



INTRODUCTION

Anita Berit Hansen
University of Copenhagen
berit@hum.ku.dk

Erling Strudsholm
University of Copenhagen
struds@hum.ku.dk

1. Background for this issue

In late autumn 2021, the Department of English, Germanic and Romance Studies at the University of Copenhagen hosted a conference on linguistic variation on the occasion of the centenary of Eugenio Coseriu's birth (1921-2021), in collaboration with the Embassy of Romania in the Kingdom of Denmark. The event brought together international scholars to discuss new perspectives on diasystematic variation in European languages, while also acknowledging the heritage from Coseriu. Three thematic sessions formed the core of the program: 1) Coseriu and the diasystem revisited, 2) variation in the new media, 3) diaphasic variation in a language learning perspective.¹

Coseriu's most influential works (1952 to 1958, see for instance van Deyck 2015:566) were published while he lived in Uruguay, but the course of his career brought him from his native town, Mihăileni in Romania (situated today in the Republic of Moldova), to Italy and – after the South-American period – to Spain, Portugal and Germany, where he held a position as a Professor of Romance linguistics in Tübingen from 1963 until his retirement in 1991. This predominantly European attachment, combined with his contribution to the study of variation in language, made the centenary of his birth an important event for our research group *Norm, Variation, Language Change*, formed in 2012 by scholars from the Department of English, Germanic and Romance Studies.²

¹ <https://engerom.ku.dk/english/research/norm-variation-language-change/calendar/linguistic-variation-in-european-languages/>

² <https://engerom.ku.dk/english/research/norm-variation-language-change/>

Coseriu's interest in "parole" as the central object of study for the discipline of linguistics, as opposed to the focus on "langue" in the Saussurian tradition, as well as in the various axes of patterning of the observed variation, was not completely unique in the 1950's. He is often identified with the construction of the "diasystem", but obviously built on concepts and ideas developed by Flydal (1952). And, as is clear in Weinreich, Labov & Herzog (1968:160–161) in their manifesto for empirical foundations for the study of language change, inspiration to look for systematicity within variation in spoken language was present already in Fries & Pike (1949). Nevertheless, Coseriu's contribution to the field of linguistics – with its integration of more abstract concepts such as that of knowledge, norm and tradition – has been fundamental not only for variational linguistics but also for pragmatics and text linguistics.

2. The diasystematic approach

The prevalent model of the diasystem includes five different parameters for linguistic variation (see, for instance, Gadet 2007). The "diachronic" dimension regards variation over time. The "diatopic" variation concerns geographic variation – not only traditional dialect research focusing on different regional varieties but also differences between country and city and between centre and periphery of a large city. The "diastratic" variation relates to socially determined differences such as age, gender, social status and level of education. The "diaphasic" variation from formal to informal register is conditioned by the communication situation. Finally, the "diamesic" variation depends on the choice of communication channel, primarily a distinction between oral and written presentation (Strudsholm 2009).

There are several relations between the different dimensions of the diasystem, and it is often difficult to keep the different dimensions separate. They also have a number of common features and mutual influence on each other. Thus, on the one hand, certain connections can be established between high style, formal language and standard written language, and on the other between low style, informal language and spontaneous spoken language. Finally, there is a tendency to categorize diatopically strongly marked language as a low variant with little social status, i.e. the use of dialect and regional variants is diastratically conditioned. It is thus often practically impossible to separate diatopic from diastratic variation, and

diastratic from diaphasic variation. A diastratic marking almost always implies a diatopically marked one, and in some cultures it is often difficult to imagine an informal language without regional features. Parallel to the decline of the dialects, the subject of dialect research has largely shifted from the diastratic to the diaphasic. While the dialect speaker previously used the dialect because he/she could not do anything else, the dialect in many contexts will now be used as an alternative code that is chosen in certain contexts, perhaps to emphasize a certain affiliation.

Berruto (1993:11) proposes a relationship between the dimensions in the sense that one interacts within the other: the diastratia within the diatopy, the diafasia within the diastratia, and the diamesia within the diafasia. In connection with a child's linguistic development, it learns a social variation from the region it grows up in, and within this variation, it learns to use different registers and behave in different situations. Finally, the fundamental dichotomy between speaking and writing is taught.

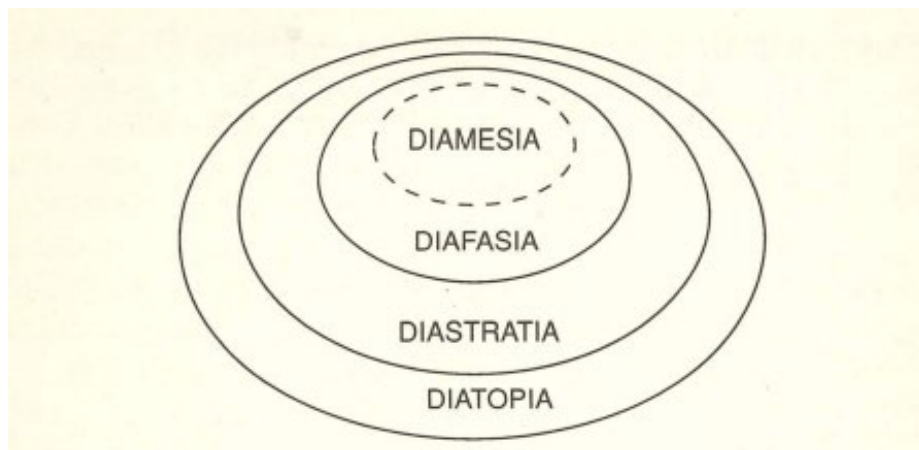


Figure 1 (Berruto 1993:11)

3. The articles in this issue

The following seven contributions all relate to different aspects of Coseriu's thinking and to diasystematic variation.

In her article, *On the interrelationship between linguistics and philosophy in Eugenio Coseriu's scientific thinking*, Araceli López Serena aims to show the close interrelationship between philosophy and linguistics

in Eugenio Coseriu's scientific thinking and to clarify to what extent the concepts and categories with which Coseriu approaches the problem of linguistic change come not from linguistics but from philosophy. Based on citations from one of his most important works, *Synchrony, Diachrony and History (SDH)* from 1958, ALS shows the relation between the linguistic and the philosophical dimension of theorisation in Coseriu's approach to language, and his advocacy of the differentiation between human sciences and natural sciences. This approach is expressed in Coseriu's differentiation between different problems of linguistic change and their correlation with different types of scientific questions. Furthermore, ALS argues that SDH cannot only be conceived as a mere treatise on the problem of linguistic change, but also needs to be recognised as a fundamental work for the general understanding of the epistemological principles of Coseriu's linguistic theory.

In their paper, *Between linguistic geography and structural linguistics: The development of Eugenio Coseriu's variational approach in the 1950s*, Viggo Bank Jensen and Lorenzo Cigana attempt to reconstruct Coseriu's framework of variation during the 1950s. The authors start from Coseriu's understanding of Pisani's notions of "isoglos" and "system of isoglosses", and how these ideas are gradually being replaced by "language architecture" and "functional language" in the adaptation of the Norwegian linguist Leiv Flydal's diasystem with its classification into diachronic, diatopic and diastratic variation. After that, the authors discuss the relationship between Coseriu's variational linguistics and three concepts – "connotation", "architecture" and "diasystems" – developed, respectively, by Hjelmslev, Flydal and Weinreich. Finally, the authors speculate on the reasons and the implications of Coseriu's failure to acknowledge Uriel Weinreich as an important source for variational linguistics.

In her contribution *The Diasystematic Status of the Diatopic Axis*, Lene Schøsler focuses on the diatopic dimension, intending to show that this level cannot be considered independently of the other dimensions of the diasystem. After a presentation of the traditional understanding of the variation axes, the author raises questions as to whether the diatopic axis is permanent or subject to change, and whether diatopy can be investigated independently of the other axes. She provides a number of examples from the history of the French language in order to show the change of status of diatopy in the course of history and the interdependence between

diachrony, diatopy and diastracy. She proposes an integrated view of the different axes of variation and claims that diasystematic factors are subject to change and that the dimensions are mutually dependent. Use of dialectal features can be an option that not only implies anchoring in the linguistic space, but also diastratic and diaphasic features. The different diasystematic levels do not represent oppositions but a co-presence; consequently, diatopy cannot be separated from the other dimensions of variation.

As the title suggests, the subject of Axel Bohmann's paper, *Diatopic variation in digital space: What Twitter can tell us about Texas English dialect areas*, is geographic variation in Texas English, on the basis of Twitter, and presents an approach that foregrounds a functional and/or stylistic interpretation of the variation rather than considering it a clear geographical index. Bohmann's analysis is based on 45 linguistic features in over 3 million tweets from across the state. He identifies two dimensions of variation that pattern in geographically meaningful ways. The first of these relates to creative uses of typography and distinguishes high scores in urban centres compared to rural areas. The second dimension concerns characteristics of interpersonal, spoken discourse and shows an East-West geographical divide. In addition to diatopic variation in Texas, the analysis also includes diastratic and diaphasic variation.

Taking us to the text linguistic level of Coseriu's theory, Flavia Teoc gives an example of how uses of metaphors in texts can change as a consequence of cultural changes (*Battle as a sacred game*). The analysis focusses on the genre of praise poetry, composed by so-called skalds, that was typical of old Norse tradition whenever a king had won an important battle over an enemy or when he had died in one. Metaphors used to describe these battles, however, seem to undergo transformations in the eleventh century, alongside the change from pagan Viking beliefs to a Christian world-view. This transition period is exemplified by extracts from early and later poems from the time. From alluding to the harsh weather or loud noises and fierce screaming which the warrior had to face (battle as storm or battle as senna), metaphors change to more rule-governed game allusions in which the fight is between good and evil (battle as a sacred game). The analysis also reflects upon the repeated use of such metaphors as ready-made discourse units that contribute to the creation of

meaning for the whole texts, and thus integrates Coseriu's theory of repeated speech.

Likewise sharing an interest in how culture affects language, Kirsten Jeppesen Kragh and Erling Strudsholm discuss how deep-rooted cultural differences may affect systems and use of pronominal address forms and to what extent the diasystem – with its present five dimensions (referring to the model of Gadet 2007) – is appropriate to catch this type of influence (*Address pronouns in a diasystematic perspective*). Adopting a contrastive approach, the authors first present tables of address forms in modern English, German, Danish, French and Italian, with a brief historical note on their developments. Then – after going through Hofstede's results from comparative business culture analyses for these selected languages – the authors ponder over the fact that the way these group, especially according to the cultural parameter “uncertainty avoidance”, do not coincide with the traditional typological division between Romance and German language families. Rather, the German work culture shows similar features to the French and Italian ones, while Danish and English work culture form an opposite cluster. Since this division, to some extent, matches the differences in use of address pronouns, the authors propose that a “diacultural” dimension be included in the study of interlinguistic pragmatic variation.

Roberto Paternostro turns to the crucial inclusion of diamesic and diaphasic aspects of language variation within L2-teaching, with special reference to French as a foreign language (*The appropriation of oral/spoken French by L2 learners: variational features and educational perspectives*). After summarizing the traditional treatment of “oral” and “spoken” French in the area of didactics, the author includes L1 sociolinguistic approaches in order to arrive at a more operational and open view, one that proves to be fruitful in L2-teaching: “Spoken” should be understood both as produced in a particular medium (phonic) and as a palette of different structural organisations, depending on how the speech pertains to the continuum between communicative proximity and distance. The author proposes to start familiarizing learners to particular forms from much earlier on (i.e. from level A1-A2) than suggested by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (B2),³ and to build up perceptual skills before productive ones in a precise progression. His

³ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages>

fieldwork carried out among Italophone French learners in Switzerland gives examples of activities in which B1-learners, after a thorough preparation phase, are able to simulate everyday interactions successfully.

It is our hope that the present volume will highlight the importance of Coseriu's work as a scholar while also opening up for continued discussions on the diasystematic dimensions of linguistic variation and their interrelations. The integration of a wide range of modern data types, including those represented by social media, and the recent exchanges between second-language researchers and variationists might prove to be fruitful new perspectives for the development of our knowledge within variational linguistics in the future. The texts in this volume are thus a contribution to the ever-fertile scientific field of norm, variation and language change.

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