UNIOR
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ANNALI
sezione
linguistica

ISSN 2281-6585

ANNALI

del Dipartimento di Studi
Letterari, Linguistici e Comparati
Sezione linguistica

AIΩN
N.S. 7
2018

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI NAPOLI
"L'ORIENTALE"

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2018

Annali-Sezione Linguistica, c/o *Alberto Manco, Università degli studi di Napoli "L'Orientale", Dipartimento di Studi Letterari, Linguistici e Comparati, Palazzo Santa Maria Porta Cœli, Via Duomo 219, 80138 Napoli – albertomanco@unior.it*

ISSN 2281-6585
Registrazione presso il Tribunale di Napoli n. 2901 del 9-1-1980

Rivista fondata da Walter Belardi (1959 – 1970) e diretta da Domenico Silvestri (1979 – 2014)

web: www.aionlinguistica.com
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INDICE

ROSANNA SORNICOLA

THE POLYPHONY OF VOICES OF THE PRAGUE CIRCLE: REAPPRAISING MATHESIUS'S ROLE VIS-À-VIS JAKOBSON'S

Per Cristina Vallini,
amica et magistra

Abstract

In questo lavoro si intendono mettere in rilievo il carattere composito e le diverse correnti culturali e scientifiche del Circolo di Praga che concorsero a sviluppare le idee struttural-funzionali della linguistica del primo Novecento. Le due componenti fondamentali che interagirono in maniera dialettica, a volte con delle tensioni e contrasti che rimasero sotto traccia e che pure si possono intravedere, furono il *milieu* ceco, aggregato attorno Mathesius, ispiratore, promotore e primo Presidente del Circolo, e il gruppo dei "young Russian scolars" venuti a Praga in seguito alla Rivoluzione di ottobre, in particolare Jakobson e Trubetzkoy. Il centro di interesse del lavoro è costituito dall'analisi della figura di Mathesius e da un bilancio del suo ruolo, considerato decisivo, nel costituirsi del funzionalismo strutturale praghese. L'esame delle concezioni dello studioso boemo fa emergere una linea di pensiero radicata nelle tradizioni di studio filologico-linguistico e nello storicismo europeo e definibile come "funzionalismo storicistico". La posizione di Mathesius è contrapposta a quella di Jakobson, il cui strutturalismo funzionalistico influenzato dagli ambienti intellettuali ed accademici russi è caratterizzato da rilevanti discontinuità culturali, ideologiche e scientifiche rispetto al pensiero storicistico europeo.

Parole chiave: Strutturalismo funzionale, Circolo di Praga, Mathesius, Jakobson, funzionalismo storico

The aim of this work is to highlight the non-homogeneous character and the different cultural and scientific components of the Prague Circle functional-structuralism. The two fundamental groups that interacted with each other – sometimes with hidden tensions and contrasts that can be glimpsed at – were the Czech milieu gathered around Mathesius, the inspirer, promoter and first

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 DOI: 10.4410/AIONL.7.2018.007

President of the Circle, and the "young Russian scholars" who convened in Prague in the aftermaths of the October Revolution, in particular Jakobson and Trubetzkoy. Focusing on the figure of Mathesius, the work presents an appraisal of his fundamental role in the creation and development of the Prague functional structuralism. The analysis of Mathesius' ideas on language highlights a line of thought rooted in the philological tradition and in European historicism which can be defined "historical functionalism". Mathesius' position is contrasted with that of Jakobson, whose functional structuralism influenced by Russian intellectual and academic contexts is marked by considerable cultural, ideological and scientific departures from European historicism.

Keywords: Functional structuralism, Prague Circle, Mathesius, Jakobson, historical functionalism

1. Introduction*

Functionalism can be seen as a complex set of theoretical notions, methodological approaches and practical applications relating to individual and social uses of languages. It has for some time been central to the scenario of European linguistics, of which it is a radical component. However, for various reasons it is by no means easy to reconstruct its history. Apart from the fact that *function* is a polysemous term causing terminological and conceptual problems, the label *functionalism* covers diverse currents of thought, though they are connected by common approaches and assumptions.

This nucleus of theories and methodologies is usually seen as having its roots in the Circle of Prague, but it would seem to have been in existence much earlier in that wealth of linguistic and philosophical reflection which, in the late decades of the 19th century, characterised a new phase in Europe's cultural panorama: positivism gave way to the principles of historicism with the concepts of function, value and purpose at its centre.

The founding of the Circle itself is much less homogeneous and linear than has sometimes been thought in historiographical research. The writings of the Prague Circle scholars show scientific, cultural and ideological traditions which are distinct, at times in contrast with each other and im-

* I wish to thank Peter Matthews who read and commented on this paper with useful observations.

 DOI: 10.4410/AIONL.7.2018.007

perfectly blended in models not easy to trace to a single common denominator. The statements regarding the sharing of premises, aims and methods that are encountered in some of the writings of the Prague linguists, especially those of Mathesius and Jakobson[1], appear to be influenced by the international climate of 1920s Prague, with its deeply-felt appeal to the values of international social and cultural collaboration and to the synergy of intellectual forces at work in the young Czechoslovak Republic. These values had been explicitly emphasized by Masaryk, a leading intellectual who was the Republic's first president and who had considerable influence over Mathesius and other exponents of the Circle[2]. The feeling they had of the importance of collaboration with their Russian colleagues, which is sometimes made explicit by Mathesius, can be interpreted in terms of the assertive Pan-Slavist tendencies of Czech intellectuals[3] which were reinforced, in the years after the October Revolution, by the drift to Prague of intellectuals working in the Muscovite and St Petersburg cultural and scientific circles.

But the two main worlds that came into contact, the Mitteleuropean Prague and the mixed Russian context, were radically different, more easily identified by the optimism of their general will and ideology than by any particular approach or theoretical and methodological choices. The routes taken by the Russians and the directions they were to follow had little in common with those of the members of the Prague *milieu*, as Toman (1995) has shown. And, on thinking it over, the period in which the Circle was active was a brief one: little less than fifteen years if one counts the pioneering years of its preparation to the substantial reduction in activity during the war; and little more than a decade considering the date of the first meeting of the Circle in 1926 to the dramatic events that led to the departures and disappearance of some of its members in 1939[4]. Some studies have pointed to the heterogeneous and composite character of the experiences the members of the Circle had to face and interact with in

[1] Cf. Mathesius (1936a), Jakobson (1933).

[2] Since the time of his article on linguistic potentiality, Mathesius recognised his intellectual debt to Masaryk's ideas: see here n 41.

[3] On Pan-Slavism and its defence, see Masaryk's (1918: 58-61) interesting comments.

[4] For the history of these events, see Mathesius (1936a); Vachek (1966: 3-14, and especially 12).

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Prague (Raynaud, 1990; Toman, 1995), analysing the various cultural environments they came from. However, these studies too end up by pointing to the prevalence of the unity that held these experiences together, analysing the production of the *Theses* of 1929, the so-called *Theses* of 1935, and other statements of general principles. It is certainly possible to identify what Vachek (1966) called "a general pattern of the Prague theory"[5]. It is less clear to recognise the extent to which the assembling of this theory was reconstruction work on the part of Vachek, who in some way ended up by putting the diverse characteristic premises, aims and method of individual researchers in second place. In other words (and making recourse to metaphor) we might wonder whether with their different positions the members of the Circle played the same tune, or whether they produced a "polyphony" in which each specific instrument played its own. Surely there were "choral" moments, like the preparation of the *Theses* of 1929, and to a less extent of the *Theses* of 1935. But how "choral" were they?

If we go beyond the admittedly interesting statements of principles made by those who had a leading role, however, the intricate intertwining of ideas in the Circle cannot easily be disentangled in such a way as to enable us to trace their origins and follow their developments.

Furthermore, the historical relationships between the Prague Circle and the various movements that, in one way or another, have called on its wealth of ideas, are multi-faceted. Each of these movements can be traced to a different historical-cultural context of 20th-century Europe. What seems to be fundamental is that the history of the origins and development of linguistic functionalism during the 20th century reflects many aspects and events of European history, and this interlacing complicates the analysis far beyond the difficulties of characterising the influences and relationships which are a normal part of the historian's work.

This paper aims to trace and analyse some of the main ideas of functionalism in their historical development by examining the scientific *milieu* and individuals that shaped them in an attempt to bring to light the complex "polyphony" of voices of European functionalism. Here with "polyphony" 'a multiplicity of voices' is meant whose combination may have been less

[5] This is the title of chapter 2 (Vachek, 1966: 15-39).

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harmonious than it has been assumed, and at times even not harmonious at all. This is perhaps in the nature of all scientific associations, and is especially to be expected in a group of people with so many differences in background, education, personality and purposes. "Polyphony" is thus no more than a metaphor for hinting at these differences and perhaps contrasts, the extent of which we may never know exactly, and for developing a narrative that aims at representing the complex life of the Prague Circle.

2. The Prague context and some leading linguists who came to meet in Prague

A starting point for an understanding of the diversity of Slavic cultural traditions which found a meeting-point in Prague and a way to compare and elaborate ideas in the Circle, is to describe analyses of the Prague context carried out by its leading figures Mathesius and Jakobson. We shall see that, on the basis of what lay behind statements of unanimity and the importance given to working together, there were signs of rifts which were not easy to reconcile. There are few explicit references to this fact, but nonetheless they would seem to be significant. Some are well-known and have been for some time, others have been noted more recently[6]. However, they are worth attention in this paper, taking the 'human factor' into account, by which I mean the various figures who entered into relationship with each other and played a role which was by no means negligible in creating the cultural context of the Circle. Raynaud (1990: 332) described Mathesius as being "instancabile e acuto tessitore di relazioni tra ambiti diversi"[7]. To this psychological description it might be added that he had the open-mindedness, energy and gentlemanly detachment of one who knew his roots were firm, characteristics suggesting true intellectual independence. He also had a profound ethical and political sense which led him to take an interest in the practical applications of linguistics. There are various signs

[6] The issue of the different traditions and attitudes in Prague has recently been viewed as a historiographical question. Raynaud (1990: 118) wondered "in che misura il Circolo avvertì o anzi sottolineò l'incidenza, sul proprio sorgere e affermarsi, della pluralità di culture e lingue presenti a Praga negli anni della sua attività". See also Toman (1995: 87-133).

[7] Unless explicitly indicated, all quotations are given in the original text.

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that he was open to dialogue, eclectic but capable of fully understanding all that was new in the international scientific scenario and of embracing it with thoughtful judgement and a personal re-elaboration. He entered the Carolina University of Prague at the very beginning of the century, in 1901, immediately after the intellectually vibrant years of the end of 19th century, and soon became a young professor of English Studies.

Mathesius underlines the importance of international collaboration in words which seem inspired by an ideology of scientific research as an opportunity for scholars to cooperate beyond the confines of their individual countries:

> As an organization of research workers, we have formed a working community of a specific type. We formed an association on the basis of a collective effort of research workers and we willingly accept into our group any qualified worker who agreed with our basic standpoint and was prepared for honest cooperation. *We have never been eager to increase our numbers because we have been intent only on the possibility of working jointly, not on the acquiring of positions of power* (Mathesius, 1936a: 149, my italics).

There is no doubt, however, that Mathesius must have been perfectly aware of the differences between the contribution to the work of the Circle of the Czech members and that of the Russians. He expresses his criticism with inoffensive courtesy when he contests the view of certain detractors (who remain nameless)[8] according to which the "working symbiosis" between Czech scholars and "the young Russian scholars" would have led to a watering-down of the Circle's activities, and that the Circle itself would have become little more than "a Czech application of the teaching of Russian linguistics and literary historical theories" (Mathesius, 1936a: 149). The detractors' thesis was demolished by an argument initially based on the statement of an ideological principle of scientific progress: "Even if this were true, it would hardly be objectionable because everywhere in the world progress in scientific research consists, for the greatest part, in the development and new application of ideas taken from elsewhere" (Mathe-

[8] Some idea of who these detractors were is indicated by Mathesius's (1936a) and Jakobson's (1933) critical description of the outdated cultural and academic *milieu* in Prague.

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sius, 1936a: 149), which is close to being an epitome of Mathesius's development as a scholar. This is followed by some statements that are especially interesting as an evaluation of the state of research in his country, which had its independence but was marginal compared with more advanced countries, and show his negative reaction to German scientific influence in the Czech academic circles of the early decades of the 20th century:

> Czech research work especially has had – apart from rare exceptions – a character of more or less independent marginal notes on the scientific development outlined by workers of pioneer foreign countries. Besides, there might be some merit in introducing Russian influence into the quarters in which an excessive hegemony had belonged to the influence of German research work (Mathesius, 1936a: 149)[9].

But the essence of his argument is another and concerns his claim, proud even if expressed with elegant understatement, to the independence and specificity of the ideas developed by the Czechs. Mathesius does not dwell on any explicit attempt to describe an organic scheme, but limits himself to mentioning his firm and long-held anti-neogrammatical opinions and the autonomous nature of the literary theories formulated by Mukařovský. However, these two references are significant. The first, in particular, is formulated in such a way as to make explicit Mathesius's awareness of himself as the leader of the Prague group. It relates to a nucleus of ideas that, though described oppositively, constituted a central aspect of the renewal of linguistic models between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th (see para. 3.1.)

> But the reality is not so simple by far and the thesis of our opponents alleging our passive acceptance of Russian models is not correct. I had sailed against the Neogrammarian tide long before I met the young Russian linguists, and as regards the theory of literature, mere reference to J. Mukařovský's thesis of 1923 will suffice to convince that, here too, the tree of the new conception of research has been deeply rooted in the native soil. Our meeting with the Russians has brought us support and instruction, and it is only honest to say in

[9] Raynaud (1990: 119) has drawn attention to this passage.

 DOI: 10.4410/AIONL.7.2018.007

> public, at this opportunity of the tenth anniversary of our Circle, that we are sincerely grateful to them for this. On the other hand, it was not always ourselves who played the part of the pupils. Our symbiosis has developed, in a very pleasant way, the mutual "give and take" which should characterize any and every occasion of scientific cooperation, and especially a genuine cooperation of Slavic research workers. This is due to the positive creative effort which has been typical of the Prague Linguistic Circle from its very beginnings. And positive research work will be our goal also in the years to come. We are certain that the balance of our activity is a good justification of our work and that it will be even better in the future (Mathesius, 1936a: 149-150).

Why is it that the typical ideas of the Praguean environment are not presented in a well-structured and organic way? One reason might be that Mathesius is simply giving a brief sketch of the Circle's activities. Another might be that, for diplomatic reasons, he does not wish to create polarities within the group, especially when his aim is to draw up an overall positive picture of the history and achievements of the Circle's scientific activity. Apart from this, there are other aspects to consider. The entire passage is coloured by Pan-Slavic ideology applied to scientific circles, a fact of considerable interest which shows Mathesius's close relationship with the cultural climate of Prague and the young Czechoslovak Republic. Of course, without wishing to over-emphasize his role as precursor, at the very beginning of his appraisal of the Circle's history Mathesius had discretely and at greater length outlined his personal scientific development, the ideas that had attracted his attention ever since his university years, the teachers who had inspired him (see section 3.). In his presentation he recounts how, from the early years of the 20th century, characteristics of his line of research were present: the idea of potentiality of linguistic phenomena, the central position given to analysis of the statics rather than the dynamics of language, the awareness of the advantages "of the procedure going from the function to the form, in other words, of the functional method" (Mathesius, 1936a: 138), the interest in modern languages.

There are some subtle points that, in my view, cannot be ignored: his designation of the "young Russian linguists" seems to point not only to the generation gap but also a difference in experience, which is made more ev-

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ident by the reference to himself as having for a long time been an opponent of neogrammatical ideas. Also, in this same appraisal, Roman Jakobson is described as "a young graduate of Moscow University, who came to Prague in June, in 1920, and called on me for the first time in September that year" (Mathesius, 1936a: 138). His opinion of the young Russian is very positive, but is expressed especially in relation to the fact that he shared Mathesius's long-term interests: "This very well-informed and extremely clever young Russian brought with him from Moscow vivid interest in the very kind of linguistic problems which had been at the center of my attention" (Mathesius, 1936a: 138-139). A further good quality in Jakobson is noted: "He greatly encouraged me in my linguistic efforts by supplying me with evidence that elsewhere, too, such problems were being persistently attacked" (Mathesius, 1936a: 139). Mathesius feels less alone now that he knows that the issues he is so much interested in are also being debated in Russia; and he is comforted by having at his side two young linguists who share his own line of research. Here Jakobson is associated with Bohumil Trnka, who became Mathesius's assistant in 1923.

The entire picture of Mathesius's memories of his early relationship to Jakobson conveys the impression of a mature professor (in the early Twenties Mathesius was already forty) who had long reflected on the important issues of theory and methods of language analysis in an atmosphere of isolation compared with those nearest him[10] and of a talented young man, enthusiastic and desirous of a climate of intellectual exchanges similar to that he had enjoyed in Moscow. That the Prague professor felt a cultural distance between himself and the young Russian is witnessed by a cryptic statement which it is difficult to interpret. In Vachek's English translation of the article we read: "The lack of close contact with the Prague philological workers […] was felt with equal intensity now by Jakobson, who had been accustomed to a very different atmosphere in his pre-Prague years" (Mathesius, 1936a: 139). Toman's translation (1995: 4) is slightly different: "The lack of lively scholarly contact with the Prague philological communi-

[10] Some of Mathesius's statements seem to suggest a certain discomfort and suffering in earlier years which were caused by the Prague linguistic environment. There is explicit mention of "[a] lack of close contact with the Prague philological workers, which used to depress me" (Mathesius, 1936a: 139).

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ty […] was now felt very intensely by Jakobson, who came to Prague from quite different circumstances". Toman dedicates an entire chapter of his book to an analysis of these "other circumstances", a chapter which is a detailed account of the cultural and academic life of Russia (see Toman, 1995: 43-69; Sornicola, 2014).

It therefore seems plausible that, in its initial phase, there was a certain cultural distance between the Circle's members and that they were aware of it. Toman too, with regard to the preliminary meeting of 13 March 1925 called by Mathesius with Jakobson, Trnka and Karcevskij [11], noted that the four men were rather different from each other:

> Mathesius was a professor of English and apparently a somewhat dry Protestant; Bohumil Trnka was his disciple and devoted assistant; Sergej Karcevskij, a Russian emigré, had been a social activist and a student of linguistics in Geneva; and Roman Jakobson, an avant-gardist and a Formalist, was now an employee of the Soviet diplomatic mission in Prague and, in the eyes of many, a Soviet spy. How did they communicate? (Toman, 1995: 5)

Apart from the communication problem, which cannot have been negligible (among other things, what language did they use together?), Toman is right in affirming that "all we know is that the four shared a passionate dissatisfaction with the old linguistics", but we cannot perhaps be so sure that they shared "a vision of an alternative" (Toman, 1995: 5), especially in the early 1920s.

Jakobson's statements regarding the birth of the group and the Prague Circle are a kind of "counterpoint" to Mathesius's account. Raynaud (1990: 119) has observed that Jakobson deals with the Czech identity and its scientific and cultural expressions "con quella familiarità e quel distacco che possono venire da chi, senza essere nativo, diviene selettivamente frequentatore e conoscitore di una realtà e di un ambiente". Against the "Praga arena della micrologia erudita" of the early 20th century, she sets the 1930s city, the "centro di un penetrante pensiero teorico" (Raynaud, 1990: 119). The criticism of

[11] This appears to be a further indication of Mathesius's authority of which he must have been well aware, as he says "on March 13, 1925, I invited to a gathering Jakobson and Trnka, and with them Karcevskij" (Mathesius, 1936a: 139).

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the positivistic orientation of Prague cultural life before the advent of the Circle is associated with the feeling of Jakobson and that of Mathesius[12]. And the statement that the theoretical work of the members of the Circle, had, as it were, "fallen into a hole" ("dialogue" is always absent)[13] seems to echo Mathesius's concerns regarding the internal life of the Circle following the achievements of members of the group in international *milieux*[14].

[12] Criticism of the old positivistic Prague *milieu* is unanimous, but the tones differ. Jakobson attacks Gebauer and his school with a certain violence. With regard to Gebauer and his students' collection and organization of material for the historical grammar and Czech language dictionary, he compares the results to "un edificio imponente, solido e semplice come la mentalità del suo fondatore. Non artistiche rifiniture, non il lampo di un'idea che basta a sé stessa, non la girandola di ipotesi seducenti che troviamo nella storia della lingua russa creata da Šaxmatov. Al contrario, i materiali raccolti pesano parecchio, e dietro il peso dei materiali e la lineare semplicità delle formule si nasconde la soggettività delle costruzioni, che si presentano sotto forma di verità pedagogiche, mentre Šaxmatov non le presenta che come base di discussione. L'"imperativo sociale" esigeva da Gebauer una norma scientifica a lunga scadenza, senza probabilità d'una prossima revisione. Al più piccolo tentativo di discussione, Gebauer ricordava che la discussione fermava i lavori di costruzione. Ogni deviazione, anche nei particolari […] era severamente condannata. *I problemi di principio durante quel periodo erano severamente messi da parte*: si assicura che Gebauer si sia pronunziato con tutta la sua autorità contro la creazione di una docenza di linguistica generale. *Era naturale che questo positivismo estremo e questo culto fanatico dei fatti isolati dovesse condurre ad una reazione radicale*" (Jakobson, 1933: 540, my italics). Mathesius's criticisms are more sober, even when he shows Gebauers's ideas to be debatable, and he deals with more specific issues like the functional theory of the subject (see Mathesius, 1924). Furthermore, Mathesius voices his appreciation of certain exponents of the old guard such as Zubatý, who often commented on the inadequacy of the neogrammatical approach "which cannot account for the complexity and delicacy of the phenomena of actual living languages" (Vachek, 1970: 235, and earlier Trnka, Vachek et alii, 1958: 36). On the antimechanistic views of Zubatý, see Raynaud (1990: 123). These views were shared by Mathesius and his followers, Vachek and Trnka. On Zubatý and Mathesius, see also Sornicola (1991: 35-36). Mukařovský attributes to Zubatý the independent formulation of the principles of the new poetics: long before formalism, he described the structural connection between the phonic and the semantic aspects of poetry (Raynaud, 1990: 124, n 281). On the Prague cultural background before the constitution of the Circle, see also Vachek (1970).

[13] Jakobson (1933: 541).

[14] Mathesius (1936a: 145) notes: "After the Prague Congress of Slavicists we were increasingly conscious of our duty not to neglect, for all our success abroad, propaganda for our ideas at home […] Two years later, we presented ourselves to the wider public of Czech educated circles in a series of meetings, the purpose of which was not to celebrate but to fight". The opponents to be fought were the imitators of an old-guard purist and pedantic mentality such as Jiří Haller, who had recently been made director of the *Naše řeč* [Our language] journal, and against whom the exponents of the Circle intended to propose their conceptions of standard Czech, lit-

 DOI: 10.4410/AIONL.7.2018.007

Jakobson retraces from as far back as the 14th century the salient examples of linguistic interest in Bohemia: "Non bisogna dimenticare che la linguistica ha in quel paese un ricco passato" (1933: 542) and his account goes from Jan Hus to Bolzano and his influence on the general grammar of Husserl, to Marty and Masaryk, whom he considers the scholar who for the first time described with great precision the difference between "static" and "historical" linguistics (Jakobson, 1933: 542). Jakobson also makes passing mention of Mathesius, almost giving him a place of secondary importance, among the linguists who went back to the thinking of Masaryk. Apart from his severe evaluations, which are as uncompromising as they could be, of the Prague linguistics context of the end of the 19th century, his assessment of the scientific and academic life of his adopted country tends to considerations which are both abstract and generalized:

> La cultura d'un piccolo paese esige una disciplina eccezionale e la ferma volontà di limitarsi. L'"arte per l'arte" degli infiniti dibattiti, la pittoresca polifonia dei problemi da risolvere simultaneamente, tutto ciò è per i paesi minori uno spreco di forze superiore ai loro mezzi. Quello che li distingue subito dalle culture dei paesi maggiori, è la linea severa della loro evoluzione. La dialettica della storia è messa a nudo in modo sorprendente; s'impone un'economia ascetica nella scelta dei fini e dei mezzi (Jakobson, 1933: 540).

On the other hand, the Russian scholar's interest in the search for relationships and general rules in linguistic data, which he considers presuppose "una preparazione teorica molto larga e un grande lavoro collettivo coordinato", leads him to look positively on the "mobilization" of the new conscripts to Czech linguistics according to "il tratto caratteristico [della] unità dei problemi e [della] uniformità della metodologia" (Jakobson, 1933: 541).

erary language and poetic language. So in the early Thirties various initiatives were taken with the intention of spreading the School's ideas in a wider educated public. These initiatives were looked on favourably by Czech intellectuals, whose reactions encouraged an intensification of the activity from 1933, "towards our active domestic audience" (Mathesius, 1936a: 147). It was in this context that soon afterwards, in 1935, the journal *Slovo a slovesnost* [Word and poetics], the Prague School's linguistic journal, was founded. A comment by Mathesius (1936: 148) seems significant: "the introductory paper, signed by the whole Editorial Board, programmatically enumerated all the tasks the Circle would like to perform in the domestic domain".

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In any case, neither Jakobson's appreciation of the old linguistic traditions of the country where he lived for almost twenty years nor his praise for the good organization of the intellectual activities there, should be over-estimated as demonstrations of full adhesion to the Prague context[15]. In his appraisal published in 1933 there is no sympathy or great harmony with the Bohemian cultural world[16] which he compares, to its detriment, to "the great neo-Latin cultures" and sees at best as a reserve of well-trained and disciplined scientific platoons (to use a metaphor of war which is well-suited to the spirit of the discussion) ready for collective undertakings but lacking individual heroes:

> Nella vita intellettuale cèca non si conosce la ricchezza di gamme colorate né l'abbondanza di delicate sfumature che si suole ammirare nelle grandi culture neolatine. Per contro, le forze sono più concentrate e meglio organizzate, e gli sforzi che mirano alla meta proposta sono ben coordinati (Jakobson, 1933: 541).

Jakobson then quotes an opinion of Mathesius according to whom "l'ardire corporativo" è destinato a far progredire la scienza cèca: questo tratto nazionale caratteristico in certo modo compensa la mancanza di ardire individuale, che crea dei pionieri pronti a combattere per i loro problemi a loro rischio e pericolo" (Jakobson, 1933: 541). It may be that Jakobson has somewhat misinterpreted Mathesius's words forcing them upon the structure of his argumentation. And it is difficult not to see in the resourceful pioneers capable of running any risk a projection of the idea of the intellectual as an avant-gardist taking up new positions which was so dear to the Russian circles in which Jakobson was schooled[17]. Such a figure must have been very far from the culture and tastes of the Prague professor of English Studies (see para.3.1.), whom it would be wrong to see as a scholar incapa-

[15] Cf. Toman (1995: 135-164).

[16] In other writings, Jakobson seems to be less drastic, however. Raynaud (1990: 56 and n) has drawn attention to a passage in an article of 1934 by Jakobson in which he outlines the assumptions of the Prague Circle, recognizing its ability in the original re-elaboration of numerous older ideas. Raynaud (1990: 56) notes that "in questa magistrale scompaginazione di correnti, le cui fonti spesso sono lontane, egli vede il particolare contributo ceco e "il gran fascino dell'arte e dell'ideologia ceca"".

[17] See Toman (1995: 7-41).

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ble of expressing original ideas and assuming responsibility for them. Aspiring to teamwork in scientific research, which was so strongly felt by Mathesius and rooted in a modern forward-thinking vision of the organization of research becomes redefined by Jakobson in a collectivist sense.

But the most evident aspect of the "counterpoint" formulated in Jakobson's appraisal of 1933 compared to that of Mathesius's of 1936 and its line of historical interpretation is a more subtle aspect of the different scientific mentalities of the two scholars. Jakobson repeatedly, and above all, underlines the importance of the theoretical-philosophical dimension, the search for general laws as the basic programme of the Circle, and he does this in a way which seems alien compared to the narrative of the older Prague professor of English Studies. His way of thinking is part of a grand conception of the *Zeitgeist* relative to scientific exploration. Quoting Vernadskij[18], who maintains that "il ventesimo secolo è il secolo in cui la scienza ha preso uno slancio meraviglioso, quale non s'è mai avuto nella storia dell'umanità, e in cui le nostre concezioni scientifiche si sono mutate radicalmente", Jakobson points out that

> la concezione strutturalistica trasforma notevolmente la linguistica: le ricerche scientifiche non sono tanto arricchite da nuovi materiali (la scienza d'anteguerra aveva messo in circolazione un materiale considerevole) quanto fecondate dalla rivelazione di rapporti esistenti tra fatti linguistici che sembravano precedentemente senza coerenza, e dai contatti istituiti tra fatti linguistici e fatti di altro ordine (Jakobson, 1933: 541).

This speculative leaning towards grand theories makes him give second place to the historical analysis of the development of ideas produced by the Circle. Jakobson states that he has no interest in establishing whether the concept of synchronic linguistics derives from Masaryk, Baudouin de

[18] Vladimir Ivanovič Vernadskij (St Petersburg 1863 – Moscow 1945) was a mineralogist and director of the St Petersburg Museum of Mineralogy (from 1886), then (1898) professor of mineralogy and crystallography at the University of Moscow. He studied numerous minerals, especially from the chemical point of view, as well as various problems of geochemistry. He wrote several treatises, the most notable of which are *Ein Versuch der beschreibenden Mineralogie* (vol. I, 1914; vol. II, 1918) and *Očerki geochimii* (1924).

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Courtenay or Saussure, whether the defence of the autonomy of poetic language comes from Russian formalism or from Zubatý, whether the Hegelian concept of the structure of the system and its dialectic was transmitted through Russian science, Victor Henry's reflection on "linguistic antinomies" and Saussure's theory, or through a current of Czech Hegelism found in traditional 19th-century grammaticography[19]. He concludes:

> È fuor di dubbio che la Scuola linguistica di Praga è il risultato di una simbiosi del pensiero cèco e russo […] è fuori di dubbio che la Scuola di Praga ha tenuto anche conto dell'esperienza linguistica occidentale: i lavori della scuola di Ginevra, la linguistica americana, l'anglistica moderna, le ricerche dei dotti olandesi: tutto codesto non poteva restare senza influsso. L'originalità della Scuola appare nella scelta delle idee nuove e nella loro unione nella totalità d'un sistema. La Cecoslovacchia è situata a un quadrivio di culture diverse, e il carattere proprio della sua cultura, fin dal tempo di Cirillo, consiste nella fusione creatrice (Jakobson, 1933: 544).

The content and style of these statements are different from those of Mathesius. Their apparent similarity, especially that of the "symbiosis" of Czech and Russian thinking, does not deceive. While Jakobson wishes to bypass contradictions (he shows here an easy and optimistic view of the Circle's history in his playing down the differences in the fusion and his belief that the different and contrasting views had been resolved into an aproblematic synthesis), Mathesius – in spite of his general statements – has too deep an historical sense not to be genuinely interested in the complex genesis of the Circle's ideas and wonder about its non-immediately reconcilable components. He recognizes the multiple roots of his own development, as well as that of the Circle, and he has always thought of himself as being its promoter and founder. Furthermore, he is much less interested in presenting the Prague scientific experience as a realization of abstract epistemological principles[20]. It suffices to look at the fine historical

[19] Jakobson (1933: 543).

[20] Notice, for example, what Jakobson states to justify his lack of interest in examining the history of the Circle's ideas: "Quello che abbiamo avuto occasione di constatare relativamente alla storia della lingua è valido anche per la storia della scienza. Ciò che è essen-

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way he introduces the question of a change of perspective in linguistics in his article-manifesto "Funkční lingvistika" ("Functional linguistics") (Mathesius, 1929):

> In the last twenty years it has become more and more evident that linguistics finds itself at the turning point of two periods. Progress in scientific research is always achieved partly by applying old tested methods to new material and new problems, and partly by seeking new methods that might throw a new light on old problems and extract new findings from old material. However, at different times the relation between these two procedures varies. There are periods of complete reliance on methods whose results have gained them almost general recognition, periods of steady and systematic work without spiritual fermentation. Then again there are times of quest and unrest when the belief in traditional methods declines, while new certainties are being created slowly and laboriously. Such a period has been reached by present-day linguistics (Mathesius, 1929: 121).

The fact that the Circle had two faces whose fusion was not achieved is shown, at a distance of several decades, by Vachek's observations (1970a: 233) which make explicit reference to a "Czech wing"[21]. Vachek generously states that the best results obtained by the Circle were those of its "brilliant Russian protagonists" Trubetzkoy, Jakobson and Karcevskij, but he also claims that "the portrait of the group would be incomplete if people like V. Mathesius, B. Havránek, and B. Trnka (to mention only the most outstanding ones) were omitted from that picture" (Vachek, 1970a: 233). The reasons for taking up such a polite position are soon clarified in a touch of bitterness: the contribution of the Czech wing had not infrequently been denied its true worth, especially on the part of "some Anglo-American scholars" (Vachek 1970a: 233). That a man like Vachek, whose elegant and courteous style is on the

ziale, non è il fatto stesso del prestito, ma la sua funzione dal punto di vista del sistema in cui esso entra: ciò che è essenziale è che esista una spinta per l'innovazione di cui si tratta" (Jakobson, 1933: 543-544).

[21] "The first thing to be mentioned here is the part played in the Prague group by what might be called its Czech wing" (Vachek 1970a: 233).

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same wavelength as that of Mathesius and other Bohemian scholars, should make such comments, is significant not only because of the awareness of differences in the Circle, but also because it reveals a trace of disappointment and regret about the divergent paths taken by the Czech and Russian components in the memories of an important exponent of the so-called "Second School of Prague", who was an upholder of Prague's scientific inheritance. Vachek expresses this strongly and clearly:

> And yet the activities of those Czech members cannot be underestimated. At least one thing deserves stressing here. It is the fact that the activities of such people very effectively prepared the ground for the ideas put down so forcefully, later on, by the Russian members of the group (Vachek, 1970a: 234).

The emphasis on the preparatory work of the Prague scholars prompts Vachek to ask himself an interesting question: Why did the new School start up in Prague and not in Vienna, where Trubetzkoy had been a professor and where people like Bühler, Kretschmer and Luick were not hostile to Trubetzkoy's ideas? In Vachek's view (1970a: 234), "the only answer to this question can be that the ground for these new ideas had proved to be prepared, after all, much better in Prague so that the Russian protagonists were to find there a readier response more easily than anywhere else."

There is no doubt that, even if the Prague scholars' only merit was what Vachek indicated, it was in fact an important one. I feel, however, that the evaluation made by this authoritative historian of the Prague Circle somewhat underestimates the contribution of the Czech wing. Its resemblance to Mathesius's (1936a) reconstruction of the Circle's history is only apparent and is not a perfect fit with all its many facets. Vachek's generous analysis of the Russian wing's contribution appears to agree with certain statements made by Jakobson in his account of the birth of the Prague Circle (see above and section 7.). It is quite possible that within the Second School of Prague, of which Vachek was a frontline exponent, the description of the early years of the Circle was influenced by the destiny of the ideas developed in Prague, which during the 20th century tended to favour the wholeview dimension of system and structure.

 DOI: 10.4410/AIONL.7.2018.007

3. The various Prague currents: the role of Mathesius

3.1 The sources of his thinking

The non-homogeneous character of the traditional cultures that converged in the Prague Circle in a complex interlacing, the threads of which were in certain ways never disentangled, emerges from an analysis of the writings and sources of Mathesius, Jakobson and Trubetzkoy. My decision to discuss the scientific character of Mathesius is by no means casual. Possibly, a combination of circumstances caused his person and his work to be less noted than they deserved to be in arriving at an understanding of the Circle's origin. A scholar of wide humanistic culture, well versed in various European and North American scientific practices, and well-informed of the research that between the end of the 19th century and the early decades of the 20th had been carried out in various European countries and in the United States[22], his writings show impressive open-mindedness and rigorous awareness of the ethical dimension of linguistics and of scientific research in general. There are several components in this awareness: the cosmopolitanism of Austrian Mitteleuropa and the political and cultural élites of the young Czechoslovak Republic as well as the moral rigour of the Protestant world[23]. Mathesius embodied the figure of the European university professor of the time, well trained in the integrated philological-linguistic and literary fields. His personality was very different from the inventive, intolerant creativity of Jakobson which had not been curbed by strict academic discipline and from the monolithically speculative and elegant capacity for synthesis of Trubetzkoy, whose highly original work was also the result of his apprenticeship in an unusually wide range of scientific and cultural domains[24].

[22] An analysis of Mathesius's sources quoted in his writings shows how widely read he was, and this is evident in his work on linguistic potentiality (Mathesius, 1911), so full of references to sources of a methodological-theoretical and empirical-experimental character.

[23] On Mathesius's early education, see Raynaud (1990: 121-125), Toman (1995: 73-101). On the influence that Protestantism had on him, see Toman (1995: 71-72).

[24] These differences have been clearly evidenced by Toman (1995: 43-69).

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Certain aspects of the different reception of Mathesius in the international scenario of 20th-century linguistics are well known and reflect the tragic fate of his country, which passed rapidly from belonging to a supranational empire to the independence of a republic and then, in the space of very few years, first to Nazi occupation and then to dependence on the Soviet Empire, conditions which for a long time resulted in the isolation of the scientific inheritance of scholars who remained in Prague and in Czech and Slovakian universities[25]. On the other hand, from the time Jakobson worked in an American context in the decades following World War II, he was more able to circulate not only his work, but also his personal understanding of Prague functionalism, whereas the work of Mathesius, much of which was written in Czech, had much less international visibility in the decades immediately following the war[26]. It is perhaps worth mentioning another difficulty due to particular circumstances: that is, the unsystematic presentation of his thinking, which appears to be characteristic of him[27].

Other factors relate to the positioning of Mathesius's work over different scientific periods, between the individualism of the late 19th century and the early 20th and structuralist operationalism, two phases that in the writings of Mathesius reflect historical progression in a way which is not wholly coherent. In spite of his adhesion to structuralist principles, clearly shown in his writings of the second half of the 1920s, and a probable influence of the discussions of the Circle and an international linguistic debate of the time, Mathesius firmly maintained his autonomy and freedom from conditioning by any school. His most significant result is the original synthesis he was able to make of the rich patrimony of thinking of linguistic individualism

[25] See Vachek (1966: 12); Svoboda (1991).

[26] The dominance of Czech over English and German is clear from the bibliography of Mathesius's works (Mathesius, 1982: 477-508). On the non-wide circulation of Mathesius's writings in Czech, see Wellek (1976: 14).

[27] Some of Mathesius's important writings began to appear in English translation as late as the 1960s, partly within a plan to present the Prague Circle, now called the "Prague School", by the painstakingly enthusiastic Vachek (Vachek, 1964; Vachek, 1966). Following this, more translations were made both as a result of developments in Western European textual linguistics and because of the new functional syntactic studies of the 1970s: see Mathesius (1975), with the interesting notes by Vachek (1959) and Dušková and Vachek (1975) on the long delayed and complex publication of this work and the English translations of Mathesius' articles in Vachek (1983).

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and the new 1920s climate, with its focus on the concept of language function. In those currents and in the ideas of Mathesius, there was an anticipation of the many developments that would come about in the second half of the 20th century with the rise of applied linguistics, textual linguistics and sociolinguistics (see para. 4.). The centrality that he attributed to syntax in general linguistics demonstrates his well-thought-out assimilation of the European debate which between the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries concentrated on the definition of syntax and the sentence[28].

It is interesting to note the evidence of his vast reading in linguistics as shown by his quotations: apart from Wegener, Gabelentz, Sweet and Jespersen, which we shall later see occupy a special position in inspiring his work, we find, among many others, Baudouin de Courtenay, Kruszewki, Steinthal, Wundt, Delbrück, Paul, Finck, Schuchardt, Shermann, Strohmeyer, Dittrick, Aronstein, Gebauer, Zubatý, Van der Gaaf, van Ginneken, Ries, Oertel, Rousselot, Jones, Sievers, Gröber, Bally, Sapir and Saussure. He was gifted with an unusually highly-developed ability to dialogue with the scholars whose work he read and to grasp the most significant points and their implications and re-route them into personal reflection. His criticism, always balanced and incisive, was accompanied by acuity of judgment (an illuminating example is his judgment on the subjectivism of Croce and Vossler, see para. 3.2.).

It is also interesting to note the range of issues of which Mathesius had a first-hand knowledge, issues which were central to scientific discussion between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century: the definition of syntax and the sentence, the nature of predication and grammatical functions, thetic and impersonal sentences, the word as a morphological unit, linguistic characterology, the question of the oscillations of vowel duration and other features of vowels and consonants.

The particular position of Mathesius at an extremely complex stage of transition in the history of linguistic ideas makes it highly relevant but difficult to come to a clear evaluation of his scientific personality and the role he played in the constitution and development of the Prague Circle.

[28] For a discussion of the European debate on syntax see Graffi (1991); Sornicola (1991) with particular respect to the Prague environment.

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An analysis of his sources points to a number of influences that he explicitly acknowledges. In his assessment of the first ten years of the Prague Circle, he notes that his concern to the "horizontal" (that is, synchronic) rather than the "vertical" (that is, diachronic) language dimension, towards which he had tended even in his days as an undergraduate, had been inspired by "those earlier German linguists who were not oriented in the Neogrammarian direction, especially […] Georg von der Gabelentz and Ph. Wegener, and […] two independently thinking non-German linguists, the Englishman Henry Sweet and the Dane Otto Jespersen" (Mathesius, 1936a: 137). These linguists had different interests, being as they were the expression of scientific contexts which were very distant from each other[29]. Nevertheless, each of the four, in his own way, was an innovator and a pioneer of new ways of studying languages towards the end of the 19th century and particularly during the intense years of the 1880s and 1890s when the many certainties concerning the principles, objectives and methods of linguistics underwent a crisis[30]. An eloquent passage by Meinecke which has been called back by Koerner (1995: 794) can give a vivid image of the cultural atmosphere of that period:

> In ganz Deutschland ist um 1890 nicht nur politisch, sondern auch geistig etwas Neues zu spüren […] [das eine ist sicher, dass] eine neue tiefere Sehnsucht nach dem Echten und Wahren, aber auch ein neuer Sinn für die zerrissene Problematik des modernen Lebens erwachte und von seiner zivilisierten Oberfläche wieder in die bald unheimliche, bald lockende Tiefe zu tauchen versuchte (Meinecke, 1941: 167).

Seen in this context, the absence of confidence in language as an objective fact that remained constant in time and space takes on a deeper significance, and especially the waning belief in the concept of rule and the consequent debate concerning the Neogrammarians' views, who had been raised by a mixed group of scholars in terms of education and inter-

[29] There are, however, a few closer affinities between Sweet and Jespersen (see Sornicola, 1991: 32).

[30] See Morpurgo Davies (1974: 637); Koerner (1975: 794-797); Morpurgo Davies (1998: 279-339).

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ests[31]. Concepts such as 'understanding', 'value' and 'purpose' become more central and are later an essential part of the theoretical nucleus of many currents of functionalism[32]. Their affirmation and interaction produced a new epistemological paradigm which has to be compared with a phase of historicism such as that put forward by Dilthey. As Rosiello has perceptively noted, Mathesius's epistemological approach is the expression of a cultural universe that recognized in Dilthey's notion of *Erlebnis* the keystone of historical research[33]. According to Rosiello

> non è azzardato concludere che il funzionalismo praghese si colloca in quell'ampio spazio di pensiero epistemologico antipositivistico aperto alla *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften* di Dilthey, in cui si colloca anche l'opera di Max Weber e il neokantismo di Windelband, Rickert e Cassirer […] In questa tradizione funzionalistica è da vedere l'adozione definitiva di un modello storicistico di comprensione dei fatti del linguaggio, alternativo a quello della spiegazione causale tipico della linguistica storico-comparativa (Rosiello 1992: 624)[34].

At least four themes can be identified as key ideas shared in one way or another by Wegener, Jespersen and Mathesius; and they are certainly characteristics of a changed atmosphere in language studies in the later years of the 19th century:

1. The idea of the real individual speaker as the ultimate foundation of language analysis.
2. The observation of linguistic reality in its immediate relation to life, with the corollary of the importance of the study of *everyday language*.
3. The description of the preeminently communicative nature of language.
4. The need to anchor the study of language phenomena to an examination of the speakers' communicative needs and purposes.

[31] The debate on *Lautgesetze* involved many leading scholars (Curtius, Delbrück, Brugmann, Schuchardt, Collitz, Osthoff, Jespersen). For an overview of the various positions taken up, see Wilbur (1977a). See also Wilbur's (1977b) general presentation of the issue.

[32] See Sornicola (1995: 165).

[33] On the notions of *Erlebnis*, *erleben* and their implications for historical research see Tessitore (1991: 98-110).

[34] On the importance of Dilthey's *Einleitung* for the linguistic thought of the last decades of 19th century see also Koerner (1991: 59).

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Themes 1. and 2. were undoubtedly present in language studies around the 1870s, and are found in Bréal, Whitney and in the Neogrammarians. They took on a specific value with the new constellation of ideas put forward by linguists of different generations and cultural settings such as Wegener, Jespersen, and later Mathesius. In Wegener's *Untersuchungen über die Grundfragen des Sprachlebens* which was published in 1885 and continued to have some influence in the early decades of the 20th century[35], the pervasive "activist" view of linguistics – that is, the study of the nature of the forces at work behind the "facts" – was evident. In this regard, Nerlich and Clarke's (1996: 13) analysis of Wegener as an exponent of "protopragmatics" seems perfectly plausible. Certain key points in Wegener's work take up themes which had been important in reflections on language in early 19th-century Germany: the importance given to the dialogic nature of discourse; the central role of comprehension (*Verstehen*). To these themes, however, Wegener adds the consideration of discourse as purposeful action and not just expression of thought and sensation[36]. The first two themes were pinned down by two important ideas of Wegener's: reference to ethics as a reason for conducting research on discourse interaction and receptiveness to the principles and methods of hermeneutics[37]. Like his master Steinthal, like Paul, he had tried to find a new foundation for the historical sciences of psychology. In any case, the attention Mathesius gives to communication needs and purposes is found in a different cultural context from that which had influenced Wegener, a context in which hermeneutics and psychology no longer play a part in the theoretical assumptions of linguistic research; this, instead, is inspired by the new philosophical framework of *Erlebnis*, and by the empirical-experimental orientation of the historical-social sciences of the late 19th century[38].

[35] The influence of Wegener's work is discussed by Knobloch (1991). Wegener's *Untersuchungen* were still considered in Prague around the years of World War II "one of the best attempts at general linguistic analysis written in the Nineteenth century" (Trnka, 1948: 164).

[36] Knobloch (1991: xv). For Wegener's theory of discourse and aims (*Zwecke*) see Wegener (1885: 63-68) and the discussion by Sornicola (1995: 166-168).

[37] See Sornicola (1995: 166-172).

[38] See Leitzmann (1916) for a biography of Wegener. Various aspects of Wegener's work are discussed by Juchem (1984); Knobloch (1988: 292-297); Knobloch (1988: 292-297); Knobloch (1991); Nerlich (1990: 153-192); Nerlich (1992: 81-87).

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3.2. Gabelentz

Gabelentz's influence on Mathesius is more difficult to determine, especially because our examination of the work of this German scholar and its impact on the general state of research in Europe between the two centuries is anything but complete. Gabelentz's *Sprachwissenschaft* is a compendium of historical-comparative linguistics and general linguistics which is rich in stimulating ideas. Coseriu (1969) has attempted to demonstrate the influence that Gabelentz exercised over the shaping of the Saussurean concepts of *langue*, *parole* and *langage*, to which he finds respective correspondence in Gabelentz's notions of *Einzelsprache*, *Rede* and *Sprachvermögen*. Coseriu maintains that further parallels can be found. The concepts of *gleichzeitig* and *einzelsprachliche Forschung* can be seen as precursors to "synchrony", while *genealogische-historische Sprachforschung* can be correlated to "diachrony". Although the relation he identified is not without its difficulty and Gabelentz's notions need to be studied within the wider context of his *Sprachwissenschaft*[39], it is quite plausible to think that the influence of this German master on linguistics of the late 19th century and the early decades of the 20th was greater than might appear. Jespersen's comments on this (1922: 98) are illuminating: he considers Gabelentz's *Sprachwissenschaft* and Wundt's *die Sprache* to be "the two greatest works on general linguistics that have appeared" in the period 1880-1890, and feels, in any case, an incomparably greater debt of gratitude to the former than to the latter scholar. Another valuable testimony to Gabelentz's importance is Hjelmslev, whose *Principes de grammaire générale* cites his work with the same frequency as the *Cours*[40].

None of Gabelentz's influences over Mathesius so far suggested seem particularly convincing or unequivocally demonstrable: neither

[39] In this regard, see Koerner's observations (1975: 791-792). Coseriu himself (1969: 10) points out that "il y a cependant une différence essentielle entre Gabelentz et Saussure en ce qui concerne la distinction entre *langue* et *parole*. En effet, ni la *parole* ni la *langue* ne sont définies par Gabelentz au moyen de l'opposition individu : communauté (ou "masse parlante"), mais exclusivement au moyen de l'opposition phénomène concret : puissance (*Erscheinung* : *Kraft*), c'est-à-dire, réalisation-technique".

[40] These references are noted by Koerner (1975: 791-792).

 DOI: 10.4410/AIONL.7.2018.007

the reference to the methodological criterion according to which one must proceed from function to form (a criterion which is explicit in Bréal and in Jespersen and to be found in others, Wegener in particular), nor the ideas relating to psychological subject and predicate (in Mathesius's terminology, "base" or "theme" and "nucleus" or "rheme") which might equally well have several other sources (Weil, Paul and above all Wegener), and in any case clearly listed by Mathesius, together with the notions of language "statics" and "dynamics", for which he expresses his debt to Masaryk[41]. These are clearly ideas that had been widely circulated in the last thirty years of the 19th century and which lived on, reassembled into new paradigms, into the first decades of the 20th [42]. The similarities between Mathesius and Gabelentz on Humboldt's theme of the centrality of individual discourse[43] seem rather generic, and Gabelentz might have been only one

[41] On the notions of "statics" and "dynamics" see Masaryk (1887: 13) as well as Mathesius (1911: 32 n 7): "It is fair to state that the difference between static and dynamic linguistic problems was first clearly envisaged by the present writer when he was reading, during his university studies, T. G. Masaryk's remarks on linguistics in his *Versuch einer concreten Logik*". Mathesius's admiration for Masaryk is stated explicitly in his summing-up of the first ten years of the Circle of Prague: "We [= the exponents of the Circle] approached the broader circles of Czech intellectual workers in May 1930 at a meeting commemorating the eightieth birthday of T. G. Masaryk. The meeting was meant not only as a tribute to the work of a philosopher but also as an act of gratitude to a man who, with his rare understanding of the effort of the younger generation of research workers, supported us with his interest and assistance" (Mathesius, 1936a: 145). On the relationship between Mathesius and Masaryk, and more generally on the Prague Circle, cf. Koerner (1973: 270); Raynaud (1990: 82-92); Toman (1995: 84-85, 97-99). Mathesius's debt to Masaryk on this point has been questioned by Vachek (see Fronek, 1988: 82-83).

[42] On the sources of Mathesius's syntactic ideas see Vachek (1966: 88-90); Graffi (2000: 181-182). For Masaryk's notions of coexistence and sequence, see Masaryk (1887: 13), and for a discussion of these, Koerner (1975: 787-789) and relative bibliography.

[43] Gabelentz (1901: 59) underlines the importance and centrality of discourse as being "language which finds expression". He also states that "[s]ie [die Einzelsprache] richtig beschreiben, heisst ihre Äusserungen erklären"; furthermore "[m]ehr soll und will die einzelsprachliche Forschung als solche nicht" (Gabelentz, 1901: 59). As Coseriu (1969: 11) points out, using Saussure's terminology, "ainsi donc l'*einzelsprachliche Forschung* déduit la *langue* de la *parole* et explique la *parole* par la *langue*". Gabelentz (1901: 59) defines discourse as follows: "Die Rede ist eine Äusserung des einzelnen Menschen […] Eine Äusserung erklären heisst, die ihr zu Grunde liegende Kräfte nachweisen". On the other hand, "die Rede will verstanden sein, und sie kann nur verstanden werden, wenn die Kraft, der sie entströmt, auch in dem Hörer wirkt […] Diese Kraft

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of the vehicles or mediators; Humboldt's ideas, in fact, are clearly present to Mathesius. He makes several mentions of the works of the great German scholar, indicating at the same time the limitations of the scientific tradition that he started (see para. 3.5.). I myself would be inclined to reject the opinion that the contexts of *Sprachwissenschaft* that refer to the notion of force (*Kraft*) underlying discourse should be considered in relation to Mathesius's idea of potentiality, which has numerous and specific aspects (see para. 4.).

The distinction between "speech of an individual" and "language usage existing in a narrower or wider language community" (Mathesius, 1911: 1-2) is in some ways similar to the concepts of *Rede* and *Einzelsprache* put forward by Gabelentz. This, however, should be considered as no sign of direct influence, since Mathesius's idea of language is distinguished from *Einzelsprache* considered as a "einheitliche Gesammtheit […] Ausdrucksmittel…" (Gabelentz, 1901: 3), and is even further distant from Saussure's idea of *langue* (just as his linguistic individualism is a very different concept from the description of *parole*)[44]. What is central to

– ein Apparat von Stoffen und Formen – ist eben die Einzelsprache" (Gabelentz, 1901: 59). Again with reference to Saussure's terminology, Coseriu (1969: 11) notes that the generating (*erzeugende*) force of *parole* is the individual language (*Einzelsprache*), and consequently the explanation of discourse coincides with the description of *langue*.

[44] There is a certain ambivalence in Mathesius's attitude to Saussure, who is quoted along with Schuchardt, Noreen, Pollak, Jespersen, Vendryès and Sapir among those who contributed to the development of the studies of general linguistics (Mathesius, 1927: 59-60). However, Mathesius (1927: 47-48) claims to have arrived independently and earlier at some ideas he and Saussure have in common. The originality of Mathesius's work on the potentiality of linguistic phenomena has been fervently advocated by Vachek (1966). According to him, the lecture presented by Mathesius in 1911 at a sitting of the Royal Czech Learned Society "is an eloquent and convincing plea for the synchronistic approach to language phenomena, an approach which was to become more general, in the context of world linguistics, only after the publication of F. de Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale*". Vachek (1966: 4) thinks that "Mathesius, however, noted some features of language which remained hidden even to the ingenious Swiss scholar. One [of] them is indicated in the very title of the paper, discussing the "potentiality" of the phenomena of language, i. e. the oscillation which may be observed at a given period of time in a given language, and which serves as a valuable indicator of the forces at work in the language at any given moment". He believes that Mathesius was "far ahead of his time" and that contingent circumstances of language (the original publication of the work in Czech) and time and place (the presentation of the paper on potentiality to an audience in 1911 in Prague

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Mathesius's conception of language is its dynamic (potential) dimension: language is in fact for him a set of possible means of expression. This dynamic dimension, which is particularly focused on in his paper of 1911, remains essential to him also in his later writings of the Twenties, when he develops a keener concern for the conventional / consuetudinary aspect of language, perhaps in relation to the new problems that came to occupy the centre of the international debate (see para. 5.). It is of no small interest that the concept of "system" appears in Mathesius's writings only in the late 1920s and 1930s[45], and in a way which seems to mark a turning point with respect to earlier work. The introduction of this concept could have been inspired by the Circle, but it seems to me significant that it remains not completely integrated into Mathesius's whole production.

3.3. Sweet and Jespersen

The relations between the Anglists Sweet and Jespersen and Mathesius seem closer. The points of contact concern two themes which were of great interest to those European linguists who around the 1870s and 1880s had played a part in the currents of innovation as anti-positivists, that is, the

that could not guarantee its broader circulation) acted as disadvantaging factors. As Jakobson himself admitted, "if Mathesius had delivered his lecture not in Prague but in Moscow, it would have caused there a veritable revolution in linguistics. In Prague, at that time, the linguistic atmosphere had not yet been quite right for the acceptance of Mathesius' theses, and both his lecture and the printed paper had failed to provoke any discussion" (Vachek, 1966: 5). Toman (1995: 83) is – I believe ungenerously – far less sympathetic with Mathesius' contribution: "All in all, the "potentiality" essay leaves one with the impression that Mathesius embarked upon an ambitious synthesis of facts brought together from different areas to be scrutinized from a single unifying point of view. But methodologically, his views are not especially sophisticated". If this judgement seems disputable, even more open to debate are the views that "in opposition to [Mathesius'] own exhortations to scholarly courage, he was himself somewhat reluctant to put such courage into practice" and that "he had not entirely shaken off the scientistic paradigm of the nineteenth century – data rather than theories were his central concern and statistics was the magic key" (Toman, 1995: 83). On Mathesius and Saussure see also Čermak (1996: 63), Marková (2003: 73), Lazard (2007). See further on here section 7.

[45] The notion appears in Mathesius's appraisal of the new trends of linguistic research (Mathesius, 1927: 62) and soon afterwards in his article "Funkční lingvistika" (Mathesius, 1929: 128-129).

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importance of the study of "living speech" or "everyday language" and the centrality of the individual speaker, topics which were also particularly dear to Mathesius:

> According to the historical school the earlier the stage, the more valuable it is, in that it shows the deeper historical roots of the later stages. The new linguistic school reverses this thesis, claiming that only present-day language can provide a complete picture of the language system, devoid of any artificial simplification. Only present-day language also allows us to fully experience language phenomena, and therefore a careful and minute analysis of present-day language is the most urgent task of scientific linguistics (Mathesius, 1929: 122)[46].

In his appraisal of the first ten years of the Prague Circle, Mathesius states that only the analysis of contemporary language can provide data which are complete enough, while the further back we go, the more inadequate the language data become[47]. Furthermore, he maintains that "the reality must have been much more complex than current historical grammar would have us believe, as the materials of the old stages of languages present, as a rule, only a very simplified picture of those languages" (Mathesius, 1936a: 138). We should note here, moreover, that in Prague itself Zubatý was another important source of influence in the matter of languages observable in the present[48].

In his 1877 *Presidential Address* to the Philological Society, Sweet had condemned the exclusively genealogical approach to comparative philology[49]. Against dead antiquarian philology he proposed a "science of living" which constitutes the "indispensable foundation" of the various branches of linguistics as well as comparative philology, its natural outlet being the practical study of languages[50]. With similar assumptions, Jespersen, fifteen years younger than Sweet, wrote that

[46] See Sornicola (1991: 32) and references.

[47] Mathesius (1936a: 138).

[48] See Vachek (1970: 235); Sornicola (1991: 35-36).

[49] Sweet (1877-1879 [1913]: 92); see also Jakobson (1966: 464).

[50] Sweet (1877-1879 [1913]: 91), see also Sweet 1882-1884 [1913]: 49-50; Jakobson (1966: 465). Jakobson (1966: 464) underlined the importance of Sweet's ideas, over and above those of Trubetzkoy and Sapir, for the development of the concept of Bloomfield's "distinctive features".

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> The science of linguistics had long stood in the sign of Cancer and had been constantly looking backwards – to its own great loss. Now, with the greater stress laid on phonetics and on the psychology of language, the necessity of observing the phenomena of actual everyday speech was more clearly perceived (Jespersen, 1922: 97).

He gave explicit expression to his admiration for the English scholar: "Among pioneers in this respect I must specially mention Henry Sweet; now there is a steadily growing interest in living speech as the necessary foundation of all general theorizing. And with interest comes knowledge" (Jespersen, 1922: 97). The two scholars also shared the interest for the study of the individual speaker and an activist approach to language phenomena[51]. Among the main tasks of linguistics, Jespersen considered the basic facts of "what is popularly called the 'life' of language", first and foremost children's language acquisition, since "language exists only in individuals and means some specific activities of human beings which are not inborn" (Jespersen, 1922: 99). This activist approach finds its most complete expression in his proposal for an "energetics of language" (*Energetik der Sprache*), the road towards which discipline was still to be laid (Jespersen, 1914: 98)[52]. An idea that in the last analysis is Humboldtian can be recognized here, and it might also have influenced Mathesius's concept of "potentiality".

The theme of the centrality of the individual speaker for linguistic research is formulated with great clarity in Jespersen's review of Saussure's *Cours*, in which he expresses his discomfort at the representation of *langue* that occurred in the lectures of the Geneva professor: "dans ces divers cas, j'aurais incontestablement préféré modifier l'expression, en substituant les sujets parlants à la langue" (Jespersen, 1916: 110)[53].

[51] A third link between Sweet and Jespersen is relevant for an understanding of their connection with Mathesius: their interest in modern languages and the practical issues of teaching them.

[52] Jespersen considered the *Energetik* as "a progressive movement of language towards precision of expression" (Koerner, 1998: 155).

[53] See Hjelmslev's (1942-1943: 172) critical observations on Jespersen's review of the *Cours*, which are resumed by Koerner's (1998: 158): "Jespersen, always the empiricist at heart, could not appreciate the desirability on the part of a theorist of language to distinguish between [the] 'points de vue' [of *langue* and *parole*]".

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He is critical of the opposition of a linguistics of *langue* and a linguistics of *parole*: "je ne vois pas que l'on gagne rien, car, malgré tout, la langue n'exist que dans et par la parole des individus" (Jespersen, 1916: 111). Moreover, he is puzzled by Saussure's tendency to make linguistic distinctions "with a ruler and a compass"[54], because these "ne répondent entièrement à la vie concrète de la langue, avec ses nuances infinies qui, en dernière analyse, reposent sur la fait que les hommes, même en parlant, sont loin de se montrer rationnels et pleinement conséquents" (Jespersen, 1916 : 113). These general principles were to lead Jespersen to postulate the need for linguistic biographies of speakers[55], a proposal which even today still retains its interest and a vitality.

Mathesius shares with Sweet and Jespersen not only certain important general principles, such as those discussed above. Even more than a similar scientific background what they have in common is a kind of inclination to the empirical-philological research as a prerequisite to the elaborations of theories. Like the two Anglists who belonged to earlier generations, he has a great interest in the textual dimension of data, and an ability to analyze it, accompanied by an outstanding knowledge of the latest experimental research being carried out in Europe and America. Hjelmslev's (1942-1943: 172) discerning opinion of Jespersen can be extended to Mathesius as well as to Sweet, as being exponents of a generation which "had discovered the *parole*"[56]; their ideas "ont été moins dirigées par des considérations théoriques que par une conception pratique, et par là même largement 'fonctionnelle', du langage" (Hjelmslev, 1942-1943: 161). But there is a further observation of Hjelmslev on Jespersen that could also apply to Mathesius, and that is that "à une nouvelle génération il pouvait donner l'impression d'un ambassadeur qui, en fin observateur de l'époque actuelle, répresentait lui-même une époque étrangère"

[54] Meillet's expression (see Meillet, 1913-1914 [1951]: 177; Meillet, 1930 [1951]: 222), which Jespersen adopts.

[55] See Jespersen (1927).

[56] "En un mot, on pourrait caractériser notre époque par la devise: découverte de la langue, et celle de Jespersen par la devise opposée: découverte de la *parole*" (Hjelmslev, 1942-1943: 172).

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(Hjelmslev, 1942-1943: 171)[57]. In effect, rather than an ambassador Mathesius could perhaps be considered the "witness" of a mandate of which he felt himself ideally to be the guardian with respect to the pre- or proto-structuralist generation, the mandate being to preserve and enrich the patrimony of fruitful disbeliefs and new ideas which, in the late 19th century, had "brought a breath of air" to linguistics; a mandate which he interpreted as not being closed to, or precluding, the new ideas which were fermenting at the beginning of the century. We shall return to this topic when we discuss the role that Mathesius, and more in general the Czech component, played in the complex development of the Prague Circle.

3.4. Marty

Much more problematic is the relationship between Mathesius and Marty, which calls the cultural background of Prague and the diverse "spirits" of the Circle to our attention. Like Masaryk, Marty was a disciple of Brentano's and a member, with Husserl, of the so-called Austrian School which occupied itself with the study of language[58]. For a long time, he was a professor at the *Deutsche Universität* of Prague (see Österreich, 1923: 500-502).

Raynaud has rightly observed that

> ad una conoscenza diretta dell'autore o delle sue opere da parte dei componenti del Circolo o ad una notevole convergenza di tematiche non si accompagna tuttavia una dimestichezza manifesta, né si evidenzia un legame forte, che conduca a riconoscere in Marty se non un (o addirittura il) maestro, almeno l'ispiratore, il precursore più prossimo, comunque un interlocutore di rilievo (Raynaud, 1990: 67).

[57] Graffi (2000: 65) notes that though Jespersen (like Bühler) did not have a strong anti-psychologistic viewpoint, his studies "paved the way to the view of language as an autonomous system".

[58] See Parret (1976); Raynaud (1982: 46-47); Knobloch (1984: 427-439); Holenstein (1990); Mulligan (1990); Raynaud (1990: 24, 76). For the importance of Marty and Husserl for Saussure, see De Mauro (1993 [1967]: 346, 351).

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While Jakobson and Trubetzkoy had read Marty's *Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung der allgemein Grammatik und Sprachphilosophie* in Russia[59], Mathesius rarely makes any mention of him in spite of having followed his courses[60]. Of course, he is one of the contributors to the so-called "Theses of 1935" (the introduction to the first issue of the review *Slovo a Slovesnost*), where Marty is cited, together with Saussure, as being one who, even more than Saussure, innovated the concepts of language statics and development. Both in the Theses of 1929 and the Theses of 1935 however the Circle's ideas may have influenced Mathesius, who adopts formulations of principle which are in some sense more extreme than those found in his own works, such as that of the teleological character of language development (see section 7.). Apart from this collective stand, however, any mention of Marty in Mathesius's work is rare. One reference of some interest is to be found in an appraisal of the currents and trends of late 1920s linguistics. Here, Mathesius expresses his disagreement with a psychologistic line of thought running from Humboldt to Steinthal and Wundt, and declares his agreement with the ideas of Marty. Criticising Wundtian psychologism, he points out that, unlike Wundt, Marty believed that language is not simply the product of spontaneous linguistic processes in strict relation to thought, but "a system of conventional signs" (Mathesius, 1927: 62). The interest of this passage lies in the fact that it is one of the first mentions of "system" in Mathesius, and the context of the discussion may lead us to a better understanding of it, also in relation to the wider *entourage* of the Circle. It is also significant that the term "system" appears together with a reference to the "conventionality" of linguistic signs, a concept of primary importance in the development of structuralist theories which was to have a particularly interesting application in Mathesius's theory of the sentence (see Sornicola, 2012). Although the reference is a brief one, it relates to aspects which are fundamental to Marty's theory, aspects that are worth summarizing here.

[59] See Jakobson (1971: 713); Holenstein (1976: 775); Raynaud (1990: 73).

[60] Mathesius's name is registered as one of the students that attended Marty's course in the academic year 1904-1905 (Leška, 1994: 73).

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Marty's view of the origin of language was profoundly anti-nativist: language does not develop instinctively, it is not the product of individual attempts at expression[61]. Furthermore, the relation between language and thought is not isomorphic. It is an imperfect relation, so that there can be no correspondence between logical and linguistic categories[62]. However, Marty did not intend to reject the assumption of the existence of universal categories of thought, a perspective that was influenced by Brentano's psychology and philosophy of language. Unlike Steinthal, he did not believe that grammar should be completely separated from logic and he did not believe in the existence of linguistic types which were totally different from each other. He distinguished between logic as the "science of the correct judgement" (Steinthal's definition) and logic in psychological sense or the science of the forms of thought[63]. Such forms are in fact universal, but they are not expressed by the same categories in all languages[64]. As for linguistic form, unlike Humboldt and Steinthal, Marty thought it should not be confused with meaning: it is rather an "auxiliary representation", an intermediate layer between meaning and phonetic form. It is an internal representation in the sense that it is accessible only to inner experience[65].

A few plausible hypotheses have been put forward on other aspects of Mathesius's intellectual debt to Marty. According to Leška (1994: 91-92), Mathesius found in Marty a sound theoretical foundation for what he considered to be a new field in linguistics: a solid basis for a functional theory and non-apriori description of the language, which differentiated between synchrony and diachrony; the approach based on content; Marty's linguistic philosophy was in fact a general semantics (*allgemeine Bedeutungslehre*). Its functional-structural approach enabled this theory to

[61] See Marty (1916-1920 I, 2: 303-304).

[62] A useful discussion of this issue is found in Graffi (2000: 61).

[63] See Marty (1908: 82).

[64] See Marty (1908: 89) and for a discussion Parret (1976b); Graffi (2000: 60).

[65] According to Marty, since functional categories are universal (differently from their structural manifestations which are language-specific) we can arrive at a better understanding of the factors that organize language as a whole structured and oriented towards an end. Marty's universal categories define a scheme for the contrastive analysis of languages, independently of whether they are connected genetically (Holenstein, 1990: 92).

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be based on evidence in establishing differences and identities of meaning. Furthermore, it explains how the basic idea of phonology, that is the relation of phonological units to content, could be adopted and implemented so easily. Particularly appreciated by various scholars as a possible source of one of the key themes of the Circle is the anti-nativist idea that the purpose of language is to satisfy communicative needs teleologically but "without a plan"[66]. This concept of purpose is mentioned in the so-called Theses of 1935, in which Marty is both praised and criticized[67]. On the other hand, Marty's assumptions concerning the universals of linguistic forms are not entirely compatible with the ideas of Mathesius, who never had a basic interest in searching for the universals of forms, but rather in carrying out historical-empirical research into the development of the characteristics of languages.

Another possible influence of Marty's concerns syntactic models. Marty may have inspired Mathesius's discussion of thetic sentences: sentences such as *It's snowing*, *It's raining*, *It's hot*, which do not lend themselves to the subject-predicate partition. As Raynaud points out, the term "thetic" belonged to a logical-philosophical rather than linguistic tradition, and its presence in Brentano and in Marty is an indication that the latter may have been an intermediary in the transfer of the notion from a philosophical to a linguistic context[68].

But how can Mathesius's reticence be explained? How could a man who had such an unusual ability to dialogue with the international community in his field, with such a wide knowledge of and insight into a wealth of sources, not cite Marty, who had been his professor? Raynaud (personal communication)[69] thinks that one contributing factor might be the difficult relations between the German and Czech universities of Prague; Mathesius's silence regarding Marty may also be consistent with the

[66] For Marty language is "intention without a plan": see Raynaud (1990: 366) and here n 137.

[67] See Jakobson (1933: 544) and for a historical examination of these notions Raynaud (1990: 366-367).

[68] For the discussion of thetic sentences, see Raynaud (1990: 330-331 and n); Raynaud (2008: 49-53); Raynaud (2012).

[69] For this idea, see also Raynaud (1990: 66-67). On Prague academic environment see Raynaud (1990: 41-54).

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need for emancipation – still alive in the 1920s and 1930s – from *Germanophonia*. And yet his careful and frequent citations include numerous German scholars. It seems to me that an answer might be found in a fundamental characteristic of Mathesius's personality, which Raynaud (1990: 358) has rightly pointed to: compared with Jakobson and Trubetzkoy, for interests and cultural background, he was more of a linguist than a philosopher[70]. Mathesius's rare mentions of Marty could be interpreted as an indication that he felt him as the "German professor of Prague"[71], detached from the currents of linguistic thinking that he followed, in which are instead present many of the linguists of the late 19th century and the early decades of the 20th whose names are mentioned in his works.

It is possible that Marty's influence, insofar as it is present, was felt in terms of its general themes with their philosophical orientation, which Mathesius was not alien to (he seems to have been well informed of the philosophical debate about language) but which he perceived as being distant from the actual experience of work of the linguist. As Raynaud has observed (1990: 369), Marty's *glossonomia* was a practical philosophy of language, "pratica non solo perché propone di intervenire sul linguaggio, ma anche per la natura di organon di quest'ultimo". However, both the activist conception of language and the centrality that Marty gave to the science of meaning (a general semasiology), as well as the articulation in diverse functions of language[72] are ideas which Mathesius develops in such a way as to lead him far away from Marty in his actual linguistic analysis[73].

[70] Raynaud (1990: 121) rightly notes that "solo a Jakobson […] sembra si possa attribuire una viva consapevolezza delle radici filosofiche di un certo tipo di interesse linguistico coltivato nel Circolo: il rinvio è a Husserl e a Marty, ma anche a Fischer e a Engliš". See Jakobson (1933: 544) on the latter two scholars, in particular Engliš to whom Jakobson gives great importance for his study of human behavior as a product of the relation between the means and the end, a relation which is to be interpreted teleologically.

[71] Jakobson's words (1933: 542).

[72] See Raynaud (1990: 377-379).

[73] For Marty (1908: 284) every linguistic expression is a sign in two senses: it is an intentional manifestation of part of the speaker's mental life, but it is intended first and foremost to exercise a certain influence on the mind of the hearer. He thinks that "absichtliches Sprechen ist eine besondere Art des Handelns, dessen eigentliches Endziel ist, in anderen Wesen gewisse psychische Phänomene hervorzurufen. Dieser Intention gegenüber erscheint die Kundgebung oder Anzeige der Vorgänge im eigenen Innern nur als ein Mittel oder *πάρεργον*, und so weist

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3.5. The Humboldtian trend

One thing which seems to be of considerable importance for an understanding of Mathesius and the contribution he made to the founding and development of the Prague Circle is his attitude to what Koerner has called, in a wide sense, "the Humboldtian trend in linguistics" of the late decades of the 19th century[74]. In this trend we can include such linguists as Baudouin de Courtenay and Kruszewski, von der Gabelentz and Finck, psycholinguists such as Dittrich, and philosophers such as Marty and Masaryk, all of whom were associated by the critical reaction to the naturalism of Schleicher and his followers and by their dissatisfaction with the atomism of neogrammatical methods[75]. These names recur in Mathesius's work, and they had various degrees of influence over him. It would be difficult, however, to unreservedly include in this Humboldtian current our Prague professor of English Studies, and for various reasons. Firstly, the very character of the trend is one of negative scientific attitudes (dissatisfaction with theories and practices that had long been predominant in the study of languages) rather than the sharing of a unified compact theory[76]. If there was a positive aspect to the Humboldtian trend, it might have been a basic principle made explicit by Mathesius, and which was certainly present in Humboldt's thinking: the centrality of the individual speaker and of speech, considered to be the source of all the fluctuations and potential changes in languages; it was of course a principle which can be traced to that of *energeia*[77]. Mathesius's adherence to this basic principle is clearly manifest in his paper on the potentiality of language phenomena in which he on a negative note identifies the

jedes absichtliche Sprechen eine Mehrheit von Seiten und verschiedene Weisen des Zeichenseins auf". For a discussion of these ideas see Raynaud (1990: 377).

[74] Koerner (1975: 793).

[75] See Koerner (1975: 793).

[76] Of Gabelentz and Finck, Koerner (1975: 793-794) rightly observes that their work has all the merits and defects of the Humboldtian current of the late 19th and early 20th centuries: a vast practical knowledge of many languages, including "exotic" languages; great interest in language classification; a tendency towards the speculative representation of the relation between grammatical structure and the conceptual representations of the speaker. All of these characteristics, however, lacked "*Abstraktionsvermögen* and theoretical rigour" (Koerner, 1975: 794).

[77] These issues are discussed in Sornicola (1991).

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basic character of 19th-century linguistic research as being the "isolation of speech from the speaking individual" (Mathesius, 1911: 26).

It cannot be said, however, that the principle of linguistic individualism was shared by all the exponents of that wide current known as "Humboldtian". There is another principle that helps to identify the trend, which can be described as "the principle of anti-objectivistic description of languages". Mathesius criticizes the conceptual representations that traditional historical linguistics offered of language, understood "as an objective fact, constant in a given place and at a given time", and proposes as an alternative to Schleicherian linguistics, influenced by natural history and the exact sciences, Kruszewski's concept which takes "as the basic features of language the complexity and indefiniteness of its units, which also call forth the fact of the variability reflected in the development of language" (Mathesius, 1911: 27)[78]. This point of view is also clearly related to the criticism of *Lautgesetze* posited by the Neogrammarians, which Mathesius sees as a development of Schleicher's biological conception of languages[79]. But it would be reductive to see in these ideas of Mathesius's only an aspect of the wide debate on phonetic laws that had arisen among linguists in preceding decades. The Prague professor's framework of ideas extends beyond the old controversy with the Neogrammarians, he was already immersed in the new atmosphere of the 20th century. Later, we shall discuss the originality and fertility of the prospect opened up by the 1911 article on the concept of linguistic potentiality (see para. 4.).

It must be remembered, however, that both the principle of individualism and that of the anti-objectivistic description of language were formu-

[78] Kruszewski (1883: 53, author's italics) had stated this opinion clearly: "Even from the most basic analysis, it is obvious that speech is extremely *complex*. Speech consists of sentences; sentences consist of words; words consist of morphological units; and morphological units consist of sounds. But sounds consist of a variety of physiological operations. Besides the *complexity* of linguistic units, our analysis has revealed another of their qualities – their *indeterminacy*. Both of these facts have enormous significance: *the whole, which consists of such units, must be unstable and capable of change*; the development of a language is explained by the nature of its elements."

[79] "The influence of natural history and exact sciences, most drastically manifested by Schleicher's conception of language as a biological organism, has led, in the Neogrammarian school, to an aprioristic belief in the absolute regularity of sound-laws and thus acted in the same direction" (Mathesius, 1911: 26).

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lated on different levels of theoretical knowledge in the heterogeneous group of linguists and philosophers we have listed, and were differently applied to the analysis of language data.

A second difficulty we have in including Mathesius in the Humboldtian trend lies in the fact that he seems to have an ambivalent attitude to Humboldt and the line of thought inspired by him in the 19th century. Consequently, while in his work on linguistic characterology presented at the first Congress of linguists at The Hague he refers to "that great current of linguistic thought and work which leads from Humboldt through Steinthal and Misteli to Finck" (Mathesius, 1928: 60), as early as 1911 he had observed that linguists with a psychological approach like Wundt, whose position he referred back to Steinthal and ultimately to Humboldt, in spite of giving much more attention to the great fluctuations of speech, "barred their way to deriving the due consequences from this fact by the too one-sided emphasis that they laid on the social character of language" (Mathesius, 1911: 26). He gives a more explicit judgment in his appraisal of the late 1920s on "New Currents and Tendencies in Linguistic Research":

> The analytical-comparative school of linguistic research which, from Wilhelm von Humboldt up to N. Finck, is represented by a series of isolated attempts rather than by systematical work, has been trying in vain to establish a continuous line of investigation. Its broad outlook has not narrowed, its interest in all kinds of linguistic problems has not cooled, but it has entirely failed to work out a precise and trustworthy method of research (Mathesius, 1927: 46).

In his criticism of the extreme subjectivism of scholars whose philosophical reflection in one way or another can be traced back to Humboldt, such as Vossler and Croce[80], we see another important aspect which contributes to a better understanding of Mathesius's position regarding the basic issues of his ideas: potentiality, the relation between linguistics and stylistics, the dimension of customariness / conventionality of language structures (see para. 5.).

[80] See Mathesius (1927: 55) and earlier Mathesius (1911: 29).

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A third difficulty is Mathesius's position in time. In some sense he was already "outside" the scientific atmosphere of the late decades of the 19th century, he belonged to a historical period which looked beyond it and recognized itself as having new points of reference, a crossroads of North American pragmatism, the methods of the social sciences, and attention to all the historic forms of human life. Being little inclined to pure philosophical thought, Mathesius shows this new cultural and scientific atmosphere in the way he expresses general issues in relation to the ultimate principles of linguistic research, formulating them in the light of specific problems with technical methodologies, such as those regarding the measurement of phonetic phenomena. This is where we can recognize his true originality. He is able to express a real synthesis (always difficult in general linguistics) between the theory and the analysis of data, the universal and the particular. In my view, it is in this perspective that we can see the clearest, even if indirect, relation to Humboldt.

3.6. The passage to functionalism

As a conclusion, Mathesius can be said to belong to an era when recourse to psychology had been abandoned, it having characterized an older phase of historical research on language. He is a representative of new currents of thought which, on the philosophical level, had found their formulation in Dilthey's criticism of the historical reasoning, and his consideration of life, human experience and the structures of their connection as being the foundation of knowledge, a foundation no longer seen as absolute, but relative and inherently problematic. This is the key to understanding both Mathesius's consideration of languages as "objects" with indefinite outlines, and his apparently contradictory appeal to the "close and devoted attachment to language realities" (Mathesius, 1911: 26). And it enables us to comprehend, too, why it is inappropriate, even misleading, to consider his position as being non-theoretical or even anti-theoretical, as some scholars have suggested (in particular Toman, 1995: 80-86). My own conviction is that the clue to understanding the history of the Circle of Prague in its beginnings and the role of its first president in particular is not simply the set of ideas we have so far discussed.

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What seems crucial to me is the elaboration of a narrative of how such a constellation of late 19th-century and early 20th-century ideas ended up in Prague by melting into functional notions, in other words how what we might call the "passage to functionalism" came about. Surely this was a complex phenomenon, the historical accounts of which cannot be reduced to schematisms. It may not be reckless, however, to say that it was part of a deeper and more pervasive change in epistemological paradigms which affected in Europe the philosophical reflection on man, history and society, a change that might ultimately be represented by Dilthey's new historiographical thinking with its ideas on meaning, purpose, value and understanding as keys to an interpretation of the rich and composite world of life[81].

Analysis of the Prague cultural and scientific background and Mathesius's sources help to throw light on this change and can establish assumptions for an understanding of the diversity of the Circle's Czech and Russian components, its "double soul". But for a more complete understanding of this dualism, other basic central themes of Mathesius's thinking need to be considered: his concept of potentiality, his ideas on language change and the concept of function with special reference to syntax. There is a strict relation between all these points. Each of them is clearly independent and different from the main ideas of Jakobson and Trubetzkoy and also from their collective positions.

4. The concept of potentiality

Mathesius's concept of linguistic potentiality is an original synthesis of various anti-positivist ideas of the pre- (or proto-) structuralist tradition from which he drew inspiration. In my view, it anticipates theoretical thinking on variation that was to be developed by sociolinguistics from the 1960s on. This essential aspect appears to have almost escaped attention in the studies on Mathesius and the formation, development and influence of the Prague Circle. It therefore deserves detailed examination.

[81] The passages of these phases in the history of linguistics as they are reflected in Mathesius are discussed in Sornicola (1995).

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Mathesius defines the concept of potentiality of linguistic phenomena (not language!) as that which manifests itself "on the static oscillation of the speech of an individual" (Mathesius, 1911: 2). He considers such oscillations to be inherent in linguistic phenomena: "static oscillation is, in many respects, an important feature of language phenomena, and […] the recognition of this fact may be of some help in solving a number of linguistic problems" (Mathesius, 1911: 3). This representation of the internal movements in the language statics is expressed and even finds its *raison d'être* in three important concepts: (1) unlike the assumption in the linguistics of the 19th century, language is not an objective fact, constant in space and time; (2) the individual speaker is the source of oscillations (variations) and the general principle whereby he has to become the focus of linguistic research finds in this property a further important legitimateness; (3) the study of oscillations in the individual speaker's production relates to statics, but constitutes an indispensable pre-condition for the study of movements in time (dynamics).

The first of these ideas is explicitly in relation to the issue of level of certainty to assign to linguistic phenomena. As we have seen, the controversy over the regularity of phonetic laws was clearly present to Mathesius, who pointed out that the subject of potentiality had often been associated with this debate. It is evident that the deeper nature of the concept under discussion is in relation to variation and irregularity, and these are provided with a rational explanation in terms of the model of "potency" or "energy". The sources of Mathesius's thinking on this are numerous. An important one is the intellectual influence of Schuchardt, who believes that "individual pronunciation is never free from variation" and "hand in hand with this unending splitting of speech is said to go the unending mixing of speech" (Mathesius, 1927: 38)[82]. Mathesius considers Schuchardt's criticism of phonetic laws to be relevant too[83]. But perhaps more important is the agree-

[82] Mathesius refers here to Schuchardt's essay *Über die Lautgesetze. Gegen die Junggrammatiker* (Schuchardt, 1885).

[83] See Mathesius (1911: 27). His shared wavelength with Schuchardt, who resisted any belief in the phantom of phonetic laws, is re-stated by Mathesius (1927: 52). A partly positive judgment is made of Meyer's work "Gibt es Lautwandel?" (Meyer 1909), for his attempt to demonstrate that "no sound-changes really exist but only a choice between parallel forms"

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ment with Kruszewski, who – as we have already observed – considered the complexity and indefiniteness of units as fundamental properties of language. Kruszewski had in fact declared an interest in the search for "laws" of linguistic phenomena, pointing out however that such laws needed to be of a different character from those advocated by the Neogrammarians and therefore sought in quite another direction[84]:

> While studying under Professor Baudouin de Courtenay I became firmly convinced that the area of linguistic phenomena, like other areas of life, is subject to certain laws in the general scientific sense of this word. For this reason I have studied living speech in the hope that I might some days understand these laws (Kruszewski, 1883: 48).

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Mathesius's thinking is his capacity to combine criticism of the concept of phonetic law and the theoretical ideas of Kruszewski with a synthesis of the results of experimental research which thrived between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, regarding the oscillations of vowel and consonant length and the properties of the phonetic and prosodic structure of the word. It is above all with respect to these descriptive problems that he constructs the main nucleus of his model of potentiality, while at the same time underlining the fact that variability is a principle which has important applications to numerous other phenomena at various levels of analysis (to syntax, in particular, the order of words, a subject which interested him throughout his life; and to semantics, to the vast range of issues concerning the extensions of meaning and in particular the oscillations of the meaning of elements relating to intellectual and emotive factors)[85]. As early as the late decades of the 19th century, empirical results on the variability of elements in terms of their position in the sentence had been achieved in the laboratories of experimental phonetics in various countries, especially Germany and France,

(Mathesius, 1911: 30). The limitations of Meyer's paper however are indicated in its being based on the insufficient data available for Middle-High German.

[84] See Kruszewski's (1883: 49) criticism of the views of Paul.

[85] Note however that Mathesius gives less space to the discussion of syntactic and semantic problems in his 1911 article: see Mathesius (1911: 20-22).

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and this had brought about a new awareness of the non-absolute representability of linguistic units (this was evident for example in the definition of the so-called "doublets" of a positional character)[86]. This awareness had been heightened by the extension of experimental research to the observation and analysis of real language production. Not only was the sentence context a source of variation of the structural properties of elements, but the same individual speakers might show a wide range of variation in their speech in relation to the social and emotional context. Mathesius quotes the research of Wegener, Sievers and Jespersen as a source of inspiration for this[87].

The concept of potentiality can be considered a truly theoretical model offering a unified picture of the new general problems involved in dealing with variation in linguistic phenomena which were raised by the large amount of 18th- and 19th- century experimental research. Its conception might have been influenced by Aristotle's notions of "potency" (as opposed to "act") and Humboldt's notion of "energeia" (as opposed to "ergon")[88]. These influences, however, should be put into perspective as be-

[86] See for example Rousselot (1891: 251-253); Meillet (1900); Meillet (1903: 32-33).

[87] Mathesius cites with special interest Jespersen's "Zur Lautgesetzfrage" (Jespersen, 1886), in which he "emphatically points out that no speaker will ever succeed in speaking in exactly the same way as any other speaker, both as regards the sounds and the content associated with them; one always has to do here with approximations" (Mathesius, 1911: 28). In effect, this awareness was relatively widespread among a number of late 19th-century scholars, including Hermann Paul and certainly Schuchardt, Noreen, Sweet (in the article under discussion Jespersen cites Noreen and above all Schuchardt as being authoritative sources of inspiration). Even more relevant is considered by Mathesius Jespersen's contribution to variations generated by the style of speech: "Just as different positions in the sentence give rise to phonic doublets of one and the same word, so such doublets are said to be due to different styles of speech and to coexist in the speech of one and the same individual" (Mathesius, 1911: 28). Of special interest is Jespersen's mention (1886: 173), cited again by Mathesius (1911: 28), of Wegener's passage (1885: 186): "in kleinen Kreisen, deren Glieder sich nahe stehen, z. B. innerhalb einer Familie, innerhalb einer Dorfschaft macht man sehr häufig die Beobachtung, dass die Worte im Gespräche dieser Glieder unter einander viel mangelhafter artikuliert werden und mit viel geringer Expirationsstärke gesprochen werden als im Gespräche derselbe Leute mit Fremden". This is one of the first description of the social phenomenology of speech style, and naturally it attracted the attention of scholars interested in "linguistic reality".

[88] For Aristotle's influence on Mathesius see Raynaud (1990: 65). Humboldt's notion of "energeia" was also a source of inspiration for Jespersen (1914), although both he and Mathesius

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ing indirect and possibly mediated through other sources. One reason for this is that Mathesius's notion of potentiality focuses on the purely linguistic representation of variation in language phenomena and its limits. Above all, in my view, Mathesius's modeling of the concept should be seen in the light of the new conceptual relativistic horizons of the sciences in the early 20th century, when the principle of objectivity characteristic of positivism was questioned. The important subject of variation and variability of real language phenomena, which began to appear in research at the end of the 19th century, and which was to become a central theme of sociolinguistics in the second half of the 20th century, is approached by Mathesius as a theoretical issue of primary importance. With the concept of the potentiality of linguistic phenomena, this theme is lucidly handled in a way that covers all its essential aspects. How could the unsatisfactory solution of variability being reduced to extreme atomism be contested? How could a point of balance be found between individual variability and the regularity of phenomena manifested in a language community? What boundaries could be established within which variability is shown to be proper of the same phenomenon and beyond which it initiates the identification of another[89]? Mathesius's criticism of the subjectivism of Croce and Vossler is an important component of his overall views, as is his discussion of the notions of "conventionality" and "style" (which we shall discuss later in this paragraph). In conclusion, it can be maintained that in his approach to the issue, Mathesius brings up with considerable clarity and rigour a matter which at that time was also a concern of Saussure's, the relation between the individual and the collective dimensions of linguistic phenomena, so heading up the pathway that was to occupy research in the 20th century. His notion of potentiality establishes the founda-

show a breakaway from the German scholar: see in particular Mathesius (1911: 26); Mathesius (1927: 46).

[89] Mathesius (1911: 28) points to the importance of Jespersen's (1904: 194) discussion of the concept of *Richtigkeitsbreite*, which is concerned with "the limits of the potentiality of individual language phenomena". Jespersen's treatment of the issue in this case focuses on intelligibility, but Mathesius perceptively takes up the more crucial aspect for the modeling of the concept that he intends to develop: "It is said here that for each element of speech there exist the limits within which it can be identified. Such limits differ not only in different languages but even in one and the same language for its different elements" (Mathesius, 1911: 28).

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tion of a theoretical model of variability that anticipates by several decades in its essential aspects the construct of the "variable" in modern Labovian sociolinguistics, both in terms of the idea of the existence of a field of dispersion of realizations of a phenomenon according to its linguistic and extra-linguistic context, and in terms of the introduction of the theoretical notion of "boundary" of the field of dispersion[90]. It is interesting that in their manifesto for a theory of language change Weinreich, Labov and Herzog acknowledged Mathesius's pioneering role in the study of variation and change, although in their ardor to find regularities beyond fluctuations they may have expressed a partial and historically unbalanced judgement:

> Mathesius' examples show a clear recognition of the transition problem that we have outlined above; however, they do not show that he had succeeded in the integration of his notion of "potentiality" into a systematic description of language. These examples show a near-random distribution of length or oscillation of grammatical options – variation without a direction. The emphasis is on the variability of the individual rather than the regularities inherent in such variation (Weinreich, Labov, Herzog, 1968: 168).

This judgement is even more interesting in restrospect when one considers that Labov's (1994) compendium of his research reconsiders the complexity of factors affecting variation and change in a different and more problematic vein than the 1968 manifesto.

As regards taking the individual speaker as the basis of linguistic study in so far as he is the source of variation, apart from the considerations made in section 3., it is appropriate to mention here certain other aspects of Mathesius's thinking on the issue. The first concerns the importance of giving attention to effective linguistic realities[91], which – as has been already noted – is a kind of leitmotiv of his research[92]. The second is the relation between "individual character of

[90] This concept has been pivotal to Labov's sociolinguistic research. For a recent overview of its applications see Labov (1994).

[91] Cf. his mention of a scientific prospect describe as a "close and devoted attachment to language realities" (Mathesius, 1911: 26).

[92] He often returns to this matter several years later: "linguistic analysis should always be based upon words and sentences which have actually been spoken or written and not upon

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speaking" and "language community". Mathesius is well aware of the methodological and theoretical difficulties of exploring these two dimensions. He realizes that linguistic analysis must proceed by grades of abstraction from the concreteness and reality of individual language, through dialects, to usage by a community, which is its widest dimension:

> Language thus includes, *theoretically*, all the phenomena of language that occur in concrete utterances of all individual speakers, belonging at that time to the same broad language community, called a nation. *In reality*, of course, linguistics can never do justice to this fact, not only on account of the astonishing richness of language phenomena in general, but mainly in view of the fact that such a community – especially a culturally highly active one – witnesses the rise of new, even if transient, language phenomena day by day (Mathesius, 1911: 1, author's italics).

This involves simplification of the objectives of the analysis, such as the fact that they must necessarily be confined to the general outlines of languages. The simplifications are due to methodological limitations which should never be ignored, though they have been in fact, resulting in mistaking the simplicity of languages for an intrinsic characteristic, while it really is a consequence of a method of study[93]. Of course Mathesius must have been aware of the necessity of abstraction in linguistic analysis, but he had a lucid and disenchanted conscience of the problematic and provisional nature of every abstraction operation. On the other hand, he believed that the individual aspects of speech should not be over-emphasized. Mathesius seems to agree with Finck's idea that "for all the subjectivity of actual speaking, the ways of speaking of the members of a given community are characterized by a high degree of uniformity, due to recollections of earlier language usage, both of the speaker and of his/her fellow speakers" (Mathesius, 1911: 29-30).

construed examples only, and it is good that the attention of linguists has been called to the fact that linguistic material does not consist in everyday clichés merely" (Mathesius, 1927: 56).

[93] Mathesius (1911: 1-2).

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However, the concept of potentiality (the oscillations of speech phenomena) was never developed by Mathesius into a systematic theoretical representation. A major difficulty was how to fit in the model the idea of the relation between individual and community, between the subjectivity and the specificity of individual characteristics, and the conventionality of facts shared by the whole of a society, issues to which Mathesius returned repeatedly at different times. Like Saussure, Mathesius too failed to find a definite solution to the problems raised, although the modeling he attempted was different from that of the Geneva professor (see Sornicola, 2012). It is interesting that in 1935 Artymovyč revisited the concept of potentiality, adopting Saussure's conceptual framework, which further testifies to the Circle of Prague's substantial transformations of important scientific ideas in the late Twenties and the Thirties[94]. What remains to be established, I would suggest, is how far Mathesius distanced himself from the framework of his outline of a theory of potentiality (we shall return to this below and in 5.).

The presentation of the concept of potentiality is also linked to a discussion of the concept of "style" and the relationship between stylistics and linguistics:

> If a linguistic analysis of individual speech is undertaken, all its phenomena constitute linguistic materials, and it is not feasible to relegate some of them into stylistics. Linguistics is a science whose task is to analyze, in a static manner, the language materials used by a language community at a given time, and, in a dynamic manner, its historical changes. Consequently, linguists are obliged to ascertain the nature of these materials by means of examining the speech of individual speakers, so that the results of such examination may reveal the full extent of the potentiality of the concerned language (Mathesius, 1911: 22).

On the other hand, Mathesius recognizes that "language does contain phenomena whose examination appears to resemble stylistic analysis: they are the so-called styles of speech", and he adds:

[94] Cf. Graffi (2000: 180), who feels that Mathesius's concept of potentiality "is somewhat close to Saussure's notion of *langue*". Such an opinion, in my view, is hardly acceptable, since Mathesius's original notion cannot be reduced to Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole*.

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> By this term we mean not the individualizing character of artistic literary creation but simply the fact that specimens of actual speech possessing analogous character or analogous aims display some common features in different speakers of the language. The influence upon language materials exercised by the said determining forces is made possible exactly by the potentiality of language and by the continuous mixing of the social dialects and slangs existing in the given community (Mathesius, 1911: 23).

The interest in styles of discourse expressed by Mathesius is another way in which he anticipates the development of sociolinguistic research of the second half of the 20th century.

5. Mathesius's papers of the years 1925-1928 on style, language and linguistic character

In the course of his thinking, it seems evident that Mathesius has some difficulty in defining the notions of "style", "stylistics" and "language", "linguistics". In his overview of currents and trends in linguistics published in 1927, Mathesius goes back to the issue of the relation between the "general" and the "individual" in language, and turns to the concept of "conventionality":

> Finer methods of linguistic analysis have brought to light the importance of what I should call the double-faced character of linguistic phenomena. It consists in a continuous fluctuation between the general and the individual […] *The communicative character of language is made possible by the conventionality of the linguistic means of expression.* The need, however, of making oneself understood has in reality not been able entirely to suppress the need of self-expression, *and so it comes about that in linguistic research we cannot limit our attention to what is conventional in language. A consequence of the conventional character of language is the fact that the individual needs of expression can never be fully satisfied with the existing linguistic means. Each individual's experience is unique, and nevertheless is to be expressed by conventional means.* This incongruity is, at least partially, removed by the constant adaptation of linguistic means to freshly arising needs of expression. New forms of expression are created on the model of the existing means of expres-

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> sion or the meaning of the old form is changed. *Thus the possibilities of linguistic expression are continuously enlarged by individual efforts, which lead either to passing deviations or, if the novelty finds a ready acceptance in the linguistic community* […] to a permanent change (Mathesius, 1927: 54-55, my italics)[95].

He concludes that "linguistic research work can either concentrate on what has already become a common possession of all members of the linguistic community or it can study the individual efforts of linguistic creation" (Mathesius, 1927: 54-55). Whatever the case, Mathesius maintains that the relation between study of language and study of style needs clarification as a prerequisite to the former benefiting from the latter. He is of the opinion, expressed in his 1911 essay on potentiality, that these two branches of science do not differ in terms of the data to be studied, but in terms of their objectives[96]. In fact, "words and sentences which have actually been used by individual speakers or writers, make up the basis of investigation in both cases" (Mathesius, 1927: 56). But in his conclusions that we are about to quote one sees a formulation which is in a certain sense new compared to that of 1911, since it underlines more noticeably the importance of those aspects of linguistic potentiality which relate to the whole community:

> In the study of language, of course, individual utterances *are analyzed as specimens of the linguistic possibilities of a whole community*, whereas in the study of style we try to ascertain *how the linguistic possibilities common to the whole community have been made use of in a special case for an individual purpose* […] Linguistic analysis accordingly, always concentrates on *what is common* or *may become common* to the whole community; stylistic analysis on the other hand is concerned with *what is individual and unique* (Mathesius, 1927: 56, my italics).

[95] On linguistic deviation and acceptance of novelties by the linguistic community here Mathesius quotes Gustav Bally's work *Psychologische Phänomene in Bedeutungswandel* (Bern, Haupt, 1924).

[96] See Mathesius (1911: 22). This is an opinion that he shares with Ries (1894: 122-123, 126-127), who had regarded stylistics not as 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.

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This formulation differs interestingly from that in the 1911 article, in which Mathesius contemplated the theoretical possibility of linguistics covering "all the phenomena of language that occur in concrete utterances" (Mathesius, 1911: 1), although – as we have already noted – he did admit the practical impossibility of putting such a programme into practice. His 1927 article, instead, defines the field of linguistics unilaterally. Once again, this change invites us to recognize the distancing from the orientation on linguistic individualism present in the 1911 article and the influence of the cultural climate of the 1920s with its pronounced emphasis on the importance of the language community. This matter had aroused considerable debate, especially after the publication of Saussure's *Cours*. Within the Circle of Prague, this was an important leitmotiv, even if the Czechs and Russians expressed it in different formulations and with different nuances. In the previous quotation, the expression "what is common or may become common" would seem to suggest that, whatever influences Mathesius was exposed to after 1911, he never abandoned his belief in the importance of the phenomena of potentiality.

However, it was perhaps the third aspect of the notion of potentiality that had the most significant consequences for the Circle and the Prague tradition, and that is its relation to the language statics and the dynamics, which reciprocally defined both dimensions. The key point is clearly expressed in the 1911 article, and relates to the concept of the oscillation boundaries in the statics:

> In our opinion the dynamic issues can only be solved after a more thorough research in individual languages has formally established which phenomenon can have been regarded in them, at a given time, as constant and which as potential. Only then will one be in a position to ask how long a potential phenomenon α 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 β, replacing α (Mathesius, 1911: 31).

He maintains that this is a difficult area of research, but that it could eventually change the basic conceptions "of what is going on in language" (Mathesius, 1911: 31). His thinking here, however, is focused on the statics

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(= synchrony), in line with his firm opinion, often repeated in his work, that the most reliable method is that which leads from the statics to the dynamics (Mathesius, 1911: 31). Although his formulation is not explicit, the idea that the statics contains phenomena in continuous motion is already expressed here with a certain clarity. It will find full elaboration in the Theses of 1929[97].

A further step towards systematising the implications of the notion of potentiality for dynamics is taken by Mathesius in his mentioned paper on the new currents and trends of linguistic research which he read in October 1925 to a preparatory meeting of the Circle and which, soon after, in November, he presented at the *Královská Česká společnost Nauk* (*Royal Czech Academy of Sciences*)[98]. Here Mathesius speaks more explicitly than in his 1911 work on the causes of language change in the context of a more detailed recognition of the primacy of the statics. Only the statics, which takes into account the "action of speaking", can provide the data for a complete analysis of the basic grammatical functions such as subject and predicate; furthermore, only the statics permits to investigate the true nature of the word and this may also lead to a deeper understanding of the sentence formation, according to Mathesius a core problem of syntax[99]. Also the study of linguistic tendencies in competition with each other, one ending up prevailing over others, needs to be dealt with especially in the perspective of the statics[100]. There is still a controversial opposition to historical linguistics, which acts as a reference-point for what is really essential in the study of change:

> Of course, the static method may prove a dangerous rival to historical research. The exaggerated faith in historical methods is based on the conviction that the origin of linguistic fact A_2 is sufficiently explained by stating that the said fact has replaced linguistic fact A_1. A looser analysis of the problem leads to the conclusion that what mat-

[97] One of the passages in which Mathesius foreshadows this idea is when he speaks of the language community in its widest sense, as a nation (Mathesius, 1911: 1).

[98] On the publishing history of this paper, see Mathesius (1936a: 139).

[99] Mathesius (1927: 48). On the crucial importance of the study of the sentence for general linguistics see Mathesius (1929: 123).

[100] Mathesius (1927: 49).

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> ters is not so much to ascertain the mere succession of facts but to show why fact A_1 has been replaced by fact A_2 (Mathesius, 1927: 49).

The search for the causes of change, however, is not easy, as is shown by the analysis of matters such as the simplification of systems of declension. This requires a preliminary examination of the "general character" of a language[101], and a study of formal systems of means of expression. The causes of changes are to be found "in the shifting needs of linguistic expression"[102]. Although Mathesius (1927: 53) maintained that this study had not even been initiated, it is interesting that a little later he tried to deal with these problems in his paper on characterology presented at the conference of the Hague (Mathesius, 1928) (see also section 7.).

To understand the role played by characterology in the development of Mathesius's ideas on synchrony and diachrony, and in particular of his functional view of diachrony, we have to consider that this discipline was defined by him as the scientific study of the idiosyncratic functional properties of individual languages[103]. Descriptive grammar and characterology are clearly distinguished in their aims: "it is the task of the descriptive grammar to give a complete inventory of all formal and functional elements existing in a given language at a given stage of its

[101] Mathesius (1927: 49). Mathesius dealt with characterology in a paper at the First Congress of Linguists in 1928. In his 1927 paper, however, he already underlines that "[l]inguistic characterology […] as I hope to show elsewhere, will play a first-rate role in the linguistics of tomorrow" (Mathesius, 1927: 49).

[102] A decisive factor lies in the already-mentioned tension between the conventional character of a language and individual needs of expression, which can never be satisfied by the linguistic means at one's disposal (see above). Here Mathesius expresses his opinion in connection to the problem of building up a new morphology "which instead of being an applied phonology only, should be a real study of formal means of expression and should try to find the causes of their changes in *the shifting needs of linguistic expression*" (Mathesius, 1928: 53, my italics).

[103] Mathesius distinguishes characterology from typology. He believed that typology was a task non-affordable by linguistics at that time: "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: 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). For a discussion of the two disciplines as alternative methods of linguistic comparison in the Prague Circle see Sornicola (2014). See here further on section 7.

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development"; characterology, on the other hand, "deals only with the important and fundamental features of a given language" (Mathesius, 1928: 59).

Characterology also involves a systemic (correlational) view, in that it "is the introduction into linguistic analysis of the conception of value and of synchronic interrelations" (Mathesius, 1928: 59)[104]. This analysis is arrived at through historico-empirical and textual analytical procedures[105] and the resulting models are thus inevitably relative and provisional. In the study of characterology the epistemological complex related to "thought", "concept" and "meaning" is abandoned in favour of the new cognitive constellation associated with "function". 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 Slavic 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: 62). The tendencies identified demonstrate the importance of synchronic relations in linguistics, in that they are correlated with other characteristic phenomena of English. They are also important as a key to understanding potentialities of diachronic changes (see section 7.).

Mathesius's statements about the search for the functional causes of changes, made in the paper presented at the Royal Czech Academy and in the paper on characterology, are significantly different from those of Saussure on the subject of change. They show a line of development in the thinking of "the professor of Prague" towards a functionalistic conception

[104] It is interesting to note here Mathesius's adoption of Saussure's terms "value" and "synchronic".

[105] There are, moreover, important links between the characterological viewpoint and stylistics. The relationship between the two disciplines may be 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: 22), and therefore its character and its style, terms that are more clearly analogous in Mathesius (1928).

 DOI: 10.4410/AIONL.7.2018.007

of the dynamic method, a conception that was to be expressed more clearly and in an extreme form in the *Theses*.

6. The many senses of the term "function"

Within the Prague Circle, the term *function* has multiple senses, which can be defined in relation to at least five fundamental concepts, some of which are closely related: function as (a) "meaning" vs "end"; (b) "use possibilities of linguistic systems" (external functions of language); (c) "functioning" of languages or of linguistic units; (d) in relation to the functional explanation of linguistic change; (e) a relation of interdependence. The term can be associated with different theoretical entities: languages and/or linguistic units, the diachronic development of systems, and methodological procedures. The different concepts and associations appear in various parts of the *Theses*. In the first *Thesis* the notion of "function" as 'meaning / purpose' is put in the foregoround, while the notions of 'functioning / operating as' and 'interdependence' are pivotal in the second *Thesis*[106] and 'external function' is a key concept in the third. The idea of 'interdependence', however, pervades the whole text (see in the first *Thesis* the recurring words *spojitost* 'connection, relation', *souvislost* 'connection, association' in the discussion of the new possibilities of using the comparative method as opposed to the traditional analysis of fortuitous, episodic and isolated facts)[107].

Here we must confine ourselves to a short examination of (a) and (e) which have special implications for understanding the different positions of the various members of the Circle[108].

[106] The notion of 'functioning, operating as' is particularly evident in the definition of sounds as elements of a functional system: "the subjective and articulatory ideas constitute the elements of the linguistic system only to the extent that *they perform in that system the function of differentiating meaning*" (Vachek, 1983: 83, emphasis mine). The notion of 'interdependence' is clearly fundamental in the discussion of functional syntax (see Vachek, 1983: 86-87).

[107] See Vachek (1970b: 37-38).

[108] For a discussion of the various senses, see Daneš (1987: 9), Hajičová (2006); Sornicola (1992), Sornicola (2014).

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6.1. Function as 'meaning' vs. 'end'

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: 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 *vyjadřovací 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) 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 pragmatic and "teleonomic" concept expressible through the metaphor whereby a linguistic element "serves as, operates as, a tool useful to an end"[109]. In

[109] 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 *teleonomic* is used by Daneš as a synonym of *teleological*, in

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attempting to interpret Mathesius's thought we might also consider the semantic value of the Czech term *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, *function* as "meaning" is a term that characterises an earlier phase in the history of linguistics. It is found in Bréal (1866), and less consistently in Paul's *Prinzipien*, in which the term *Funktion* often seems to equate with "grammatical meaning"[110]. It is not without interest, in any case, that Paul (1880, and again in the edition of 1920: §146) already speaks of "functional differences" (*Funktionsunterschiede*) that can be preserved by phonetic differences (*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. Recourse to these pragmatic metaphors and their presence 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.

the present chapter it is reserved for the pragmatic principle just mentioned, whereas *teleological* is used in its familiar diachronic sense.

[110] 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 §135 and §294 (in this last paragraph the term alternates with *use* [*Gebrauch*]). Sometimes *Funktion* alternates with *Bedeutung*, without any apparent semantic difference (in §103). In §104, however, *Funktion* is set against *Bedeutung*: "for the genitive it is not possible to determine any simple meaning (*Bedeutung*) for which the functions (*Funktionen*) that it already has in the originary 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 [§155]). On "meaning" and "use" in nineteenth-century linguistics, see Morpurgo Davies (1998: 311–312).

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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 advocated by a precursor of functionalism, Michel Bréal (1866: 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".

6.2. 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 oppositive relations. As early as Gabelentz (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

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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 inventory, become extremely important "from the standpoint of the function of the phonemic system" (Trubetzkoy, 1939: 75 [English translation]). The nature of a phonological opposition (privative, gradual or equipollent) depends on the structure and the functioning of the respective phonemic system[111]. 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" [1939: 242]). This functional classification supplements the classification produced by a logical analysis of phonological oppositions (1939: 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 interdependence refers inherently to the concept of system, and vice versa (see Delattre, 1979).

On the syntagmatic axis, the idea of interdependence pertains 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.

[111] 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, 1939: 77).

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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, 1920 [1880]: 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[112]. 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"[113] gradually gained ground also in the field of linguistics.

The notion of 'interconnection' / 'relation' becomes a leitmotiv in Mathesius's writings of the second half of the Twenties.

7. The *Theses* of 1929

The process of drafting the *Theses* presented in 1929 at the First Congress of the Slavists is undoubtedly a historical issue of the greatest importance for a comprehension of the Circle's origin and especially for an understanding of how scholars from different countries and with different backgrounds and orientations came to describe their ideas with an appearance of unity. Here too, it may be useful to approach the task examining the presentations of the protagonists, Mathesius and Jakobson, in order to find possible "dissonances", and then go on to look at the text that was actually produced and jointly signed. Since it is impossible here to examine

[112] Graffi (1990) 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 (1991) on the relational conception of syntax as a characteristic of the Prague Circle.

[113] Thus Ferrari (1996: 38) in reference to Cassirer. See also Knoppe (1992: 7–26).

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the whole text of the *Theses* (this would make the topic of a monograph), I shall focus only on some aspects of the first *Thesis*.

To summarize a few well-known facts. Work on the 1929 *Theses* had been preceded by a joint discussion by members of the Circle which was developed some time before, thanks to an opportunity offered by the Dutch linguists of the Catholic University of Nijmegen, who were the organizers of the First International Congress of Linguists at The Hague in 1928. They had invited the participants to answer six general questions on the ongoing changes of direction in linguistic research. In his overview of the first ten years of the Circle, Mathesius states that the uniformity of the opinions of its members was confirmed by the fact that four of its members (Jakobson, Trubetzkoy, Karcevskij and himself), without any preliminary agreement, and in response to the fourth question (on the best method to adopt for a complete grammatical analysis of any language), developed and presented nine of the thirteen theses[114]. This experience was enriched by interaction with representatives of the School of Geneva, Bally and Sechehaye, with whom important points of convergence were found[115].

The work undertaken was to be useful in the Circle's preparation for the First Congress of the Slavists held in Prague in October 1929, where it had been decided to give a joint presentation of theses. In those months the Circle's members engaged in delivering public lectures in Prague and in a rich scientific activity the results of which were published in the first two volumes of *Travaux du Cercle de Prague*. Preparation for the Prague Congress occupied the months from the summer of 1928 to October 1929[116] and "most of the work was devoted to the elaboration of the linguistic theses which give a complete and synthetic program of linguistic research with special regard to Slavic languages" (Mathesius, 1936a: 143). The theses set out in the second section (linguistics) and in the third (pedagogy) were presented by all the members of the Circle. In the first section (literary history) Mukařovský gave an individual presentation of his ideas with accompany-

[114] Mathesius (1936a: 141).

[115] Mathesius notes that this resulted in the representatives of the Prague Circle (Jakobson, Mathesius, Trubetzkoy) and the School of Geneva presenting a joint program of linguistic analysis at the Congress at The Hague.

[116] Mathesius (1936a: 142).

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ing notes. Most of the work was taken up by ideas on linguistics. This was the outcome of a collective effort carried out by the members of a special commission coordinated by Jakobson, Havránek, Mukařovský and Mathesius over a period of many months and after numerous meetings[117].

It is interesting to note the role that Mathesius assigns to the "domain of the phonic level of language"[118] in his recollection of the activities of the late Twenties. He points out that it had occupied a position of great importance in the works of the Circle from its very beginnings, and links this interest with the theses presented at The Hague and in Prague. The centrality of the phonic dimension seems to be related to various circumstances. One important factor is seen in the context of criticism of neogrammatical ideas, which was a basic concern during much of Mathesius's career even when, in the late 1920s, this particular debate might have been considered to a certain extent "worn out". The fact that the Circle should dedicate so much attention to the phonic level to which the principles of the neogrammatical school had been applied with the greatest rigour, and had obtained their greatest success, does not seem fortuitous; the Prague scholars, and especially Mathesius, may have wished to beat their adversaries "of the old school" on the ground that had been most congenial to them[119]. However, it was not simply a question of backward-looking comparisons. Mathesius recognizes that the Circle's interest in the phonic dimension derived not only from the work of Baudouin de Courtenay, but also from American linguistics, and above all from Sapir[120], as well as from Jespersen and Daniel Jones; but he assigns a special role to the studies of Trubetzkoy and Jakobson: "All these facts, and especially the achievements of our Russian colleagues, Trubetzkoy and Jakobson, were to make phonology our main *cri de guerre*" (Mathesius, 1936a: 144). The Circle's interest in phonology took on further importance in view of preparations for the second international

[117] Mathesius (1936a: 143).

[118] The terminology used by Mathesius (1936a: 144) calls for comment. To the more general designation of "phonic level of language" he contrasts "phonology" (a term already present in Mathesius (1927) and which also appears in Mathesius (1929)).

[119] This idea might have been validated by the parallelism which Mathesius (1936a: 144) establishes between neogrammatical interests and the interests of the Circle.

[120] For Mathesius's references to Sapir, see Eramian (1988: 377-378) in his wider discussion of relations between Mathesius, Jakobson, Trubetzkoy and the American linguist.

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congress of linguistics at Geneva in 1931, where – in Mathesius's words – "phonology would be the main issue, in regard to which it would be necessary to define our standpoint" (Mathesius, 1936a: 144)[121].

And yet, in spite of these statements, phonology as a functional-structural discipline was only one of the many interests of the first president of the Circle, and it was not even a central one. His long-practised attention to phonetics is of course another matter. Think, for example, of the development of his theory of potentiality, of his concern for intonation in relation to word order, and then of his treatment of the phenomena of emphasis[122]. I think that Mathesius's history of the Circle contains various clues that indicate how far the collective *cri de guerre* was distinct from the interests of individual scholars. There is further evidence of this. Apart from the *Theses*, at The Hague Mathesius presented a personal paper on characterology which, though having much in common with the first *Thesis*, set out an autonomous line of research to which he gave great importance (see para. 5.). Furthermore, if we consider other significant works of his of the late 1920s, such as his functional linguistics manifesto of 1929, we see that phonology is discussed as a third point in his presentation of the new idea of functionalism, following two other issues that were always central to his thought: the definition of sentence and the flexibility of word order in Czech[123]. It is true that he states that the study of the phonic aspect of language was changing in line with the new overall direction of linguistics, and that the old positivistic interest in experimental phonetics, focused on the articulation of sounds, had been replaced by the functional approach with its emphasis on the relation between phonic data and data related to meaning[124]. And it is also true that these statements might indicate a distancing from, or a rethinking of, the conceptual framework of the theory of

[121] Mathesius (1936a: 144-145) provides further information on developments in phonology in the Prague Circle between 1930 and 1935, such as the organization of an *International Phonological Conference* in Prague in December 1930. Trubetzkoy appears to take on a special role in this period (his paper opened the discussion at the Congress of Geneva in 1931, and phonology was one of the main topics discussed in the plenary sessions).

[122] For his treatment of these topics, see Mathesius (1939); Mathesius (1941-1942).

[123] See Mathesius (1924a; 1924b; 1939; 1941-1942).

[124] See Mathesius (1929: 128-129).

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potentiality as formulated in 1911. But it would, in my view, be wrong to deduce from this that the original inspiration of his research had succumbed to the new ideas of his younger Russian colleagues. A bibliographical examination shows that his writings on matters of phonology are far fewer than others in his extensive production. To sum up, the *Theses* had expressed the basic principles of a new scientific approach, within a "common program of linguistic analysis", but to what extent was the "we" of the principles advocated collectively pervasive or spontaneous?

Further evidence is provided by Jakobson's different account of the history of the Circle, in which he makes reference to a disciplined organization that could almost be called "military":

> Già nel 1929, durante il congresso degli slavisti a Praga, [il Circolo] si presentava come una organizzazione combattiva e disciplinata, con tesi programmatiche precise. *La novità della struttura di questo Circolo, in confronto col tipo tradizionale delle società scientifiche, appare nel fatto ch'esso rinunzia al compito d'un parlamento di diverse correnti* e proclama apertamente nello statuto che esso mira a collaborare al progresso delle ricerche linguistiche sulla base del metodo funzionale e strutturale, e che *l'attività d'un membro del Circolo che si svolgesse in opposizione a questo programma lo farebbe escludere dall'organizzazione* (Jakobson, 1933: 541, my italics).

This gives us a glimpse of a picture that is very different from that aspiring ideal of human and scientific brotherhood and the liberal spirit of collaboration so often expressed by Mathesius. It suggests, in fact, a kind of totalitarian view of the social life of the Circle, though it may also contain an element of subjective perception of the real situation. Whatever be the case, this reference to the statute's ruling that any departure from the method would lead to expulsion from the Circle certainly makes one think.

Also significant are Jakobson's statements on who should write and/or redraft anything in the *Theses*. In letters of 2nd and 11th June 1969 to Jean-Pierre Faye, the former from Harvard, the latter from San Diego, Jakobson asserts that the first drafts of the *Theses* 1 ("Problems of method following from the systemic conception of language and the importance of this conception for Slavic languages"), 2a ("Tasks to be performed by the examina-

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tion of the linguistic system, particularly the Slavic: Research on the phonic side of language") and 3a ("Problems of research into languages of different functions, especially Slavic: On the functions of language") were prepared by him personally; that *Thesis* 3c ("Problems of research into language of different functions, especially Slavic: On poetic language") was written by him and Mukařovský, and that *Thesis* 7 ("Problems of an all-Slavic linguistic atlas, particularly in the lexicon") and especially 8 ("Problems of the method of Slavic lexicography") were written by Trubetzkoy (*Change* 3, 51). Only a few days later, however, another letter introduces some amendments made at the request for clarification of Faye: "la première des thèses, hors ma propre contribution déjà mentionnée, a été esquissée en majeure partie par Mathesius. La thèse sur le langage littéraire a été esquissée par B. Havránek et la première esquisse de la thèse sur le Vieux-Slavon d'Église provenait de N. M. Durnovo" (*Change*, 3, 51), and he adds: "J'aimerais le souligner, le caractère d'auteur (authorship) que je mentionne concerne une esquisse préliminaire qui fut, ensuite, soumise à discussion et qui subit certaines retouches dans le comité du Cercle, comprenant alors Mathesius, Trnka, Havránek, Mukařovský, et moi-même" (*Change*, 3, 51).

It is perhaps not purely speculative to suggest that in the texture of the *Theses* the origin of certain parts may still bear witness to the different interests and topics of research of the individual scholars. For example, the emphasis on language as a system of purposeful means of expression, the study of characterologies of present-day languages (first *Thesis*), the treatment of the theory of linguistic onomatology, the nature of the word, the theory of functional syntax, the activity of combination of words (second *Thesis*) seem to reflect Mathesius's paths of investigation, while in the discussion of the new possibilities of using the comparative method, the structural comparison of related languages, the idea of "nomogenesis" (first *Thesis*), the structural principle of the phonological system (second *Thesis*) it is possible to recognize more directly the interests of the young Russian scholars.

Restricting our discussion to an examination of the first *Thesis*, the generally valid mention of a "preliminary draft" by Jakobson, followed by discussion and "touching-up" by the Committee suggests at least that there was a dialectic in the drafting of the text, a dialectic adumbrated by Mathe-

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sius's account according to which the work took many months and "numerous meetings". It is also to be noted that Jakobson gives Mathesius a leading role, not only because his is the first name he mentions, but above all by asserting that the first *Thesis* was largely "drafted" by him, an assertion that contradicts what he says in his letter of 2nd June, which attributes the first draft to himself.

When one considers the different scientific profiles and contrasting personalities of Jakobson and Mathesius, these discrepancies invite us to think critically about the effective conceptual amalgam of the *Theses*, and especially the first, which is what interests us here. We may approach this problem observing the changes of perspective in the elaboration of two important ideas. The first concerns the representation of language as a functional system (chapter 1a), the second, the relationship between synchrony and diachrony (chapter 1b). The representation of language as a functional system was not too distant from Mathesius's thought as expressed during his previous long scientific career (he had described all linguistic activity as oriented towards ends, recognized the expressive and communicative functions of language, defined the centrality of the speaker's intention and the concept of function). However, the text of the first *Thesis* seems distant from the ideas of Mathesius's earlier writings, which are remote from the view of language as a "system of purposeful means of expression"[125] (Vachek, 1983: 77) and even more from the rigid notion that "no fact of language can be understood without regard to the system to which it pertains"[126] (Vachek, 1983: 77). It is true that the notion of "interdependence" of phenomena surfaces more or less explicitly in various works of Mathesius's, but it seems to be related to an autonomous thread of thought as it is already present in the paper on potentiality and enjoys continuity long after the 1929 *Theses* (see further on). The concept of system is, of course, already found in the work presented to the Royal Czech Academy in November 1925 and then published in a volume in honor of Zubatý (Mathesius, 1927); and it asserts itself most clearly in the functional linguistics

[125] "Un système de moyens d'expression appropriés à un but" (Vachek, 1964: 33).

[126] "On ne peut comprendre aucun fait de la langue sans avoir égard au système auquel il appartient" (Vachek, 1964: 33).

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manifesto (Mathesius, 1929). It is possible that the Circle's discussions had influenced Mathesius here, as also the changed cultural and scientific horizons of the young Czechoslovak Republic and mid-twenties Europe. Mathesius's references to his relations with the School of Geneva and their points of convergence are significant in this regard (Mathesius, 1936a: 142).

But how far did this influence go? It is my view that we should doubt the fact that the dimensions of the system had taken on a role in his thinking similar to that which it had in Jakobson's and Trubetzkoy's. During these years, Mathesius often gives voice to his distancing from Saussure. The differences of attitude and adhesion to the functional system model can be assessed by comparing Jakobson's rather cold detachment from empirical research and his totalitarian and totalizing conception of the theory (1933: especially 541) with Mathesius's eclectic liberalism and his interest in the observation of data, and even more so with his conviction that linguistic phenomena and languages possess an ineradicable indeterminacy. His reference to this aspect was made explicit not only in his paper on potentiality, but also many years later in a paper on the systematic analysis of the problems of grammar which was written after the *Theses* of 1929 and those of 1935. Although he seems here to achieve a more carefully thought-out integration of the various parts of his theory[127], and despite falling back on the notion of system, there remains a conception of the basic character of indeterminacy of language and consequently of the limitations of linguistic analysis: "the deeper insight we get into the organism of language the more we are persuaded of its complexity and of the impossibility of arriving at clear-cut statements without distorting objective reality too much" (Mathesius, 1936b: 316). Statements like this, made in the mid-1930s, suggest that Mathesius, though extremely sensitive to continuing developments in research and open to collaboration with the younger Russian scholars, maintained his personal unmistakable scientific identity. The changes he underwent during his research between the early years of the 20th century and those of the late 1920s and 30s can be reflected on, as can his seeming abandonment of the concept of potentiality and his adoption of the systemic model. But on reflection, the anti-reifying, anti-hypostatizing attitude

[127] For a more detailed discussion, see Sornicola (2012).

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which had characterized his early studies had not changed. Further evidence of this can be seen in the statements with which he opens his paper on characterology delivered at the Congress held at The Hague. Here Mathesius (1928: 59) stated that the characteristic trait of this discipline was "the introduction into linguistic analysis of the conception of value and of synchronic interrelations". He dedicates the whole paper to the interdependence of language phenomena, but he points out with lucid objectivity that "the only aim of linguistic characterology is a better scientific analysis of the given language" and that "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: 59). To sum up, I believe there was no totally unanimous agreement on all the ideas in the *Theses*. Despite the fact that evidence is scarce, it is on the other hand sufficient to conclude that the *Theses* represented a laborious process of pinning down opinions that at times needed to be argued through. The drifting views may have been backgrounded but this did not result in a totally coherent picture.

The second aspect of the first *Thesis* that invites critical reflection on to what extent there was unanimous agreement concerns the relation between synchrony and diachrony, and in particular the Circle's criticism of the conception of the mechanistic and random nature of change. Here again, behind the collective statements, certain differences of interest, theoretical framework and academic lines of research can be seen. Mathesius undoubtedly concurred with the statement regarding the primacy of the analysis of synchrony with which chapter 1b begins. Some passage in his writings also tend to make us think that he did not exclude the possibility of conceiving language as a functional system both in its past forms and in reconstructions of its evolution, an idea that is strongly asserted in the first of the *Theses*. An examination of his paper on characterology would seem to be particularly useful. In stating that characterology is the study of interrelations and values of elements, Mathesius underlines its specifically synchronic nature:

> If it is the task of the descriptive grammar to give a complete inventory of all formal and functional elements existing in a given lan-

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> guage at a given stage of its development, linguistic characterology deals only with the important and fundamental features of a given language at a given point of time (Mathesius, 1928: 59).

However, he also admits that

> in languages with a traceable development the function of linguistic characterology is not confined to the working up of the characteristics of their linguistic structure at different points of their own history. The greatest importance of linguistic characterology in such cases lies in the ability to discover new problems for historical investigation or to show new ways for the solution of problems already under discussion (Mathesius, 1928: 60).

Returning to an idea found in his earliest writings, he identifies a characteristic of English of fundamental importance: its tendency for the theme of the sentence to coincide with the grammatical subject. This characteristic is related to others, such as the large number of passive structures, constructions with verbs of perception + object + predicative participle (for example, *He found himself menaced*), personal constructions with verbs of sensation or experience (*I am sorry to hear, I am warm enough*), the relative order of subject preceding the verb[128]. Mathesius (1928: 66) poses the question of how to classify "the meaning of the discussed facts for historical investigation". He observes that the tendency to make theme and subject of the sentence to coincide, still true of the contemporary language, "lay at the bottom of the changes by which in Middle English nearly all impersonal constructions were converted into personal ones" (Mathesius, 1928: 64), which was certainly equivalent to assigning explicative importance, in diachronic investigation, to the tendency which is identified as being fundamental. Once again, however, he expresses himself prudently, seeming to point to a research path to be followed than to describe a theory of change, although this, yet again, supports his criticism of the traditional methods of historical linguistics of the positivist kind, based on the analysis of single unrelated facts:

[128] See Mathesius (1928: 62-66).

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> To anyone with a trained feeling for the delicate intricacies of linguistic development it must be evident that many new departures are offered to those who would follow the sketched interdependences backward into the past and try to see the chronological succession of single facts (Mathesius, 1928: 66-67).

The content of this passage seems close to a statement in the first *Thesis*: "the comparative method definitively dismisses the fruitless and fictitious method of examining history of isolated facts; it reveals the basic tendencies of development of this of that [sic!] language" (Vachek, 1983: 80)[129]. But the concluding discussion of the paper deals with ideas that seem far from other formulations in the first of the *Theses*. Criticizing Van der Gaaf's opinion that the development of the personal constructions of English from impersonal constructions was due to confusion of cases deriving from the weakening of unaccented syllables, Mathesius (1928: 67) states that this phonetic feature can be considered only as an initial formal precondition[130], but it cannot positively explain the influences "that determined in which direction the development was to proceed". His hypothesis is that there were changes in the English functional sentence perspective relating especially to the predicative verb and grammatical subject[131]. The set of interdependences examined might, in his view, help to clarify the problem of change and therefore show that "characterological analysis on a strictly synchronic basis gives new impulses even to the historical study of languages" (Mathesius, 1928: 67). Certain aspects of this discussion are particularly striking. Firstly, the dimension of the study of interdependences which takes priority is synchrony, while diachrony takes second place[132]. Secondly,

[129] "L'étude comparative rejette à l'écart, definitivement, la méthode stérile et fictive de l'histoire des facts isolés, elle révèle les tendances fondamentales du développement de l'une ou l'autre langue" (Vachek, 1964 : 35).

[130] Mathesius (1927: 53) had already expressed his scepticism regarding the explanatory force of phonetic features in the process of English losing its system of declination, in agreement with Jespersen 1894.

[131] See Mathesius (1928: 67).

[132] Note that in this paper Mathesius (1928: 59) uses the terms "synchrony", "synchronic", but not "diachrony", "diachronic", preferring instead "history" and "historical study" (Mathesius, 1928: 60, 67).

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the extensions of the supported method of analysis to historical research are conceived as "tendencies", "influences" and "new impulses" for understanding the developments of languages over time. These points of view are not incompatible with certain statements in the first *Thesis*, but once again they indicate a style of thought which is wholly personal and easily distinguishable from that of the opinions put forward collectively.

The conception of the relations between synchronic and diachronic methods is expressed, from a theoretical point of view, in the first *Thesis* in a more radical and articulated form. It is asserted in fact that "one cannot place insurmountable barriers between the synchronistic and the diachronistic method as is done by the Geneva School"[133] (Vachek, 1983: 78, original text in italics) and that not only "it is […] impossible to appreciate also the changes in language without any regard to the system subjected to these changes"[134] (Vachek, 1983 : 78), but that diachronic study needs the notions of system and function, without which it is incomplete. These are ideas that Mathesius might have come to share, in spite of the style being less nuanced than his own[135]. The model according to which, even in a synchronic state, there is evolution because speakers are aware of the stage that is about to disappear, of the present stage and of the stage being formed, raises a topic that had been clearly present among French and Swiss dialectologists since the end of the 19th century, and which Mathesius probably knew about (the topic is discussed by Rousselot[136], a phonetician and dialectologist cited in the article on potentiality). But the consideration of speakers' awareness is a new theoretical issue to which it is by no means easy to recognize contributions by individual members of the group of writers of the *Theses*.

[133] "On ne saurait poser de barrières infranchissables entre les méthodes synchronique et diachronique comme le fait l'école de Genève" (Vachek, 1964 : 34).

[134] "On ne saurait juger non plus les changements subis par la langue sans tenir compte du système qui se trouve affecté par lesdits changements" (Vachek, 1964: 34).

[135] It is possible to share Čermak's (2009) view that Jakobson's interpretation of Saussure's ideas on synchrony and diachrony was too simplistic and may not have put them in the right perspective: cf. Sornicola (2007).

[136] See for example Rousselot (1891: 161).

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Furthermore, it is not clear whether the opposition to the School of Geneva, which was to be repeated a few years later in the 1935 *Theses*[137], was shared by all the members of the Circle. The passage in the 1929 Theses which expresses the opposition is explicitly cited by Jakobson (1933: 542-543) in a context where he confirms the criticism of Saussure and declares the Circle's intellectual debt to Masaryk for the relation between synchrony and diachrony. However, the interpretation of the opinion of the Czech philosopher and politician seems rather forced:

> La linguistica è soggetta alla regola generale secondo cui lo studio dell'evoluzione di ogni cosa dev'esser legato allo studio della cosa stessa – non si può ripeterlo con bastante insistenza agli storici di tutte le specialità […] Quegli che non conosce la cosa in se stessa, non comprenderà la sua evoluzione (Masaryk, 1885: 108-109, cited in Jakobson, 1933: 543)[138].

I believe that this statement is very relevant to a general principle of European currents of historicism of the last twenty years of the 19th century;

[137] Mathesius repeatedly mentions Saussure in his writings, but without developing any clear argument against him. In the 1935 *Theses* Saussure's position is more critically discussed than that of Marty: "In matters of language development he has followed traditional mechanistic opinions, and openly stated that linguistic changes are blind and random, and that the community is not capable of bringing about any change in the language; according to Saussure the community is bound to the language as much as the language is bound to it. Marty, as a Prague contemporary of Saussure and a student of Brentano's, took the question much further by referring to the problem of purpose not only to the statics but also to language development. And yet Marty too went only half way by unjustifiably generalizing the theses of the lack of regularity in language development" (Havránek, Jakobson, Mathesius, Mukařovský, Trnka, 1935: 1 [translation from Czech]); see also Raynaud, 1990: 366-367). Marty is criticized in particular for his idea that the speaker lacks awareness of language change: "For Marty language is *planlose Absicht* (planless intention); in his view, the initiators of a linguistic innovation are unaware both of the language as a whole and of the functioning of its parts, as well as the final outcome of the innovation within the context of the whole and the methodological principles of the changes they bring about. Their attention is fixed only on the object, on communicative ends alone, while the linguistic values remain in the shadow because the speaker's intention is not directed at the language itself" (Havránek, Jakobson, Mathesius, Mukařovský, Trnka, 1935: 2. [translation from Czech].

[138] Here Jakobson refers to the original Czech version of Masaryk's work. For the German quotation see Masaryk (1887: 193).

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the principle whereby the deepest levels of the understanding of history are to be found by starting from the interpretable structures of life of the present, and only to a very small extent by the teleological interpretation of the historical process upheld by Jakobson[139]. The emphasis on teleologism, in my view, is characteristic of Jakobson's thinking, and is in line with his wider philosophical interests. In the same article he mentions two philosophical works published in Prague at the beginning of the 1930s, Engliš's *Telelologie jako forma vědeckého poznání* [*Teleology as a form of scientific knowledge*] and Fischer's *Základy poznání* [*The Bases of knowledge*] and calls them "the two books which characterize modern Czech philosophy", claiming that they are "in spite of the differences in the authors' philosophies […] very close to the tendencies of the Circle" (Jakobson, 1933: 544)[140].

What is especially distant from the ideas of Mathesius as expressed in his writings is the notion of 'law' in the first *Thesis*. It appears explicitly in the passage which discusses the new possibilities of the comparative analysis of languages of the same family and their consequences, and it may be said to provide the theoretical framework of the method. The rejection of the idea that the comparative method as applied to Slavic languages should be restricted to genetic matters is found side-by-side with the idea that comparison should be used more widely: "it is a method suited for discovering *the structural laws of language systems and of their development*" (Vachek, 1983: 79, authors' italics)[141]. To achieve this, the data may be provided not only by the analysis of differences between genetically unrelated languages (the influence of the principles of typological comparison is evident here), but also by the structural differences that have taken root over time between languages of the Slavonic family. This approach not only upsets the idea that the convergent and divergent developments of languages

[139] Jakobson (1933: 543) asserts that "la concezione strutturalistica del legame tra l'essenza della cosa e la sua evoluzione è in stretto rapporto, in Masaryk e nei lavori del Circolo, con l'interpretazione teleologica del processo storico, mentre per il Saussure i mutamenti sono ciechi e sprovvisti di senso".

[140] We cannot avoid noting that the works of Engliš and Fischer belonged to a different philosophical horizon to that of Masaryk. Jakobson follows here a line of historical analysis which seems entirely personal and debatable.

[141] "C'est une méthode propre à permettre de découvrir *les lois de structure des systèmes linguistiques et de l'évolution de ceux-ci*" (Vachek, 1964: 36).

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are random and episodic, but it also reveals "the regularity of interconnection" (Vachek, 1983: 79) between facts of convergence and divergence[142]. This kind of research would lead to a typology of the development of the Slavic languages, in other words "[the] grouping together [of] a series of interconnected changes into one whole" (Vachek, 1983: 79-80)[143].

On this basis, a principle is expressed that defines the laws of concatenation of the facts of language evolution:

> [i]n the scientific discipline examining facts of evolution – to which also historical linguistics belongs – the conception of facts of fortuitous origin, even though of later consistent implementation, is at present giving way to the conception of regular interconnection of the facts of development (nomogenesis) (Vachek, 1983: 80-81)[144].

It is interesting that the emphasis on the rejection of mechanistic ideas, repeated almost excessively at several points of the first *Thesis*, is combined with an attempt to give to linguistics a method that would surely entitle it to be considered one of the evolutionary sciences. It seems to me that we can see in this speculative style oriented towards philosophical and epistemological interest characteristics of Jakobson which were alien, as it were, to Mathesius. I believe we have good reason to doubt that Mathesius, with his lucid awareness of the complexity of languages and their evolution, his deep relativistic conception of the "tendencies" found in statics and dynamics, could have been the originator, the main writer and supporter of the passages we have quoted. History, of course, cannot be arrived at by mere conjecture, but an intertextual analysis of the writings of various exponents of the Circle appears to reveal opinions that were not perfectly attuned. Perhaps Mathesius, in part the writer and in part the reviser of the

[142] The French text diverges here from the English: it has "lois de solidarité" (Vachek, 1964: 35) instead of "regularity of interconnection".

[143] "C'est-à-dire le groupement d'une série de faits mutuellement solidaires en un seul tout" (Vachek, 1964: 35).

[144] "Dans les sciences évolutives, au nombre desquelles figure aussi la linguistique historique, on voit aujourd'hui la conception de faits produits arbitrairement et au hasard – fussent-ils réalisés avec une régulatité absolue – céder les pas à la notion de l'enchaînement selon de lois de faits évolutifs (nomogénèse)" (Vachek, 1964: 36). Note that here again the French translation diverges from the English (cf. *lois* vs *interconnection*).

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first *Thesis*, consented to nomothetic and nomogenetic formulations of language development, even when they were alien to him, being influenced by his human empathy and lenience for the combative attitude of the young Russians; this transpires more or less explicitly from his memories of the early years of the Circle, and perhaps (and above all) he wished to avoid tensions and ensure the compactness of the group – just what he had most at heart.

This is, of course, no more than an hypothesis. What I am convinced of is that the points discussed in this paper clearly support the argument for the considerable "polyphony" of the Circle. In various ways both Mathesius's and Jakobson's accounts of their experience of writing the *Theses* of 1929 testify to the existence of different views and controversies. It is of course typical of the composition of disputes in diplomatic and academic groups to use a language that plays down divergences and arguments, and Mathesius was too fine a diplomat not to follow this custom. Yet the "many months" and "numerous meetings" mentioned by him are eloquent as are Jakobson's contradictory versions of the drafting of the *Theses*. Could the "many meetings" be seen as gatherings of "diplomats attempting to agree the wording of a treaty"[145]? Perhaps, but then how was the agreement reached and what was the compromise found? This is difficult to know. Might compromise have been obtained by resorting to the notion of "function" seen as "a fudge", "a word which was vacuous enough for different parties to read different things into it" and possibly "an ideal solution" in that "no one can deny that units of a language do have functions"[146]? I would be inclined to think that the compromise – if there was any – was not reached on this premise. It is true, as we have observed, that the notion of "function" was used in various ways by the Circle's scholars, and no overall elaborate reflection of theoretical nature was developed to elucidate its complex nature and polysemic definition nor to explore its broad implications in depth. It was like "the air" that was breathed in Prague of the late Twenties, too thin and yet pervasive, too implicit and yet necessary to be the deliberate instrument of such a compromise. The presence of the vari-

[145] This is Peter Matthews's interpretation, which was suggested to me in a letter of 17 April 2013.

[146] Peter Matthews's words in the letter of 17 April 2013.

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ous notions of "function" and "functional analysis" in the *Theses* may simply be seen as a consequence of the fact that then as now no linguistic theory can be developed without the idea of what language and its units are for and how the latter are interrelated.

In my view, the final form in which the *Theses* were clad shows dissonances and faults which manifest that no substantial agreement was ultimately reached. It may be that, from within the general chorus, individual voices might still be heard.

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 DOI: 10.4410/AIONL.7.2018.007

La rivista è in distribuzione presso:

TULLIO PIRONTI S.R.L., *P.zza Dante 89, Palazzo Ruffo di Bagnara, 80135 Napoli*. Tel. 081 5499748 e 0812180169. Fax: 0815645026.

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editore@tulliopironti.it
http://www.tulliopironti.it/contatti.htm

Collaborazione in redazione: *Francesca Carbone, Marta Sommella*

UniorPress

il torcoliere

Prodotto da
Il Torcoliere • *Officine Grafico-Editoriali d'Ateneo*
Università degli studi di Napoli "L'Orientale"
Finito di stampare nel mese di settembre 2018