

Meaning and Function: The Place of Coseriu's Linguistic Theory in Functional Linguistics

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Abstract: The use of the word *functional* in the most diverse theories and approaches has contributed in no small measure to the confusion in linguistics today. This article does not claim to give an overview of the different directions of functionalism in linguistics. Rather, the aim is to present what Coseriu's view characterised as functional in his time and to what extent his theory outlined a path that still makes sense in functional-cognitive linguistics today. This will involve an examination of Coseriu's difficult-to-identify concept of function. Furthermore, the article will also show that functional thinking is relevant for current grammatography.

Keywords: function, meaning, grammatography, oppositions, functional unit

1. Functionalism in structural linguistics

The concept of functionalism has been claimed by so many directions in linguistics over the last decades that it is difficult to find a common orientation. First of all, it is important to limit oneself to those branches that have developed particularly influential functional approaches. Even with this restriction, we will have to deal with different concepts of function, which have often been exclusively defined and fixed in the different currents of functional linguistics.

Already the Aristotelian conception of signs, which in later theories is in agreement with the question of the arbitrariness of linguistic signs, does not only concern the relationship between sound and the thing being described, but also the capacity of signs

to possess a semantic function (Coseriu 1967a: 87–89; see also Coseriu 2004). For medieval *modistae*, a sound (*vox*) becomes a word by its denominating function (*ratio significandi*). Coseriu added Humboldtian elements to it for the explanation of the functioning of a language that mainly raises the question of creativity, and Saussurean elements for the explanation of meaning as a relative and dependent value of the semantic environment in a language (Coseriu 1971; 1980; Haßler 1991; 2006; Saussure 2003).

Coseriu had, of course, taken into account the writings of several earlier authors (cf. Haßler 2016b) who, like John Locke (1632–1704), had dealt with words, but from a perspective restricted to their importance for human cognition. In Coseriu’s history of the philosophy of language we read: “How can the universal function of language in its objective function be made compatible with its intersubjective function, since the second seems to relativise the first, revealing itself as historical and thus particular? Will this mean in the end that the apprehension of reality through language is not universal, but conditioned by particular languages? Does the recording of reality differ from one linguistic community to another?” (Coseriu 2003: 17; my translation, G.H.).

In an article on Georg von der Gabelentz’ (1840-1893) synchronic linguistics, Coseriu complains that theoretical linguistics has an incomplete view of history and that more distant authors who have already developed certain ideas on language structure and its realisation in language use are forgotten. Coseriu sees correspondences between Gabelentz’ and Saussure’s terms (*Rede – parole, Einzelsprache – langue, Sprachvermögen – langue*) that were already observed by other authors, and thus Coseriu deduces Gabelentz’s influence on Saussure (Coseriu, 1967c: 76). In another article, also published in 1967, Coseriu

describes the prehistory of structural semantics, using the example of Karl Wilhelm Ludwig Heyse's (1797–1855) analysis of the semantic field 'sound'. Coseriu reinterprets Heyse's analysis in the sense of an explicitly structural analysis to clarify the methodological agreement with structural semantics (Coseriu, 1967b).

After various isolated approaches, the functional principle found its first programmatic expression in a structuralist context in the theses of the Prague Linguistic Circle published in 1929. In these, language is defined as "un système de moyens d'expressions appropriés à un but" ("a system of means of expression appropriate to a purpose, Durnovo et al. 1929, 7). These theses postulated that language is a functional system (*langue comme système fonctionnel*) and warned against erecting insurmountable barriers between the synchronic and diachronic views of language. Furthermore, these theses stressed that the most important object of linguistics is the study of the correlative relationships between the elements of the linguistic system, so that although the bearers of these relationships escape consideration of language, the correlate of language is always considered to be the extralinguistic reality, without which language has no right to exist.

The functional concept of the Prague Linguistic Circle certainly includes the meaning of linguistic signs, but when the functional linguistics of this school considers language from the functional point of view, it includes by function the tasks that linguistic means fulfil. It also has a conception of function which is not purely semantic in the traditional sense, but neither distributive nor completely asemantic as among American structuralists. In phonology, for example, the phoneme is a unit which has no content, but which has a function: the function of distinguishing content or meaning (cf. Helbig 1989; ¹1974, 51).

These two facets of the concept of function, on the one hand the function in communication and linguistic action, and on the other hand the distinctive function in the language system, also distinguish the later directions of functional linguistics.

When Coseriu assumed a professorship in Germany, there were already several structuralist theories that also dealt with the concept of function and modified it in different ways. Charles Bally (1932) had opened up the possibility for a functional view of syntax with his division of the sentence into *modus* and *dictum*. He understands *modality* as the combination of a modal verb and a subject, which together form the *modus*. He considers the formally subordinate sentence as a representation which, through the *modus*, becomes an affirmation, an evaluation or an expression of will linked to a subjective authority.

For Martinet, author of the *Grammaire fonctionnelle du français* (1979), it is important that a functional grammar follows the principle of double articulation, which requires strict respect for distinctive units, phonemes, and minimal significant units, monemes. Martinet has identified, at the level of general linguistics, monemes which are only determinant, but not determinable, and which are designated as *modalities* (cf. Clairis 2009, 37).

Emilio Alarcos Llorach, to whom Coseriu dedicated contributions to two celebratory publications (Coseriu, 1978: 2001), including one entitled *Alarcos y la lingüística europea* ‘Alarcos and European linguistics’, can be considered the founder of the functional-structural school in Spain. According to Coseriu, our knowledge of syntagmatic functions at sentence level has made decisive progress thanks to the functional syntax research of Alarcos Llorach and his school in Oviedo (Coseriu 1989, 44). The so-called *funcionalismo español* ‘Spanish functionalism’ is a very clear example of how a functionalist theory can shape and reorder

an entire tradition of grammatography. Alarcos Llorach's grammar, published in 1994, which replaced the outline of an academy grammar in its acceptance, is just as indebted to it as more recent works, for example by Ángel López García (1989; 2013) or Salvador Gutiérrez Ordóñez (1997a; 1997b). Besides Michael A.K. Halliday, sources of this direction are especially Louis Hjelmslev, to whom the consistent functionalisation of differences in the level of expression is attributed, and not least Coseriu, especially his functional structuralism. The categorisation made on three levels seems particularly important: syntactic functions, semantic functions (which are essentially identical with thematic roles), and finally the pragmatic functions, such as theme (*soporte*) and rheme (*aporte*) in the information structure. The approach of Spanish functionalism is therefore paradigmatic because a contrast is not made with elements present in the utterance, but with elements given in the language system that could stand in the same place and with which a functional difference is naturally established. Overall, it can be assessed that Spanish functionalism works very strongly with differential-oppositive delimitations and in this respect is clearly in the structural tradition of Coseriu, but also of the Prague School.

The functional and structural approaches of the modality are characterised by the hypothesis of a parallelism between formal and semantic entities. This also leads us to consider that any difference in form is correlated with differences in content.

2. The functional categories

There are at least two sources for the grouping of linguistic means into functional categories: the work of Eugenio Coseriu on verbal categories and the work of Aleksandr Bondarko on functional-semantic categories. Coseriu developed a theory of verbal

categories (Coseriu, 1972) which can easily be applied to this subject. He defines categories as functions that are only attached to the process of speech, i.e. they cannot be determined from the system of language. In the language system, he argues, there are only functional schemas. Thus, all that can be said about a given language is what system of categories it has and what means of formal expression correspond to each category:

En cambio, esto no puede hacerse en el plano de la «lengua» como *sistema*, porque la «lengua» no comprende ninguna palabra real, sino solo *esquemas funcionales*. Con respecto a una lengua determinada, sólo se puede decir cuál es su *sistema peculiar de categorías* y cuál es la *expresión formal* de cada una de ellas. En efecto, en el hablar correspondiente a una lengua se comprueban sólo determinados modos significativos, que constituyen su sistema categorial, y a cada modo significativo corresponde un modo formal; de otra manera, la lengua no podría funcionar como técnica de la que todo hablante histórico dispone para la realización de su libertad expresiva (Coseriu, 1972: 16).

As functional categories are realised in a specific way in each language through idiomatic categories, a functional category such as modality can be realised through verbal inflection, respectively through modes. However, the conception of idiomatic expressions in each case cannot be determined a priori; syntagmatic relations are sometimes preferred and, in the absence of inflection, they are even the only possibility. According to Coseriu (1972: 23-24), the traditional divisions into parts of discourse are conventional and heterogeneous, since they are made according to different criteria. Nouns and verbs are determined according to semantic criteria, while adverbs are explained according to syntactic criteria. According to Coseriu, these obviously arbitrary and hybrid categories serve their purpose outside linguistic theorising, but they need to be questioned

scientifically. Consequently, the categories can only be defined semantically, but the formal means of expression must be described separately for each language. In particular, Coseriu points out that functional categories do not correspond to classes of words and that the categorical meaning of words is not identical to their lexical meaning (Coseriu, 1972: 24-25):

[...] la definición de las categorías solo puede ser semántica. [...] Además hay que tener presente que las categorías verbales no coinciden con las «clases» de palabras y que el significado «categorial» no se identifica con el significado léxico (Coseriu, 1972: 25).

This explanation of functional categories according to semantic criteria, which dissolves the boundaries of word types, makes it possible to obtain, for example, a broad concept of modality that encompasses the expression of the attitudes that a speaker can adopt towards the propositional content of an utterance. From such a broad concept of modality, the following statements are all modalised, the modalisation being not only by mode as in (10) and (12) to (14), but also by adverbs (9) and (13), epistemic verbs (10), (11), expressions of fear (12), necessity (13) and will (14):

- (9) Peut-être que Pierre viendra.
- (10) Je doute que Pierre vienne.
- (11) Je sais que Pierre viendra.
- (12) Il est à craindre que Pierre vienne.
- (13) Il faut absolument que Pierre vienne.
- (14) Je ne veux pas que Pierre vienne.

Such consideration of the linguistic devices of different language levels as expressions of a functional category suggests an onomasiological approach, originally used for the study of

lexical facts. As a concept has been assumed and different designations of this concept have been sought, now in the case of grammatical categories, meanings are assumed and their realisation by different markers of the category is studied.

Bondarko chose such a procedure for his theory of functional-semantic categories, which also suggests an onomasiological approach and was developed mainly for the comparison of languages. A functional-semantic category may (but not necessarily) be based on a purely grammatical category in a given language (Bondarko 1967; Schwall 1991, 99-102). Whereas the grammatical category corresponds to a certain essential property, for example of the verb, the semantic-functional category is expressed by morphological, syntactic, phonological, or a combination of all these means, or contextually

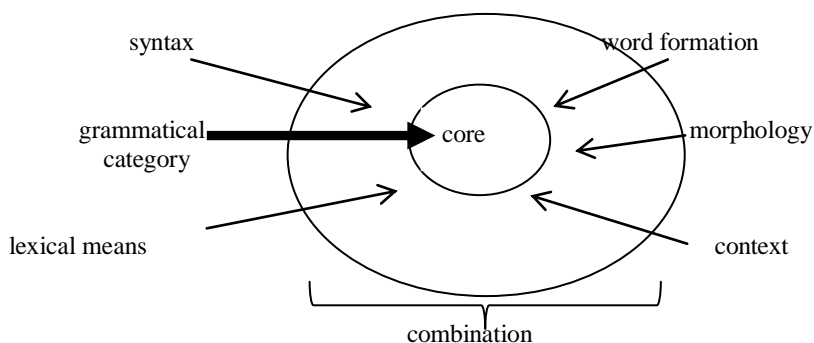


Diagram 1: functional-semantic category

For Bondarko, the determination of the content of a semantic-functional category on the basis of its grammatical core is also possible in all languages, i.e. functional categories can be assumed if there is a grammatical core in any language. For the study of aspectuality as a functional-semantic category on an

onomasiological basis in Romance languages (cf. Dessì Schmid 2014; Haßler 2016a, 181-298), this consideration was relevant because these languages do not have a grammatical aspect, but they have verbal forms, modes of action, aspectual adverbs and other devices that may mark aspectuality:

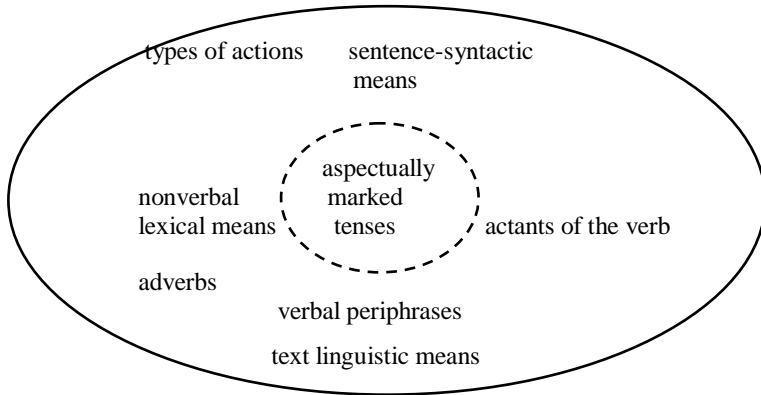


Diagram 2: Functional-semantic category of aspectuality in Romance languages

3. Functional approaches in linguistic schools in the second half of the 20th century

In the second half of the 20th century, there were a number of linguistic schools that claimed the concept of function as their own. They worked very much in isolation and hardly took notice of outsider scholars, just as there is little evidence of Coseriu taking notice of the work of such schools. Nevertheless, there are commonalities in the concepts of function that can be derived from the requirements of the time and the development of linguistics. Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is associated with the writings of Michael A. K. Halliday, and it was continued in Simon C. Dik's Functional Grammar (FG) as well as in the

mainly American functional school Role and Reference Grammar (RRG) (cf. Halliday 2004, ¹1994, Dik 1997). Dik postulates the communicative point of departure as imperative: a functional approach means asking how language functions in use, how speakers and addressees can communicate with each other through the use of linguistic expressions, how they can understand and influence each other, the latter being related to knowledge, attitudes, prejudices, feelings:

When one takes a functional approach to the study of natural languages, the ultimate questions one is interested in can be formulated as: How does the natural language user (NLU) work? How do speakers and addressees succeed in communicating to each other through the use of linguistic expressions? How is it possible for them to make themselves understood, to influence each other's stock of information (including knowledge, beliefs, prejudices, feelings), and ultimately each other's practical behaviour, by linguistic means? (Dik, 1997, I:1)

In this determination lies both a shortening and a broadening of the view of grammar. First of all, the emphasis on the communicative goal seems to obscure the view of the underlying mechanisms, an accusation which seems justified to me on the surface, but which applies to different functional approaches to very different degrees. On the other hand, the starting point opens the door to pragmatics, and it is certainly no coincidence that one of the most interesting points of discussion within functional grammar is the extent to which pragmatic aspects must be taken into account from the outset when determining grammatical categories. Coseriu (1989, 24) mentioned Halliday's statement that only two layers are rationally necessary and therefore necessarily universal: the word layer and the sentence layer. This is because in every language there must be minimum combinable

elements and units of combination in the “saying” (the unit of saying, specifically the sentence). But all the other layers may or may not appear, as they are not rationally necessary (Halliday, 1961: 252).

Dik’s functional theory assumes five interacting ability systems involved in human communication:

- (1) **LANGUAGE** abilities: The user of a natural language is able to use and interpret linguistic expressions of great complexity and variety.
- (2) **EPISTEMIC** skills: relate to the maintenance and use of knowledge bases.
- (3) **LOGICAL** skills enable the derivation of knowledge from existing stocks.
- (4) **PERCEPTUAL** skills: the perception of the environment and the use of these perceptions for the production and interpretation of utterances.
- (5) **SOCIAL** skills allow not only to say something, but also to decide how to say it in the interest of achieving the communicative goal.

These five ability areas result in something that is then called communicative competence in some works and that is supposed to constitute the actual object of the theory of a functional grammar. Of course, this approach is also concerned with methodological delimitations. In the first instance, Kuhn’s concept of paradigm is used, and a formal and a functional paradigm are contrasted.

- (1) In the *formal paradigm* a language is regarded as an abstract formal object (e.g., as a set of sentences), and a grammar is conceptualized primarily as an attempt at characterizing this

formal object in terms of rules of formal syntax to be applied independently of the meanings and uses of the constructions described. Syntax is thus given methodological priority over semantics and pragmatics.

In the *functional paradigm*, on the other hand, a language is in the first place conceptualized as an instrument of social interaction among human beings, used with the intention of establishing communicative relationships. Within this paradigm one attempts to reveal the instrumentality of language with respect to what people do and achieve with it in social interaction. A natural language, in other words, is seen as an integrated part of the communicative competence of NLU (Dik, 1997, I:2-3).

The confusion is exacerbated by the use of terminology: what is understood by natural language could not be more different. If Chomsky means by this the language given to man by his nature, a terminology that is centuries old and has always given rise to the same misunderstandings, then natural language for Dik is something quite different, namely precisely the individual languages that have arisen naturally in their differentiated nature. Coseriu, to whom many functionalist schools within Romance studies owe important impulses, uses the term *historical language* for this, which is also not unproblematic, but at least avoids the conflict with the use of terminology following Chomsky.

In a similar way to Dik, systemic functional linguistics, which was developed after Halliday, sees its field of activity primarily in demarcation from structural approaches. SFL developed from work by Firth in the 1930s, but is primarily the work of his student Halliday, beginning in the 1960s. The SFL has been influential above all in various areas of applied linguistics related to language teaching. SFL has also been influential in

computational linguistics, especially Natural Language Generation (NLG).

A central concept of SFL is stratification, according to which language is to be examined on the four strata of context, semantics, lexicogrammar and phonology-graphology. Context – in the sense of the definition of communicative competence mentioned at the beginning – also includes something like social roles (called tenor), modalities in the sense of communication channels (orality/writtenness, monological/dialogical). Semantics explicitly includes what is usually called pragmatics. From this point of view, semantics has to do with three levels of facts: (a) the propositional content, (b) interpersonal semantics (meaning speech act functions, expression of speaker attitudes), (c) finally, text semantics.

A functional analysis is also aimed at in the area called lexico-grammar; this is done primarily as an analysis of utterances according to concepts such as agent, medium, subject, mode. In this context, reference is made to Halliday 1994. However, let us first remain within the functionalist premises as formulated by Dik. According to this, language is primarily determined as an instrument of social interaction. This implies that it is not to be defined primarily through arbitrary structures, but through specific purposes.

(2) What is a natural language? A natural language is an instrument of social interaction. That it is an instrument means that it does not exist in and by itself as an arbitrary structure of some kind, but that it exists by virtue of being used for certain purposes. These purposes concern the social interaction between human beings (Dik, 1997, I:5).

The main function of language is seen as the establishment of communicative relations between language users. In this

context, communication is not understood as the simple passing on of information, as is remarkably honestly stated, it even seems easier on this basis to understand language as an instrument of self-organisation and self-expression than to explain the common basis for functioning in intersubjective communication.

These branches of functional linguistics emerged in reaction to the formal approach represented by generative grammar, and they go back to a general dissatisfaction with formalist accounts of language, which led to the emergence of several branches of linguistics that claim to be functional (cf. Aijmer 2016, 495). The linguistic approach adopted in these schools can also be seen as structural-functional, but it has received more attention in Anglophone linguistics. The emergence of a number of functional models recognising the importance of the cognitive, the social, and an interactive context for the study of the modality has occurred in parallel with the development of Coserian linguistics.

4. Coseriu's notion(s) of function

In an article entitled *Die funktionelle Betrachtung des Wortschatzes* ('The Functional View of Vocabulary'), there are statements on Coseriu's concept of function. It is interesting to note that this article appeared in the Yearbook of the Institute for the German Language for 1975 together with contributions by other important Germanists on the subject of vocabulary and semantics. First of all, Coseriu introduces the term *lexematics* (*Lexematik*) for the functional consideration of vocabulary and defines it as the study of the single-language lexical content, i.e. the lexical meaning (*der einzelsprachlich gegebene Inhalt*, Coseriu 1975: 7). He thus uses *function* for a very narrowly defined field of reference and also distinguishes it from other types of meaning at the very beginning of his article. *Meaning* is

the content given in a single language; meaning in this sense exists only in languages, but not in speech in general. In other words, meaning only exists as German, French, English, etc. meaning. The *designation* is the reference to the extralinguistically meant reality or this reality itself (idea, fact, state of affairs). Irrespective of the linguistic form, designation is already given in speech in general. Coseriu explains this distinction between meaning and designation on the basis of the verbs for ‘to bring’:

So können z.B. dt. *bringen* und sp. *traer* u.U. das gleiche bezeichnen, die Bedeutung der beiden Verben ist jedoch nicht dieselbe, da sp. *traer* das inhaltliche Merkmal ‘in Richtung auf die erste Person’ enthält, dass in dt. *bringen* nicht vorhanden ist; ebenso bezeichnen fr. *porter* und it. *portare* zwar auf das gleiche „Faktum“, ihre Bedeutung ist aber verschieden (frz. *porter* schließt ein, dass sich das „Getragene“ nicht selbstständig fortbewegt). In ähnlicher Weise bezeichnen *Caesar Pompeium vicit* und *Pompeius a Caesare victus est* denselben Tatbestand, jedoch durch verschiedene Bedeutungen. Die Bedeutung ist immer und ausschließlich die Inhaltsseite eines sprachlichen Zeichens (oder einer Zeichenkonstruktion) im strengen Sinne: Sie ist die einzige sprachliche Gestaltung der Bezeichnungsmöglichkeiten. (Coseriu, 1975: 7).

Although Coseriu’s definition does not make the concept of function any clearer, insofar as it narrows it down to lexical meaning, these explanations and examples show several important ideas. First of all, Coseriu states that meanings of lexemes can only be determined within a certain language, they are thus determined within the language and are determined by certain features that are not present in other languages. Here Coseriu seems to follow Saussure’s notion of ‘valeur’ (cf. Haßler 1991), which sees the meaning of a word as determined by its position in

the lexical paradigm and by its distinctions from neighbouring words. On the other hand, Coseriu also assumes qualities of meaning that go beyond individual lexemes when he considers the two constructions *Caesar Pompeium vicit* and *Pompeius a Caesare victus est* to be different in their meaning, but related to the same extra-linguistic fact. Differences in form, here the difference between active and passive, thus make a functional difference at the level of meaning. In the reference to extra-linguistic facts, this difference can be neutralised. With this extension of qualities of meaning and possibilities of meaning to constructions of signs, Coseriu formulates an idea that can be related to contemporary construction grammar.

Coseriu proves to be a functional structuralist when he explains that lexematics is not about what is analogous as a speech meaning or can constitute an “opposition” in certain speech acts (e.g. *Es dauert eine Stunde* ‘It takes an hour’ – *Es dauert eine Zigarette* ‘It takes a cigarette’), but about the meaning that is identical in the system of language (*langue*), i.e. is identical even in completely different sentences (*Eine Zigarette anzünden* ‘To light a cigarette’ – *eine Zigarette dauern* ‘to last a cigarette’ etc.) or about what is always in opposition in language (e.g. *Jahr* ‘year’ – *Monat* ‘month’): *Jahr* and *Monat* are not in such an opposition, since a war can last a month as well as a year or several years. And as for texts, the same meanings can occur for different or even opposite senses: *Es dauert eine Zigarette*, for example, can be understood and represented as a relatively very short duration or as a very long duration (cf. also only a minute – a whole minute, only a year – a whole long year) (Coseriu, 1975: 9).

Beyond the meaning in the language system, determined by oppositions, however, Coseriu also assumes lexemes that are destined in the language itself for certain texts or for certain uses of texts. In addition to their lexematic content, these lexemes have

an external determination of the type “for texts of the type x”, “for the text use x”. For example, lexemes such as German *meckern*, Italian *ridire* (purely lexematically ‘to object’) are intended in advance ‘for the criticism of another’, ‘for insinuation’ in utterances like *Was hast du zu meckern?*, *Che cos’hai da ridire?*, but not *Ich meckere*, *Io ridico*. Utterances like *Ich meckere*, *Io ridico* are only possible, if it is a matter of reproducing or restating what someone else has said (Coseriu, 1975: 9). As a prerequisite for functioning in texts, Coseriu thus assumes, in addition to the lexematic meaning, a binding of the lexemes to certain text types and textual contexts. In this way, he sees the functional consideration of vocabulary as justified both vis-à-vis traditional lexicology and semantics and generative grammar as an autonomous and primarily necessary research direction.

Assuming functional units does not at all mean that one assumes only one “meaning” (= meaning of speech) at a time, but rather that one endeavours to determine the limits given in each individual language within which an infinite number of meanings of speech are permissible. On the other hand, the term *polysemy* only makes sense if one does not assume unlimited polysemy; thus, in a certain respect, it makes sense to assume polysemy within *write*, but this presupposes that the polysemy itself is not unlimited, i.e. that *write* does not simply mean everything (e.g. also ‘run’, ‘fry’, ‘swim’). For, if polysemy was unlimited, it could not be investigated; not only functional semantics, but any semantics would be meaningless, and even speaking itself would be simply impossible (Coseriu. 1975: 11).

Coseriu formulates a series of premises for the study of functional units. Like all the other single-language facts, lexical meanings must also be established as functional units where they are actually and directly available for functioning, i.e. in the language system of a “functional” language as a “technique of

speech” (Coseriu, 1975: 14). The functional units must first be established in the primary language – not in the metalanguage, in synchronicity – not in diachronicity, in the free technique of speech – not in repeated speech (fixed expressions, idioms, quotations). The functional units cannot be established in the historical language either, because they do not function in this language as such, but only in this language with additional determinations; and depending on these additional determinations, the functional units may possibly be completely or at least partially different. A historical language (i.e. a historically delimited language usually identified with an *adiectivum proprium*, e.g. *German* language, *French* language, *English* language) is not a homogeneous technique of speech, but usually a complicated structure of partly coinciding and partly diverging speech traditions; it shows differences in space, between socio-cultural strata and between situation-conditioned types of expression modalities (Coseriu, 1975: 14).

In functional language itself, the units and their structures must be identified at the functional level of the language system. The language system, in fact, is defined by Coseriu as the level of functional differences or “oppositions”. The language norm, by contrast, is the level of the traditional realisation of a language system, which on the one hand represents a selection among the possibilities offered by the system, but on the other hand contains not only what is functional but also what is simply traditionally customary. The language type, for its part, is the level of the types and categories of the linguistic functions and procedures occurring in a language system. Thus, for example, the meaning of *Hauptstadt*, *Hauptmann* in German would be ‘main city’ or ‘main man’ (cf. *Hauptsache*, *Hauptgrund*, *Haupteingang*, etc.) from the point of view of the language system; but that it is a question of ‘main city’ or ‘main man’ in a certain respect (English *capital*,

captain), i.e. that a certain choice has been made here among the possibilities offered by the system, is a fact of the language norm. And the fact that a language prefers e.g. the verbal or the noun form of reality would be a fact of the language type. The functional units must also be identified at the level of the language system because both the consideration of the language norm and the language type presuppose this level as already known (Coseriu, 1975: 15-16).

With the designation in a speech act, a use of meaning takes place that is not determined by this alone but at the same time by general principles of thought and by the experience of the world. As a third type of meaning, Coseriu defines *sense*, which presents itself as the particular content of a text or text unit. Sense only arises at the level of the text, i.e. the speech act or the coherent structure of speech acts of a speaker in a situation and not in speaking in general nor in the individual languages.

Compared to lexical and other units with nominative functions, Coseriu was less concerned with syntax and syntactic functions. To be mentioned in this context is his article entitled *Principes de syntaxe fonctionnelle* (Coseriu 1989) and its Spanish translation (Coseriu 1996). Syntax or functional grammar – Coseriu sees no need to distinguish between “syntax” and “grammar” – is the paradigm of the grammatical *signifié* ‘signified’. It establishes the semanto-grammatical structure proper to a given language or – since in language any structure concerning the two semiotic levels, expression and content, is semantically motivated – more simply: the grammatical structure of a language.

Coseriu extends his conception of the content of linguistic signs to the level of speech acts. In linguistic content (=everything that is communicated and understood by means of a speech or speech act), three types must be distinguished: the designation, the

signified and the meaning. Designation is the relationship between signs or linguistic constructions and the extralinguistic reality “designed” in each case, or this extralinguistic reality itself as designed by signs and constructions; this is what is often called *reference*. The signified is the content given by the language used in the discourse, and exclusively by it, i.e. the organisation of the specific designation possibilities of a given language. Meaning, finally, is the specific content of a discourse or a fragment of discourse as a given for that particular discourse through the combination of designation, language signifier and extralinguistic determinations of the considered discourse (e.g. knowledge of the designated “things”, knowledge of the “situation” in which one is speaking, knowledge of the persons participating in it) (Coseriu, 1989: 5). Coseriu distinguished the nomination of a fact and the predication on it, using terms in the spirit of Wilhelm von Humboldt’s language theory, by adding the structuralist concept of opposition. For Coseriu, the task of any functional syntax is to establish in each case what the considered language says as such and by itself, by means of its grammatical oppositions, and to establish for each language a paradigmatic system of these oppositions; in other words, to establish for each language its own grammatical *Weltanschauung*, its specific system of structuring the world of events and relations which are the object of the “saying”:

La tâche de toute syntaxe fonctionnelle, c’est d’établir en chaque cas ce que la langue considérée *dit* en tant que telle et par elle-même, au moyen de ses oppositions grammaticales, et d’établir pour chaque langue le système paradigmatique de ces oppositions ; en d’autres termes, d’établir pour chaque langue la « *Weltanschauung* » grammaticale qui lui est propre : son système spécifique de structuration du monde des événements et des relations qui sont l’objet du « dire ». (Coseriu 1989, 6)

For Coseriu, *functional* always means being differential in a double sense. On the one hand, he is concerned with the oppositions within the language system; on the other hand, the differences in the means of expression of the individual languages must also be taken into account. He refers to Wilhelm von Humboldt's work *Über das Entstehen der grammatischen Formen und ihren Einfluss auf die Ideenentwicklung* ('On the emergence of grammatical forms and their influence on the development of ideas', 1822) and characterises it as the first work in which grammatical meaning was treated in its differentiation and individual language expression. With the comparison of forms of exotic and European languages that follows, Coseriu makes no claim to truth; he merely wants to clarify the difference in the expression of certain grammatical functions:

En ce qui concerne la norme du japonais parlé actuel, il faudrait ajouter que ce *kuru*, qui dans le système est le « présent » et en même temps la forme générale du verbe (« l'infinitif »), s'emploie plutôt pour désigner des événements à venir et que, pour désigner des faits actuels, l'on a en japonais une autre construction, semblable à la « progressive forme » de l'anglais ou à *estar* + gérondif (*estar haciendo*), mais en même temps assez différente aussi bien au niveau de sa valeur dans le système qu'au niveau de ses emplois. (Coseriu, 1989: 8-9)

In the intra-linguistic consideration of individual forms, Coseriu proves to be a pioneer of construction grammar approaches. For example, he examines the construction *avec X* in French and finds that it has instrumental meaning in the example *je coupe le pain avec le couteau*. However, this instrumental meaning cannot be marked as its grammatical meaning because *avec x* is also used, for example, in *se promener avec Marie*, in *ce gâteau est fait avec du sucre et de la farine* and *je le fais avec*

plaisir, in which X corresponds to a person, a substance and an attitude. The construction *avec X* is thus used to express an abstract meaning of concomitance or copresence of X (Coseriu 1989, 9). According to Coseriu, functional grammar has to look for invariant meanings of constructions that can manifest themselves in use as concrete speech meanings (*acceptations*).

Functional grammar aims to establish the grammatical meanings distinguished by a given language and the structural (oppositional) relations between these meanings in the same language, and it refers to a second level, the types of use of these same meanings in the designation. In order to do this, it starts from the premise that in principle – that is, despite possible grammatical synonymy and the syncretisms that are always possible in a language, there is for every given expression a given unitary function (Coseriu, 1989: 12).

With this definition of the tasks of functional grammar, Coseriu distances himself from the functional categories presented in section 2 and, of course, even further from generative grammar, which he is always very critical of and which he characterises as “onomasiological grammar”. Onomasiological grammar (especially transformational grammar, explicitly especially in its so-called “generative semantics” form, but more or less implicitly in all its forms), on the contrary, considers identities and differences in designation as primary and ignores identities and differences in meaning. Consequently, it is not, strictly speaking, grammar of languages, analytical grammar, but rather grammar of speech in general, synthetic grammar: it does not consider the structuring of the grammatical content of each language, but rather the use of material structures (and, implicitly, of meanings) as a means of structuring the content of a language. corresponding to it) in speech, i.e. in acts of designation (Coseriu, 1989: 12). Coseriu then describes this attitude, which he ascribes to

“onomasiological” grammars, again using the example of *avec X*. Thus, in this case, this type of grammar would consider as grammatically different the different uses of the construction *avec X* (*avec le couteau, avec Marie, avec sucre, avec plaisir*, etc.) and, on the contrary, as grammatically identical expressions such as (*[je coupe le pain] avec le couteau, en employant un couteau, en me servant du couteau*, etc.), and also, of course, in the same case, Russian *ножом*, lat. *cultrō*, as all these expressions design, in this sentence, an instrument. The function that a construction fulfils is thus marked on a more abstract level than the meanings in speech (concomitance instead of instruments, persons, substance, attitude...). However, Coseriu resists accepting the communicative function of whole sentences as a criterion for identifying linguistic units.

Coseriu clearly differs from contemporary approaches in construction grammar by the strict separation of lexical and grammatical meaning. The grammatical meaning, due to the fact that it only occurs in combinations in the “saying”, is a complex meaning, which encompasses several types. Indeed, in order to delimit exactly the object of the functional grammar or syntax, it is necessary to distinguish at least five different types of meanings: the lexical meaning proper, the categorial meaning, the instrumental meaning, the syntactic meaning and the ontic meaning. The lexical meaning is the meaning that immediately corresponds to the organisation of the extralinguistic world by means of languages, and it represents the type of reality named by language. This is, for example, the meaning that the words of the series *white – whiteness – whitening* have in common. In all these words the same type of colour is named, different from the types named by the series *green – greenness – greening, redness – red – reddening* etc. The categorial meaning is that the terms *white – green – red, whiteness – greenness – redness, whitening –*

greening – reddening of these series have each time in common and which, on the other hand, is different for the terms of each series; it does not concern the substance but the form of the intuition of reality. For this intuition of reality, Coseriu (1989: 20) refers to Husserl's differences in the *Weise der Erfassung* ('way of recording').

The syntactic meaning is the meaning of a grammatical combination: lexeme(s) and/or catememe(s) + morpheme(s). Thus, the combination *casa+s* has the meaning 'plural', as opposed to the 'singular' of *casa* (= *casa+0*); and the combination *el libro* has the meaning 'actual', as opposed to the 'virtual' of *libro*. The same is true for meanings such as: 'present', 'future', 'indicative', 'active', 'passive' etc., which are all syntactic meanings, being meanings of determined combinations characterised by "instruments". Finally, the ontic meaning is the meaning corresponding to the existence value attributed to the state of things signified by a sentence or proposition: it is, at the level of the sentence and in relation to the syntactic meaning of the sentence, more or less what the categorical meaning is in relation to the lexical meaning of a word or a group of words. Thus, the sentences *John did*, *John didn't do*, *Did John do?* have exactly the same syntactic meaning, but they have different ontic meanings, because the existence value attributed to the state of things, they mean is different every time. Meanings such as "assertive", "interrogative", "optative", "injunctive" (subdivided in each case into "positive" and "negative") are, precisely, "ontic" meanings (Coseriu, 1989: 20-21).

According to Coseriu, the fact that grammatical oppositions are always and necessarily oppositions between "combinations", which in each case include a given element and a determining element, and that, consequently, grammatical paradigms are always "paradigms", means that they are always "combinations of

syntagms”, implies that any grammatical system must have at least two levels: that of combinable elements and that of combinations or syntagms. The possible grammatical layers are, in their order, as follows ascending: the minimal element (or moneme), the grammatical word, the group of words, the clause, the sentence and the text (Coseriu, 1989: 22).

The grammatical layer of the sentence is characterised by the predicative function; for example, in the case of *il pleut*, there is an “unattributed” predication, while in the case of *Jean lit* (and even *il lit*), there is an “attributed” predication. It is, moreover, a layer, well known in any type of grammar; Coseriu only points out that the complex sentence (containing “subordinate propositions”) does not constitute a superior layer, but corresponds to this same layer of the sentence. The upper layer, expressing functions that go actually beyond the sentence, is the layer of “text”.

It is interesting that Coseriu discusses problems of the information structure in terms of repeated speech. In the following quotation, he mentions different word order in the question of what water is like and characterises the topicalisation in the Spanish sentence *El agua ¿cómo está?*, which can actually be used to refer to the previous mention of water, as repeated speech. The thematic part of the sentence is thus presented as having been produced before, while the predication given to it expresses the new. Likewise, the insistent questions *Que ¿cómo está el agua?* and *Que ¿cómo está el agua?* are presented as repetitions of the question already asked:

Ainsi, si l'on dit en espagnol *¿Cómo está el agua?*, cela constitue au niveau du texte une question qu'on pose pour la première fois (question non répétée), ou dans laquelle on ne dit pas si elle est répétée ou non; si, par contre, on dit *El agua ¿cómo está?* (ou bien: *Que ¿cómo está el agua?*), c'est une « question répétée » :

on signale qu'on a déjà posé cette question et qu'on la répète parce qu'elle n'a pas eu de réponse de la part de l'auditeur (qui n'a pas entendu ou n'a pas compris ce qu'on lui demandait). En allemand, on aurait dans ce même cas *Wie ist das Wasser?* pour la question non répétée (ou non marquée a cet égard) et *Wie das Wasser ist?* pour la question marquée comme répétée (Coseriu 1989, 23).

This argument makes it clear that Coseriu's thinking in terms of oppositions at all levels of language dominates his concept of function. He contrasts units on the different strata and derives their meanings from their differences. As the last example shows, he also includes pragmatic questions in his syntactic considerations, but uses a completely different explanatory framework than contemporary linguistics.

5. Conclusions

Coseriu noted that functional grammar was not given the place it deserved in the linguistics of his time. Obviously, however, he understood functional grammar to mean only the theory he himself outlined and made little reference to other functional linguists. In the streams of functional linguistics presented, it is remarkable how little consideration is given to each other and how little mention is made of representatives of other schools. This is also due to the considerable differences in terminology which make communication difficult. The concept of 'function' is also defined very differently by different authors. These definitions range from the meaning of individual elements used as markers of a grammatical category, through its logical determination, to the consideration of the functions of entire utterances in communication. Nevertheless, a number of positions are common to the different authors and schools:

- (a) The correlation between form and meaning is generally assumed and interpreted in such a way that any difference in form must be matched by a difference in meaning.
- (b) The systematic ordering of linguistic elements expressing a functional category is understood as a system of stratification that deviates from the levels of language and categories of traditional grammar.
- (c) In the study of a functional category, conceptual determinations of the different realisations are assumed and an onomasiological approach is chosen, but not designated as such.
- (d) In addition to the study of the functions of the individual linguistic elements, an examination of the functions of the sentence is often undertaken. In this way, a clearly pragmatic perspective is adopted which takes into account the use of language.

The shift from structural-functional to cognitive-functional considerations has been flexible since the last decades of the 20th century. Functional approaches now converge with cognitive perspectives (Goossens 2007). This is also evidenced by functional models that are both cognitive and functional. Functional Procedural Grammar (FGP) (De Schutter/Nuyts 1983; Nuyts 1989; Nuyts 2001) is an example of this (cf. Aijmer 2016, 506). Coseriu's theory fits into this development, whereby the philosophical foundation of his ideas is particularly noteworthy (cf. Haßler 2015b).

The term *functional* is now also used for various discursive-functional approaches. These are not specifically related to a particular theoretical model of language and grammar, but they do have in common that they pay attention to the role of the speaker from an interactional or discursive perspective. The notion of *stance* is used in different disciplines such as linguistics, anthropology, sociolinguistics, and functional discourse linguistics

(Ochs 1996; Hunston/Thompson 2000; Kärkkäinen 2003; 2007; Biber 2006; Englebretson 2007, Haßler 2015a) to refer to the functions of linguistic elements in the communicative situation. Related terms are *commitment* (Stubbs 1986), *evidentiality* (Chafe 1986; Marín Arese/Haßler/Carretero 2017), *metadiscourse* (Hyland/Tse 2004), and *engagement* (White 2003) (cf. Aijmer 2016, 508).

Coseriu's theory can be characterised as a philosophically based structural-functional theory that has points of contact with many approaches developed contemporaneously. Its compatibility with modern pragmatic, construction-grammatical and functional-cognitive approaches also identifies him as a forerunner of these directions.

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