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Linguistic Norm in the Linguistic Theory of Eugenio Coseriu

The aim of this paper is to illustrate Eugenio Coseriu's conception of linguistic *norm* considered as a *descriptive* term and to relate it a) to its place in Coseriu's theory of language, b) to the history of linguistic thought, c) to normative conceptions in Coseriu's theory, and d) to other concepts, mainly to that of *discourse traditions* (Koch 1997), largely discussed during the last years. I will depart from some general observations on Coseriu's terminology and on his relationship with the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, showing how Coseriu develops his conception of *norm* in a discussion of the limits of the *langue-parole* distinction. The next step will be to introduce Coseriu's terms of *correctness* and *exemplarity* and to indicate the relationship between *norm* and *discourse traditions*.

Eugenio Coseriu, Norm, Correctness, Standard, Saussure, Discourse traditions, exemplarity, history of linguistic thought

1 Introduction: Coseriu's *norm*

This is not for the first time that Coseriu's concept of *norm* is being discussed in a manual on language norms (see Bédard/Mauvais 1983), and a possible initial statement could be that what is currently understood as "linguistic norm" and what is *norm* ('norma', Coseriu 1952) in Coseriu's terminology are two completely different things, related only by the homonym. This would shorten the paper, but it would not be very satisfactory. Another possibility would be to claim, as some authors have done, that Coseriu's *norma* may in fact be much more related to current normativity than it seems at a first glance. But this also would be in part misleading and incomplete. So I will pursue a different way in this paper: I will try to show, in a first step, what Coseriu's concept is really about and then see how it relates to other concepts of normativity, even those to be found in Coseriu's own work.

Coseriu's conception of norm is presented explicitly in his seminal paper *Sistema, norma y habla* ('System, norm and speech'), first published in Spanish in Montevideo in 1952 (and later re-published in several editions). As in other of his fundamental contributions from this period (such as *Forma y sustancia en los sonidos del lenguaje*, 1954, *Determinación y entorno*, 1955-56, and *Sincronía, diacronía e historia*, 1958), the starting point of the paper is Ferdinand de Saussure's terminology, with the strategy of resolving the aporias of Saussure's dichotomies by adding a third concept: *norm*, in the case of the dichotomy between

langue and *parole*, and *history* in the case of the dichotomy between *synchrony* and *diachrony*.

Coseriu's term aims at criticizing an orthodox structuralist view and, at the same time, at signaling the importance of a structural analysis. We could roughly say that Coseriu is a structuralist who believes in the adequacy of the structural analysis for those aspects of language that are in fact structured, adding at the same time numerous insights into phenomena that are not caught in a structural view. *Norm* is a term which allows to take into account linguistic facts that go beyond purely oppositional features of *langue*, and the claim is that there are, between individual *parole* and systemic *langue*, traditional, non-distinctive realizations of the *langue* in different communities. One of Coseriu's clearest examples to illustrate this is the Spanish vowel system: there are only five oppositional vowel phonemes, *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, and *u*; but speakers of Spanish *normally* realize the first *e* in a word like *verde* 'green' as an open vowel and the second as a closed vowel. Any other realization would be possible and probably understood by hearers (as long as it remains within phoneme boundaries), but it would not be considered to be *normal*.

This basic observation has numerous consequences, and Coseriu develops his conception of norm far beyond phonology, as we will see. But before coming back to Coseriu's framework, I will first start with some general observations on Coseriu's terminology and the relationship between Coseriu and Saussure.

2 Coseriu's terminology and Saussurean thought

2.1 Coseriu's terminology

Eugenio Coseriu (1921-2002) was a Romanian linguist who, after studies in Romania and Italy, left Europe in 1951 and worked for several years in Uruguay before coming back, first to Portugal and then, until his death, to Germany, where he occupied the chair of Romance linguistics at Tübingen University from 1963 until his retirement in 1993. He can be considered as the most influential Romance linguist in the second half of the 20th century, with considerable impact also beyond Romance linguistics.

Already during his academic education, Coseriu is not really part of a linguistic school and defends his own, particular linguistic theory and terminology. The basic principle he follows is that linguistics, as part of humanities (and as its base) must not ignore the intuitive knowledge of its object. Linguists, as speakers in general, are producers of language and they implicitly know what a language, a dialect, a syllable or a phoneme is. Language thus is an object not comparable to

objects in natural science, where such an intuition does not exist and arbitrary hypotheses must be verified. Of course linguistics as a science does not end with intuition but rather profits from intuitive knowledge as a starting point for explicit and systematic analysis (Kabatek 2014). For Coseriu, the connection to everyday knowledge should be mirrored in an adequate linguistic terminology, which may be close to current usage of words (which are, in a further step, terminologized explicitly). With this in mind, it is not surprising that we find terms like *norm*, *correctness*, *situation*, *region*, or *history*, all of them rooted in everyday language but used as terms in Coseriu's theory (see Kabatek/Murguía 1997, 221-224). The problem with this kind of terminology (as compared to artificial and motivated terminology like *signifiant/signifié* or completely artificial terminology like *x-bar-scheme*, see Kabatek 2015) is twofold: first, it can be easily confounded with everyday usage, and second, the same terms might appear in different terminological settings, and this is the case, e.g., with *language* or also with *norm*, where we have very different definitions and different conceptions in different linguistic theories. A remedy to this is to talk systematically about "norm in Coseriu's sense", but in fact we find rather a connotational stratification between those pertaining to a Coserian "in-group" who use the term without mentioning the author (presupposing that the theory they refer to is widely known) and those who do not use it at all in this sense.

2.2 Coseriu and Saussure

Coseriu defines his linguistic theory as a theory which was created within a Saussurean frame:

qu'à strictement parler, mon travail de linguiste s'est déroulé dans un cadre saussurien (Coseriu 2004, 21)

This must of course be commented. It would be wrong to understand this in the sense that would consider Coserian linguistics as an evolution within the limits of Saussurean thought. In fact, Coseriu rather takes Saussure – or, to be exact, the *Cours de linguistique générale* (Saussure 1916/1984) – as a departing point for discussion, pointing at the limits of Saussure's dichotomies and adding, in general, a third term in order to show phenomena left out or ignored in Saussure's view. This could be regarded as totally anti-Saussurean, but it somehow helps to preserve some of the basic assumptions of Saussurean thought: by adding the *norm* to *langue* and *parole*, the systemic view towards the *langue* can be maintained. And this is also the case with other Saussurean conceptions.

Now we actually know from more recent studies that the "real" Saussure was less dogmatic than the *Cours* and that some of the apodictic statements (like the famous last sentence of the *Cours*, postulating the primacy of the *langue*) were in

fact added by the editors. The priority given to the study of *langue* and of *synchrony* is somewhat exaggerated in the *Cours*, and in some of the famous *Orangerie*-manuscripts published some years ago we see a much more Humboldtian Saussure— a Saussure much closer to Coseriu’s thought (see, e.g., Saussure 2002, 129).

However, for Coseriu, it was the text of the *Cours* which offered an almost perfect base for the presentation of his own linguistic thought. He adopted the fundamental idea of the *langue* as structured abstraction and he limited at the same time the structuralist view to those aspects of language which could really be described as systemic, adding other aspects which lead *beyond structuralism*, “más allá del estructuralismo”, as Coseriu formulated it in several occasions.

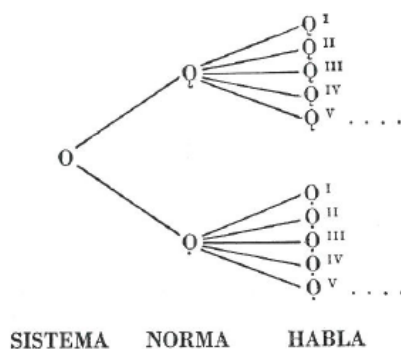
3 *Sistema, norma y habla*

The exhaustive paper *Sistema, norma y habla* was published by Coseriu in 1952. He had left Europe in order to occupy a position at the newly created *Universidad de la República* in Montevideo, Uruguay. As other South American countries, Uruguay had not suffered but rather profited from the World War and offered, in contrast to Europe after the disaster, welfare and good working conditions. Coseriu’s mission was to build up a new department, and he wanted to make his own work and that of his colleagues be recognized worldwide, so he initiated a series of publications and systematically sent the papers he and his group produced to renowned linguists all over the world. The first of these papers was *Sistema, norma y habla*, an exhaustive study of 64 pages with a short four-pages summary in German (*Sprachsystem, Sprachnorm und Gespräch*). It was published as a separate, independent paper and as part of no. 9 of the newly created *Revista de la Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias* in Montevideo. Originally, it was an oral communication presented at the Centro de Lingüística in Montevideo on May 10th, 1952. In the same year, also an Italian version was published, and in later years, the text was re-edited several times and translated into several languages. The version with the largest diffusion was the one included in the volume *Teoría del lenguaje y lingüística general*, a collection of five of Coseriu’s most important studies published by the prestigious Spanish editor Gredos in 1962 (with subsequent re-editions). However, the text remained, as Coseriu’s theory in general, largely unknown in the English speaking world, and an English translation is still lacking.

In fact, the basic idea already appeared in a nutshell a few years before in *La lingua di Ion Barbu*, a short paper published in 1948 in Milan in Italian in the *Atti del Sodalizio Glottologico Milanese* (see www.coseriu.de). Here, Coseriu speaks of some linguistic innovations in the work of the Romanian poet Ion Barbu, “es-

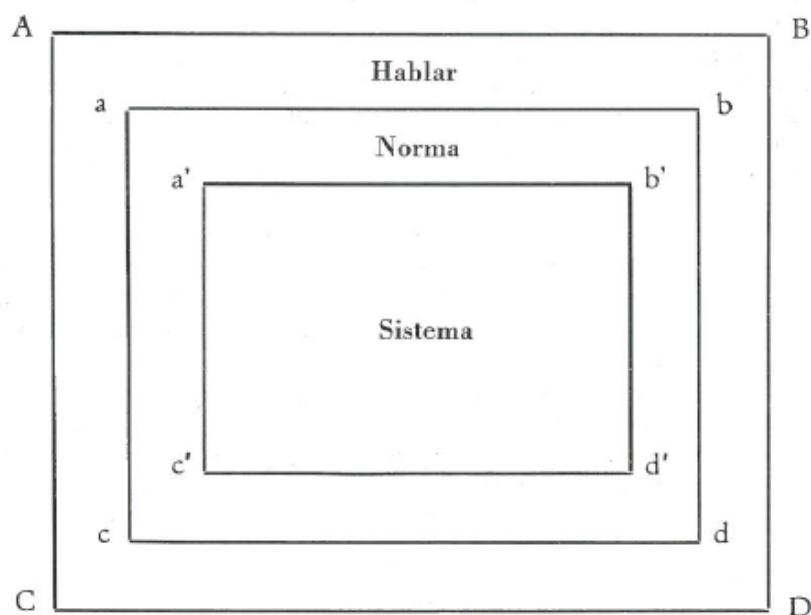
tensioni di usi normali nel sistema linguistico romeno” (p. 3), (‘extensions of “normal” uses within the Romanian linguistic system’), distinguishing between these extensions and “errors”. It is interesting to note that in this short paper, Coseriu not only considers innovations of form, but also of content, and that the idea of “norm” implicitly appears here in a large sense, not limited to phonic phenomena.

The 1952 paper contains seven sections and departs from several attempts by other scholars to modify or to complete Saussure’s distinction between *langue* and *parole*, adding further categories and differentiating the two terms. Coseriu rejects proposals such as those presented by the linguists working in the framework of glossematics due to their “excessive abstractions” and he defends, at the same time, the abstract side of language as a system which must be harmonized with the concrete nature of utterances. He discusses exhaustively Saussure’s own view as presented in the *Cours*, claiming that the threefold distinction he wants to introduce can be found implicitly in Saussure’s own conception, when *langue* is considered, on the one hand, as a social reality, and, on the other hand, as functional language defined by oppositions between its elements. The clearest predecessor is found in Trubetzkoy’s distinction between phonemes as functional units and variants, traditional realizations of phonemes, which go beyond their merely functional value. Also the phenomenon of *neutralization* is considered to be part of this non-functional but “normal” realization. The phonic dimension is seen as that which allows most easily for illustrating what *norm* is meant to be. The aforementioned example of Spanish vowels allows for a good illustration of this: there are only five vowel phonemes /a/, /e/, /i/, /o/ and /u/, but at least in the case of /e/ and /o/, there are two clearly different current realizations, an open one and a closed one, according to the articulatory context. So between the unlimited amount of individual realizations and the abstract functional unit there is the *normal* realization, the *norm* of the language:



Even if phonetics allows best for showing this, Coseriu’s claim is that the threefold distinction is valid for all levels of linguistic structuring: on the level of mor-

phology, the “norm” is responsible for the existence of irregular forms, and when children create regular analogies and say “fought” instead of “fought”, this just shows how they apply the rules of the system. In word formation, the norm of French prefers *garantir* and the norm of Spanish *garantizar* even if the systems of both languages also would allow for forms such as Fr. **garantiser* or Sp. **garantir*. This is also valid for content: Coseriu claims that the adjective *papal*, which refers to the Pope, could also perfectly refer to the ‘potatoe’, *papa* (in American Spanish), but the norm of the language has chosen this limitation. Another example on the level of the lexicon: Spanish *agua dulce* refers to fresh water and not to sweet water whereas *agua salada* is salted water. He also discusses some syntactic phenomena and insists that *norm* is a general concept relevant for all levels. Once the examples are given, Coseriu sketches what he calls not less than a “coherent theory of speech and its formalizations”, where different degrees of abstraction are shown between concrete utterances and “langue” as functional system, including the step in between, the norm:



In this view, the concrete and individual utterance (ABCD) is an example of ‘normal’, traditional realization of a language (abcd) which shows the systematicity of the language (a’b’c’d’). The norm is vaster than the system since it includes also the traditional, non-systematic facts; on the other hand, the system goes beyond the norm since it is a ‘system of possibilities’ which also includes virtually possible, but not actually traditional realizations of the system: a word as *shaveable* is not a common word in English (maybe with the exception of

barber's jargon), but it virtually exists and can be used even by those who have never heard it ("he had an almost completely unshaveable face"). Here, Coseriu also sees the potential of the term for describing aesthetic effects of linguistic innovation (as in the mentioned work of Ion Barbu). He furthermore insists on the importance of the *norm* for language change: since the norm within the system reflects the balance of the system ("el equilibrio del sistema", Coseriu 1952/1973, 107), changes in norm can precede changes in the system. In a later paper (Coseriu 1968), Coseriu widens this view adding a further category, *language type*, a notion referring to Wilhelm von Humboldt's typology and the idea that the different areas of a language system are deeply related and reflect deep principles which can be discovered by the linguist. In this view, changes of the system are changes within the type, and changes of the norm are changes within the system.

To sum up this section: Coseriu considers *norm* to be a fundamental term for linguistic theory, it is necessary in order to resolve the lack of clarity given in a limitation to the Saussurean dichotomy of *langue* and *parole*. It distinguishes explicitly what in Saussure's thought appears fused in two aspects of *langue*: the social side of common, traditional ways of realizing the system and the system with its oppositions. But this distinction has little to do with the prescriptive idea of norm (cf. Ezawa 1985, 2012), as Coseriu himself explains:

Aclaremos además que no se trata de la *norma* en el sentido corriente, establecida o impuesta según criterios de corrección y de valoración subjetiva de lo expresado, sino de la norma objetivamente comprobable en una lengua, la norma que seguimos necesariamente por ser miembros de una comunidad lingüística y no aquella según la cual se reconoce que "hablamos bien" o de manera ejemplar, en la misma comunidad. (Coseriu 1952/1973, 90)

'We furtherly clarify that it is not about norm in the common sense, something established or imposed according to criteria of correction and of subjective valorization of what is expressed, but rather about the objectively attested norm in a language, the norm we follow necessarily because we are members of a linguistic community. So it is not the norm according to which, in the same community, you recognize that someone "speaks well" or in an exemplary way.'

But this does not mean that Coseriu is not interested in the issue of prescriptive norms, as we will see in the next section.

4 Coseriu and prescriptivism: *exemplarity*

In the context of the present handbook, it is convenient, once we have shown that *norm* in the sense of Coseriu 1952 is not to be confounded with prescriptive norm in his terminology, to look at other areas of Coseriu's theory where normativity is

being treated. There is one central text in his work where this is the case: in the 1950s, one of the issues Coseriu is working about is linguistic “correctness”, and he starts writing a manual entitled *El problema de la corrección idiomática* (‘The problem of linguistic correctness’) for language teachers directed originally towards his students at the *Instituto de Profesores* in Montevideo. This exhaustive study, however, remained uncomplete, and the finished parts are still waiting for publication, even if some of the central ideas were published in several papers (e.g. Coseriu 1988, 1990; see also Kabatek/Murguía 1997, 207-219).

Coseriu makes a distinction between what he calls “correction” and “exemplarity”, claiming that in the discussion on linguistic correctness we can frequently find confusions and reductions. Both terms are again, as was the case with *norm*, used in a particular way by Coseriu and must be understood within his framework: “correct” is used in a purely systemic way as “belonging to a system”, no matter if this system is the one of the standard language or a dialect: “Lo correcto se relaciona con la “estructura” de la lengua (de toda lengua): es la conformidad con tal estructura.” (Coseriu, ms.) (‘correctness is related to the ‘structure’ of language (of any language): it is the conformity with this or that structure’). He quotes among others Charles C. Fries as source for this conception:

First, it is often maintained that the speech habits of the socially acceptable are *correct* and that those of the other groups are *incorrect*. From the point of view we have here set forth concerning differing dialects we are driven to the conclusion that such a judgement is untenable. There is a correctness in each of the dialects. [...]

To use «I saw» and «I did» in speaking «vulgar» English is just as incorrect and careless as to use «I seen» and «I done» in the dialect of the socially acceptable. (Fries 1945, 133)

Coseriu insists that in this sense, it is absurd to say that someone “speaks Spanish correctly” since nobody speaks the Spanish language as a whole, and Spanish dialects and sociolects are as Spanish as the Spanish standard. So when talking about correction, it must always be specified to which variety this correction refers. What is correct in a certain dialect might not be correct in the standard language and vice-versa.

“Exemplary” in change is referring to the language selected as prestige language in a community, the variety serving for communication with range wider than local, a synonym to *standard*, as Coseriu himself states generally without using this term.

The terms imply Coseriu’s conception of language variation as presented in different works from the 1950s onwards (Coseriu 1957, 1979, 1998). He not only criticizes the limitation of Saussure’s distinction between synchrony and diachrony, adding *history* in a Hegelian sense as a category for a holistic view on language, but he also postulates to distinguish between what he calls a *Historical*

language as a bundle of varieties and a single variety. This is done by adopting the important terminological distinction between language *structure* and *architecture* introduced by the Norwegian linguist Leiv Flydal. In a paper which discusses Saussure's notion of *language state* ("état de langue"), Flydal (1951) distinguishes two dimensions of synchronic variation: *diatopic* (spatial) and *diastratic* (social) variation. Coseriu adds *diaphasic* (stylistic or situational) variation as a further dimension.

For structural analysis, linguists need to identify such varieties, and the identification is always threefold: a variety is *syntopic*, *sinstratic* and *symphasic* at the same time, e.g. the variety of a certain village spoken by a certain group in a certain situation. Now, once a variety as a *langue* is identified, the linguistic features being part of it and forming oppositions in it are considered "correct" and those not pertaining to it are considered "incorrect". For example, in certain varieties of English, it is "correct" to use double negation and forms like "aint" instead of standard English "have not": in a variety where "I aint got no money" is the normal expression, "I do not have any money" would not be "correct", i.e. it would not be a form of that variety. This does not mean that in a discourse a speaker could not use both forms; this, however, would be considered a switch between two varieties.

"Correctness" would thus be something completely different from "exemplarity". In Coseriu 1990, the author illustrates the two notions with the example of Argentine Spanish forms of address. In Argentina, the form *vos* is used as informal address form. Coseriu claims that the form is *correct* in Buenos Aires Spanish but not exemplary in the whole Spanish-speaking world: *tú* is considered to be the general standard form of informal address. He condemns tendencies to prohibit the use of *vos* at Argentine schools even in informal contexts saying that in such cases the whole language would be reduced to exemplarity, and he also criticizes the opposite reduction, when everything which is "correct" in any variety is also accepted as "exemplary" and standard selection is denied. The criticism, directed towards Robert A. Hall Jr.'s claim to "leave your language alone" calls it "false liberalism" to teach people that "anything goes", especially when those who teach this ideology are part of elites able to speak the "exemplary" language and impede the access to elites when teaching a utopic ideology not corresponding to the social reality (Kabatek/Murguía 1997, 216).

But exemplarity is not the only term Coseriu uses to refer to supra-regional forms of language. The other ones are *common language* ('lengua común') adopted probably from Germ. *Gemeinsprache* as we find it in the work of Hermann Paul (1880/1920), and finally *norma*, but here in a different sense.

In *La corrección idiomática*, Coseriu first introduces the term *lengua común* as a "supradialectal variety" able to influence and even to absorb the dialects. He states that also the common language might be internally differentiated and that this differentiation is stronger in the case of languages spoken in several coun-

tries. He furthermore specifies that these differences are generally stronger in the lexicon than on the phonetic level and even weaker in the morphosyntax of a language. In a way, Coseriu sketches here the situation of *pluricentric languages* (Clyne 1992), and it is not by coincidence that these reflections appear in a manual designed for teachers of Spanish.

But not enough with the common language and its differentiation: the exemplary language is on top of the common language and is like a common language within the common language: “*lo ejemplar es una lengua común dentro de la lengua común.*”

Finally, even the exemplary language as an abstract model can be differentiated in the different regions where a language is spoken. We have thus a complex, hierarchical building in the architecture of a historical language, with basic dialects, sociolects and styles, a common language with its inner differentiation and an exemplary language which again also might be differentiated. On the top of all, Coseriu claims a “virtual” exemplarity defined by common elements of the different exemplarities. In this context, he also uses the term *norma*, this time referring to the ideal norm of a language:

pues lo ejemplar es una “norma” - una *lengua*, un sistema de regularidades -, y no una suma de realizaciones (Coseriu ms.)

so the exemplary is a “norm” – a language, a system of regularities – and not a sum of realizations

Norm is here not the descriptive norm in a structural sense but an ideal of orientation in a linguistic community:

Por otro lado, así como la lengua común suele presentar variedades regionales, en el plano de lo ejemplar suelen desarrollarse normas regionales, muy en particular en las lenguas que se hablan en varios países, pero a menudo - y por lo menos hasta cierto punto - también en un mismo país. Así, en inglés se distinguen perfectamente, por lo menos, una ejemplaridad “inglesa” y una ejemplaridad americana (con varias normas regionales). En el caso del portugués, hay una norma de Portugal y una norma brasileña; dentro de la primera, una norma de Lisboa y otra que puede llamarse “de Coímbra”; y dentro de la segunda, por lo menos, una norma de Río (“carioca”) y otra de São Paulo (“paulista”). En el caso del italiano, se habla, en particular para la fonética, de una norma “florentina” y una norma “romana”. Y para cada una de estas lenguas existe también una ejemplaridad general, no sólo idealmente, sino también concretamente (en la medida en que las varias normas regionales coinciden). A este respecto puede hablarse de *planos* o *niveles de ejemplaridad* (diferentes, por supuesto, de los “niveles de lengua”). (Coseriu. ms.)

on the other hand, as the common language generally will have varieties, on the level of exemplarity regional norms might emerge, particularly in languages spoken in different countries, but frequently – and at least up to a certain point – even within the same country. So, in English there are at least two distinct exemplarities, an English

exemplarity and an American exemplarity (with several regional norms). In the case of Portuguese, there is a norm of Portugal and a Brazilian norm, and within the first one there is a norm of Lisbon and another one which could be called “of Coimbra”; and within the second, there is at least a norm of Rio (“carioca”) and a norm of São Paulo (“paulista”). In the case of Italian, it is particularly on the level of phonetics where a “florentine” and a “Roman” norm are distinguished. And for all of these languages, there exists also a general exemplarity, not only ideally, but also concretely (in the way in which various regional norms coincide). In this respect, it is possible to talk of *levels of exemplarity* (different, of course, from the “levels of the language”).

Here, *norm* appears, on the one hand, as a term for the differentiation of regional standards of pluricentric languages, and, on the other hand and with reference to the “levels of norm”, as a taxonomically superposed term.

This somewhat ambiguous use of *norm* in Coseriu’s work has led to certain confusions, when this second sense of *norm* (= norm within an architecture) is mixed with the first one (= norm as structural term). It has been claimed, e.g., that Portuguese is a language with two norms (the Portuguese one and the Brazilian one) corresponding to the same *system*. This is however not compatible with the structuralist notion of *system* since Portuguese in Portugal and Brazil clearly present different systemic features. Here, the term norm is being “vulgarized” or consciously (or not) misunderstood in order to claim language unity, without distinguishing its two different functions. Similar argumentations have been observed for the use of norm in the description of Spanish (see Kabatek 2015).

5 Norm and varieties

It should be added to the previous section that the “exemplary language” is also an exemplary norm and that it includes non-systematic aspects (in a structuralist sense of “system”). For example, the pronunciation of [c] and [x] in German *ich* and *doch* is not a matter of systemic opposition but of allophonic variation fixed in the norm. In this sense, a standard norm is, in Coseriu’s terms, an *exemplary norm* and not only a system. It might be said that Coseriu’s view follows two different aims; on the one hand he tries to complement the structuralist view and on the other hand he aims at offering an integral view on language beyond structuralism.

In the first sense, the distinction between dimensions of variation is important in order to identify structural units. The structuralist needs to disclaim between elements that are part of a system and extrasystemic elements. An analysis of the structural oppositions must exclude, e.g., foreign elements.

In the second sense, however, there is no reason to limit variation and the view on language varieties to purely oppositional terms, and this is precisely a consequence of the system-norm distinction. For a speaker’s production and per-

ception, a dialect is a dialect distinct from others not because there exist structural, oppositional reasons for it but rather because it presents perceivable differences. From the perspective of the Spanish standard, e.g., Eastern as well as Western Andalusian are clearly perceived as dialects. Eastern Andalusian has a different vowel system (distinguishing e.g. singular from plural by vowel quality) than standard Spanish, Western Andalusian doesn't. For speakers from other regions, Eastern Andalusian is not "more dialect" than Western Andalusian: both are perceived as realities which differ with regards to the standard. Even differences which only affect the norm and leave the systemic oppositions intact are perceived as such. This is why in an integral view on language variation a notion as "diasystem" (Weinreich 1954) as a purely structuralist notion is not sufficient, and the dimensions in a Coserian sense should not be limited to a systemic view. Instead of a diasystem, we could rather talk of "dianorms", as I proposed some time ago (Kabatek 2003).

6 *Norm and discourse traditions*

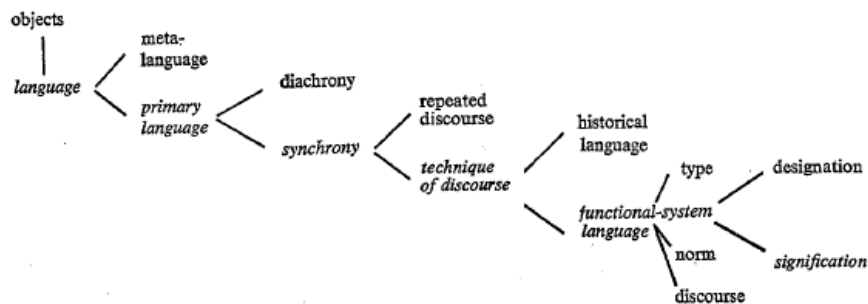
Some scholars have criticized the apparent contradiction between Coseriu's inclusion of the notion of *norm* in synchronic linguistics saying that in its reference to traditional usage, *norm* should in fact be considered as a historical term (Lara 1983, 174-175). According to Lara, the historicity of elements of the norm may only be shown by comparing different synchronies. Here seems to be a misunderstanding with regards to the concept of historicity. Coseriu clearly distinguishes the assumed historicity of language (including the norm) from the external view on the history of language: speakers are historical individuals and do not invent their language but adopt it; they are, in that sense, part of a common history. But once they assume the language, they need no historical knowledge of it. In a very Saussurean sense, to speak a language is a synchronic fact. This includes the norm. A speaker always speaks individually, realizing a certain norm and a certain language system.

However, some decades ago and within a Coserian framework, a different perspective on historicity of language was proposed by Peter Koch (1997), claiming that on the historical level of languages, not only systems and norms should be distinguished, but also so-called *discourse traditions*, traditional ways of saying things, formulae, textual forms, particular stylistic facts. It should be discussed what the relationship between discourse tradition and norm is since both terms refer to *traditionality* in language. It seems to me that both concepts should be clearly considered apart: norm in its "structural" sense as outlined in Coseriu 1952 is a purely structural term which serves to show that linguistic signs are realized in traditional ways which show a competence beyond the purely structur-

al one: to speak is not only to represent oppositional signs but also to transmit these signs in a traditional way. *Discourse traditions*, in turn, are not traditions of linguistic signs but traditions of *texts*, including the situational and the interpretational component of texts.

7 Conclusions

As we have seen, the concept of *norma* in Eugenio Coseriu's linguistic theory is a complex and a crucial one. In *Sistema, norma y habla*, Coseriu develops this concept mainly for the *structural* description of a language. He shows exhaustively that linguistic competence embraces more than just the knowledge of a language system in a structuralist sense. Between the abstract level of phonemes and morphemes, there is a collective, traditional level of realization, sometimes, as on the phonic level, partly determined by articulatory reasons, sometimes, as on the level of word formation, determined by communicative needs and conventions beyond purely systemic oppositions. In this sense, what Coseriu calls *norm* is not "norm" in the prescriptive, normative sense. The distinction between system and norm is a necessary one for the structuralist analysis. In his later writings on structural semantics or *lexematics*, Coseriu claims that a coherent structural analysis needs to make seven prior distinctions in order to identify its real object of analysis. This means that the structure of the system, even if considered something really existing in language and by no way an invention of linguists, is not served on a tray immediately but it must be identified by a series of prior analytic techniques (Coseriu/Geckeler 1974, 148):



Simultaneously, in the unpublished *El problema de la corrección idiomática* as well as in other writings, Coseriu refers to *norm* in the context of the *architecture* of *historical languages*. Here, he first talks about *correctness* and limits this term to the distinction between elements corresponding to a system (i.e. "correct" elements in that system) and elements not corresponding to a system. Secondly, he introduces the terms *common language* and *exemplary language* in order to

refer to historically selected forms of a language which serve for large-scale communication. The term *norm* reappears here, somehow independently of Coseriu's structuralist distinction, in a more common sense referring to different local standards in the case of pluricentric languages.

Norm refers in both contexts to an orientation, to something to be followed (Koch 1988). Since the orientation implies traditional realizations of language, the term has thus some affinity to the more recent term *discourse tradition*, introduced by Peter Koch within a Coserian framework. However, discourse traditions should not be confounded with norm: they are traditions of texts, of concrete utterances, of *Ergon* in a Humboldtian sense, even if their repetition makes them become part of linguistic creativity, of *Energeia*.

Coseriu's concept of *norm* seems still to be a useful notion since it allows for describing linguistic realities between individual variation and systemic abstraction. Some scholars have understood it in a purely statistical sense, as a term for the average realization of language (Rey-Debove 2003); others have introduced similar concepts without making a clear-cut distinction between *system* and *norm* (Langacker 1987, Tomasello 2000). Coseriu's term is a necessary one within his own linguistic framework. It is critical with Saussure's distinction of *langue* and *parole* and makes it at the same time meaningful. It shows the limits of structural analysis, helping at the same time to preserve the structural method for the really structured aspects of language. Probably it was rather misleading to have chosen an already traditional term and to have tried to impose a new concept competing with others. Probably it was also misleading to use the same term in another context, much closer to the traditional ones, when talking about the *architecture* of a language. But if we leave the purely terminological question apart and look at the conceptual framework behind it, Coseriu's notions of *norm*, *varieties*, *correctness*, *exemplarity* etc. still enclose stimulating and interesting contributions to current discussions, above all because they are part of an impressively coherent language theory.

8 Literature

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