

Theories and Methods in Linguistics
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Klaas Willems
double articulation

structuring of language into morphemic and phonemic units.

doppelte Artikulation

Gliederung der Sprache auf morphematischer und phonematischer Ebene.

The term *double articulation* was coined by A. MARTINET. With SAUSSURE the view that natural language is arbitrary became predominant in modern linguistics. According to Martinet, however, the concept of arbitrariness is insufficient to distinguish natural language from other means of communication, especially from signs in the animal world and human sign systems other than language (e.g., road and traffic signs). In order to account for the essential difference, MARTINET elaborates on the fact that natural language is articulated (Fr. *articulé*) in a unique way (MARTINET 1949: 33 and 1960: 17). MARTINET's "articulation" does not refer to the production of sounds. For a proper understanding of what exactly he means when claiming that language is articulated twice, we need to distinguish between an earlier and a later account of *double articulation* in his writings. In the early account (MARTINET 1949), the first articulation of language relates to the level of meaning, the second one to the level of expression. By virtue of the first articulation, a stretch of speech consists of discrete units with invariant meanings, distinguishing a natural language occurrence, e.g. *I have a headache*, from a semantically unanalysable exclamation (e.g. *Ouch!*). By virtue of the second articulation, the expression side of the meaningful units can be analysed into phonemic units which distinguish different meanings, without themselves being bearers of meaning (e.g., /h/ vs. /d/ in *head* vs. *dead*). In the later account, which became the canonical version of the concept of *double articulation*, the relation between both articulations is conceived differently (cf., e.g., MARTINET 1957; 1960). The *première articulation* now applies to both meaning and expression at the same time, whereas the *deuxième articulation* only applies to the latter. This version essentially corresponds to the traditional distinction between morphemic or morphological units (*monèmes* in MARTINET's

[1960: 20] terminology, i.e. full-fledged signs), each of which consists of a *signifié* (linguistic meaning) and a *signifiant* (expression), and phonemic or phonological units (*phonèmes*) which are not yet signs. According to MARTINET (1960: 45), linguistic analysis naturally starts off with the ‘concrete’ units of the second articulation before embarking on a description of the ‘mental’ units of the first articulation. Moreover, both articulations are inevitably linked to the general principle of economy in language. With regard to the lexicon of a language (which is, of course, essentially an open inventory), the first articulation relates to the fact that language is the infinite use of finite means. Yet economy is particularly clear regarding second articulation, the number of phonemes in the presently known languages of the world varying between 11 (Rotokas, Papua New Guinea) and 141 (!Xũ, southern Africa). Without economy on both levels of articulation, languages would display a complexity no human linguistic competence would be able to process. With his *double articulation* doctrine, MARTINET carries on a tradition going back to Greek-Roman antiquity (particularly evident from the writings of Aristotle and the Stoics). However, in the more recent history of the language sciences, scholars such as HUMBOLDT, GABELENTZ and SAUSSURE are MARTINET’s most notable forerunners. They agree that natural language is inconceivable without articulation, which is the central structural principle rendering possible a synthesis of thought and sounds (or written characters, or gestures, as in Sign languages). This results in discrete units that can be combined in an infinite number of ways to form word formations, syntagms, sentences, and texts or discourse.

Literature

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