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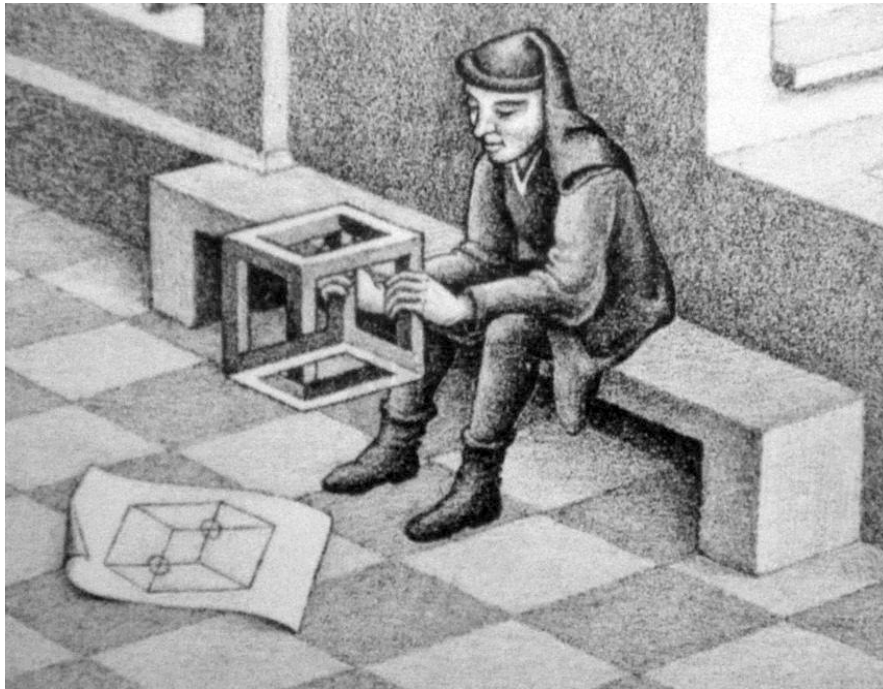
*The Dynamics of Language*



# **HJELMSLEV AS A ‘FORERUNNER’ OF THE SEMANTIC MAP METHOD IN LINGUISTIC TYPOLOGY**

Lorenzo Cigana (F.R.S.-FNRS)  
Thanasis Georgakopoulos (ULiège)  
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**Workshop**  
**'History of linguistics and its significance'**

# Outline of the talk

## 1. Introduction

- Mapping expression and content

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  - Name dropping, inspiration, or deeper similarities?

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  - Analyzing language specific categories based on general principles
4. Contrasting Hjelmslev and semantic maps
  - Structuralism vs. substantialism
5. Conclusions
  - Historical: Hjelmslev as a forerunner?
  - Methodological: impact on contemporary methods?
  - Comparative epistemology: dialogue between structuralism and substantialism?

# Introduction: mapping expression and content

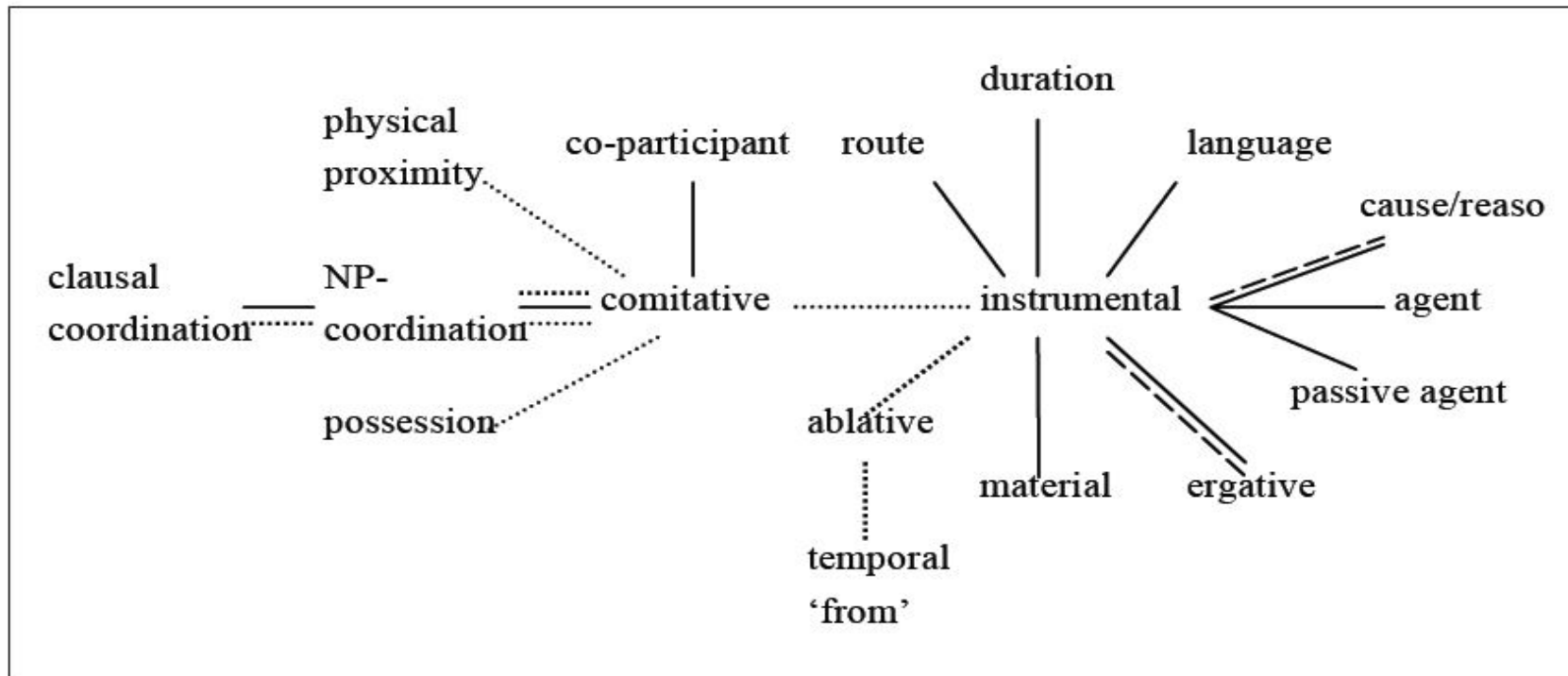


Figure 1. A map of the Comitative-Instrumental domain (Narrog & Ito 2007)



# Introduction: mapping expression and content

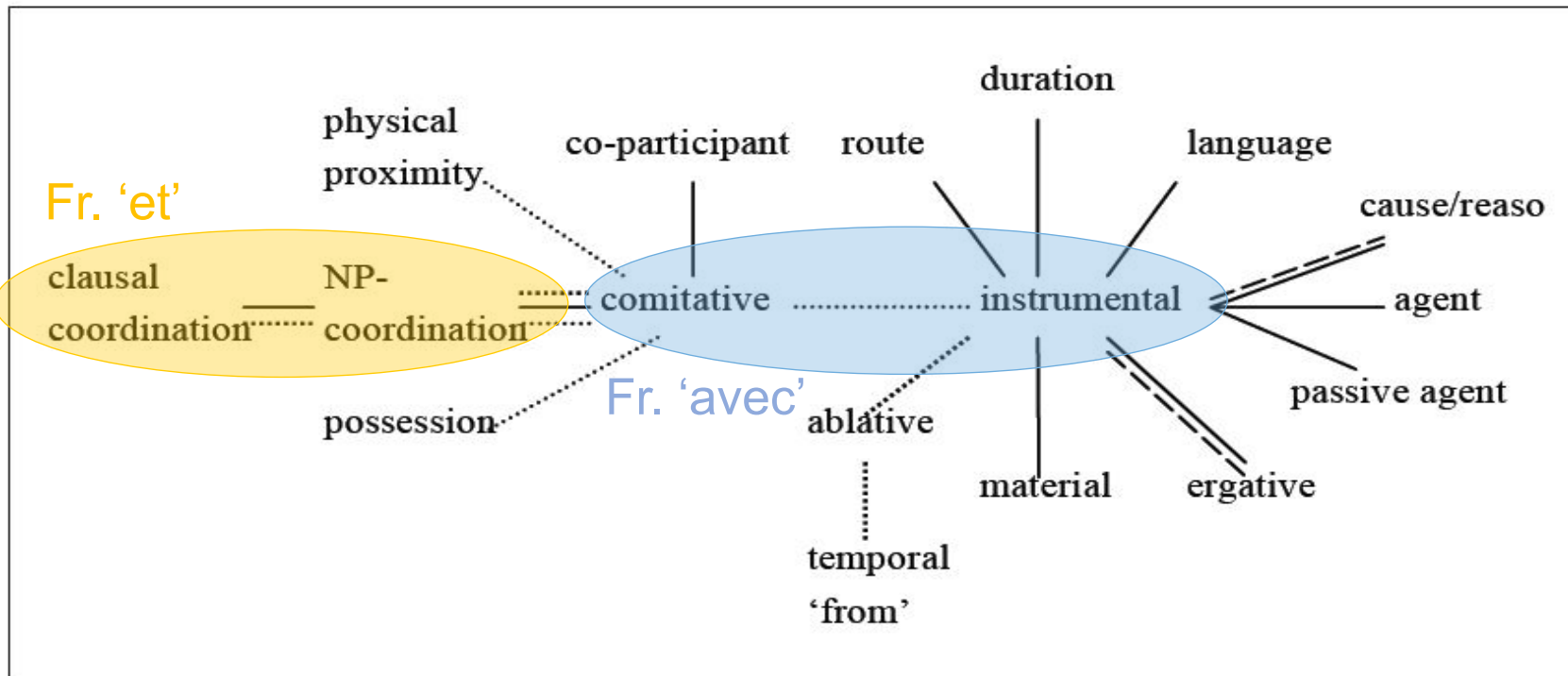


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# Introduction: mapping expression and content

	+β	B	γ	Γ
+α	E II Sb	DI I	In	Ab
A	Sl	Spl	Ps	Cm
β	E I Sb	DI II	G	Cp
B	Sv	Spd	D	Am
γ	Prs Sb	Prs Sp	Eq	Si II
Γ	Sb	Sp	Si I	N

	+β	B	γ	Γ
+α	E II Ce	E II Pst	E II	E II Ads
A	II Ce	Psl	II	AI
β	E I Ce	E I Pst	E I	E I Ads
B	Cv Ce	Psd	Cv L	Cv
γ	Prs Ce	Prs Pst	Prs L	Prs Ads
Γ	Ce	Pst	Ine	Ads

**Figure 2.** Hjelmslev's rendering of the category of case in Lak (Hjelmslev, *La catégorie des cas*, 1935)

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# Hjelmslev in the literature on semantic maps

“Recently, the issue of applying semantic maps to lexical typology—as anticipated already in the **early studies by Hjelmslev** and Lazard—has also been taken up by Majid et al. (2008) and François (2008)”  
(Cysouw et al. 2010: 1)

“The multivariate probabilistic effects, which reflect various salience phenomena, cannot be captured **by semantic maps like Hjelmslev’s (1959) [1957]** or, more recently, Haspelmath’s (2003)”  
(Levshina et al. 2013: 826)

# Hjelmslev in the literature on semantic maps

But the first explicit mention of Hjelmslev is in Haspelmath (2003)

<i>træ</i>	<i>Baum</i>	<i>arbre</i>
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<i>skov</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>forêt</i>

**Figure 3.** Partitioning of the TREE–WOOD–FOREST semantic domain in three languages (Hjelmslev 1965\*: 54)

“Being a structuralist, Hjelmslev used this example to show how different languages carve up the semantic space **in radically different ways**”  
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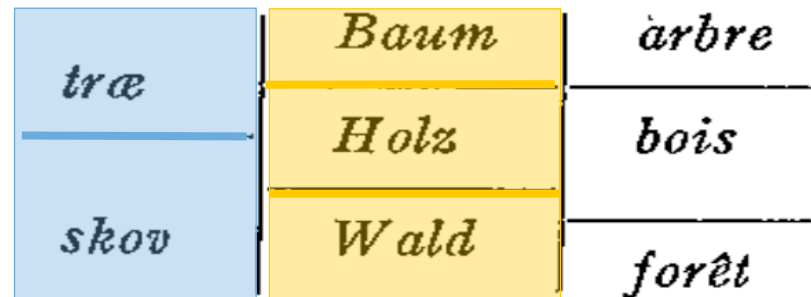
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“(…), but from the present perspective, **the differences are not all that great**. One could easily imagine the differences to be such that no non-trivial universal semantic map can be drawn. Thus, Hjelmslev's own example can be used to make a very different point, **not for relativism, but for universalism of meaning.**”

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		Lexical items			
		Danish	French	German	Spanish
MEANINGS/ ANALYTICAL PRIMITIVES	TREE	<i>træ</i>	<i>arbre</i>	<i>Baum</i>	<i>árbol</i>
	WOOD (mat.)		<i>bois</i>	<i>Holz</i>	<i>madera</i>
	FIREWOOD				<i>leña</i>
	FOREST (small)	<i>skov</i>	<i>forêt</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>bosque</i>
	FOREST (large)				<i>selva</i>

Figure 4. Partitioning of the TREE–WOOD–FOREST semantic domain in four languages (Haspelmath 2003, inspired by Koch 1998, etc.)

# Hjelmslev's comparative method

Even if Hjelmslev's diagrams in *Prolegomena* have paved the way for comparison, they were conceived for **an entirely different purpose**, namely to show the difference between linguistic *form* and *substance* in a reader-friendly fashion

What is visualized is the *theoretical principle* underlying comparison, *not the method*, which is provided elsewhere, i.e., *La catégorie des cas* (1935-1937)

# Hjelmslev's comparative method

**Linguistic comparison cannot be carried out directly**, by singling out linguistic units from various languages and comparing them, since each unit has no value *per se*: its proper definition comes from the place it occupies within the system (the corresponding paradigm or *category*)

For Hjelmslev, what can be compared is the formal articulation of each linguistic domain (e.g., lexical, morphological, phonological, etc.).  
Briefly: one does not compare things, but different internal boundaries



# Hjelmslev's comparative method

The general procedure follows three steps:

1. *Analysis*: the paradigm (category) is set up, by identifying all its constitutive units (*taxemes*) using standard criteria and operations (commutation, etc.);

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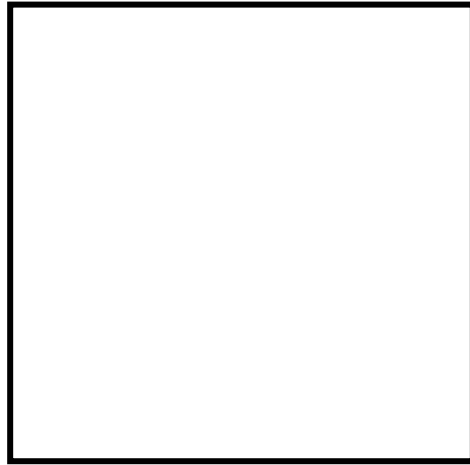
1. *Analysis*: the paradigm (category) is set up, by identifying all its constitutive units (*taxemes*) using standard criteria and operations (commutation, etc.);
2. *Distribution*: the units (taxemes) are distributed within a up-to-three dimensional space, which represents a category as a system of coordinates (parameters), according to specific criteria and rules (overlapping, syncretism, markedness, etc.); at this step, each unit receives a formal (positional) definition

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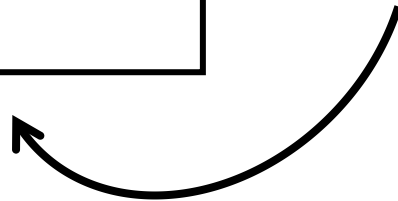
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3. *Reduction*: units are further decomposed into components (smallest invariants or *glossemes* = formal version of “distinctive features”)

# Hjelmslev's comparative method

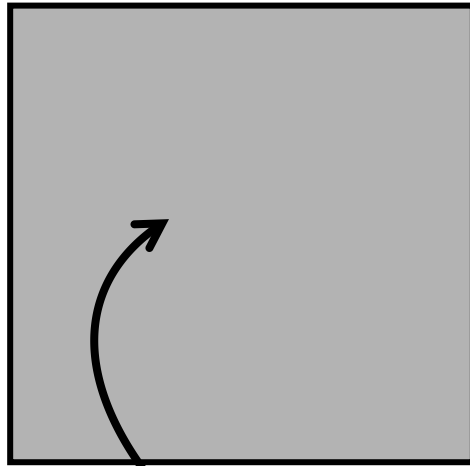


A category is conceived as an area whose boundaries are fixed from a crosslinguistic perspective, and whose formal definition is given morphosyntactically (ex.: case = pure 'homonexual government')

What ensures the possibility of comparison (= by superposition) is uniform extension



# Hjelmslev's comparative method



A category is conceived as an area whose boundaries are fixed from a crosslinguistic perspective, and whose formal definition is given morphosyntactically (ex.: case = pure 'homonexual government')

What ensures the possibility of comparison (= by superposition) is uniform extension

Its 'intension' (its semantic substance) is represented by the positive 'filling' (graphically captured by the internal area)

It is called 'fundamental meaning'

# Hjelmslev's comparative method

## PARAMETERS

1. Fundamental meaning of the category as a whole:  
***direction***

# Hjelmslev's comparative method

β	S
B	T
γ	D
Γ	G

Figure 5. Modern English  
(Hjelmslev 1935: 119)

## PARAMETERS

1. Fundamental meaning of the category as a whole:  
***direction***
2. Up to three (implicational) *dimensions*:
  - a. **proximity/distance**

# Hjelmslev's comparative method

-	β	S	(Subjective)
+	B	T	(Translative)
±	γ	D	(Dative)
∅	Γ	G	(Genitive)

Figure 5. Modern English  
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# Hjelmslev's comparative method

	$+\beta$	B	$\gamma$
$+\alpha$	Il	Al	Mt
A	Cp	G	Er
$\beta$	Dr	Tm	Eq
B	E	Ab	Dl
$\gamma$	D	Ad	In
$\Gamma$	Ine	Ads	N

Figure 6. Chechen  
(Hjelmslev 1935, II: 55)

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# Hjelmslev's comparative method

	+ β	B	γ
+ α	Il	Al	Mt
A	Cp	G	Er
β	Dr	Tm	Eq
B	E	Ab	Dl
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Chechen Ablative receives the 'cartesian' definition +1B+2B, which is interpreted semantically as [distance] [without contact]

**Figure 6.** Chechen (Hjelmslev 1935, II: 55)

# Hjelmslev's comparative method

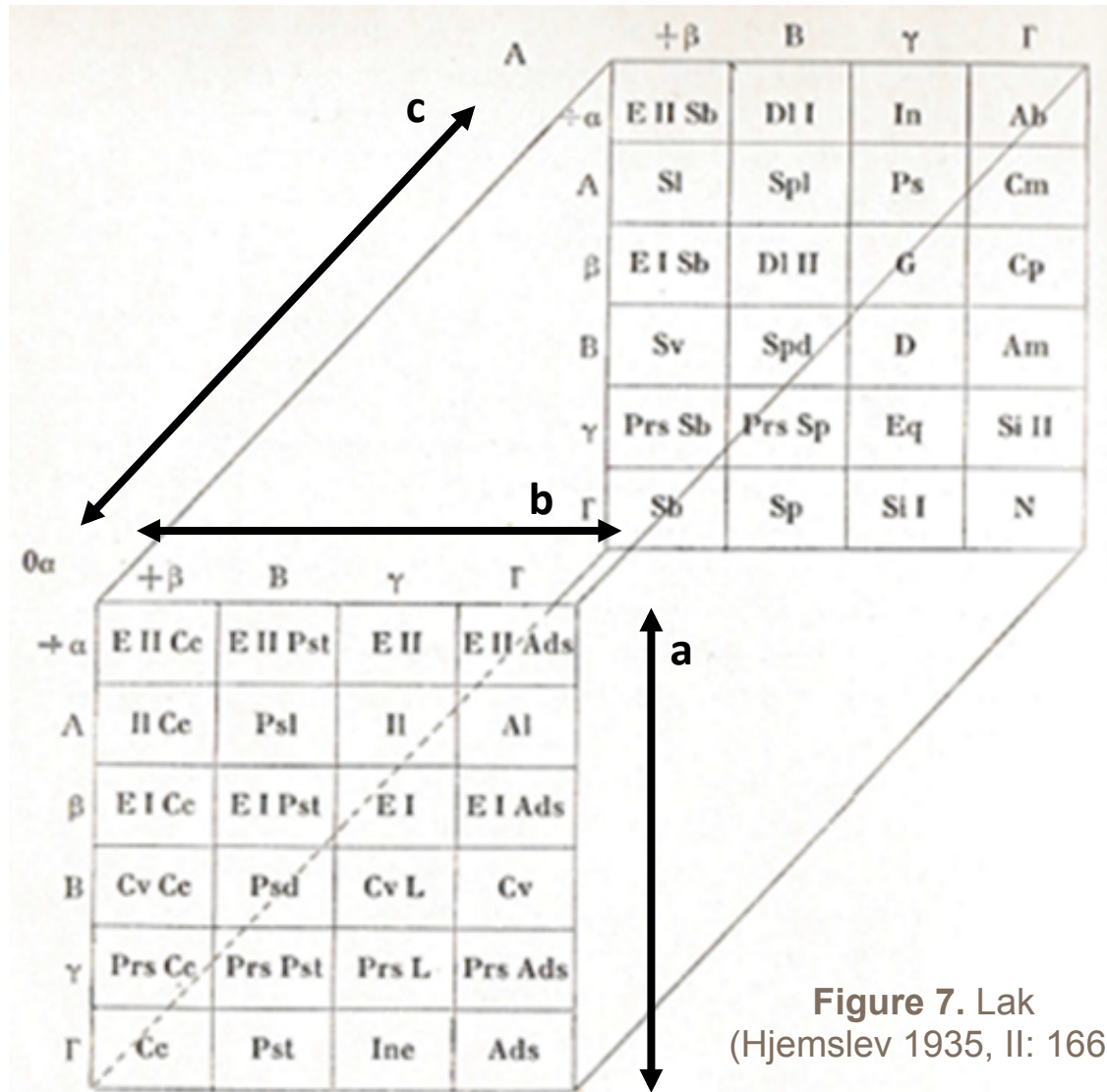


Figure 7. Lak  
(Hjelmslev 1935, II: 166)

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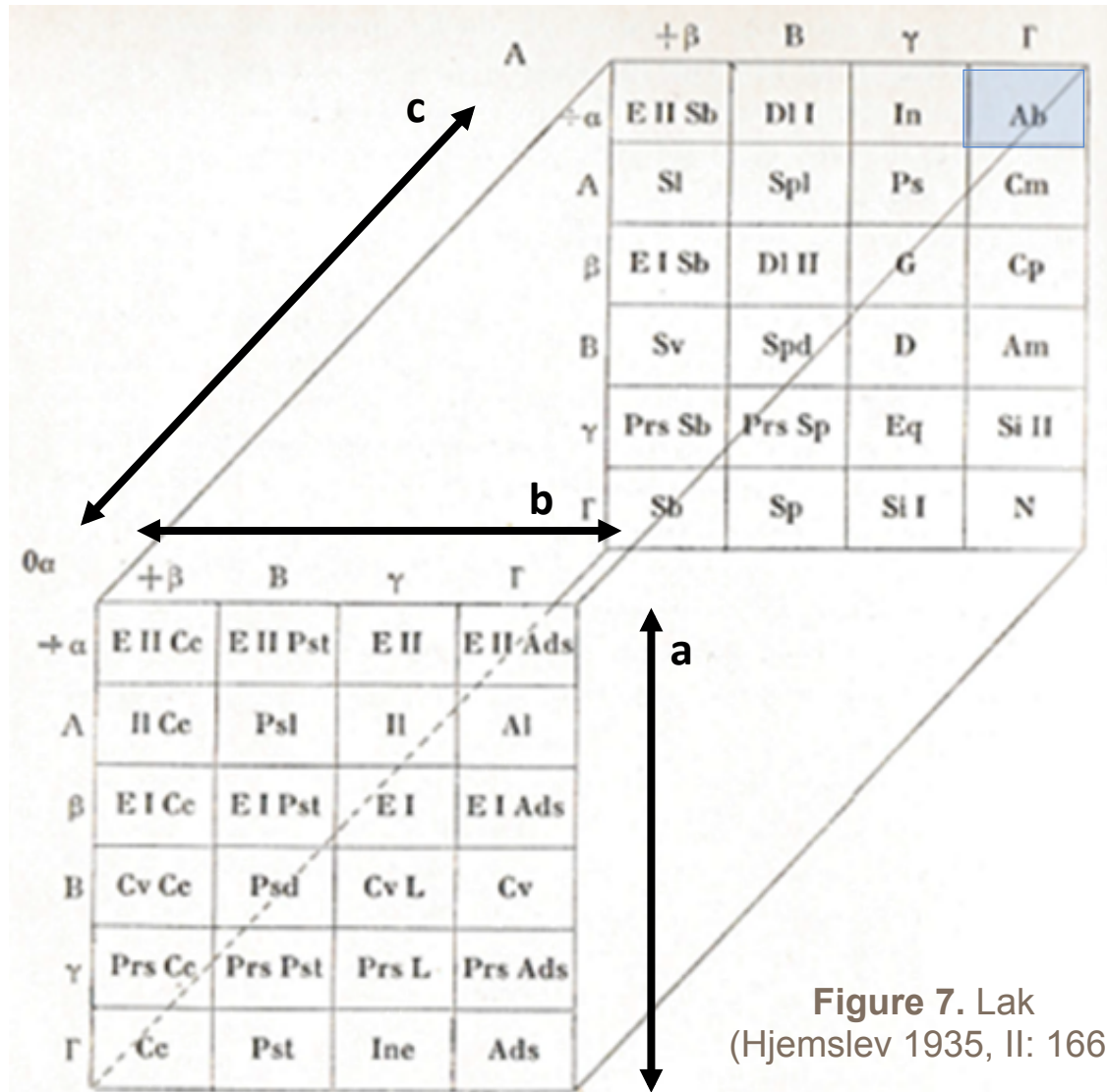


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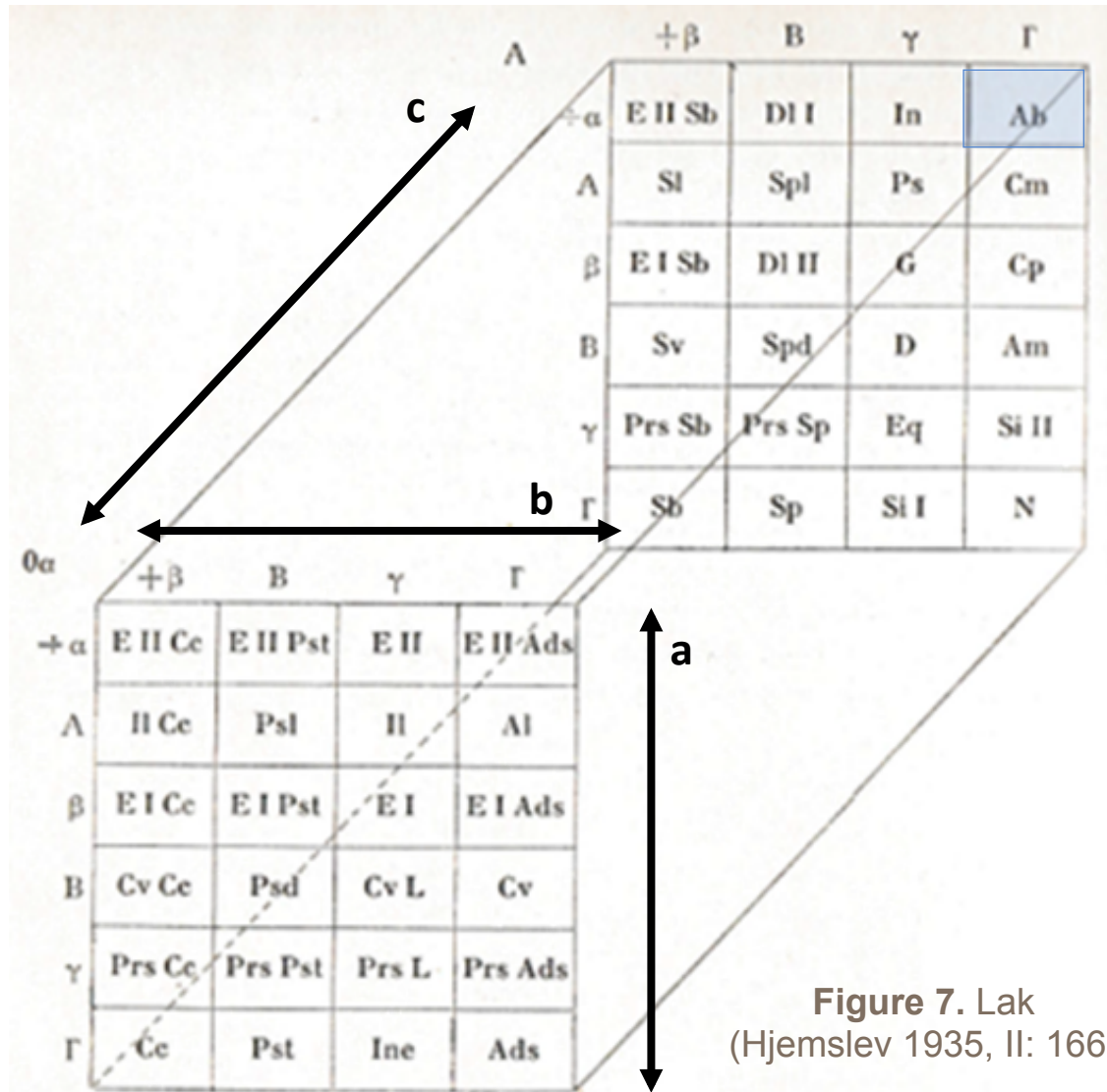


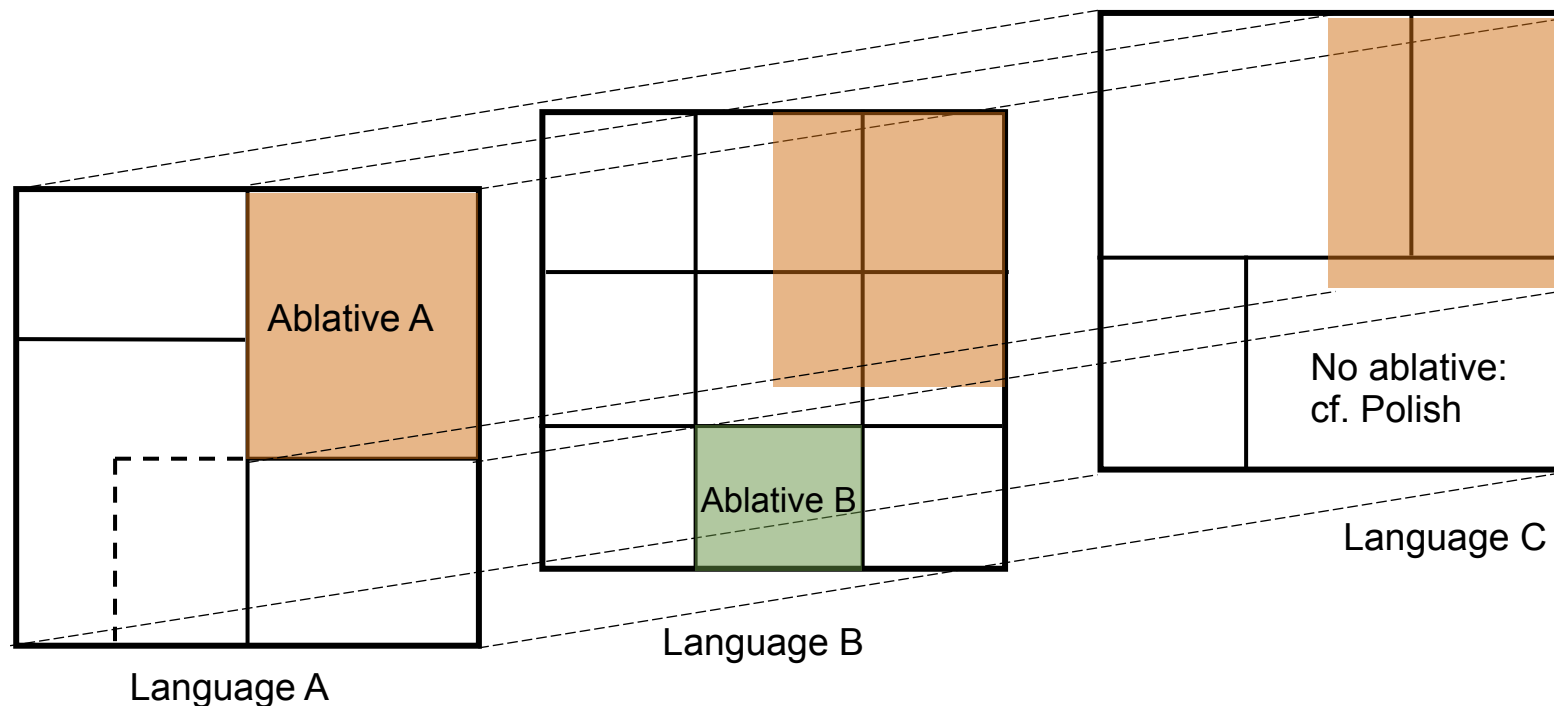
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## PARAMETERS

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  - a. **proximity/distance**
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  - c. **subjectivity/objectivity**
3. Reduction: each unit is further decomposed into ultimate invariants (*glossemes*):  $\alpha$ , A,  $\beta$ , B,  $\gamma$ ,  $\Gamma$ ,  $\Gamma_2$  ← pure structural (formalistic) issue

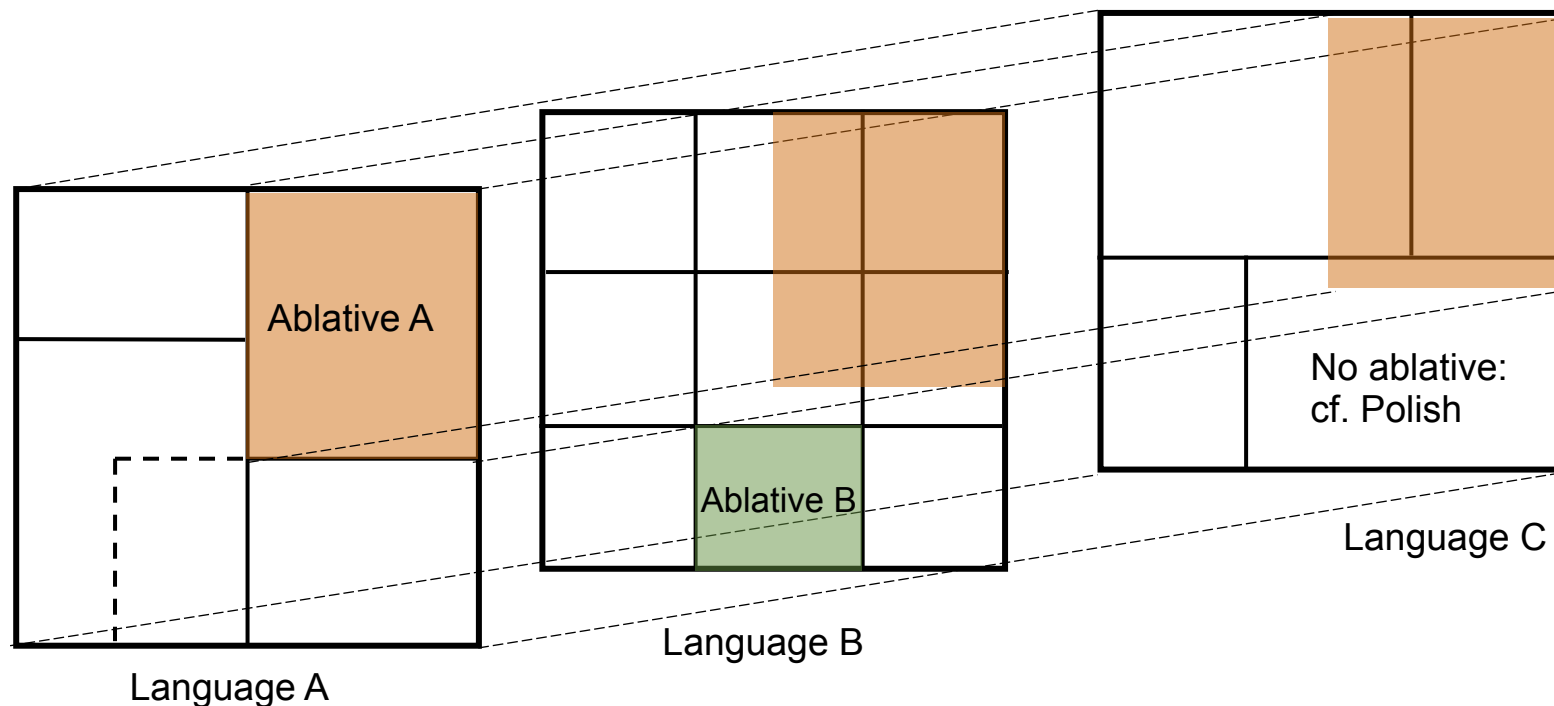
# Hjelmslev's comparative method

Conceived as a superposition between languages (structures), linguistic **comparison cannot be carried out directly** by relying on single forms (cases), since there is no guarantee that these units are uniform (thus comparable) → *squinting grammar* (Jespersen)



# Hjelmslev's comparative method

“The very terms ‘locative’ and ‘nominative’ are ambiguous, and their content may vary from a linguistic state to another. The definitions provided are only valid for some particular systems of some languages” (Tr. of Hjelmslev 1935: 100)



# Contrasting Hjelmslev and semantic maps

	<b>glossematics</b>	<b>semantic maps</b>
<b>1. Domain</b>	category	conceptual space
<b>2. Extension</b>		
<b>3. Method</b>		
<b>4. Approach</b>		
<b>5. Set of primitives</b>		
<b>6. Point of view</b>		



# Contrasting Hjelmslev and semantic maps

	<b>glossematics</b>	<b>semantic maps</b>
<b>1. Domain</b>	category	conceptual space
<b>2. Extension</b>	predetermined	ad libitum
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# Contrasting Hjelmslev and semantic maps

## Hjelmslev

The definition of a category, depends on functional facts arranged deductively. This relies on a methodo-/epistemological principle: *structural reduction* (from open to closed sets of elements)

“In order to formulate the problem in a correct way (...) a definition must be given that allows the **category to be rigorously delimited** without violating the fact, by identifying (...) the semantic zone specific to the category as a whole and by later showing how particular cases are distributed on this scale of meaning”

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## Semantic maps

The conceptual space is envisioned as a continuum, and the maps capture bits and pieces of this continuum depending on the focus of each study

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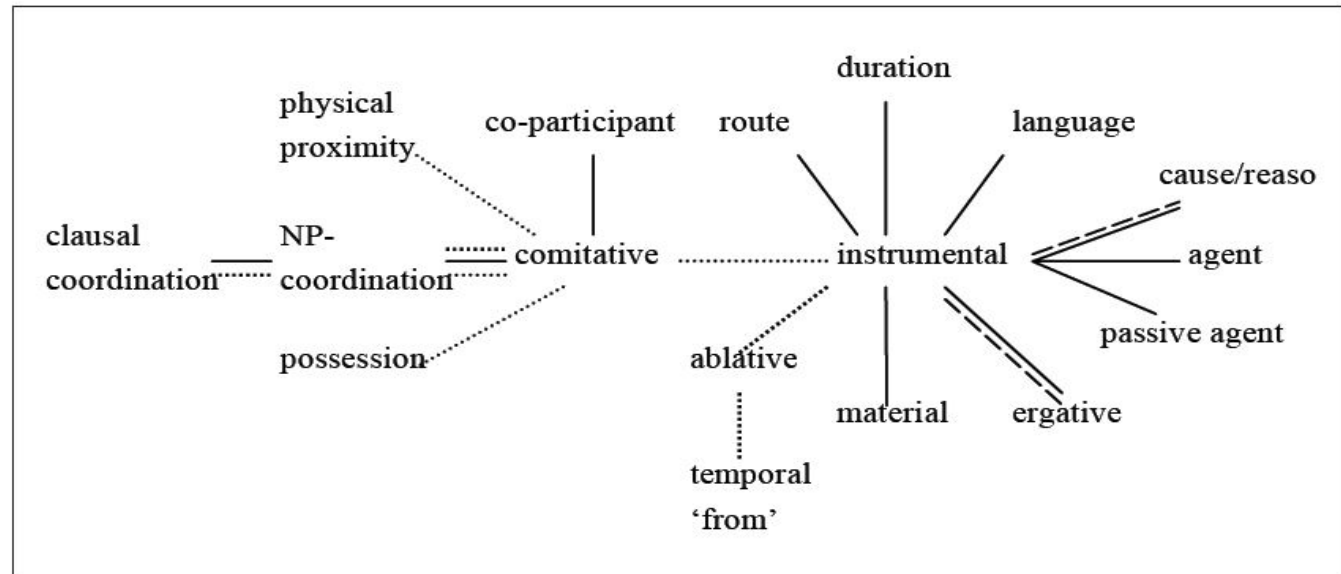


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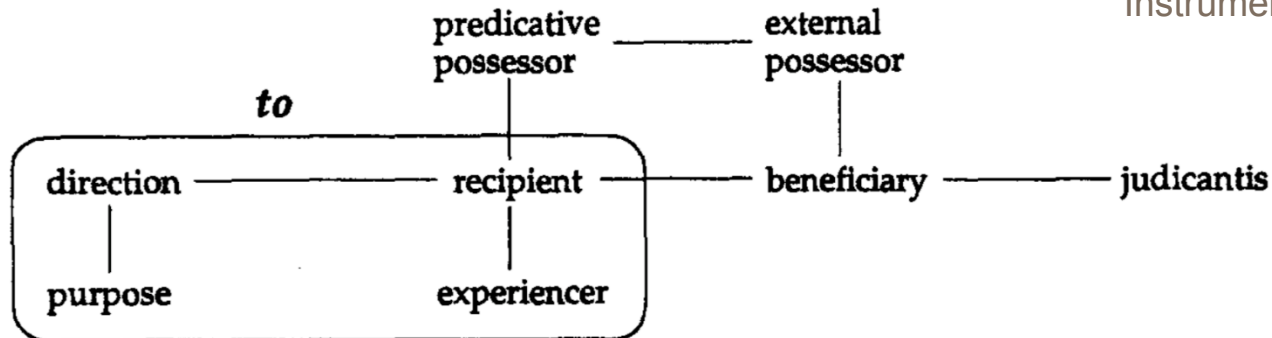


Figure 8. A map of typical dative functions (Haspelmath 2003: 213)

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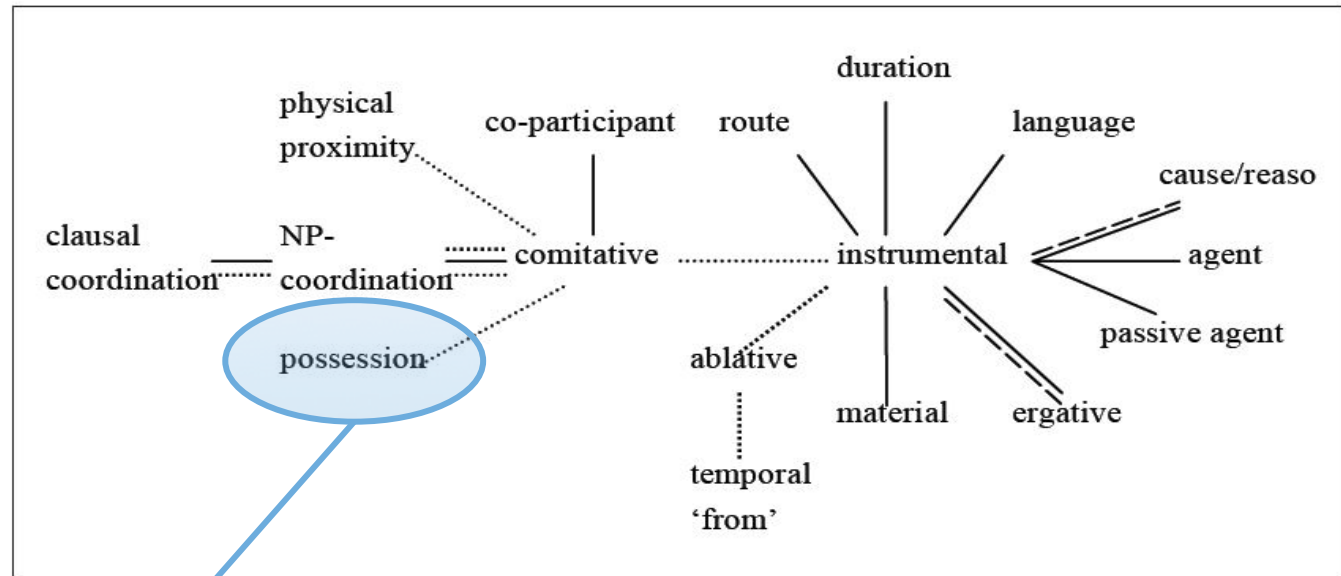


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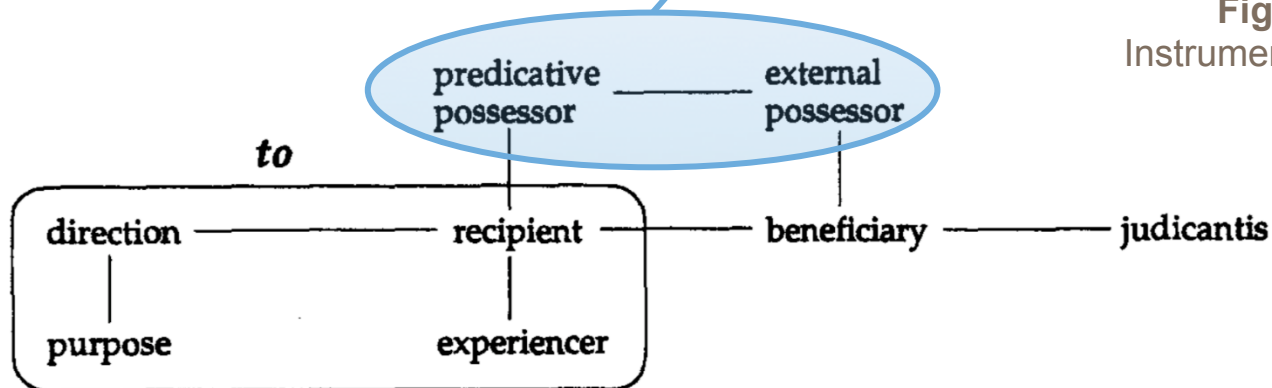


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<b>2. Extension</b>	predetermined	ad libitum
<b>3. Method</b>	deductive	
<b>4. Approach</b>	monosemic	
<b>5. Set of primitives</b>	closed	
<b>6. Point of view</b>		

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<b>1. Domain</b>	category	conceptual space
<b>2. Extension</b>	predetermined	ad libitum
<b>3. Method</b>	deductive	inductive
<b>4. Approach</b>	monosemic	polysemic
<b>5. Set of primitives</b>	closed	open
<b>6. Point of view</b>		

# Contrasting Hjelmslev and semantic maps

## Hjelmslev

“A case, as any other linguistic form in general, doesn’t have many different meanings: **it has just one meaning**, supporting a single abstract notion from which all different concretes instantiations can be deduced ... to each single unity of the system must correspond a single value”

(Tr. of Hjelmslev 1935: 85)



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(Tr. of Hjelmslev 1935: 85)

## Semantic maps

**Inductive** approach that relies on language comparison for identifying the different meanings of linguistic expressions (**polysemy**), hence resorting to an **open set of primitives**

# Contrasting Hjelmslev and semantic maps

		Lexical items			
		Danish	French	German	Spanish
MEANINGS/ ANALYTICAL PRIMITIVES	TREE	<i>træ</i>	<i>arbre</i>	<i>Baum</i>	<i>árbol</i>
	WOOD (mat.)		<i>bois</i>	<i>Holz</i>	<i>madera</i>
	FIREWOOD			<i>leña</i>	
	FOREST (small)	<i>skov</i>	<i>forêt</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>bosque</i>
	FOREST (large)				<i>selva</i>

Figure 4. Partitioning of the TREE–WOOD–FOREST semantic domain in four languages (Haspelmath 2003, inspired by Koch 1998, etc.)

# Contrasting Hjelmslev and semantic maps

		Lexical items			
		Danish	French	German	Spanish
MEANINGS/ ANALYTICAL PRIMITIVES	TREE	<i>træ</i>	<i>arbre</i>	<i>Baum</i>	<i>árbol</i>
	WOOD (mat.)		<i>bois</i>	<i>Holz</i>	<i>madera</i>
	FIREWOOD	<i>skov</i>		<i>Wald</i>	<i>leña</i>
	FOREST (small)		<i>forêt</i>		<i>bosque</i>
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Figure 4. Partitioning of the TREE–WOOD–FOREST semantic domain in four languages (Haspelmath 2003, inspired by Koch 1998, etc.)

		MEANINGS/ ANALYTICAL PRIMITIVES				
		TREE	WOOD (mat.)	FIREWOOD	FOREST (small)	FOREST (large)
Danish	<i>træ</i>	√	√	√	–	–
	<i>skov</i>	–	–	–	√	√
French	<i>arbre</i>	√	–	–	–	–
	<i>bois</i>	–	√	√	√	(√)
	<i>forêt</i>	–	–	–	(√)	√
German	<i>Baum</i>	√	–	–	–	–
	<i>Holz</i>	–	√	√	–	–
	<i>Wald</i>	–	–	–	√	√

Figure 9. Lexical matrix for the ‘tree/wood/forest’ domain

# Contrasting Hjelmslev and semantic maps



Figure 10. A semantic map inferred from the data in Figure 9

# Contrasting Hjelmslev and semantic maps

	<b>glossematics</b>	<b>semantic maps</b>
<b>1. Domain</b>	category	conceptual space
<b>2. Extension</b>	predetermined	ad libitum
<b>3. Method</b>	deductive	inductive
<b>4. Approach</b>	monosemic	polysemic
<b>5. Set of primitives</b>	closed	open
<b>6. Point of view</b>	(hyper-)emic	etic (& emic)

# Contrasting Hjelmslev and semantic maps

## Hjelmslev

From Hjelmslev's point of view, the etic operations and labels strongly depend on the general **emic** structure of language ('etic' values are variants of linguistic forms); his approach can thus be defined as **hyperemic**



# Contrasting Hjelmslev and semantic maps

## Hjelmslev

From Hjelmslev's point of view, the etic operations and labels strongly depend on the general **emic** structure of language ('etic' values are variants of linguistic forms); his approach can thus be defined as **hyperemic**

## Semantic maps

Distinction between:

- a. the map = language-independent **etic grid**, i.e., "a coherent chunk of a universal network"
- b. language-specific (emic) categories are mapped onto this universal network of meanings

(François 2008)

# Contrasting Hjelmslev and semantic maps



Figure 10. A semantic map inferred from the data in Figure 9

# Contrasting Hjelmslev and semantic maps

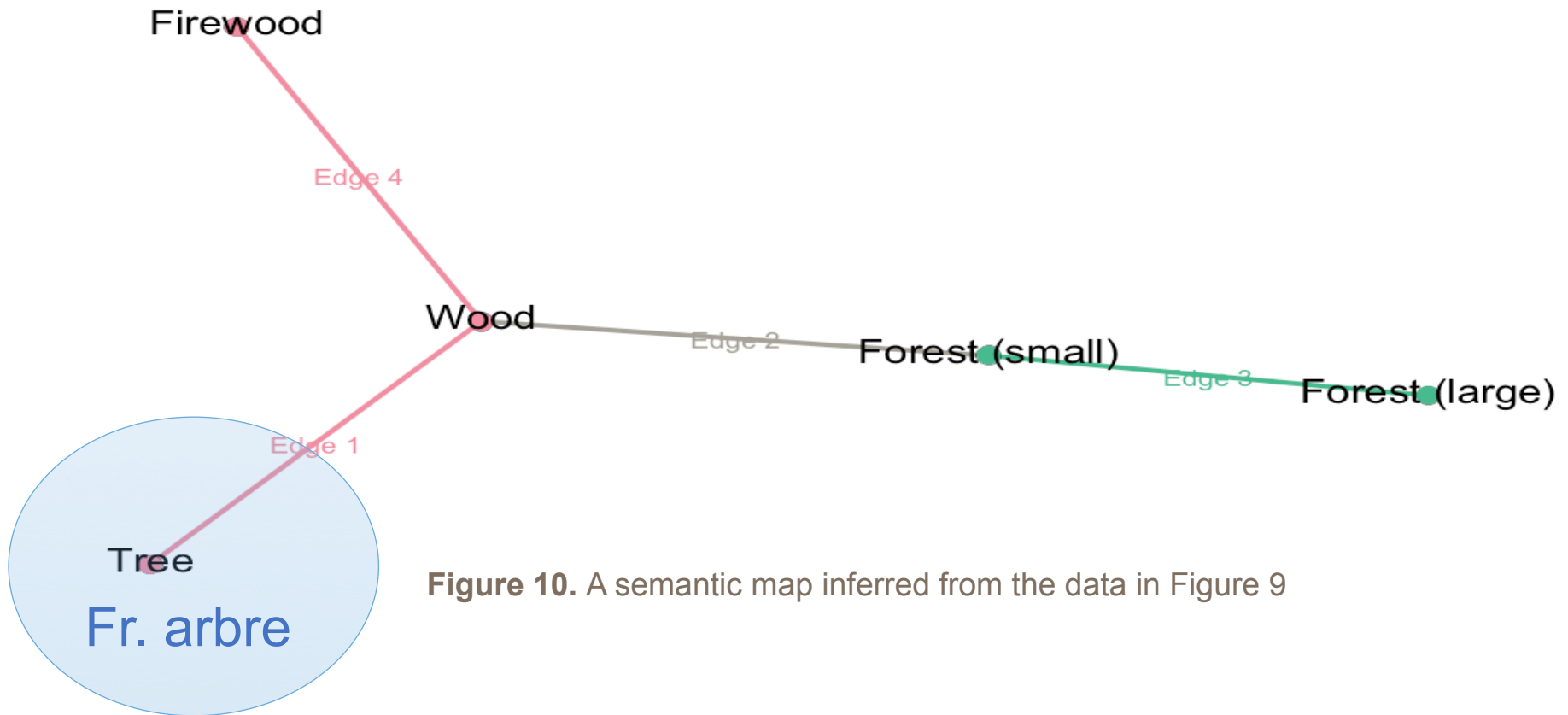


Figure 10. A semantic map inferred from the data in Figure 9

# Contrasting Hjelmslev and semantic maps

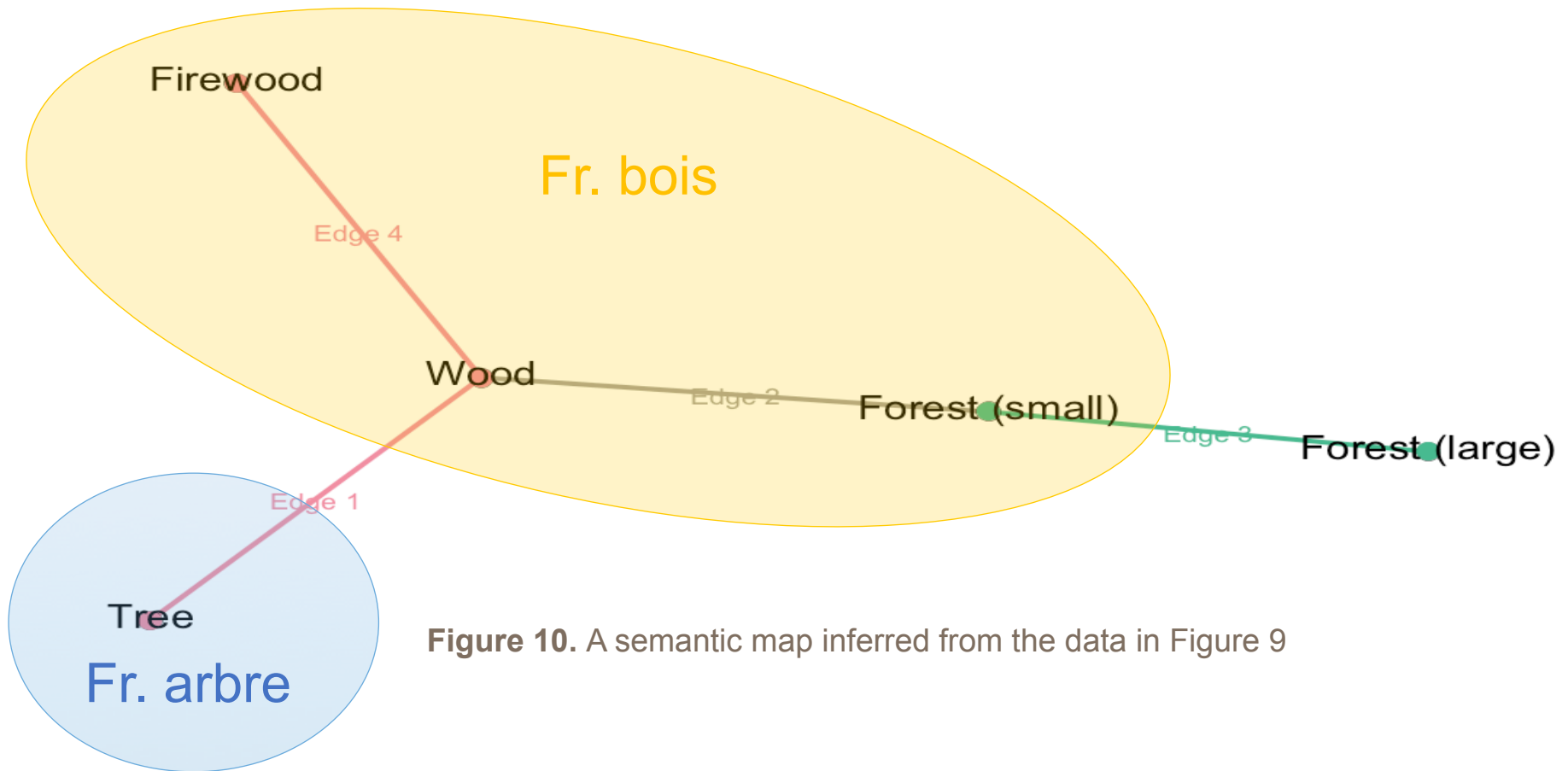


Figure 10. A semantic map inferred from the data in Figure 9

# Contrasting Hjelmslev and semantic maps

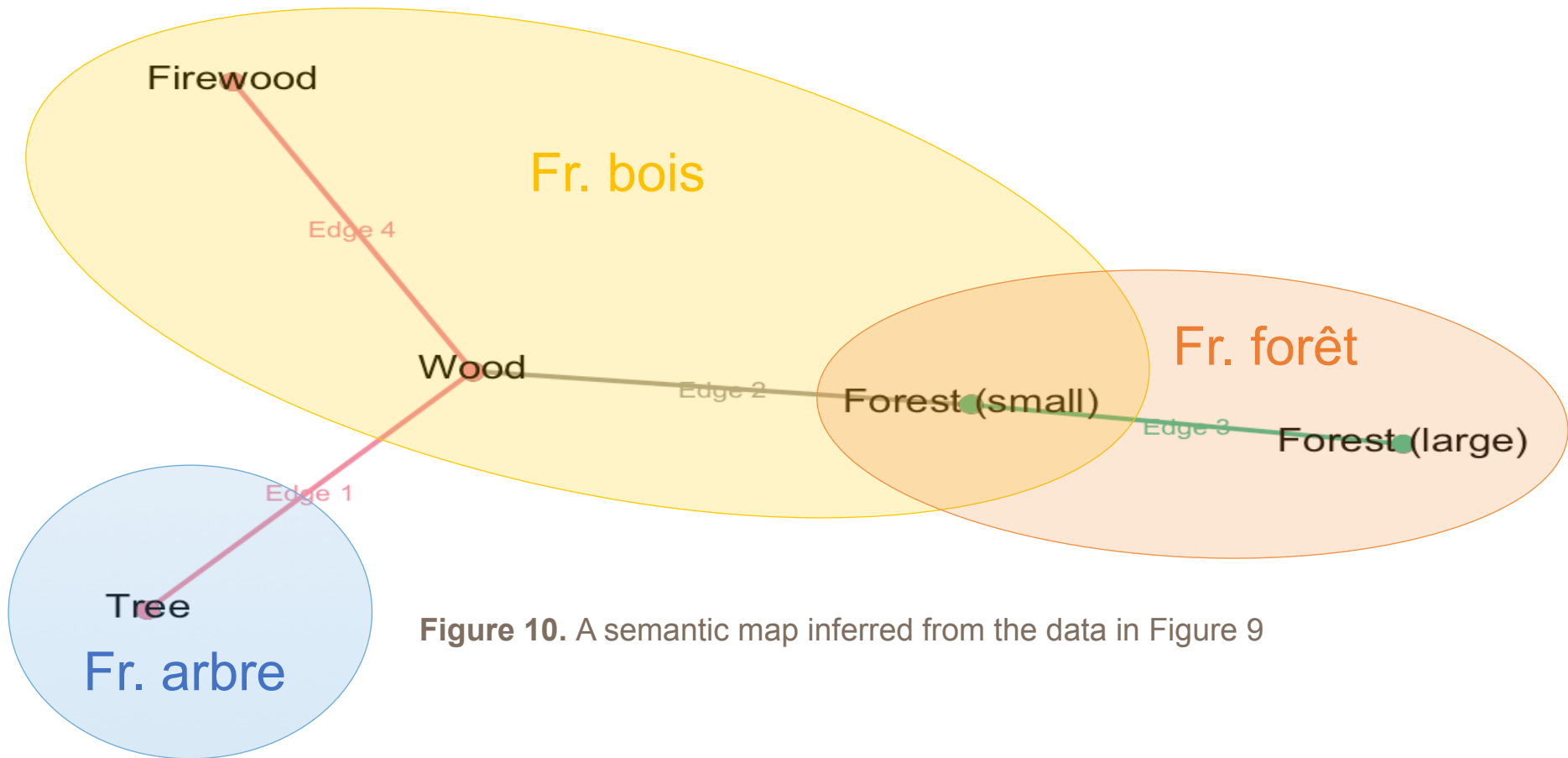


Figure 10. A semantic map inferred from the data in Figure 9

# Conclusions (1/3)

## 1. Historical: Hjelmslev as a forerunner?

- As regards the theory as a whole: **no**
- For some specific ideas: **yes**
  - 1) structuring the content-plane
  - 2) ... of cross-linguistically comparable semantic zones
  - 3) ... using graphical representations

## Conclusions (2/3)

1. Historical: Hjelmslev as a forerunner?
2. Methodological: impact on contemporary methods?

- As regards the theory as a whole: **no**
- For some specific ideas: **yes**
  - 1) structuring the content-plane
  - 2) ... of cross-linguistically comparable semantic zones
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## Conclusions (2/3)

1. Historical: Hjelmslev as a forerunner?
2. Methodological: impact on contemporary methods?

- As regards the theory as a whole: **no**
- For some specific ideas: **yes**
  - 1) structuring the **expression-plane**
  - 2) ... of cross-linguistically comparable phonetic zones
  - 3) ... using graphical representations



## Conclusions (2/3)

1. Historical: Hjelmslev as a forerunner?
2. Methodological: impact on contemporary methods?

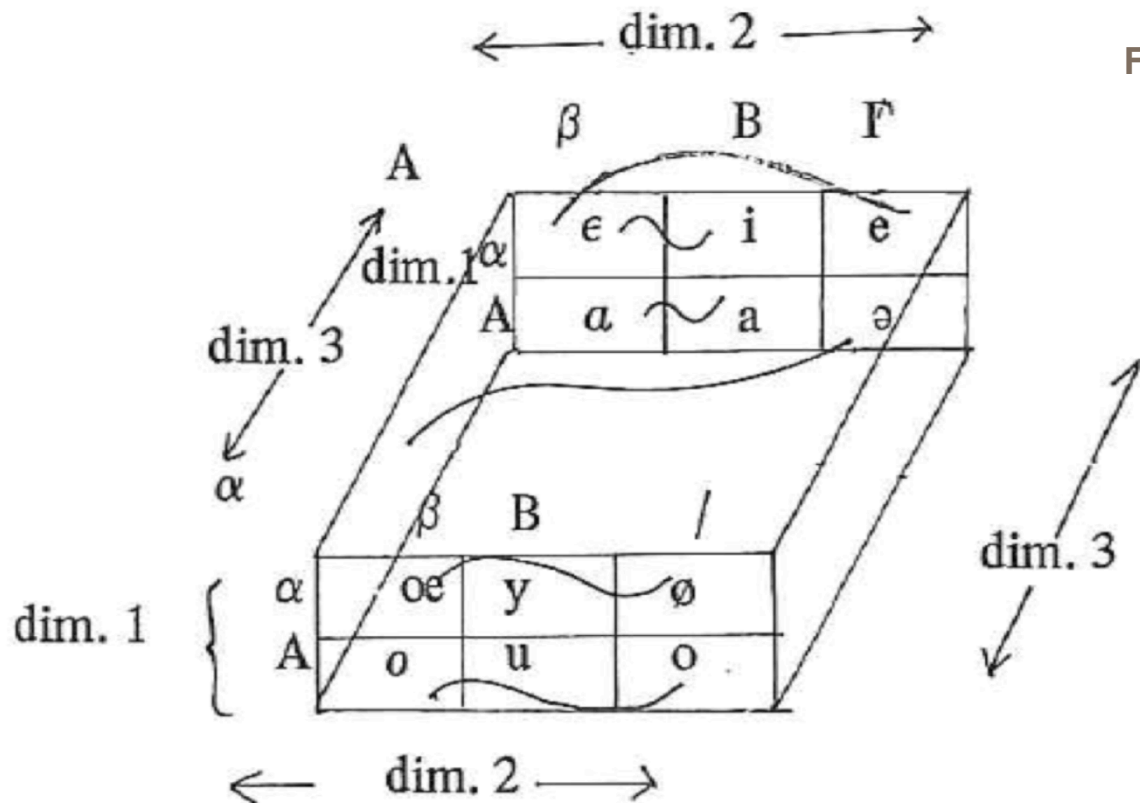


Figure 11. The category of pseudo-vowels of French (1970: 220)  
Cf. Vykypěl (2003); Basbøll  
(forthcoming)

## Conclusions (3/3)

1. Historical: Hjelmslev as a forerunner?
2. Methodological: impact on contemporary methods?
3. Comparative epistemology: dialogue between structuralism and substantialism? (cf. Haspelmath 2015)

→ No obvious intermediary position between the two frameworks

→ Both theories construct their objects in radically different ways (constructivism vs. realism), which are consequently hardly comparable

# Thanks!

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