

## DISCUSSION

### ÉLÉMENTS...: A. MARTINET OR P. M. POSTAL?

There exists a quite popular disease among American linguists to review fashionable authors in translations without the ability to read them in the original and little interest to relate their work to realities outside their own prejudices in the matter. Consequently, references to Humboldt and Saussure, for instance, are ever increasing. Postal's review article constitutes such an attempt to do justice to the 1964 translation of Martinet's *Éléments*. As a superficial count reveals, of 36 printed pages, only about 9 deal with 9 direct references to Martinet. The remaining 27 pages expound ideas personal to Paul M. Postal and are irrelevant to a review of Martinet. Postal's explicit critique can be characterized by 5 assumptions: (1) Martinet's theoretical position is anti-mentalistic; (2) he excludes 'introspection' as an admissible method of observation; (3) his conception of meaning is anti-mentalistic and consists of essentially contentless terminology; (4) his conception of phonology is one of the 'taxonomic' variety; and (5) Martinet's characterizations about the nature of grammar cannot stand up to serious scrutiny. Postal appears to adopt the very strong position that Martinet's framework of theory can be classified with other mere data-cataloguing devices of the kind already described by him earlier in *Constituent Structure*, and presumably now in *Aspects of Phonological Theory*. It is our intention here to see whether this position can stand up to serious scrutiny.

(1) Postal's first assumption is that Martinet's position is anti-mentalistic (pp. 152-56). This assumption is supported from a *single* quote in Martinet's preface (pp. 12/6), where Saussure is chided for his more or less explicit psychologism. The *Larousse* defines the 'psychologisme' of the original as: "Système qui cherche à ramener la philosophie à la psychologie". I am unable to see how there can be any proof on Martinet's stand, anti-mentalistic or otherwise. If J. J. Katz were to chide G. A. Miller for his 'psychologisme' in his work with Chomsky, should we conclude that Katz's stand, as author of such 'conflicting' titles as *The Philosophy of Language* and 'Mentalism in Linguistics', is anti-mentalistic? There certainly is room to accuse Martinet of needlessly participating in an essentially uninteresting controversy, to know whether language is the domain of the philosopher or the psychologist, but there can't be any anti-mentalistic, or mentalistic for that matter, implications to Martinet's thinking. Postal, instead of confronting us with statements where Martinet unambiguously rejects mentalism, gives us quotes which he

considers obvious mentalistic 'slips' (pp. 155, 159). Indeed, the *Elements* are crammed with such 'slips', and we are entitled to know how many slips it takes before it is taken for granted that the author is conscious of what he is doing.

(2) Postal's second assumption (pp. 156–59) claims that Martinet excludes 'introspection' as an admissible method of observation, and that consequently, he is unable to come to grips with the linguistic competence of the speaker, since the domain of this competence is mentalistic and unobservable as such. Again, the claim is supported by one single quote:

He (the linguist) will confine himself to saying that nothing can be recognized as forming part of the language which is not common to several speakers. This holds good of meaning as of everything else, and it excludes introspection as an admissible method of observation, since it can affect only one person, who incidentally, being both observer and observed, finds himself in the most unfavorable conditions for carrying out impartial research (pp. 44/42).

From analysing this statement internally as well as relating this isolated quote to the rest of the book, it seems to me that only one type of introspection is condemned, that is introspection when attempting to deal with the competence of the *ideal* speaker-listener. Obviously, my own competence of French, though accessible through introspection, is unlikely to prove identical to that of the imagined speaker-listener. Chomsky's views are no doubt in that line (1965, p. 3):

Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance. This seems to me to have been the position of the founders of modern general linguistics, and no cogent reason for modifying it has been offered. To study actual linguistic performance, we must consider the interaction of a variety of factors, of which the underlying competence of the speaker-hearer is only one. In this respect, study of language is no different from empirical investigation of other complex phenomena.

However, a comparison of the uses of 'introspection' in Postal's article convinced me that he isn't using it at all traditionally, at least if again I may assume Martinet's French competence reflected in the *Larousse* rather than in Postal's head. This sort of 'introspection' reminds me of Martinet's own rather vague 'mental activity' (cf. for instance pp. 18/13). I am unwilling to believe that Postal was unaware of this when he continues:

He (Martinet) of course pays no attention to this pointless advice and every example he gives in the book depends, as is necessary, on his intuitive knowledge of the language(s) involved. He does, however, try to cover this up, as do many other linguists with similar views, by virtue of the practice which has developed in much modern linguistics of suggesting that intuitive knowledge has been gained by 'objective' means (p. 158).

There are six claims underlying Postal's statement: (a) Martinet's judging and/or remembering of information gained from a native informant constitute a case of using intuitive knowledge; (b) "use of intuitive knowledge" and "use of introspection" are equivalent as statements; (c) Martinet's "introspection as a method" (pp. 44/42, see above) covers both statements of (b); (d) Martinet rejects the use of intuitive knowledge as defined in (a); (e) Martinet has to use his intuitive knowledge anyway but pretends to be able to do without it; (f) Martinet has invented a set of cover-up procedures, presumably to give Postal a chance to write an unfavorable review. Unfortunately, we have already seen that "introspection as a method of observation" is not as universal in its meaning as Postal would like it to be; nor is there any suggestion that "methods of observation" are solely valid in a general methodology; as a matter of fact, "methods of observation", throughout the book, are only suggested when investigating parole. Since Postal, in Katz and Postal (1964, p. IX), seems to equate the langue-parole model with his own competence-performance dichotomy, one would have expected that Postal extend his interest into Martinet's pages devoted to langue, if he really wanted to find out how Martinet comes to grips with the internalized linguistic competence of the speaker-hearer. Anyway, it is up to Postal, not to me, to support his own claims; his 'proof' based on the single quote (out of 205 pages) in question is definitely a shot in the dark.

(3) Pages 160-62 deal with Martinet's approach to meaning. Again, they abound with trivialities such as "Martinet's failure to understand", "it is clear that", and "implicit although obviously unsuspected refutations". The "most striking evidence of that cultural lag" (between Europe and the U.S.) alludes to ideas of his that were exposed more fully in *Constituent Structure*, where all worthwhile linguistics were said to come from America. Any reviewer would be somehow at a loss to come to grips with polemic irrelevancies of this sort. Again, a single quote (from pp. 44/42 as well) attempts to show Martinet's anti-mentalistic conception of meaning. All other references to the latter's semantic theory are explicitly excluded from discussion as "essentially contentless terminology". This simple trick enables Postal to claim that Martinet does not cope with the deep structure questions of ambiguous lexical items (such as *cousin*)<sup>1</sup>, since 'meaning' is totally a function of context in the latter's theory, though an item out of context may have "semantic possibilities". The quote, on which the third assumption is based, reads as follows (pp. 44/42):

<sup>1</sup> Postal himself bases his own treatment of ambiguous lexical items on Katz and Fodor (1963). The latter's views on the subject have proven, in the meantime, to be highly questionable (Weinreich, 1966, pp. 398-99; McCawley, 1968, pp. 580-81).

To each difference of meaning, there corresponds necessarily a difference of form somewhere in the message. ... On the other hand a linguistic element has, strictly speaking, a meaning only within a context and a given situation. In itself a moneme or more complex sign only contains semantic possibilities, certain of which are actually realized in a given act of speech.

A whole page is wasted on speculations about the meaning of "semantic possibilities". Here, ability to read the original would have come in handy. Indeed, "virtualités sémantiques" would have permitted at once to relate the "semantic possibilities" to the theory as a whole. Martinet differentiates thus between semantic features which are in syntagmatic contrast and those which are in paradigmatic opposition.

As the remainder of Martinet's semantic theory is concerned, it would be interesting to see why Postal refuses to demonstrate, step by step, the presumed contentlessness of double articulation. The latter concept is not only dealt with in *Elements* but is also the subject of two separate articles by Martinet (1949, 1957). It is not difficult to see in this signifié-signifiant model an analogue to Postal's own deep-surface structure dichotomy,<sup>2</sup> liberally used and misused in the 36 pages of his review. Since Martinet's conception of the sign includes sentence-sized signifiés and signifiants, it would indeed have been very difficult for Postal to explain that away.

(4) The next 12 pages of Postal's review (pp. 162-73), are concerned with phonology. Parts of it read like reviews of Trubetzkoy or Lounsbury rather than one of Martinet. It abounds with practically every conceivable type of unsupported declaration, such as "Martinet and others", "taxonomic phonemics, Martinet's version included", "although I can find no explicit statement (by Martinet), it is clear that he would / would not...", etc. Quotes from Trubetzkoy, in addition to being in the original German (something one misses very much in his quoting of Martinet), are longer than anything quoted from Martinet; it makes one wish he had reviewed Trubetzkoy instead.

In all, 5 direct references to Martinet are used to convince the reader that Martinet's conception of phonology is taxonomic (his 4th assumption). The first two (pp. 56-57/55-56 and pp. 61-62; see pp. 162-66) are those that Postal agrees with; he quotes them only in order to demonstrate that consistency (in taking an anti-mentalistic stand) is not one of Martinet's strong points. Since this presupposes the validity of all of Postal's previous assumptions, I don't have to deal with them here.

The third reference (pp. 68-69) touches upon a case of linguistic economy peculiar to Spanish phonology. Postal (pp. 166-67) accuses Martinet of

<sup>2</sup> On the synonymy of signifié, first articulation, and deep structure on one hand, and signifiant, second articulation, and surface structure, see Wittmann (1967).

hedging and reducing the discussion to emptiness by eliminating the universal aspects. However, no proof is offered as to why linguistic economy should only be discussed when concerned with universal linguistic processes, or why a particular case of economy in a particular language cannot be arbitrary.

Martinet's suggestion to avoid the term 'morpho(pho)nology' for areas of inquiry otherwise quite justifiable (pp. 91-92/96) constitutes the fourth reference (pp. 167-71). If the passage in question means anything at all, it only demonstrates Martinet's dislike for a particular word. Since euphonic preferences do not constitute a linguistic theory, it stands to reason that Martinet's isolated remark cannot be interpreted without reference to more explicit statements on the matter. Postal, however, surprises the reader with the conclusion that "Martinet's phonology ... fits wholly within the modern view which asserts that phonological structure is purely phonetic and independent of grammar", without any supporting evidence other than Martinet's prejudices as to terminological usage. Instead, we are treated to a lengthy review of Lounsbury's work and the implications of the latter's explicit rejection of morphophonemic representation. Martinet's rejection of morphophonemic representation is always implied but never substantiated. I don't think that I am too radical in assuming that such "reviewing" procedures are not only unacceptable but totally unethical.

The last reference is to overlapping in phonology (pp. 60-61/59-60; 171-73). Martinet is said to allow partial overlapping only. The evidence presents itself as follows:

*Although I (Postal) can find no explicit statement, it is still clear that Martinet, like most other 'structural' linguists, would on no account permit complete overlapping ... (Italics are mine).*

(5) Pages 173-77 purport to demonstrate that it is really not worth considering notions like Martinet's in detail.<sup>3</sup>

Almost every definition is vague and imprecise. Consider just one. 'The name syntagm is given to every combination of monemes' (104).

I suppose using *string*, *formative*, and *concatenation* instead of the *syntagm*, *moneme*, and *combination* would have saved the day; the definition would have been less 'empty'.<sup>4</sup> No further quotes are offered except a random enumeration of terms obviously taken from the Index, all of which are dismissed *summa summarum* as unable to stand up to serious scrutiny. I have demonstrated elsewhere (1964a, b, 1968) that Martinet's taxonomy of formative differentials generates all the items of moneme structure sub-components as widely diver-

<sup>3</sup> 174: "I cannot believe that in 1965 it is really worth considering notions like the above in detail." Pages 177-86 are devoted to the 'notes', mostly reviews within a review of another review.

<sup>4</sup> Or are we to assume that "A string is one or more concatenated vocabulary symbols" in Koutsoudas' introductory text (1966) is just as empty?

gent as those of German and Mauritian Créole.<sup>5</sup> Postal's refusal to extend his interest beyond the 104 pages of the first half of the book<sup>6</sup> prevents him from getting as far as Martinet's idea of a kernel sentence (*noyau central de l'énoncé*, pp. 120/127) and discovering the transformations which operate on them. Such a conception, Postal claims without a shred of evidence, is totally foreign to Martinet and incompatible with his fundamental methodological principles.

(6) It can be seen quite readily that Postal's statements contained in the article under discussion cannot be accepted as a serious, unprejudiced review of Martinet's *Elements*. Incidentally, it was not my intention to prove or disprove here the adequacy or inadequacy of Martinet's theoretical framework. But it stands to reason that insidious attempts at contentless polemizing do not have to be tolerated without an appropriate reply.

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<sup>5</sup> The only notion absent in Martinet's prose which I had to supply was that of the 'pseudo-moneme'. A theory of the dictionary and the nature of possible entries has to allow for what might conveniently be called 'pseudo-monemes', i.e. such items which are traditionally called 'compounds' and 'derivations' but which *behave functionally like single formatives*. Cf. Motsch's (1962) attempt to redefine word-formation within the framework of generative grammar.

<sup>6</sup> Indeed, there isn't a single reference to pages 105-205/110-224.