

LUIT: Language - a Unified and Integrative Theory

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1. Opening Remarks

Language is but an expression, albeit probably the most complex one, of human properties which are not linguistic in themselves. Accordingly, it must be explored within a larger framework that comprises other sciences of life. It is not mathematics that language and linguistics are related to, but biology. True, linguistics has always applied to biological metaphors (language *families*, *trees*, etc.). Time has come to go further, and that is the first task cast upon linguistics today: language's link to biology is not metaphoric but essential. In this sense LUIT is integrative: it integrates language into a broader framework. One corollary is that the concept 'natural language' is a pleonasm.

The second task linguistics is facing now – and in this sense LUIT is unified - is recognizing its own intrinsic unity, which follows from the intrinsic unity of language, due not to an imaginary universal grammar but to the fact that in language, all levels - phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics - are solidary and must therefore be investigated as such: as in any complex phenomenon, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, separate only on methodological grounds (Coseriu 1988). Linguistic analysis must reflect the unity of language and not impose on it a division into domains with little or no connection with each other, blurring what language is and the way it works. Syntax – including among others constituent-order¹ and agreement - is certainly not autonomous, but neither are phonology, morphology or lexicon; language's first aim is communication, *i.e.* transmitting pragmatic and conceptual content, and the means to do it is form, which in itself conveys and to a tangible extent reflects meaning, since the linguistic sign is not completely *arbitraire* but to some extent iconic; oppositions in language are not binary but scalar, and language is not synchronic or diachronic but dynamic. In the framework of LUIT, several notions are fundamentally reconsidered.

¹ 'Word-order' is inadequate, since morphemes too follow an order. Although rigid as compared to syntactic order, morphological order is not fortuitous, especially if we bear in mind that the verbal nexus, for example (see § 7), consists of two constituents, be their formal expression what it may. 'Constituent-order' is therefore a better term.

I. The ‘3rd person’. There is no such thing. A statement like ‘All grammatical persons display property X except the 3rd’ is tautological since what is commonly, unfortunately and mistakenly termed ‘3rd person’ is the entity (be it human or not) not taking part in the speech act as such. The features it partakes with the 1st and 2nd are accessory. Even a sentence like ‘Peter entered the room and greeted everybody’ needs a 1st person to be uttered, either orally or otherwise. The only persons in any true linguistic sense and *in any true grammatical sense* are those which represent speaker and hearer: the 1st and 2nd. Henceforth the so-called 3rd person will be called ‘non-person’, following Benveniste (1966) who intuited this but did not go to the heart of the matter.

Evidence is found in each and every realm of linguistic analysis. Morpho-phonologically, the non-person deictics are either identical or descended from deictic demonstratives which have nothing whatsoever to do with grammatical person as such, and are clearly different from the radical(s) of both the 1st and the 2nd person, which often share one and the same radical. This illustrates the common nature of the 1st and 2nd persons as opposed to the non-person. Such is the case, for example, in Afroasiatic (cf. Semitic 1st SG and 2nd SG /ʔan-/; non-person SG and deictic demonstrative /h-/) and in Amerind (cf. Quechua 1st and 2nd /-qa-/; non-person and deictic /-ay/). Yet even when 1st and 2nd do not share one and the same radical, they have nothing in common with that of the non-person: this is the situation in Indo-European (1st SG /m-/; 2nd SG /t-/; non-person SG and deictic /i-/; /ð□□□□/ etc. according to language or language-branch). The non-person can be any noun, nominal or deictic demonstrative, while 1st person and 2nd person are prototypically only and precisely that. In languages with grammatical agreement, non-person is very often marked by zero while the real (dialogic) grammatical persons have a positive explicit mark save in the imperative, whose subject is a 2nd person by default. The 1st and 2nd persons are prototypically human hence endowed with speech – which in this context is a capital property – subjectal, agentive, thematic, determined, marked by specific morphemes with often several variants in complementary distribution: an autonomous form, a bound form and a sagittal² form (me-to-you / you-to-me). The non-person is prototypically non-human, objectal, patientive, rhematic, not marked by specific morphemes but by deictic demonstratives which often have only one grammatical form but can be expressed by virtually all the noun forms and demonstrative forms in the language except those explicitly devoted to 1st and 2nd person.

In Silverstein’s (1976) animacy hierarchy, what he calls 1st and 2nd *personal pronouns* (and I call *personal deictics*, see § 2 below) are higher than what he calls 3rd *person pronoun* (*non-person deictic*). Estival and Myhill (1988) say Kham (Tibeto-Burman) has ergative case marking on nominal and non-person deictic agents, but not on 1st and 2nd person deictics; Squamish, formally split-ergative in terms of verb-agreement, has ergative case

² The term is Hagege’s. His teaching has been a stimulus to develop my views. *Gracias, Claudio.*

marking limited to non-person: ‘Both the Squamish ergative construction and the Shuswap passive are associated with less topical agents (*i.e.* agents representing new information and 3rd as opposed to 1st and 2nd person)’ (*ibid.*, 471). In Nootka (Trask 1979) if the agent is 1st or 2nd person, it is the subject and the verb is active; if the agent is the non-person and the patient is 1st or 2nd, the patient is the subject and the verb is passive; if both agent and patient are non-person, either may be the subject, the verb is active or passive respectively. In Basque, a direct object is indexed in the verb like an intransitive subject but a few forms differ in having the transitive subject marked thus and the direct verb unmarked. All are forms with non-person direct objects, which makes Trask suggest that ergativity in Basque was formerly confined to 1st and 2nd persons patients, and later the ergative case-marking was extended to the other transitive subjects.

The essential difference between on one hand the 1st and 2nd persons, on the other hand the non-person is as old as language itself. It follows from evolutionary reasons; *i.e.* from the essentially communicating nature of the former as opposed to the essentially communicated nature of the latter. Which brings us to the second notion to reconsider.

II. Deixis. A thorough analysis of demonstratives in a variety of languages from different families and types which I carried out after noticing, in 1987³, the importance of deictics in Pilagá, a Guaykuru (Amerind) language spoken in North-Eastern Argentina, led me to some unexpected conclusions: demonstratives are the only universal category both in diatopy and in diachrony, and they have little in common with nouns at any level - phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, acquisition, dia-glottics (borrowing): Deictics are highly frequent hence prototypically mono-syllabic, now as they are of supreme importance, they have an overall tendency to form conglomerates *even* in non-compounding languages like Semitic: Ar. /ha:-ða:/, ha:-ði-hi/, Hebr. /ha-la-ze, ze-hu, ha-ze-hu, zo?t-i, ha-zo?t-i/; but also in others: Fr. *ce-ci, celui-ci*, Lat. *hi-c, nun-c* (cf. Grk. *vvv*, Gmn. *nun*), Guarani *ko-a-va*, Basque *hu-n* “celui-ci”, all constitute conglomerates of deictics (for a more complete survey, cf. Kirtchuk-Halevi 2004a); morphologically they are often not analyzable - into root + scheme, for example - even in languages like Semitic in which that is the very basis of nominal and verbal morphology; neither are they categorically transferable by derivation or subject to declination; paradigmatically they constitute a specific, rather closed paradigm, expanding only within itself, whilst syntagmatically they often behave differently both than nouns and noun determiners. Which, incidentally, leads to consider them otherwise than noun determiners: in a clause made out

³ A symposium held the same year at Stanford on *Understanding Origins: Contemporary Views on the Origin of Life, Mind and Society* (1992, Varela F. & J.P. Dupuy eds., Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, Boston, London) ignored the origin of language. Likewise, the *Société de Linguistique de Paris* had explicitly banished communications on the topic until the present writer exposed his views in several reviews in the late nineteen eighties, then in his Ph.D. dissertation (1993). I do not know of any evolutionary linguistic theory on the origin of language prior to mine. Bühler (1934) explicitly rejects any evolutionary implication of his own theory (Kirtchuk-Halevi i.p.).

of *deictic + noun* (the order depending on the language), e.g. *'this book'*, the head might be the deictic. Syntactically, deictic demonstratives are determined by nature and are even the source of definite articles in all languages that possess such. Semantically they are quasi-void. Pragmatically they are vital. Synchronically they are universal and exist independently of grammatical constraints. Diachronically they are primary. Dia-glottically they are practically never borrowed. Functionally they primarily and essentially refer to extra-linguistic (+ discursive) entities. In each and every realm, prototypical deictics differ from prototypical nouns.

Neither category is reducible to the other one: deictic demonstratives reflect monstration, whereas nouns reflect conceptualisation. The former necessitate practically no memory and no calculating power, *i.e.* very reduced brain capacities, whereas the latter imply both. Deictics allow communication in context, where the referential center of both speaker and hearer is *ego*, *hic* and *nunc*, which links it both to phylogeny and ontogeny; conceptualisation, on the other hand, allows communication out of context and reflects a much more advanced stage of brain capacities. Which means that deicticity is not only an essential property of language, but also that deictics preceded nouns in the history of language diachronically and are more central in the body of language in synchrony. It is nouns that are pro-pronouns, and not the other way round, except in anaphora, another ill-used albeit most fashionable concept, which is nothing but a particular case of deixis: intra-discursive deixis. It is a confusion between the general and the particular case that generated the traditional view, reflected in the etymology of the term "pronoun".

The ultimate conclusion of this analysis points to deixis as the primordial and first linguistic function, at the origin of the language faculty (Kirtchuk-Halevi *passim*). Primitive dialogue founded on deixis and intonation turned a group of primates into 1st-and-2nd persons, who in this fashion became the creators of the language faculty. The element they pointed *at* or reacted *to*, *i.e.* the non-person, was the trigger for its creation.

Only after proto-linguistic communication emerged through deixis and intonation (see below § 6), could the cerebral equipment necessary to deal with symbolic elements develop, perhaps as an autopoietic evolutionary outcome (Maturana & Varela 1980) of the communicational needs fulfilled until then only in context. Hence could the sophisticated functions of language (cognition, categorization) evolve, enhancing this primitive communicative and context-dependent device to the decisively advantageous communicative *and* cognitive one called human language⁴.

⁴What Givón (2002) calls pre-language is in fact pre-grammar. His claim about conceptualization as a direct outcome of ocular vision, without previously passing through the decisive stage of *monstration*, *i.e.* deixis, lacks both consistence and coherence: as pointed out by Maturana & Varela (1985), linguistic objects do not ontologically precede the coordinating actions of the people who construct them in language nor does the signification of words precede the things to which they apply; there is no Kantian world 'an sich' on the one hand and on the other hand a domain in which that world is

III. Multiple Encoding. Agreement reflects the formal repercussion of one or more properties of the nucleus on other members of the clause or sentence, which in a structural perspective is sheer redundancy. In the framework of LUIT, on the other hand, the fact that the same data are encoded in several places in the clause or sentence is not a waste of time or energy. Quite the opposite, it facilitates comprehension, memorization and reaction, and at the same time it allows for other mechanisms like constituent-order to express pragmatic functions. Traffic lights are characterized by their colours, but at the same time by their respective positions. In language too, data are encoded at several levels simultaneously, *viz.* morphological-cum-phonological, *e.g.*, a specific form with a specific intonation, cf. Fr.

- (1) Va ↓↓
 go-I.
 'Go !'

Moreover, those mechanisms are mutually correlated: it is the *intonational prominent part* not its flat part that corresponds to the *informational prominent part* (see below § 5). It follows that agreement is not restricted to morpho-syntax or, for that matter, to grammar. It exists in language as a whole, although it is not always explicitly codified. If language were independent of functional and cognitive factors, such a profusion of superposed encoding devices would be a waste. Hence, not only intellectual but also sensorial channels are used to facilitate understanding, response and storage of data. It is the non-employment of those channels that would be anti-economic, since it would give-up using some cognitive faculties of the human being, who is more than a (calculating) machine. This is the end of redundancy in language. Multiple encoding and some of its grammatical manifestations, including agreement, are narrowly linked to another property of language, which originates in cognitive, functional and communicative factors:

IV. 'Topicalization'⁵ and 'Dislocation'. Both conventional twin-terms imply the pre-existence of a canonical syntactic structure: a speaker wishing to modify the informative equilibrium of its components would change their order. To obtain the pragmatic goal of 'topicalization' the speaker would 'dislocate' syntax. Iconicity, however, proves crucial in falsifying that opinion: communicatively, given (= topical, thematic) information is known, whilst new (= focal, rhematic) one is not. When the speaker begins an utterance by the topic, he does nothing but posing the basis upon which will be constructed the rest of the

symbolically represented: conceptual reality is strictly related to the way in which it is constituted in language. Nothing of this, however, applies to what I call *deictic reality*, which implies no conceptualization whatsoever but simply shared attention towards a non-conceptual object which is *pointed at*: this is Bühler's [1934] 1982 *monstratio ad oculos*.

Thus, it is deixis that is at the crossroads between perception and linguistic communication.

⁵ In this paper, the terms *topic / theme* are used indistinctly, as are their counterparts *focus / rheme*.

utterance, namely its focus, which is, from a communicative viewpoint, the new constituent. The Arab grammarians of the first centuries of the Hegira intuited this, who parsed the noun sentence into /mubtada'/ 'beginning' and /xabar/ '[new] information'. This iconic link between given information and first position, new information and non first position, shows that an utterance built according to this pattern follows a natural order⁶. When the utterance begins with the topic, whatever its syntactic function, it does not result from the dis-location of a previously established syntactic order.

In the following examples, the topic is placed at the beginning of the utterance. It may bear an ascending intonation contour (noted by upward arrows) and be followed by a pause (noted by closing brackets). Only then comes the rest of the utterance.

French (Hirst and Di Cristo 1998)

- (2) Mon voisin ↑] il est toujours malade ↓]
 My neighbour, he's always ill
 (2a.) Mon voisin? (↑↑) Il est toujours malade ↓ ↓]]
 My neighbour? He's always ill.

Argentina Spanish (Kirtchuk-Halevi, native speaker)

- (3) Vos ↑, dec-i-le lo que quier-a-s ↓]
 2 SG say-I.2SG-3SG.3A N.PR R wish-S-2SG
 You, tell him whatever you wish

The utterances with 'topicalization by dislocation' belong to a primary, spontaneous, immediate, emotive, spoken-language mode of expression; they are especially frequent in child language. It would be incoherent for such a mode to require more, and more complex intellectual operations than the sophisticated, rational, mediate, adult-like, written-language mode. An utterance beginning with the topic, then, does not result from the modification of a canonical syntactic order but quite the opposite: it precedes it. Intonation and prosody support this claim inasmuch as the constituent supposedly dislocated is at the basis of an ascending curve and followed by a pause, which separates it from the rest of the utterance. As can be seen from the French examples above, the construction parallels the interrogative mood, with a question (topic) and answer (focus).

The linguistic message is not to be parsed, fundamentally, into Subject and Predicate (and certainly not into Subject and Verb, see § 7 below) but into [*topic* and] *focus*.

V. Focus Intonation. The focus or rheme is the most important part of the utterance from the communicative point of view. In other words, it is at the prominent part of the informative contour. It tends to be in final position, which is the cognitively privileged one as it is closer to the point where speech stops. Thus, the item that occupies it is more likely than those in non-final position to be stored in memory, processed and reacted to in real

⁶ Languages where the rheme comes in first position often stress the first syllable of the word (e.g. Finno-Ugric). Thus, the correlation between phonological and communicative salience is respected.

time. Iconically, the focus tends to be also at the salient part of the intonative contour; it follows that it cannot be clitic, cf. in English

- (4) JD: You live here, don't you? [jul˘vhi::r ↑ dontju]
NW: Who lives...?! [hul˘::vz ↓]
- (5) A. John: Did Lucy eat the cake?
B. Mary: *I* did!

(4) is a piece of dialogue from 'Rebel without a cause'. In James Dean's question, the topic is *you* and the focus is *here*, the verb 'live' being little more than a copula. In Nathalie Wood's answer, however, 'live' is placed at the intonational prominent part by its vowel's length and frequency: thus, it gets communicative primacy as well and becomes the semantically and pragmatically charged focus of the utterance. In (5), B begins with the subject, which is in the position normally devoted to the topic. It occupies, however, the salient part of the intonation contour: therefore, despite its syntactic rôle and position, it is interpreted as the focus of the utterance (see § 6 below).

All this too shows that in order to transmit communicative content, expressed primarily by intonation, prosody and pragmatic constituent order, form and substance are narrowly interwoven, and that those factors and their linguistic expressions override and determine morpho-syntactic forms and rôles, not the other way round.

VI. Intonation. Indeed a property of language that has to be reconsidered is intonation, generally included among the supra-segmental, i.e. additional features of the linguistic sound (in both senses of the word) component. This is nonsense: intonation overrides other formal properties of the utterance; incidentally, it is intonation, too, that allows for elementary communication with infants, with foreign-language speakers and even with animals. All this tends to prove that intonation is not supra-segmental in any true linguistic sense: intonation is not an additional linguistic feature but at least a co-segmental and perhaps a sub-segmental phoneme, in the sense that it is prior and more important, from the communicative point of view, than the segmental part of the utterance. Every syntactically constituted sentence has an intonation, but there are communicatively relevant intonations without sentences. Even languages that we only know through written documents had an oral expression, which preceded their pictorial, ideographic, syllabic or alphabetical representation; nowadays too, most languages are not written but only spoken. To put it boldly, all people communicate by talking, but not all people communicate by writing, and that is all the more true as one goes back in time in diachrony, in ontogeny and in phylogeny. The relation of intonational patterns, present in each and every language to this day and which are cross-linguistically amazingly akin (Hirst and Di Cristo 1998) and

segmental phonemes, whatever their representation by current orthographies or by IPA, is therefore analogous to that of deictics and nouns: the opposite of the received opinion⁷.

To claim that an utterance is ambiguous on the grounds that intonation is not transcribed is tantamount to claiming that a depicted horse is ambiguous on the grounds that the organs affecting it to one sex or the other are not represented. The real animal is either a horse or a mare, and the real utterance means often one thing or another (or another, etc.) depending on intonation. Making linguistics on the basis of deficient transcriptions is equivalent to making zoology on the basis of depicted animals.

VII. Verb. Contrarily to what is maintained in all theoretical frameworks either implicitly (*e.g.* by Greenberg, who labels the main syntactic functions – rather incoherently – S[ubject], O[bject] and V[erb]) or explicitly (*e.g.* by Chomsky, who parses the S(entence) into N[oun]P[hrase] and V[erb]P[hrase]), the category ‘Verb’ is not universal synchronically and is recent in diachrony, ontogeny and phylogeny. Moreover, even in languages where it is a clearly distinct part of discourse, it is a complex, second-order part of discourse since it is a nexus (Jespersen 1924) made of an actant and a lexical theme, a nexus whose morphological expression varies from one language to another. The verb category is not an essential one in any real linguistic sense, quite the opposite: the more clearly distinct it is, the more recent and the more superfluous – from a communicative viewpoint – the distinction. If linguistics had not been created by native-speakers of Indo-European tongues, the verb as such would have been mentioned merely as one of the possible realizations of the predicative relation, which in turn is nothing but the grammaticalization of a theme-rheme pragmatic relation. Akkadian does not possess suffixed verbal forms and shows the emergence of this prototypical characteristic of Semitic morphology for the perfective aspect out of the coalescence of a nominal stem (‘stative, permansive’ iconically marked by a long vowel) and a personal deictic. The theme-rheme relation, first expressed by pragmatic and phonological means (the thematic deictic was probably facultative, initially) grammaticalized to a predicative relation, expressed by a frozen term-order which ended up morphologizing into a new predicative part of speech called ‘verb’ (a thorough analysis is to be found *ap.* Cohen, 1984; see also Testen 2004). In Indo-European too verbal personal indices can be shown to reflect erstwhile autonomous ones. This is the diachronic process at the basis of the synchronic verbal category cross-linguistically. Different languages are at

⁷ Tones are a different matter. Hombert (1975) shows that they emerge following the attrition of segmental phonemes and that no language is tonal to begin with. An example is Contemporary Hebrew, where the neutralization of the opposition between Classical qāmac and pātah along with the attrition of the fricative pharyngeal led to a re-phonologization of those oppositions between identical vowels in terms of tone. All this tends to prove that the so-called suprasegmentals are not of one and the same nature. This part of phonology – and perhaps phonology as a whole – must be re-founded, especially when one bears in mind that, contrarily to the structuralist dogma, phonemes *do* carry meanings albeit subconsciously (Fonagy 1983.)

different stages of the process, with or without morphologization, with or without freezing of constituent-order.

Semitic as a whole illustrates the process whereby grammaticalized templates emerge: Bohas (1997) and Kirtchuk-Halevi (2004b) show the Semitic root to be bi-phonemic and not tri-phonemic to begin with, so that by no means can the verb in this language-family have pre-existed as a category either to the root, to the morphological patterns or to other parts of discourse. *Mutatis mutandis*, this statement is valid for language as such. Among the categories mistakenly considered as indispensable and universal, the verbal one is the last to emerge, many millenaries after the *Homo Sapiens sapiens* endowed himself with the language faculty and many months after the *Homo Sapiens sapiens* infant enables that faculty in his own system. Moreover while prototypical verbs are active, transitive and perfective, many real utterances in real language are none of those: most utterances in real languages, be they grammatical sentences or not, do not contain real verbs; that the copula, which marks that a nominal or a deictic has a predicative role, be construed as a verb is merely a grammatical trick played by certain languages in order to confer to their grammar a uniform look and to allow for the absence of an actant (since it can be represented in the copula). Save for Indo-European ears, a sentence like 'This is a table and that is a chair' is not more verbal than 'Me Tarzan, you Jane' (ungrammatical in English, perfectly formed in many other languages), 'Like father, like son', 'Really?', 'How wonderful!' or 'This way'. Intransitivity appears to be not only more frequent but also more ancient than transitivity; in ergative languages too: Nichols (1982, 457-8) calls Ingush 'fundamentally intransitive... the verbal morphosyntax appears to be geared for accepting intransitives as input rather than for producing them as output.... Even the underived transitives... include many... which can also function as intransitives' (see also Hagège 2002). The link in many languages, either in synchrony or in diachrony, between agent and possessor, also supports my claim.

2. Closing remarks

The advantage of LUIT, based on observation of linguistic data and reflection thereupon is manifold: it (1) enriches the linguistic scene with data that until now were at best treated as merely 'expressive' (Bally [1932] 1965) or at worst deliberately left out of it; (2) establishes clear links between linguistic facts that until now seemed unrelated to each other; (3) does so by an inversion of perspectives between *cause* and *effect*; *central* and *marginal*, *prior* and *late*, and in this sense it is a Copernican revolution in linguistics; (4) allows to explore the development of language not only from present day backwards, but also from its evolutionary beginning onwards, *towards* present time: to dig the tunnel in both directions, so to speak, which is bound to yield faster and better results; finally it (5) links language to other phenomena characteristic of the form of life known as *Homo sapiens sapiens*. Taken individually the phenomena dealt with may seem 'expressive', the term that for a long time

allowed to account for them without integrating them into analysis. Yet their omnipresence at all realms and at all levels of language, any language at any stage, leads to see them not as accidents but as manifestations of the nature of language and its speakers. Of language not grammar for it is the former not the latter that is the object of linguistics. Grammar is only the emerged part of the iceberg called language. All linguistic theories are false which postulate (I) three equal grammatical persons, and/or (II) deictics as pro-nouns, and/or (III) multiple encoding as restricted to grammar, and/or (IV) syntactic structures as commanding communicative ones, and/or (V) non-segmentals as additional phonemes, and/or (VI) verb as such in language as such, and/or (VII) language as restricted to grammar.

The relationship between structural linguistics and LUIT is akin to the one between classic and modern physics (as for generative linguistics, it evokes ptolemaic astronomy). If we (a) look at language as it is through its particular manifestations including among others infant speech, spontaneous adult speech and creoles; (b) pay the communicatively and pragmatically salient elements of language as much attention as the one devoted to the conceptually important ones; (c) consider diachrony not as historicity but as dynamism; (d) conceive human beings not as rational animals but as animals capable of reason, as Jonathan Swift had it; (e) grasp all the information linguistic data and speaking people offer us and ask all the questions they keep replying to, we are bound to conclude that language is part and parcel of (human) evolution.

Abbreviations

A - actant; I - imperative; N.PR; - neuter pronoun; R - relative; S – subjunctive; SG – singular

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