The Many Routes of Functionalism

Rosanna Sornicola

The paper takes two volumes recently published (*Functional Grammar: A Field Approach*, by A. Bondarko and *Syntax. A Functional-typological Introduction*, vol. II, by T. Givón) as the starting point for discussing different approaches to functionalism. A number of problems have been selected to compare similarities and dissimilarities in functional theories, i.e. the relationship between form and function, the notion of potentiality, the role played by psycho-cognitive factors, iconism and arbitrariness, as well as language change. In particular, it is argued that the different views on most of these issues allow us to distinguish different traditions in functionalism.

1. Routes of functionalism.

"Functionalism" is nowadays an overused word in linguistics. It is used to designate so many schools, so many individual approaches, so many outcomes that one wonders whether it really encompasses a set of positive characteristics, or whether it should not be defined negatively with reference to what it differs from.

The scope of theoretical and methodological choices that may be involved is shown by two recent books, Alexander Bondarko's *Functional Grammar: A Field Approach* (Amsterdam, Benjamins 1991) and Talmy Givón's *Syntax. A Functional-typological Introduction, vol. II* (Amsterdam, Benjamins, 1990). Neither of these books, strictly speaking, offers new perspectives on functionalism; rather, both can be envisaged as further attempts to systematize previous research.[1] They instantiate two different approaches to functionalism, where traditional leit-motivs, which are dispersed in the vast linguistic literature of the last century, mingle and reassemble together. They can fruitfully be contrasted in order to make us ponder some crucial issues coming out again and again in the history of functionalism, which have been left open till now. Something of what will be said here may seem strangely

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[1]   Bondarko's book is an enlarged English translation of *Funkcional'naja grammatika*, Nauka, Leningrad, 1984.

reminiscent of debates of the end of last century or of the first decades of this one. History has no rectilinear course.

Interesting problems arise: why do old ideas that had been severely criticized reappear and gain ground in a part of the scientific community? Why has so-called functionalism never succeeded in being unified under a paradygm? Why has it lost ground since the Second World War to the benefit of that part of structuralism emphasizing the "formal" facets of language? And, finally, why is it reviving now, with all the potentialities of the past - some more influential than others? We cannot try to answer these questions here. It is clear, however, that an important role is played by the socio-cultural dimension. Bondarko's and Givón's different backgrounds, in fact, should be taken into due account.

The approach of the first scholar is deeply rooted in the Slavic tradition in the study of language and culture, highlighting the part-whole relationships of semiotic systems as well as the system-context interaction;[2] a more exquisite specimen of the pervasive Russian non-individualistic world-view could hardly be thinkable. On the other hand, the sources of Givón's ideas are more eclectic and distinctly "Western": Jespersen is the oldest and most powerful European influence felt, while the American anthropological and linguistic heritage is reflected in the mass of typological literature of the last twenty years on African, Native American Indian, Sino-Tibetan languages inter alia. Above all, Givon's personal elaboration of trends and data imposes itself on the attention of the reader.

2. Some remarks on the history of the word 'function'.

It can be no surprise that functionalism is such a multifarious area of research, if one considers the multiple meanings of the word 'function'.

As has been observed by Daneš for Prague School functionalism (and his observations could be extended to functionalism *tout court*), at least four different conceptual threads are intertwined in the word function:

(a) the methodological device to start from the common needs of communication and expression and to ask by what means these needs are satisfied in the language being analysed (a consequent claim is that a comparison of different languages, without regard to their genetic relations, can be carried out chiefly on the basis of the common needs of communication and expression);

(b) the notion of 'external functions' of language (and/or utterances);

(c) the notion of 'functions of the units of the language system';

(d) the notion of 'functional explanation of language developments'.[3]

However, 'function' is a key word not only in linguistics, but in other fields of science as well. As regards the concept of 'function', the possible mutual relationships among the various fields are very complicated.

Consider, for example, the mathematical concept of 'function', whose earlier stages have been traced back to Descartes.[4] Developed over more than two centuries with the contributions of Euler, Lagrange, Fourier, Cauchy, among others, this concept has a typically relational nature, most evident in the refinements of the second half of the last century - especially those subsequent to Cantor's set theory.[5] The often quoted definition by Lejeune-Dirichlet gives an interesting standard for the beginnings of Nineteenth Century; it clearly states a law of correspondence between variable quantities: "Entspricht nun jedem x ein einziges, endliches y, und zwar so, dass, während x das Intervall von a bis b stetig durchläuft, $y = f(x)$ sich ebenfalls allmählich verändert, so heisst y eine stetige oder continuirliche Function von x für dieses Intervall".[6]

Although further research would be necessary on this point, it seems that the early Nineteenth Century mathematical conception did not influence linguistic thought. In 1866, when Bréal put the emphasis on the study of the function of words - in his famous inaugural lecture at the Collège de France for the reopening of the Course of Grammaire Comparée - he was clearly speaking of function as 'meaning'.[7] This latter was conceived as 'use' in the smart and challenging view opposing function to form, i.e. usage by the speaker to the abstract and petrified appearence of language.[8] Nor do the later, post-Cantorian developments seem to have influenced linguistic research quickly. As has recently been observed by Graffi, it is in a way obvious that linguistics of the mid of the late century had not been affected by the new, revolutionary approaches in logic and mathematics (Graffi refers here especially to Steinthal), while "più stupefacente è forse il fatto che...fino circa agli

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[3] Daneš (1987: 9).

[4] See Youschkevitch (1976: 37).

[5] Cf. Klein (1908: 446-47): "Seitdem aber der von G. Cantor geschaffene Mengenbegriff mehr und mehr in den Vordergrund tritt, der das Kontinuum aller x nur als ein Beispiel einer "Menge" von Dingen betrachtet, zieht man nun auch Funktionen heran, die nur mehr für die Stellen x irgend einerbeliebigen Menge definiert zu sein brauchen, und nennt überhaupt allgemein y eine Funktion von y, wenn jedem Elemente einer Menge von Dingen (Zahlen oder Punkten) x ein Element einer Menge y zugeordnet ist". For the modern approach to function see Church (1956), § 3; Kneale & Kneale (1962: 450-51); Galuzzi (1979: 482 ff). Kneale & Kneale (1962: 484 and 499-502) is also interesting for the discussion of "function" in Frege.

[6] Cf. Lejeune-Dirichlet (1837: 135). An interesting sketch of the development of the mathematical concept can be found in Galuzzi (1979).

[7] Cf. Bréal (1866).

[8] Function as 'meaning' and 'use' also appears in Paul's *Prinzipien* (see Paul 1920, § 155-157) and in Saussure's *CLG* (Ch. 7, § 1); it is interesting that in both cases the word is opposed to form.

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[2] See Prevignano (1979) for an interesting overview of the "inter-Slavic" semiotic tradition.

anni '30 di questo secolo, quasi non si riscontrino accenni, in ambito linguistico, a questa nuova tendenza della logica ed ai suoi principali rappresentanti".[9]

The mathematical relational conception seems to have affected linguistics only much later, especially in the Fifties and Sixties of this Century, through research coming from multiple sources (the interest in new logic, the attempt to find a unitary definition of linguistic and mathematical structures).[10]

Biology is perhaps the oldest source of models and metaphors for the development of "functional" ideas in linguistics.[11] At the beginning of Nineteenth Century, the notion of dynamic interaction of the parts of a living organism concurring to a "common purpose" was central in Cuvier's as well as in Humboldt's thought.[12] However, although the ideas of language as an organic set of part-whole relations, and as a tool suited for a certain purpose characterize Humboldt's powerful view, they spread only decades later, in a changed cultural environment. The idea of function as a relation of interdependence between parts of grammar can be found in Gabelentz' *Sprachwissenschaft*;[13] later it occurs as a leit-motif in the Russian semiotic School as well as in the Prague School.[14] It is doubtful whether already in Bréal this notion was linked to the idea of 'functioning' of a living entity. Be it as it may, this link emerges (or is enhanced) at the turn of the century in Jespersen and not long after in Mathesius.[15]

Function as 'purpose' leads us again to the same line: Gabelentz, Jespersen and later on some exponents of the Russian School or of the Prague School.[16] However, the origin and development of this concept is very complicated. At the turn of the century, Durkheim's sociological models may well have contributed to moulding it.[17] The influential idea of the *'fait social'* is, in fact, explained in terms of both the efficient cause by which it is produced and the function which it fulfills.[18]

No less important was the raising of another question, strictly tied to the interpretation of function as 'purpose, goal', i.e. the controversial teleological character of linguistic structures.[19] Here we cannot undertake the task of disentangling all the different paths leading to this issue. However, as the position towards the teleology problem plays a major role in all functional theories (and often helps define their collocation in the area), it should be observed at least that most of the ambiguities lay in assigning to 'purpose' the value of 'conscious intent'. This amounts to implying that linguistic systems have intents or, even worse, that linguistic change is "the result of willful distorsions of inherited patterns".[20] While such assumptions are obviously absurd, it is legitimate to speak of a teleology of function, in the sense that some constituent elements of a structured system serve a certain purpose.[21] The most credited and convincing version of such teleologism relies on biological foundations of human communication; suffice here to mention the well-known "principle of least effort", whose powerful effects have been underlined in functional tradition from Jespersen on. Some scholars have tried to reconcile the unconscious interpretation of teleology with the non-functional view of causalism, championed by Bloomfield.[22] However, in the analysis of specific cases the two approaches are not easy to reconcile.

3. The controversial relationship between form and function.

The keystone in understanding functional theories seems to be the relationship between form and function. In reading through Bondarko's and Givón's works the implications of the different conceptions appear clearly.

Bondarko presents us with a many-sided view of the problem. He is well aware of the scope of theoretical and methodological implications coming out of various views of the form-function relationship:

"As far as the orientation of grammatical analysis is concerned, the most important thing in describing the concept of FG is above all to recognise the fundamental possibility of analysis proceeding from meaning to form. Such a

[9]   Graffi (1991: 38). Ibidem, fn 23 he observes that in his *Philosophy of Grammar* Jespersen quotes Peano and not Russell; furthermore the linguists of the time did not seem interested in Frege (Graffi 1991: 38, fn 24).
[10]   However, 'function' as 'correlation' is a central notion in the work of Tynjanov in the Twenties (cf. Prevignano 1979: 39).
[11]   Cf. Arens (1955: 145 ff); Foucault (1966, ch. 8, § 3); Cassirer (1946).
[12]   See Picardi (1973), especially on p. 72; see also Di Cesare (1991: XXII).
[13]   Cf. Gabelentz (1891: 461 ff); in the second edition of the work (1901) he adds more explicitly that each language is "ein System, dessen sämmtliche Teile organisch zusammenhängen und zusammenwirken" (481).
[14]   Cf. Prevignano (1979: 29).
[15]   Cf. Somicola(1992a: 25) for a discussion of this point.
[16]   Cf. Gabelentz (1891: 461): "Erstens gälte es, die grammatischen Erscheinungen der Sprachen als solche, also in Rücksicht auf die Erscheinung, zu classificiren und nun festzustellen, welchen Zwecken in den verschiedenen Sprachen und Sprachfamilien jene Classen dienen". Cf. also Prevignano (1979: 28); see idem, 39 ff. for a discussion of the teleological vs. non-teleological interpretation of function in the inter-Slavic tradition.
[17]   The influence of Durkheim is also felt on Saussure (see De Mauro 1972: 349-50) and Mathesius (cf. Daneš 1987: 6).
[18]   See Applebaum (1987: 109). "Social facts exist for a purpose, or function, and to understand them one has to see what the social fact accomplished in establishing the social order" (110).

[19]   As has been observed by Pierre Delattre (1979: 415) as regards the notion of 'function' "going from the inanimate to the animate world one notices the gradual introduction of complementary ideas, concerning the notion of finality or that of intentionality" . "The general notion of 'correspondence', that is, corresponding variation of different quantities, is the basic concept in mathematics; it remains unaltered in the science studying inanimate nature. Things differ in the shift from science of inanimate nature to sciences of animate nature. Here the notion of function tends not to include the properties of elements considered in their environment, but simply those concurring to the realization of a certain goal" (416). Biology, and especially embryology, show the most typical examples of "finalistic processes", such as the morphogenetic mechanisms building up the so-called "teleonomic structures" (see Monod 1970, especially ch. 2).
[20]   Cf Anderson (1073: 789).
[21]   Cf. ibidem.
[22]   See Vincent (1978: 412-13).

possibility is characteristic of FG as contrasted with formal (structural) grammar. At the same time, this is not a constant or obligatory attribute of FG. Grammatical description may only be based on analysis proceeding from form to meaning - but nevertheless it will be functional if it is specially aimed at examining the laws of functioning of grammatical units in speech".[23]

The idea of functioning is central in B.'s view, and points to a dynamic and "relational" model of language:

"Central to functional-grammar research (in our understanding) are the laws and types of functioning of grammatical units in their interaction with the units of other levels and aspects of language - and, as far as present-day research suggests, these laws can differ greatly from one language type to the next. The principal object of analysis is not universal concepts, but rather the actual semantic functions of language, which contain both universal and non-universal elements... The laws governing the functioning of grammatical units are included... in the notion of the grammatical system of language, representing its dynamic aspect. Everything that has been traditionally seen as the grammatical differences between languages of different types, also belongs to the aspect of language structure under review. Even structurally similar forms and categories of related languages can show substantial differences from the point of view of their functioning".[24]

While traditional grammar is based on the principle of system differentiation, FG is characterized by the opposite view of system integration. B. compares structural grammar and FG to monosystem and polysystem analysis, respectively, which are current in general system theory. Monosystem analysis is based on the division of complex objects into homogeneous units, and deals with strata or levels; on the other hand, the aim of polysystem analysis is a comprehensive investigation of interaction between systems of different levels.[25]

Three types of FGs are identified by B. according to various conceptions of the form-meaning (or function)[26] relationship. Type a)

[23] Bondarko (1991: 6).
[24] Bondarko (1991: 7-8).
[25] See Bondarko (1991: 5).
[26] B. seems to alternate between two different points of view in defining meaning and function. If on p. 2 meaning is considered as a synonym for function, on p. 31 it is observed that "the concept of function (...) may come close to the concept of meaning, but does not coincide with it. The non-identity of the two concepts is above all conditioned by the fact that, apart from semantic and semantico-pragmatic functions correlated with meaning, there are other types of functions (stylistic and structural) which are outside the sphere where there can be any question of function approaching meaning". Still more clearly :"Meaning is associated with the relationship between form and content, i.e., between a language unit and what it signifies ...By contrast, a function forms part of a system of concepts associated with the teleological model of language which embraces various types and spheres of purpose - the purpose of language units, types of speech, texts, and ultimately language as a whole" (32). More generally, "The meaning of a form is its inner quality...As far as functions are concerned, they belong to a system of a different kind. Here the chief role is played by the association between functions and functioning" (31). However, the meaning-function relationship is asymmetrical in that "any meaning of the form is at the same time its function (in the sense that the

(which has been defended by the Russian School, the Czech School, the Copenhaghen School, and by Jakobson, Kuryłowicz, Martinet, and Guillaume), is characterized by a description proceeding from form to meaning. Although it may seem that type a) FG is close to a formal (structural) grammar, the specific character of FG is clearly discerned when "the special object of research and description is the functioning of grammatical units, when it is the functions of grammatical units and other language elements interacting with them that come under scrutiny, when special attention is devoted to context and speech situation in their interaction with the meaning of grammatical units, and when analysis is not limited to studying grammatical categories in the language system but is markedly geared to the utterance and speech as a whole and its specific conditions in the communication process".[27]

In type b) FG description proceeds from meaning to form. Among the partisans of this approach only Baudouin de Courtenay and Brunot are mentioned. B. is understandably skeptical about the possibility of applying this orientation in grammatical description. After having quoted two critical opinions on this point by Brunot himself and by Ščerba,[28] B. observes that many descriptions of this type have a practical rather than a theoretical import; their use is especially recommended as a basis for active acquisition of a foreign language. [29] Although "grammatical research of this type is useful because it enables one to integrate in a single system the diverse language means which traditional grammar based on form analyses in different parts of grammatical description..., practically speaking this orientation of analysis cannot be independent of form".[30] Any attempt to define the system of linguistic meaning of a given semantic area will imply "going beyond the analysis proceeding from meaning to form and using the opposite direction, from form to meaning".[31]

The importance of proceeding from function to form in linguistic description was a main issue at the beginning of the Prague School tradition. Mathesius, for example, might be numbered among the supporters of this view.[32] However, Daneš convincingly observes that his position was rather a general theoretical assumption in the presentation of the aims of research than the starting point of the discovery

expression of this meaning constitutes the purpose of the given form), but not every special function of a particular form constitutes a special meaning, since by far not all varieties of the aims of the use of forms can be interpreted as their inherent features which are significant for the language system" (32).
[27] Bondarko (1991: 9).
[28] Brunot recognized that a description going from meaning to form is not a grammar in the conventional sense and admitted that this approach is rather linked to the practical aims of language teaching (see pp. 11-12). Ščerba, was still clearer: for him it was impossible to proceed only from meaning to form.
[29] Bondarko (1991: 13).
[30] Bondarko (1991: 13).
[31] Bondarko (1991: 14-15).
[32] Cf. Mathesius (1929: 99).

procedure.[33] In the actual practice of analysis, in fact, Mathesius always followed the double approach from form to function and from function to form.

Today the orientation from function to form has become a sort of hallmark of various functional theories, like those of Dik or Givón.[34]

Here again, however, theoretical treatments and actual descriptions should be carefully distinguished. Starting with pragmatic functions (topic, tail, etc.) and then making the corresponding structures (i.e. linear representations) explicit, as in Dik's FG, may be nothing more than a scheme of presentation of a theoretical framework, like - for example - a formal routine in a computer program. At the empirical level, on the other hand, establishing the priority of function can lead to a vicious circle. Suppose, for example, that one has to describe the function "topic" in a certain language. If one starts with the functional value (whatever it might be, what is being spoken about, or known information, etc.) and then tries to single out the structures in which this is coded, one will soon face the difficulty of how to grasp precisely corresponding forms. Has not each constituent bearing referential value in the utterance a certain degree of topicality? It is no wonder then that what has been set up on this base is a hierarchy of pragmatic/semantic values of topicality.[35] The point is that meaning (or function) is not a sufficient condition for the identification of structure. I am not arguing in favour of a radical view of the autonomy of structure. Rather, what is suggested here is that at the descriptive level the procedure cannot avoid the preliminary consideration of structure, while at the theoretical level the need for double orientation from form to function and from function to form amounts to the admission that in principle there is no particular orientation at all.[36]

4. Bidirectionality of the relationship between form and function and the notion of "functional-semantic field".

The idea that it is indispensable to combine the two kinds of analysis (type c) FG, in B.'s terminology) has found authoritative supporters within functionalism, such as Jespersen (see Jespersen 1924). This bidirectional procedure consists of various stages of analysis:

(i)   Singling out a certain semantic category which exists in a given language, on the basis of grammatical forms, with analysis proceeding from form to meaning;

(ii) Finding the diverse means which can express this semantic category in the given language, with analysis proceeding from meaning to form;

(iii) Analysing the functioning of the basic forms, in order to determine the meanings expressed by them.[37]

B.'s work develops a model that conforms to procedures (i)-(iii), i. e. the "functional-semantic field" (FSF). This is conceived of as a bilateral unity of form and function; that is, "a system of linguistic means on various levels of a given language (...) united due to the community and interplay of their semantic functions".[38] At the same time, each unity of this sort is associated to an underlying semantic category; this is the semantic invariant that ties together heterogeneous language means and conditions their interaction.[39]

Morphological categories are the starting point for selecting FSFs in a given language. For example, in Russian the category of aspect (i.e. its morphological coding devices) is the grammatical "nucleus" (centre) of the field of limitativity (limitativity "refers to the various ways in which an action is related to a limit").[40] On the other hand, the structure of this field also includes "peripheral" components,[41] such as lexico-grammatical classes of terminative/aterminative verbs.[42]

Likewise, the morphological category of tense in Russian (and in other European languages as well) is the centre of the field of temporality; adverbs such as *prežde* 'before', *zavtra* 'tomorrow' interact with these tense forms in the process of their functioning and combine in various ways with these forms.[43]

Although the analysis of the field of limitativity gives the finest and most detailed exemplification of the model,[44] other FSFs are sketched for Russian. They are considered under major groups, such as:

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[33] Daneš (1987: 11).
[34] See the most recent version of Dik's theory in Dik (1989). As to Givón, see below on § 5-7.
[35] See for example Givón (1983).
[36] For a discussion on this point see Somicola (1992b).

[37] Bondarko (1991: 16).
[38] Bondarko (1991: 21).
[39] Ibidem.
[40] Bondarko (1991: 89).
[41] The distinction between "nucleus" (or "centre") and "periphery" is a classical one in the Prague School tradition: cf. Vachek (1966: 27). Note that B. does not rule out the possibility of morphological categories not being the nucleus (centre) of a FSF, but claims that those non-morphologico-centric FSFs "play a negligible part" in his theory; in other words, his main concern is with inflectional languages (see, however, Bondarko 1991: 97 ff.).
[42] The terminativity/aterminativity opposition depends on the grammatical category of aspect; while aspectual pairs and the non-correlative perfective aspect correspond to terminativity, the non-correlative imperfective aspect corresponds to aterminativity (see Bondarko 1991: 89).
[43] Bondarko (1991: 95).
[44] See the discussion on pp. 64-94. The complicated Russian aspectual system is analysed in terms of the type of limit expressed by the verb: internal vs external limit (pp. 65-67), real vs potential limit (pp. 67-68: real limit is a constant semantic feature of the perfective aspect, while potential limit can be expressed only by the imperfective aspect), explicit vs implicit limit (pp. 68-69. Limit is explicit when "we see a full expression of the fullness (exhaustiveness) of a given action"; on the other hand, limit is implicit if the meaning of exhaustiveness is only implied in a certain context, albeit with the participation of grammatical forms permitting such implication; in Russian the first is expressed by the

(1) FSFs with the *predicative nucleus* (this group includes the complex of fields of aspectual and aspectual-temporal relations; the complex of fields of modality, temporality, and existentiality; the complex of fields connecting predicativity with the fields of subject and object);

(2) FSFs with the *subject-object* nucleus (this group includes the fields of subject and object, the communicative sentence perspective, and also, according to certain features, the category of definiteness/indefiniteness);

(3) FSFs with the *qualitative/quantitative* nucleus (the fields of quality, including comparativity, the category of possession connected with attributive relations, etc.);

(4) FSFs with the *circumstantial* nucleus (locativity, the field of conditionality, etc.).[45]

As is clear, the above groups of FSFs have a more general import, in that they assemble together language-specific fields sharing universal (or nearly such) properties, like predication, subjecthood, objecthood, circumstantiality. On the other hand, the theory opens the way to sound typological comparisons. Not only does the significance of the individual fields vary from language to language, as is observed by B. (for example, the field of limitativity does not have the same value in Romance languages as in the Slavic ones), but the nucleus itself of a single field may vary; an interesting example is relevant to the subject/object field: while in Russian the nucleus is chiefly based on the grammatical category of case, in languages like Italian (or Spanish) it is based on agreement.[46]

What is interesting in this approach is the marked orientation on 'functioning' of a set of grammatical and lexical means within a semantic unit (field).

Especially important is the role assigned to the notion of (extra- and intra-) linguistic 'environment'. This helps to capture those - as it were - "sub-structural" forces that are activated by the very process of relating different but compatible elements into a syntagmatic unit.[47] A valuable

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contribution by B. is the model - introduced from the general system theory - of a system manifesting and creating all its properties in the process of interaction with its environment.[48] Interesting problems are raised by B. as regards this point: which qualities of a given system are manifested and which are created in interaction with various types of surroundings? How do types of surrounding interact with a given unit or category in the process of functioning? Which facet of the interaction of a unit with its surroundings is the leading one in each particular case?[49] No decisive answer has been presented, but these questions seem stimulating and challenging for linguistic reasearch.

A corollary of this approach is that what in traditional structural models would be considered as 'secondary meaning' (i.e. that part of meaning which is due to linguistic or extra-linguistic context), acquires a full theoretical status. More generally, the greater flexibility of this approach results in a greater delicacy of the descriptions.

5. The definition of "function" in terms of potentiality.

Another crucial point in the identification of functional theories is the definition of function. Of particular interest is that presented by B., which is closely related to the concept of potentiality and realization:

"We interpret the function of a language unit as such a unit's ability to accomplish a certain purpose and to be used in a certain way in speech, on the one hand, and as a result of that unit's functioning in interaction with its environment, i.e., as a purpose realised in speech, on the other hand. In the former instance a function appears in its potential aspect, in the latter in its resultative aspect".[50]

B. emphasizes the interdependence between the teleological and the causal interpretations of function, proposing a "causal-goal" interpretation. According to him, "the potential of the given unit's functioning programmes, as it were, a number of essential features of its behaviour in diverse speech acts, concentrates the possibilities associated with this unit by virtue of usage, and provides the basis for its new realizations".[51] For example, forms like *sdelaeš* 'you will do/make' have a potential determining their free use with second person meaning and, under certain conditions, their use with a generalised personal meaning (as in *čego ne sdelaeš radi druga* 'You'd do anything for a friend'). As

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perfective aspect, while the latter has to do with the imperfective aspect in positions of neutralization of aspectual opposition), absolute vs relative limit (pp. 70-72).
[45] Bondarko (1991: 97-98).
[46] See Sornicola (1990) for some arguments.
[47] The concepts of "monocentric" and "polycentric" FSFs are interesting developments of this approach. The basic distinction between the two types is that while the first FSF is characterised by a strong semantic nucleus, the latter exhibits a weak nucleus, with various means (morphological, syntactical, lexical, etc.) that do not form a single homogeneous system of forms. The well-known Russian perfective/imperfective opposition can also be envisaged in terms of this difference (see on p. 85; other Russian examples are on pp. 100-101).

[48] See the discussion on pp. 53 ff.
[49] See on p. 56.
[50] Bondarko (1991: 26).
[51] Bondarko (1991: 27).

is clear, this argument offers the theoretical base for the explanation of grammaticalization phenomena.[52]

The concept of 'functioning' is enriched by means of the potential/actual dichotomy: "the functioning of language units is the process of actualisation and interaction in speech of units, classes and categories of the language system used by each member of a given lg. community"[53]. Although the actual process of functioning takes place in speech, the rules and types of functioning of language units belong to the language structure, representing its dynamic component. Dynamics, in fact, is an essential feature of the concept 'function':

"Functioning is always transformation: transformation of language into speech, transformation of functions as possibilities and potential aims into functions as the aims of communication (...), transformation of functions from the point of view of the speaker (functions for the speaker) into functions perceived by the listener (functions for the listener)".[54]

6. Givón's definition of 'function'.

Givon's functionalism presents a different approach to many of the problems discussed so far. In this framework the notion of 'function' is unproblematic and one-sided. The word "function" covers, in fact, only the concept of 'external functions' of language (i.e. socio-cultural, psycho-emotive and aesthetic functions)[55] and what is related to discourse pragmatics.[56] Furthermore, neither the notion of 'functioning' nor the dual approach to form and function characterize G.'s functional theory. On the contrary, the primary role is played by the orientation from meaning to form. According to G., general principles, which are elaborated at the semantic/pragmatic level, would influence morphology and syntax. Consider, for example, the so-called "proximity principle", stating that "elements that belong together more, semantically or pragmatically, tend to be put in closer proximity at the code level".[57] This is just a vague version of the well-known structural principle of configurationality, which has been formulated in a rigorous way in generative grammar.[58] This principle holds true in languages with structural (i.e. hierarchical) configurations of constituents, which can be generated by phrase structure rules of the type:

$$X'' \rightarrow \text{Spec } X'$$
$$X' \rightarrow X \text{ YP.}$$

An important property of phrase structure representations in these languages is that operators/modifiers are "adjacent" to the operand/modified word (i.e. the lexical head of the phrase). This precisely corresponds to one of the most important facets of G.'s "proximity principle";[59] it is worth stressing, however, that in the generative framework adjacency is a formal notion which can be defined in terms of precedence and dominance of the nodes of a tree-graph. No less important seems the fact that the universal validity of the proximity principle is highly questionable, in that deviations and exceptions occur in natural languages, as G. himself admits. In generative literature, in fact, configurationality has been treated as a typological property of languages.

More generally, the whole project of the two volumes of *Syntax. A functional-typological Introduction* is framed on the assumption that universal discourse strategies (i.e. cognitive processes) can lay the foundations for a general syntactic typology: the particular structures which are typical of individual languages are always given as *a posteriori* descriptions, i.e. they are not considered *per se*, with precise formal analysis.

To give but one example from a vast array of cases, the phenomenon of relative clause extraposition (cf. *He delivered a lecture yesterday that no one could understand*), which is typical of written English, is considered on a par with the scattering of NP constituents in Fox (Algonquian) (cf. *ma.haki kenenohtamwihene wi.teko.waki*, 'these cause-understand + 1/2 IND owl + PL = 'I made you understand these owls') as a deviation from a sub-case of the proximity principle. Furthermore, the pattern exhibited by Fox examples is said to be "strikingly reminiscent of right dislocation in spoken English" (cf. *Mine was faster, the Chevy, This one will do, the sheep-dog*, etc.).[60] Several problems arise with this description. First, three different structures are gathered under the heading of a seemingly general process. The interest in the process, however, is made trivial by the fact that neither the linguistic context nor the functioning of the structures in question have been closely examined (in particular, Fox examples are second-hand quotation). How is it possible to demonstrate that the process underlying the three structures is the same? Even the cursory observation that in one case (relative clause extraposition in English) the structure belongs to the written language, while in the remaining two cases the structures pertain to spoken levels should suggest that the phenomena in question have a different pragmatic nature. Secondly, the definition of the process itself lacks rigour. What connects the three "deviant" structures

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[52] This is a current issue in contemporary linguistic literature: cf. for example Traugott & Heine (1991-92).
[53] Bondarko (1991: 36).
[54] Bondarko (1991: 37).
[55] See Givón (1984: 30).
[56] G. observes that "only within a specific *discourse* context do propositions carry discourse function" (see Givón 1984: 30-33).
[57] Givón (1990: 470); see also ibidem, fn. 7.
[58] For recent research on this topic in the generative framework see Marácz & Muysken (1989).

[59] See Givón (1985: 202).
[60] Givón (1990: 484).

considered is a very weak tie, i.e. the scattering of NP constituents. As is evident, this property is too unconstrained to be interesting: the formal conditions of relative clause extraposition are different from those of right-dislocations and these latter, in turn, - as far as can be seen from the scant data - seem still different from the conditions of Fox structures.

One wonders whether this sort of functional theory has not gone one step too far in separating form from function, structure from communicative needs and purposes. Traditional structuralists were well aware of the pitfalls of such a line of reasoning. Saussure's lucid comment comes to mind on the inseparability of form and function ("formes et fonctions sont solidaires, et il est difficile, pour ne pas dire impossible, de les séparer"),[61] an idea that would later be shared by Meillet and agreed on by many scholars in the Prague school tradition. One also remembers the severe judgement given by Bloomfield in his review of Jespersen's *Philosophy of Grammar*: "In the study of linguistic forms, therefore, I should not appeal, as Jespersen sometimes does, to meaning as if it were separable from form, or to the actual human necessities and conveniences of communication".[62]

Although the more general assumptions on which Bloomfield's statement is based could hardly be tenable today (linguistic change is considered in a strictly neogrammatical way), something of the cool disenchantment and severe self-discipline reflected in the following statement still commands respect: "On the one hand, we flatter ourselves when we think that we (as linguists, at any rate) can estimate these [i.e. needs and purposes of communication]; on the other hand, they do not affect the somewhat meagre abstraction which we can and do study".[63]

7. *Functionalism and the role of psycho-cognitive factors.*

Devoid of the notion of 'functioning', the whole approach suffers from a sort of rigid mechanism. It should be noted, in fact, that the use of second-hand examples is very frequent. Furthermore, never is the reader presented with utterances from real texts.

In spite of the programmatic emphasis on discourse context, this plays a modest role in actual description. It can be suspected that what really matters for the author is not pragmatics or discourse context *per se*, but rather its psycho-cognitive counterpart. However, the area of cognition is presented rather as a set of untested speculations than as the result of serious empirical research.

This leads us to a problem with broader implications, i.e. how the relationship between psycho-cognitive correlates of language and

[61] *CLG*: 186.
[62] Bloomfield (1927: 82).
[63] Ibidem.

linguistic structures should be conceived. In particular, we must in this sense be concerned with the question of whether it is possible to study linguistic structures as an epiphenomenon of cognitive processes. An old debate, which can be traced back as far as to the reactions against Wundt in the first decades of this century, reemerges again here.

We may confine ourselves to remembering the criticism of Wundt by Mathesius, who thought that the solution to linguistic problems was not to be found "from the point of view of the psychology of language, but from that of linguistics imbued by psychology".[64]

In a way, the question mentioned above touches on what can be considered as a crux of typology: on what basis is a typological description to be set up? Structure alone is not sufficient to find cross-linguistic criteria of analysis. As a matter of fact, a purely structural typology makes the notion of linguistic type rather simplistic and typological variation a clear-cut and static reality.

In a nutshell, it can account neither for the complexity of typological diversity nor for the internal dynamism of each linguistic type. Conversely, typological descriptions centered on non-structural, broadly speaking "functional" factors, have always met with the difficulty of establishing the cut-off points in the transition from one type to another.

G.'s attempt is interesting but dangerous. Although his psychological stand is not completely devoid of interest, many of the phenomena involved (backgrounding, foregrounding, afterthoughts, etc.) were already present in Wundt and the followers of his *Völkerpsychologie*. One has to recognize, of course, that G. goes much further than *Völkerpsychologie* in trying to build up a whole systematic typology on the basis of perceptual factors.

This is what makes his enterprise challenging and in a way fascinating. The question, however, arises whether any systematic typology can be built up at all on perceptual factors. I suspect that the answer is negative.

8. *Iconism and functional theories.*

Another point worth mentioning in G.'s approach is the central role assigned to iconism, which is conceived of as a general relation of isomorphism between pragmatic/semantic forces and syntactic structures. This is a powerful and pervasive principle, reflected in many different linguistic phenomena, such as - for example - agreement and complementation. While the observation that "agreement within the noun phrase may be considered another iconic expression of the unity of the noun phrase" seems banal, it cannot be confidently accepted on

[64] Mathesius (1924: 138). Specifically, here the discussion concerned the problem of sentence definition.

typological ground that the four coding devices affecting complementation (co-lexicalization, presence of a subordinator, case-marking, choice of the verb-form) are not arbitrary.[65]

They are, each in its own way, iconic expressions of the degree of integration of main and complement event. For example, according to G., in co-lexicalization the more integrated two events are, the more integrated the verb-stems are; in subordination, the more integrated two events are, the less they are likely to be separated by a subordinator.[66] G. is not alone on this road. He shares the persuasion of the pervasiveness of iconism with other exponents of American functionalism.[67]

This may seem just another swing in the centuries-old controversy between iconism and arbitrariness.[68] It can be no chance, however, that those who claim the importance of iconism also support an orientation of grammar from function (meaning) to form, as the two approaches are strictly interrelated. Bondarko, in fact, who favours a dual approach to form and function, also endorses the principle of "asymmetrical dualism of the language sign".

This principle implies the absence of isomorphism between the units of expression plane and the content plane, that is, "the possibility of one unit of the expression plane corresponding to several units of the content plane and, conversely, one unit of the content plane corresponding to several units of the expression plane".[69]

Here again B.'s functionalism shows itself to be rooted in Russian linguistic thought (Karcevskij is explicitly mentioned as the source of the notion of 'asymmetrical dualism of the language sign').

As in the case of the form-function relationship, the Russian trend in functionalism is closer to the positions of Saussure and Bloomfield, who had thought deeply about the importance of the arbitrariness principle.[70]

9. *The problem of linguistic change in a functional perspective.*

A final question concerns the functional views of linguistic change. In various functional theories there seems to be a wider consensus on some points, although scholars belonging to different traditions may emphasize specific sides of the problem.

Thus, for example, the pre-eminence given to function over structure and the idea of a pervasive action of iconism in grammar are reflected in G.'s idea that identity of function is the main cause of linguistic change. In his discussion of the diachronic pathways of passivization G. claims that "as elsewhere in diachronic change *similarity* - or functional *overlap* - is the central ingredient in the assumption of passive functions by a partially similar construction".[71] For him the possibility that diachronic development can also be driven by structural analogy is debatable in that "if a structure is functionally similar to the passive chances are it is already structurally similar as well, given the pervasive iconicity of grammars".[72]

On the other hand, B.'s opinions on linguistic change are confined to theoretical questions. Historical development of linguistic functions is seen as the outcome of a dynamic process, winding around from the potentialities of language units to their concrete realizations in discourse, and from these, in turn, to new potentialities:

"The possibilities of language units condition their functioning and the achievement of certain goals in concrete utterances, while these concrete realizations of functions in speech acts become, in turn, the basis for development of new possibilities of language units, which keep finding new realizations. These realizations of interdependence condition not only the reproduction of the functions of language units, but their historical development. Its sources are rooted in the realization of functions in concrete speech activity as part of human activity in a broader sense (under the influence of social factors)".[73]

This view is consistent with the central role assigned to 'functioning' by B. It expresses a line of thought uniting many scholars throughout this century and could be considered as the most interesting contribution of functional theory to the problem of linguistic change.

It offers, in fact, a useful frame to the analysis of connections, developments and transformations, which is typical of historical research.[74]

Different as G.'s and B.'s conceptions may be, they share certain assumptions about the nature of explanation in the study of linguistic change. Above all, they share the optimistic search for general

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[65] See the treatment of grammatical agreement within NP (Givón 1990: 475 ff.) and the observations on iconicity principles in the syntax of complementation (560-61).
[66] Givón (1990: 560).
[67] For a representative collection of American works on iconicity see the papers in Haiman (1985).
[68] Cf. the recent discussion in Di Cesare (1991: XXXVII-XXXVIII) and the literature quoted in fns.
[69] Bondarko (1991: 6-7).
[70] As to Saussure, cf. De Mauro (1972) with the important consideration that "Se tale arbitrarietà viene intesa nella sua reale portata, essa è sinonimo di radicale storicità di ogni sistemazione linguistica" (p. 353). Bloomfield's ideas can be seen in his review of Jespersen's *Language* (Bloomfield 1922, especially on pp. 59-60).

[71] Givón (1990: 600).
[72] Ibidem, fn 38.
[73] Bondarko (1991: 29).
[74] As early as 1911 Mathesius highlighted the importance of potentiality of linguistic units in the historical development of languages. This has been a leit-motiv in the work of many European scholars, more or less connected with the original Prague School tradition (see Sornicola 1992a). In the United States the importance of potentiality functions for historical reasearch has been recently stressed by Traugott.

principles in diachronic processes. Another question of great moment lurks here, which concerns not only linguistics but history as well. Since the second half of last century the awareness has been reached that the study of history cannot deal with laws or principles. Rather, it concerns particular situations. This is what makes history different from philosophy of history. History, in fact, is an empirical science grounded on the minute, patient inspection of sources, i.e. texts; its task is the interpretation - in the penetrating words of Arnaldo Momigliano - "di quella realtà di cui le fonti sono i segni indicativi o frammenti".[75] The tasks and tools of general historical research are also peculiar to historical linguistics. The resort to texts is the first and fundamental step in the study of linguistic change (although it can by no means determine the whole procedure). This practice distinguished the work of early functionalists, who - like Jespersen and Mathesius, among others - were masters of philology as well as linguistics. Today many functional treatments of linguistic change are not text-oriented: the purely speculative search for general laws is pushing the study of linguistic change beyond the boundaries of historical linguistics.[76]

There is a second and more general problem with functional treatments of the historical dimension. When B. shares Kacnel'son's view that the masculine gender of the Russian word *dom* expresses nothing more than "a formal marker, semantically empty and therefore "irrational" or "illusory",[77] he is considering a purely synchronic perspective. It is hardly necessary to mention that such formal markers, synchronically "devoid of meaning", are the remnants of historical morphological processes. What seems worrying here, however, is the supposed equivalence between 'semantically empty (from a synchronic point of view)' and 'irrational'. This makes one think that even in most mature functional conceptions (synchronic) meaning is the fundamental criterion. It is no wonder that on the basis of such conceptions one finds it difficult to deal with history. Although functional models with potentiality functions turned into realization functions capture an important part of historical dynamics, they are not sufficient to understand the complexity of linguistic change. There is "something interfering with" the functional mechanisms transforming potentialities into realizations and realizations into new potentialities. This "disturbing factor" is history, with all its burden of irrationality and oscillation, with its paths started and then left, with its going forward and then backward. It may be that functionalism has been too confident in its powers.[78]

[75] Momigliano (1974: 22).
[76] Malkiel (1968) observes that "to the extent that genetic linguists are concerned with historical situations, unique by definition, they can resort to the device of "model formation" only to a limited scale" (p. 4). He also maintains that "the postulate of historical uniqueness is not easy to reconcile with the search for evolutionary universals" (ibidem).
[77] Bondarko (1991: 35).
[78] Some warnings against an overuse of functional considerations in linguistics are given by Labov (1987).

What is a linguistic explanation? In matters of diachrony general principles can never be "explicative". It is not potentiality that explains, it is history that explains. The limits of scientific models and procedures - any scientific model and procedure - should always be the horizon of research. Linguistics can only benefit from this, if it has to be a unitary science investigating the past and present of languages.

Address of the Author:

Rosanna Somicola
Dipartimento di Filologia Moderna
Facoltà di Lettere
Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II
Via Porta di Massa 1
80133 Napoli
Italy

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