Between Linguistic Geography and Structural Linguistics: The development of Eugenio Coseriu's variational approach in the 1950s

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Abstract
Abstract. In this paper, we follow the development of Coseriu's conceptual tools for variational linguistics during the 1950s. Our starting point is Pisani's notion of "isogloss", which Coseriu initially regarded as a core idea for his own approach and yet progressively abandoned in favour of the more structuralist-oriented notion of "functional language", adopted in the wake of Louis Hjelmslev's framework, through Leiv Flydal's mediation. Finally, we speculate about the reasons and the implications of Coseriu's failing to acknowledge Uriel Weinreich as an important source for variational linguistics.

Keywords: variational linguistics, functional linguistics, diasystems, Coseriu, Hjelmslev, Flydal, Weinreich

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to follow the genesis and evolution of Coseriu's variational framework, focusing on three main sources: *Sistema, norma y habla* (1952), *La geografía lingüística* (1955) and *Los conceptos de "dialecto", "nivel" y "estilo de lengua" y el sentido propio de la dialectología* (1981/1958). Our first approach deals with Coseriu's understanding and utilisation of the term "isogloss" (§ 1) and its theoretical underpinning. We will then investigate how, and possibly why, the concept of a "system of isoglosses", adopted by Coseriu after Pisani, is gradually replaced by the ideas of "language architecture" and "functional language"

(§§ 2-4). Finally (§ 5) we will discuss the historical and theoretical relationship between Coseriu's variational linguistics and three key concepts that lie at its core – "connotation", "architecture", and "diasystems" – developed respectively by Louis Hjelmslev (1899-1965), Leiv Flydal (1904-1983), and Uriel Weinreich (1926-1967).

An overview of the conceptual migration can be summarised as follows (Figure1):
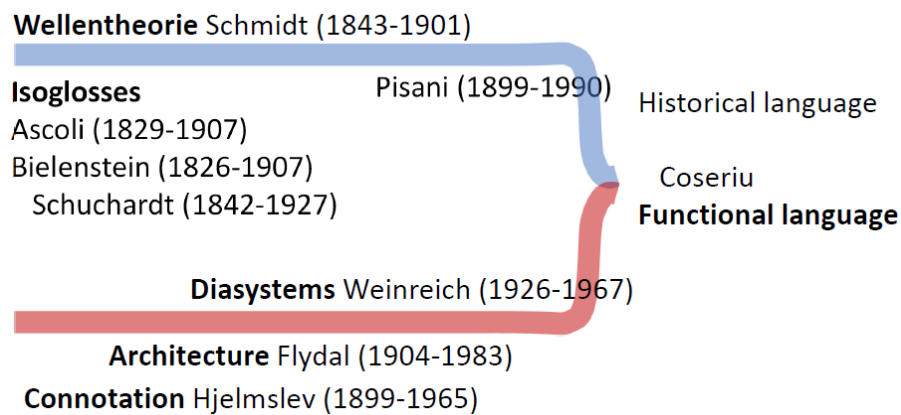

Wellentheorie Schmidt (1843-1901)

Isoglosses
Ascoli (1829-1907)
Bielenstein (1826-1907)
Schuchardt (1842-1927)

Pisani (1899-1990)

Historical language

Coseriu
Functional language

Diasystems Weinreich (1926-1967)

Architecture Flydal (1904-1983)
Connotation Hjelmslev (1899-1965)

Figure 1

2. The notion of "isogloss" and its issues

As is well known, nineteenth-century historical and comparative linguistics relied heavily upon a branching model of linguistic evolution called the "*Stammbaum* theory", in which the Indo-European languages made up the prototype. This was especially popularised by August Schleicher (1821-1868), who saw the individual languages as a sort of autonomous organism whose development was directed by internal laws of birth, life (branching into particular historically attested languages), and death (Schleicher 1861-62, 1863). During the last decades of the nineteenth century, this vision of language evolution was challenged by the "wave model", introduced in 1872 by Johannes Schmidt (1843-1901). According to this model, linguistic change was to be conceptualised as a progressive circular expansion of a given linguistic feature (or a combination of multiple features) from the geographical region of its first adoption across wider

areas, spreading across clusters of dialects. A second blow to the *Stammbaum* theory was imparted from the domain of dialect geography and two main theoretical outputs. The first one was the idea of the "isophone", coined by Graziadio Isaia Ascoli (1829-1907) in 1873. It was composed in analogy to conceptually close terms such as "isobar" and "isotherm", and designated an ideal locus of identity within a broader spectrum of phonetic phenomena (usually pronunciation). The second one was the idea of the "isogloss", introduced by the Latvian pastor August Johannes Gottfried Bielenstein (1826-1907) in his 1892 *Die Grenzen des lettischen Volksstammes und der lettischen Sprache in der Gegenwart und im 13. Jahrhundert, ein Beitrag zur ethnologischen Geographie und Geschichte Russlands* (cf. Trudgill & Chamber 1998; Nitina 2011:239). The intention was to chart spoken dialects of the region by drawing an ideal boundary between the use vs the non-use of a given linguistic feature (such as the pronunciation of a vowel, the meaning of a word, or the use of some morphological or syntactic feature). As such, an isogloss also maps the difference between these variations onto a geographical territory, thus serving as a differentiation parameter.

Despite its rather intuitive character and easy implementation, the notion of the "isogloss" is not exempt from ambiguity. It does not only represent an ideal boundary *distinguishing* two (or more) different areas in relation to different features, it may also be interpreted as a line *connecting* different features that concur in identifying and circumscribing a given linguistic tradition, system, or community. This ambiguity is well known; c.f., for example, Trudgill & Chambers 1998:89:

> Presumably, the word is intended to convey the fact that a line drawn across a region will show two areas on either side which share some aspect of linguistic usage but which disagree with each other. Dialectologists have used the term in two slightly different ways, with the result that the isogloss has been represented graphically in two different ways:
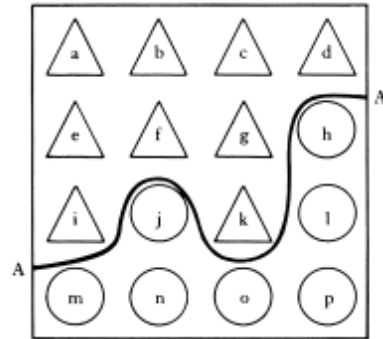
Map 7-1. A single line A separates the region where feature △ is found from the region where its counterpart ○ is found. Line A is an ISOGLOSS
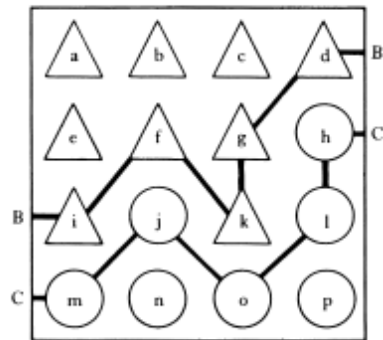
Map 7-2. Two lines separate the regions where △ and ○ are found. The lines link speakers with feature △ (line B) and those with feature ○ (line C). The two lines form a HETEROGLOSS

It is not by chance that the term "heterogloss" was suggested (see Map 7-2 above), in an attempt to distinguish between the two concepts and resolve the ambiguity.

The issue is not purely terminological, but primarily conceptual, and its implications are far-reaching: isoglosses are instrumental in pinpointing individual phenomena, or even individual instantiations of a single linguistic feature, yet they are scarcely able to address a collection of phenomena in terms of *classes* or *systems*. In fact, one could claim that it was this ambiguity, built into the very concept of the isogloss, which urged

Coseriu to choose a more structurally oriented interpretation of linguistic variation. In 1952, Coseriu still vacillated between two poles:

1. the concrete view of language as only existing in the acts of the speakers – the latter, in turn, being conceived as the source of language, per se, not only of the innovative elements introduced to it. In Italy, this view gained momentum in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a way of countering the push towards the institution of a national standard, as theorised by Italian literates, most notably Manzoni (cf. De Mauro 1970:46 ff.), and it was endorsed by Benedetto Croce (1866-1952) who never ceased to stress the role of individuals as the only reality of language (see above);
2. the structural view of language, centred on the description of linguistic units as forming a system of possibilities, to be selected and realised by speakers. As representatives of that view, Coseriu singles out Wilhelm von Humboldt and Louis Hjelmslev, the latter a direct follower of Humboldt in this regard (see Coseriu 1973/1954:175).

Both views have advantages and shortcomings. The intrinsic risk of the structural interpretation of language – a risk of which Coseriu was well aware – is that of losing connection with empirical data, i.e. the concrete linguistic acts (*Sprechakt, actes de parole, linguistic act*), instead offering an overly abstract rendering of linguistic phenomena. The concrete interpretation of language, while being able to capture concrete data, falls short with regard to conceptualising them in a cohesive way, i.e. as belonging to an overarching entity (be it a dialect or a national language). Language itself is then bound to dissolve into a mass of mutually disconnected facts, leading to an "atomization" (Sp. *atomización*) of its very object (Coseriu 1955:68; see Mancini 2008).

We argue that Coseriu tried to resolve the gap between the two positions by moving (chronologically as well as logically) towards the latter, thus changing his way of conceiving linguistic variation itself. In what follows, we trace the elaboration of Coseriu's original idea of historical language as a "system of isoglosses" into his theory of linguistic variation, including the so-called "dia-concepts" and the idea of "functional language".

The change in Coseriu's concepts might be understood in connection to an inbuilt dialectic between *individual* facts (like the ones captured by isoglosses) vs *general* facts. If isoglosses were a way to avoid acknowledging the existence of an overarching system, only a systematic collection of isoglosses could tackle language as a totality begging description: the system, expelled through the front door, was likely to re-enter the room through the back door as an unavoidable foothold for linguistic analysis.

3. Combining the two approaches

In Coseriu's *Sistema, norma y habla* (1952), the oscillation between the two abovementioned positions is clear and palpable. The systemic alternative is fleshed out more consistently by Coseriu, inspired by Louis Hjelmslev's theory (see above). He conceived a layered model of different levels of abstraction:

> The *system* presents itself […] as an abstract entity, "a network of functions"[1] […] The *system* is a system of possibilities or coordinates that indicate open and closed paths [...] it only requires that the functional conditions of the linguistic instrument are not affected. (Coseriu 1952:58-59; our translation)[2]

> The *norm* is […] a system of forced realisations, of social and cultural impositions. (Coseriu 1952:59; our translation)[3]

Yet he also maintained his focus on the role of the concrete speaker's act, or *habla* (Saussurean *parole*), in the flow of discourse. This was not

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[1] Coseriu (1952:7, 14) introduces this as Hjelmslev's notion. Coseriu (1952) does not give any precise reference to a Hjelmslev work but quotes two renderings of Hjelmslev's ideas, and these constitute the starting point of the book. For more details, see Bank Jensen (2021:106-110).

[2] "El *sistema* se presenta […] como una entidad abstracta, "una red de funciones" […] El s*istema* es sistema de posibilidades, de coordinadas que indican los caminos abiertos y los caminos cerrados […] exige que no se afecten las condiciones funcionales del instrumento lingüístico".

[3] "La *norma* es […] un sistema de realizaciones obligadas, de imposiciones sociales y culturales".

without a slight reformulation, however. To account for this, we return to the years Coseriu spent in Italy.

During his stay from 1940 to 1950 – the year in which Coseriu left for Montevideo (Uruguay) – he prepared several of his most important works, the first being *Sistema, norma y habla*, which, however, was only published in 1952. Quite at odds with the structuralist approach which Coseriu was refining and implementing in the book, the Italian influence remains apparent and stems mostly from Benedetto Croce and Vittore Pisani.

The Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce focused very much on the linguistic creativity of the individual subject – a line of thought that dominated the Italian panorama of humanities, linguistics included, for several decades:

> Language [...] is perpetual creation [...]. The continual new impressions give birth to continuous mutations of sounds and meanings, that is: to ever-new expressions. To look for a model language is, thus, to look for immutability within motion. Everyone speaks, and must speak, according to the echoes that things awaken in his own psyche, that is: according to his own impressions. (Croce 1965/1902:164, quoted in De Mauro 1970:49; our translation)[4]

While Croce represented, so to speak, the theoretical climate in which Coseriu was immersed, Vittore Pisani (1899-1990) played a decisive role in his education. Before his leaving for Montevideo, Coseriu attended several meetings of the *Sodalizio Glottologico Milanese*, founded by Vittore Pisani in 1948, and borrowed from him the notion of a "system of isoglosses", which he introduced into his own work, albeit somewhat reformulated, in 1952.

Dovetto (2017:33) has rightly noticed that Coseriu (1952:54-55) gives a direct reference to Pisani's conception of language as a "system of isoglosses". Dovetto further points out that "for Pisani 'language' must be understood as 'something continuously variable'":

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[4] "Il linguaggio [...] è perpetua creazione [...]. Le sempre nuove impressioni danno luogo a mutamenti continui di suoni e di significati, ossia a sempre nuove espressioni. Cercare la lingua modello è, dunque, cercare l'immobilità nel moto. Ciascuno parla, e deve parlare, secondo gli echi che le cose destano nella sua psyche, ossia secondo le sue impressioni".

[…] The abstraction that we call 'language' therefore represents an average of models that is, or should be, of common property in a given moment and territory, and constitutes a sort of idealised norm for those speakers. By defining the elements that are potentially shared across the members of a given linguistic community in a given moment as "isoglosses", and thus by expanding the original geographic understanding of such a concept, we are able to define 'language' as a 'system of isoglosses that brings together the individual linguistic acts'. (Pisani 1947/1939:13, quoted in Dovetto 2017:33; our translation)[5]

From the quotation given above, the following conclusions can be drawn: (1) Pisani based his definition of language on the punctiform act of the speakers; (2) by utilising the term "isogloss", Pisani intends to capture concrete linguistic phenomena, yet he does not say anything about the way in which these phenomena constitute a language, thus incurring the risk of dissolving the very notion of language as such into an atomistic bundle of isoglosses; (3) Pisani, however, talks of an "idealised norm", which is necessarily *potential*, and thus conceived as a virtual condition for the individual linguistic facts themselves; (4) moreover, he speaks of a "system of isoglosses". It is not completely clear, however, what he means by "system": he seems implicitly to conceive such a virtual condition in a systematic and cohesive way, yet he only uses the term loosely, echoing a concept with contemporary currency, possibly due to the technical connotation attached to it. At any rate, this loose definition has an epistemological basis, as (5) Pisani explicitly rejects any reified conception of language, i.e. as a static entity existing independently of the acts of the speakers. On the contrary, for both Pisani and Croce, language is in a constant state of change. Coseriu (1952) takes up this approach *pari passu*:

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[5] "L'astrazione cui diamo il nome di 'lingua' rappresenta perciò una media di modelli che è, o dovrebbe essere, di dominio comune a un dato momento e in un dato territorio, e costituisce una sorta di norma ideale per tutti quei parlanti. Chiamando isoglosse, con ampliamento del concetto in origine geografico, gli elementi comuni in potenza ai componenti di una certa comunità linguistica in un determinato momento, possiamo definire la lingua 'sistema di isoglosse riunente gli atti linguistici individuali'".

> The concept of *language* constitutes itself upon the concrete linguistic acts, as an abstraction (cf. Humboldt, Paul, Jespersen, Croce, Bertoni), as a *system of isoglosses* (aspects proven to be common in the considered acts). According to us, the clearest and most coherent formulation in this sense was given by *Vittore Pisani* [*La lingua e la sua storia*, now in *Lingüística generale e indeuropea,* Milan, pp. 9-19]. (Coseriu 1952:54-55; our translation)[6]

It appears that Coseriu is trying to combine Pisani's definition of "language" as a "system of isoglosses" with his own structural concepts of "system" and "norm". He does so, however, by subtly redefining what Pisani calls "language", interpreting it in terms of "historical language", thereby separating it from his own, now more structural, vision of functioning (functional) language. This distinction is first drawn in 1958, when he introduces a proper term for it. In 1952, the combination of these two dimensions is still rather obscure, resulting in a somewhat contradictory claim:

> We can, therefore, speak of *norm* and *system* referring to a *language* (system of isoglosses), instead of referring exclusively to *speech* […] only that the concept of language […] is a *historical* concept […] while *system* and *norm* are *structural* concepts and, for that very reason, *synchronic*. (Coseriu 1952:62; our translation)[7]

Interestingly, in the passage which follows this citation, Coseriu leaves out the term "system of isoglosses", focusing instead on the ideas of *norm* and *system* to account for the functioning of language (Sp. *lenguaje*):

[6] "Sobre la base de los actos lingüísticos concretos, se constituye como abstracción (cf. Humboldt, Paul, Jespersen, Croce, Bertoni), como *sistema de isoglosas* (aspectos comunes comprobados en los actos considerados), el concepto de *lengua*, cuya formulación más clara y coherente en este sentido ha sido dada, según nosotros, por *Vittore Pisani* [*La lingua e la sua storia*, ahora en *Lingüística generale e indeuropea,* Milán, pp. 9-19]".

[7] "podemos, por consiguiente, hablar de *norma* y *sistema* refiriéndonos a una *lengua* (sistema de isoglosas), en lugar de referirnos exclusivamente al *hablar* […] sólo que el concepto de lengua […] es un concepto *histórico* […] mientras *sistema* y *norma* son conceptos estructurales y, por eso mismo, *sincrónicos*".

the distinction between *norm* and *system* allows us to better clarify the functioning of language, the linguistic activity, which is at the same time creation and repetition (re-creation) within, and according to, the coordinates of the functional system (that is, of what is essential for language to fulfil its function); forced movement and free movement, within the possibilities put forward by the system. (Coseriu 1952:62-63; our translation)[8]

Coseriu had borrowed and redefined the two terms to describe the functioning of language on a synchronic level, as opposed to the historical language as a "system of isoglosses", thus now not only localised geographically, but also socially and stylistically. In this distinction, one can clearly see a double meaning of "system" at work: $system_1$, intended as an abstract overarching totality (thus denoting a quality of an entity); and $system_2$ (of isoglosses), intended as a coherent collection of phenomena (thus denoting a quality of the method). These two implicit nuances were not completely disentangled, however, as only the notions of *system* and *norm* as belonging to the functioning language were defined in any elaborate way.

4. Coseriu's *La geografía lingüística* (1956)

In 1956, Coseriu published *La geografía lingüística,* in which he discusses the method and the epistemological framework of linguistic geography.

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[8] "La distinción entre *norma* y *sistema* nos aclara mejor el funcionamiento del lenguaje, la actividad lingüística, que es al mismo tiempo creación y repetición (re-creación), dentro del marco y según las coordenadas del sistema funcional (es decir, de lo que es imprescindible para que el lenguaje cumpla con su función); movimiento obligado y movimiento libre, dentro de las posibilidades ofrecidas por el sistema".
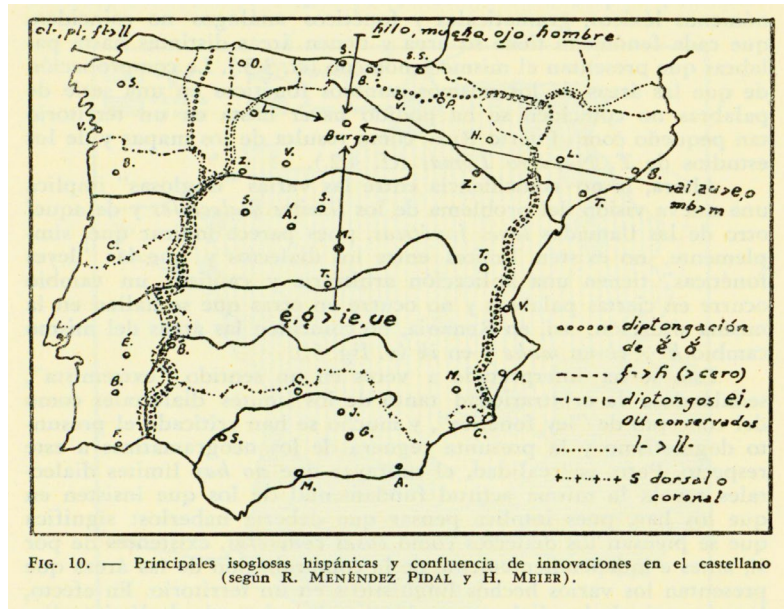
Figure 2: Coseriu (1956:54)

According to Coseriu, linguistic geography has the merit of having done away with the Romantic view of language as an autonomous organism, initiated by Schleicher, by substituting it with the more scientific conceptualisation as a "system of isoglosses", promoted by Pisani. In general, however, Coseriu restricts the role of linguistic geography to being merely a method, instead further elaborating his structural turn of thinking initiated in 1952. The warning against the atomistic nature of geographical linguistic analysis has to be read as a push towards its complement, i.e. the striving towards homogeneity as a condition for description. Whereas in 1952 this push was but foreshadowed in the concepts of "system" and "norm" (see above), by 1956 Coseriu actively combines the best of each perspective, endorsing the use of a structural approach in the field of dialectology (that is, in the domain typically associated with variational linguistics and the geographical method), and distancing himself from at least a part of the Italian tradition.

It is significant that Coseriu repeatedly refers to Pisani's idea of a "system of isoglosses", quoting it not only in his contribution to linguistic

geography (1955), but also in one of his most influential works: *Sincronía, diacronía e historia* (1957-58) – a publication which marked a milestone in his career in more than one way.

5. A second step: Coseriu (1981/1958)

First, some background. In August 1957, Coseriu met Leiv Flydal at the 8th International Congress of Linguists, held in Oslo (5-9 August). This acquaintance was to have a deep influence on Coseriu, possibly leading to his partial change of approach, as evidenced in his work on dialectology, prepared in 1958 but first published in 1981, *Los conceptos de "dialecto", "nivel" y "estilo de lengua" y el sentido propio de la dialectología*.

In this text, the intertwining of the structural framework and the variational approach based on Pisani's "system of isoglosses" is carried out more consistently via the adoption of Flydal's theoretical tools, i.e. the classification into diachronic, diatopic, and diastratic variations and the encompassing notion of an "architecture of language". The reference is so precise that it cannot go unnoticed:

> To these three types of differences correspond, on the other hand, (i.e. in the sense of convergence and homogeneity of idiomatic traditions), three types of univocal systems of isoglosses (or at least more or less univocal), namely: *syntopic* unities, which can be called 'dialects' albeit being a specific kind of dialects; *synstratic* unities or *levels of language* (for instance 'cultivated language', 'middle-class language', 'popular language', etc.); and *synphatic* unities or *style of language* (for instance 'familiar language', 'solemn language', etc.). (Coseriu 1981/1958:12; our translation)[9]

On the very next page, Coseriu continues with Flydal's terms, adding his own, namely the "diaphasic" and "synphasic":

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[9] "3.1.2. A estos tres tipos de diferencias corresponden en sentido contrario (es decir, en el sentido de la convergencia y homogeneidad de las tradiciones idiomáticas) tres tipos de sistemas de isoglosas unitarios (o, por los menos, más o menos unitarios), precisamente: unidades *sintópicas*, que pueden seguir llamándose *dialectos*, pues son, en efecto, un tipo particular de "dialectos"; unidades *sinstráticas* o *niveles de lengua* (por ejemplo, "lenguaje culto", "lenguaje de la clase media", "lenguaje popular", etc.); y unidades *sinfáticas* o *estilos de lengua* (por ejemplo, "lenguaje familiar", "lenguaje solemne", etc.)".

> […] within each syntopic unity, diastratic and diaphasic differences (respectively. of level and style) may exist; at each level, diatopic and diaphasic differences may exist, and in each style of language, diatopic and diastratic differences. (Coseriu 1981/1958:13; our translation)[10]

At this point, he also introduces his new, properly structural, non-variational concept, i.e. the notion of "functional language", defined as follows:

> A linguistic system that is univocal from these three points of view, or a 'syntopic', 'synstratic', and 'synphasic' language, respectively (thus a syntopic unity taken on a single level and in a single style of language), may be called *functional language*. (Coseriu 1981/1958:13; our translation)[11]

From this point on, he is able to fully distinguish between "historical language", as reflecting the whole architecture of language variation as concretely and historically given, and "functional language", to be understood as a level of description in which abstraction is made from all those variations in order to obtain a homogenous object for analysis.

On page 17, Coseriu uses the dia-terms in combination with that of a "system of isoglosses" one last time: in the remaining fifteen pages of his 1981/1958 article, this concept is absent, never again to return – at least to our knowledge – in later works, i.e. after 1958. Let us summarise the steps of Coseriu's elaboration:

1. the concept of the "isogloss" was developed within dialectology as a way to bring into focus a single linguistic feature (or a relevant selection thereof) in the considered language, while Flydal's dia-concepts were developed within stylistics;
2. at some point, Coseriu must have realised that the use of the term "isogloss" was equivocal and confusing,

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[10] "[…] dentro de cada unidad sintópica suele haber diferencias diastráticas y diafáticas (de nivel y de estilo); en cada nivel podrán comprobarse diferencias diatópicas y diafáticas, y en cada estilo de lengua, diferencias diatópicas y diastráticas".
[11] "Un sistema lingüístico unitario desde los tres puntos de vista, o sea, una lengua "sintópica", "sinstrática" y "sinfática" (es decir, una unidad sintópica tomada en un solo nivel y en un solo estilo de lengua), puede llamarse *lengua funcional*".

3. to tackle this issue, Coseriu adapts Pisani's notion of a "system of isoglosses", originally based on the speakers' individual linguistic acts and somehow implying a bottom-up perspective, by generalising it on the basis of Flydal's theory, the starting point of which is in the linguistic system itself, and proceeding to concretise particular sub-systems according to a top-down movement;
4. thanks to Flydal, Coseriu was able to get a new foothold for his theory, and to ground the variational linguistic phenomena within a systematic, general framework;
5. this process of systematisation, conceived in 1952 but only presented in 1958, eventually resulted in the forging of the new term of "functional language". Let us take a closer look at the possible sources of inspiration for this systematisation.

6. Coseriu's sources: Flydal, Hjelmslev, Weinreich

Coseriu's formulation came as the last of many redefinitions of a basic idea which had been taken up by at least three linguists before him, listed below from the most recent to the oldest:

a) Louis Hjelmslev, whose concept of "connotation" represented the theoretical foothold for Flydal's own variational linguistics;
b) Leiv Flydal, who concretely handed down the variational dia-concepts to Coseriu and also invented the complementary concept of "architecture of language" (*architecture de langue*), see 5.1 below;
c) Uriel Weinreich, who was the first to develop the term "diasystem" and introduce it into dialectology.

It is important to stress the fact that this constellation of linguists is not purely conceptual but first and foremost historical: the interaction, and thus the influence, at least between Hjelmslev, Flydal and Coseriu, is well attested and has already been the subject of reconstruction (see Völker 2009; Bank Jensen 2012, 2021).

6.1 Hjelmslev and Flydal

At the time of the meeting between Coseriu and Flydal, in 1957, the latter had already been working with Hjelmslev for three years. Hjelmslev, for

his part, first met Coseriu in 1957, during the Oslo conference, yet he had already known (about) him since at least 1951. In 1955, Coseriu initiated a correspondence with Eli Fischer-Jørgensen, a close collaborator of Hjelmslev. Fischer-Jørgensen educated him thoroughly in matters of glossematics (Bank Jensen 2015a). And, by 1954, Coseriu had already criticised Hjelmslev's formalistic and "algebraic" stance which, according to him, led to an overly abstract and mathematical rendering of language, hardly compatible with Coseriu's own concept of language as an historical output of human freedom. In what follows, we will reconstruct the conceptual exchange between the aforementioned linguists, as well as their interactions.

If we give credit to the role that Flydal's ideas played in Coseriu's conceptualisation, then we also have to acknowledge the important influence Hjelmslev – notably his *Omkring Sprogteoriens Grundlæggelse* (1943) – had on Flydal. In this respect, two important ideas were developed by Hjelmslev in the forties: the notion of connotation and the distinction between scheme ("sprogbygning"), norm, usage and act, achieved by elaborating on Saussure's classic distinction (*langue*, *parole*). Even though Coseriu did not begin quoting and actually *using* Hjelmslev's theory until 1952 – limiting himself to Hjelmslev's best-known conceptual tools: "system/scheme", "norm", "act", "form", and "substance" (however, not "usage"[12]) – the first contact between the two linguists dates back to 1951. On 23 October of that year, Coseriu wrote to Hjelmslev from Montevideo to start an official collaboration between the newly founded Department of Linguistics in Montevideo and the Linguistic Circle of Copenhagen.

> I am very pleased to notify you of the establishment of the Department of Linguistics within the Institute of Philology. It would be an honour for said Department to establish and maintain relations with a scholar as illustrious as yourself and to receive the suggestions and advice with which your long experience may favour us. I would also appreciate the eventual sending of publications and other bibliographical material that might prove to be of incalculable value for the fulfilment of the tasks carried out by the institute. For my part, as the Department develops, I will have the opportunity, in

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[12] It is important to note that Coseriu (1952) does not quote Hjelmslev's concept of "usage" as such because he refers to Hjelmslev's theory in an oblique and indirect way, not quoting Hjelmslev's own writings. See Bank Jensen 2015a, 2021.

turn, to issue any information or publication of interest to you. Please accept my most distinguished consideration. (Coseriu 1951; our translation)[13]

There are no traces of an answer from Hjelmslev, yet the received letter bears a handwritten reminder to send to Montevideo the issues of the *Bulletins du Cercle Linguistique de Copenhague*, one of the two publications produced by the Circle.[14]

In the same year, Flydal contacted Hjelmslev, discussing Hjelmslev's idea of "system/scheme" in connection to his "architectural" concept of language. The connection was further deepened in 1954, the year in which Flydal decided to spend some months in Copenhagen to be close to Hjelmslev, where he had a kind of a "glossematic turn".

Flydal's idea of "architecture" can be easily rephrased as a concept of language, as a system consisting of multiple, not necessarily mutually homogenous, "states", infelicitously dubbed as "structures", or partial systems. In Flydal's view, for instance, elements of a language called "archaisms" function simultaneously and perhaps in synchronic competition with other elements such as lexemes or idiomatic expressions, but must be classified as belonging to a different stage in the evolution of that language, as they are often recognised – and used – by the speakers themselves:

> We will say that the different systems of French known by an erudite [...] are for him simultaneous linguistic structures. Within his linguistic consciousness these different structures are disposed according to an axis on which certain simultaneities are arranged or, as we prefer to call them,

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[13] "Tengo el placer de comunicar a Ud. que acaba de establecerse el Departamento de Lingüística dependiente del Instituto de Filología. Para dicho Departamento sería un honor establecer u mantener relaciones con un estudioso tan ilustre como Ud., al tiempo que recibir las sugerencias y consejos con que su larga experiencia nos pueda favorecer. Agradecería, también, el eventual envío de publicaciones y detrás material bibliográfico que hace resultar de incalculable valor para al cumplimiento de las tareas que desempeña el instituto. Por mi parte, y a medida que el Departamento vaya desenvolviéndose, tendré ocasión, a mi vez, de emitirle cualquier información o publicación de su interés. He es muy grato saludar a Ud. con la consideración más distinguida".

[14] "*BCLC* udveksles med Instituto de estudios superiores de *Montevideo*, sección de filología y fonética experimental (der sendes Boletín de filología)" (Hjelmslev's handwritten text on Coseriu 1951).

> certain temporal coexistences. Their heterogeneous character in relation to their environment confers on them an expressive value: as 'archaisms'. [...] Those partial systems, which are occasionally and individually borrowed from other structures belonging to the same idiom, will here be termed 'extrastructuralisms' [intraidiomatic]. (Flydal 1952:244; our translation)[15]

A given linguistic structure (Coseriu [1958] 1981:21-22, "internal structure", Sp. *estructura interna* or "structure" *tout court*) consists of elements co-occurring synchronically – or, as Flydal says, tied together by a relationship called "solidarity". Yet language as such is more complex than that, as it also includes another kind of solidarity, establishing a different sense of structure: one that could be called "extrasynchronic" (see Coseriu [1958] 1981: "external structure", Sp. *estructura externa*, p. 31), as it ties together elements belonging to different states. This second kind of solidarity, existing *across* different partial systems, is said to be looser than the first kind, existing *within* a given partial system, yet still indispensable in accounting for an historical language:

> […] we will henceforth call it the 'whole architecture of a language', and understand by 'architecture' not the architectonical disposition of the parts belonging to a totality, but the systematic totality itself made up of solidary parts, whose reciprocal solidarity is less marked than the one existing between the different parts of the structure. (Flydal 1952:245; our translation)[16]

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[15] "Nous dirons donc que les divers systèmes de français que connaît l'érudit […] sont chez lui des structures de langue simultanées. Dans sa conscience linguistique ces différentes structures s'ordonnent, selon ses connaissances avec plus ou moins de conformité à l'ordre historique, suivant un axe qui, d'un point de vue strictement synchronique, n'est plus un axe des successivités temporelles, mais un axe le long duquel se rangent certaines simultanéités ou, comme nous aimerons mieux les appeler, certaines coexistences temporelles auxquelles leur caractère hétéroclite par rapport à leur entourage confère une valeur expressive : les « archaïsmes ». […] Nous désignerons ci-après par le terme d'« extrastructuralismes », qu'on pourrait qualifier au besoin d'intraidiomatiques, ces systèmes partiels occasionnellement et individuellement empruntés à d'autres structures du même idiome".

[16] "[…] nous appellerons ici l'*architecture d'ensemble de la langue*, en entendant par l'*architecture* non pas la disposition architectonique des parties d'un tout, mais un tout systématique formé de parties solidaires, dont la solidarité réciproque est moins accusée que celle qui existe entre les différentes parties de la structure".

Overall, while an actual correspondence between Flydal's and Hjelmslev's frameworks is debatable, the theory of the former certainly builds upon the latter's ideas. At least three factors illustrate this. Firstly, as we have just seen, Flydal employs the notion of "solidarity", which had already gained currency in the scientific *koiné* – mostly through the works of Meillet and Lalande but which was explicitly defined as a technical term of structural linguistics by Hjelmslev – to denote a relationship of co-occurrence (or co-dependence) between two elements. Secondly, Flydal refers to Hjelmslev's *sprogbygning*, broadly intended as the "edifice" of a given language – thus covering both the meanings of "scheme" and "articulation" (Fr. *charpente*) – and resonating with the Humboldtian idea of *innere Form*, despite being used by Flydal to denote the "architectural language", i.e. a language as historically given. Thirdly, Flydal mentions Hjelmslev's *Omkring Sprogteoriens Grundlæggelse* (1943) as particularly relevant to his own framework, specifically chapter 22, where the seminal notion of "connotation" appears, the scope of which is to root the formal structure of a sign to its variational (respectively historical, geographical, possibly physiognomical, etc.) context.[17] The entanglement of these three factors can be appreciated in a letter sent to Hjelmslev on 14 December 1951:

> When I had finished writing the article about language and style last summer and thought I had mastered the material, I then re-read chapter 22 in *Omkring Sprogteoriens Grundlæggelse* – which I had carefully refrained from opening during the actual work – yes, then I found myself saying that it was all relatively trivial. However, in the meantime, I have learned to understand this chapter of your book somewhat better than before. Had I checked the text [*Omkring sprogteoriens grundlæggelse*], I would also have been able to refer to the expression 'sprogbygning' instead of to 'charpente de la langue' from *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure*. It must still be possible to hold me responsible for the fact that from what I write on p. 244 (of *Style et langue*) it does not appear with sufficient clarity that what I have borrowed from you is the *picture*. I should have added that I have used this picture in relation to the material *I* had in mind, and not to what *you* operate with in your dissertation on *Langue et Parole* – despite being related to it. I apologise for having given rise to such a misunderstanding and hope it will not have further consequences for the readers' apprehension of your ideas.

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[17] The resulting label is dubbed as "connotator". Thus *guaglione*, denotes a /young boy/, connoting a regional language stemming from the area of Naples, the stylistic form of prose, the normal style, the neutral value, etc: all these being its "connotators".

> By referring to [your picture] in that way, I intended to guard myself against the accusation of having plagiarised or distorted it. If I didn't also borrow your designation, it was because 'charpente' cannot be so easily reconciled with any designation for subdivision (such as architecture, or even less easily in the case of 'sprogbygning') […] (Flydal 1951; our translation)[18]

Significantly, chapter 22 of Hjelmslev's (1943) work discusses the necessary widening of perspective which comes once the analysis of the core level of language – "denotation", or the function existing between signifier (expression) and signified (content) – is exhausted. This first step is actually only possible by means of a suspension of all other functions that tie a given denotative structure to its historical context. These functions of the second order are collectively called "connotation", and they are instrumental in pushing the analysis further, i.e. towards language in all its complexity. In fact, the premise of a structural homogeneity of a given language is only temporarily assumed to gain insight into its structure but is dropped in order to account for the variational and heterogeneous existence of the given language (see Hjelmslev 1961/1943:114-115).

This has several implications. For instance, no element in a given language is free of connotation, just as no element is "neutral" with respect to certain stylistic, geographical, historical, or subjective contexts which may be regarded as variational parameters. Moreover, a connotator has to

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[18] "Da jeg i fjor sommer hadde skrevet ferdig artikkelen om språk og stil og syntes jeg behersket stoffet, og så på ny leste Kapitel 22 i Omkring sprogteorien – som jeg omhyggelig hade latt väre å åpne under selve arbeidet –, ja, da fant jeg sant å si selv at det hele var forholdsvis banalt. Men jeg hadde jo i mellomtiden lärt å forstå dette kapitlet av Deres bok noe bedre enn tidligere. – Hadde jeg slått opp i Sprogteorien, ville jeg for resten også ha kunnet henvise til dens uttrykk "sprogbygning" i steden for til "charpente de la langue" i Cahiers de F. de Saussure. Det må vel allikevel kunne legges meg til last at det ikke fremgår med tilstrekkelig tydelighet av hva jeg skriver på s. 244 (i Style et Langue) at det er *billedet* jeg har lånt fra Dem. Jeg burde vel ha tilføyet at jeg har anvendt dette billedet på det stoffet *jeg* havde for øye, og ikke på det – riktig nok beslektede – *De* opererer med i deres avhandling om Langue et Parole. Jeg beklager å ha gitt grunn til mistydingen og håper den ikke vil ha videre følger for læsernes oppfatning av Deres idéer. Min tanke med å gi henvisningen den form den har fått, var å gardere meg mot beskyldningen for å ha plagiert å fordreiet Deres billede. Når jeg ikke også lånte Deres betegnelse, var det fordi "charpente" ikke så lett lot seg forlike med noen betegnelse for underavdelinger (slik som architecture, og enda lettere "sprogbygning")".

be described according to all those parameters simultaneously, which in Hjelmslevian terms works like a Cartesian system of coordinates (see Cigana 2023: *appendix* for a tentative representation of this idea). This also means that homogeneity is only attainable by extracting, and temporarily removing, the relevant connotators: two signs become comparable in the mind of the linguist once the different connotators have been removed. A given language is thus assumed to function homogeneously while existing as heterogeneous, as made up by multiple systems, each possibly having "their own diachrony" (Hjelmslev 1970/1946:102). In short, "language is not one language, but many" (Hjelmslev 1973/1941:115; see also Cigana 2021), as, for instance, a single "system" (properly: "scheme") may support multiple, completely different or partially overlapping "norms".

While this view, and the corresponding method, was tackled by neither Coseriu nor Flydal, they both acknowledged it more or less implicitly as a good foothold for their respective theories. It is no surprise that they were both able to move from a simplistic opposition (unitary system vs diversity and punctual variation as expressed by isoglosses) towards a more nuanced one: macro-system (Flydal: architectural language; Coseriu: historical language) vs micro-systems (Flydal: partial systems; Coseriu: functional language).

Again, this is not to say that the three theories are just three versions of the same framework, nor even of the same theoretical stance: For instance, one of the main differences between Coseriu and Hjelmslev lies in the fact that while, for the former, dialectology deals with "external" correspondences established between "internal" structural oppositions (Coseriu 1981/1958:22), for the latter, the point was to interpret these external correspondences as "functions of second degree" (see Cigana 2023), thus ultimately providing a means of treating variation in a structural way. However, all three positions at stake here did endorse a conceptualisation of linguistic phenomena in terms of functions and networks of possibilities to be realised within a hierarchy of levels – systems, norms, or usages (see Bank Jensen 2015a, 2021).

6.2 Weinreich
To what extent did Weinreich come into the picture? What is the link between him and Coseriu? This is significantly more difficult to assess.

Coseriu did use Weinreich's concept of "dia-systems" (Coseriu 1966:199), but he never explicitly acknowledged him for it. In 1954, Weinreich asked the question: *Is a structural dialectology possible?* (see his answer below). Coseriu (19811958, see below) seems to offer an answer to Weinreich's question, albeit without reference to Weinreich's work. Consider the following passages:

> 1. In linguistics today the abyss between structural and dialectological studies appears greater than it ever was. The state of disunity is not repaired if 'phoneme' and 'isogloss' occasionally do turn up in the same piece of research. Students continue to be trained in one domain at the expense of the other. Field work is inspired by one, and only rarely by both, interests. The stauncher adherents of each discipline claim priority for their own method and charge the others with 'impressionism' and 'metaphysics' as the case may be; the more pliant are prepared to concede that they are simply studying different aspects of the same reality. (Weinreich 1954:388)

> 4.5.1. We can then better understand why in a sense (that is: if by 'structural' we mean 'that which establishes and describes structures') the expression 'structural dialectology' is a contradiction in terms: since structures are established within functional language which by definition does not present any diatopic variation, to speak of a 'structural dialectology' is to speak of a 'non dialectological dialectology' or 'science of variation which studies homogeneity'. (Coseriu 1981/1958:22; our translation)[19]

Thus, both Weinreich and Coseriu questioned the idea of a "structural dialectology", reaching apparently opposite conclusions: while Weinreich claimed that a structural dialectology indeed exists, Coseriu claimed that it could and does not. Considered more closely, however, the state of play is slightly different. Weinreich's answer is actually twofold: structural dialectology is indeed possible, provided that: 1) it supplements its conceptual framework with the "social-science tools" of "external dialectology" (Weinreich 1954:398, 400); and 2) it treats a collection of

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[19] "Se entenderá ahora mejor por qué, en un sentido (si por "*estructural*" se entiende: 'que establece y describe estructuras'), la expresión *dialectología estructural* es una contradicción en los términos: puesto que las estructuras se establecen en la lengua funcional, que, por definición, no presenta variedad diatópica, hablar de 'dialectología estructural' es como decir 'dialectología no dialectológica' o 'ciencia de la variedad que estudia la homogeneidad'".

isoglosses systematically, as a hierarchy, by establishing a series of correspondences or substitutions – which Coseriu calls "equivalences" (Sp. *equivalencias*, Coseriu 1981/1958:21) – within a shared overarching structure. Take, for example, Weinreich's treatment of the variations within the Yiddish language, considered a transversal system (or "dia-system", significantly labelled as 1, 2, 3, see Figure 3), including five elements, the first /i/ and the third /a/ of which constitute a class including different realisations, respectively belonging to the Polish, the Ukrainian, and the Lithuanian:[20]
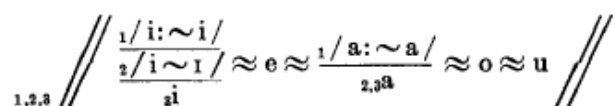
$$\left.\left._{1,2,3}\right/\!\!\right/\frac{_1/\,i:\sim i\,/}{\underset{_{2}}{\underbrace{_2/\,i\sim I\,/}}}\approx e\approx\frac{_1/\,a:\sim a\,/}{\underset{_{2,3}a}{}}\approx o\approx u\left.\left/\!\!\right/\right.$$

Figure 3: "the actual vowel inventory of Yiddish considered as a diasystem of three dialects, 1. Central ('Polish'), 2. Southwestern ('Ukrainian'), and 3. Northwestern ('Lithuanian')". (Weinreich 1954:394)

This is, however, consistent with Coseriu's framework, since, under his definition, dialectology describes – or, properly said, *establishes* – the relations between the varieties as occurring between different "structures":
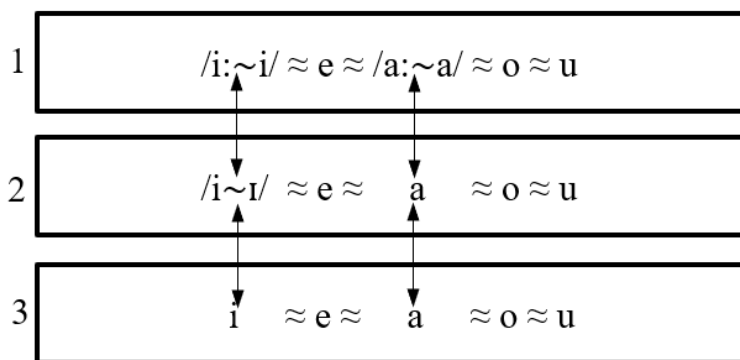

Figure 4: Tentative transposition of Figure 3 in Coserian framework

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[20] Which, in Hjelmslev's terms, constitute three "connotators".

Only in this sense, then, is a "structural dialectology" problematic: that is, dialectology does not "describe" structures (the varieties labelled "1", "2", and "3" in Fig. 3, 4), but "deals with structures" (*opera con estructuras*, see Coseriu 1981/1958:23), and those have been established by "another discipline" (*establecidas por otra disciplina*, see Coseriu 1981/1958:33), namely grammar. It thus seems that the divergence between the respective answers lies more in the terminology than in the concept itself: While, for Weinreich, the predicate "structural" applies to the method, for Coseriu, it applies to a given entity, i.e. a homogenous linguistic layer. Yet they both maintain the idea that studying dialectal variations is a matter of systematically treating the functions – "correspondences" or "equivalences", respectively – across different levels: not just the dia-systems (Weinreich)[21], but also between systems, norms, and usages (Coseriu).[22]

7. Open conclusions
Let us sum up. Roughly speaking, we can say that Coseriu approached the structural argument based on three sources: Leiv Flydal, whose theory Coseriu enriched by adding the idea of "diaphasic" and of "dia-systems"; Louis Hjelmslev, who had already been a source for Flydal, but who was referred to by Coseriu, for a different reason, and only later acknowledged for his concept of "connotation" (1981/1958, *Tekstlinguistik*); and Uriel Weinreich, who was never explicitly acknowledged for his "dia-systems" despite clearly representing a fruitful reference.

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[21] "It may be feasible, without defining 'dialect' for the time being, to set up 'dialectological' as the adjective corresponding to 'diasystem', and to speak of dialectological research as the study of diasystems. Dialectology would be the investigation of problems arising when different systems are treated together because of their partial similarity. A specifically structural dialectology would look for the structural consequences of partial differences within a framework of partial similarity" (Weinreich 1954:390).

[22] "Dialectology, as an investigation of *the entire* diatopic variation, cannot be carried out only within the level of the 'system', but must be carried out also – and in the first place – on the level of the norm of realisation" (our translation of Coseriu 1981/1958:24, "la dialectología, en cuanto estudio de *toda* la variedad diatópica, no puede hacerse sólo en el plano del 'sistema', sino que debe hacerse también – y en premier lugar – en el plano de la norma de realización").

We could speculate on this last point by saying that Coseriu's avoidance of quoting Weinreich led – or at least contributed – to the division of sociolinguistics into two traditions, the American scholarship (including Weinreich, Labov, Herzog) and the Romance one. For instance, Berruto (2017:272) observes that the system-oriented trend of Italian sociolinguistics is mostly inspired by the qualitative variational (socio)linguistics of Coseriu, while the quantitative sociolinguistic approach of Labov is somewhat underrepresented.

What is certain, at any rate, is that while Hjelmslev and Flydal adopted a top-down approach to linguistics, Coseriu tried to systematise his ideas on linguistic variation, adopting Pisani's bottom-up point of view, centred on the notion of a "system of isoglosses". After the milestone event of 1957, however, he moved closer to Hjelmslev's and Flydal's position, elaborating on it and eventually developing his own idea of "functional language".

It would certainly be worthwhile examining this connection further, interpreting the evolution of Coseriu's stance in the light of how his thinking was – and still is – perceived, whether in terms of continuity or innovation (see Renzi 2013; Bank Jensen 2015b).

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