the “handmaiden” of psychology and psychiatry (sciences from which it is nevertheless quite distinct and independent). The ideal of linguistics as a field of specialisation that is still young and fragile, but “destined to render service to mankind”, and that of the linguist as someone dedicated “to the service of his neighbour, his people and mankind” (Reichling, [1947] 1948: 24) have lost neither their fascination nor their value. They are as pertinent today as they have ever been.

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