CHAPTER II

INDUCTION AND DEDUCTION

Linguistics has always been inductive, as Hjelmslev calls it, by which he means that it has always applied a method passing from something particular to something general in its formation of concepts: from the individual sounds to the phonemes (classes of sounds), from the individual phonemes to the categories of phonemes, from the individual meanings to the general or basic meanings, and from these to the categories of meanings. It was a progression from segment to class, not from class to segment, a synthetic, not an analytic movement.

The concepts thus obtained cannot be generalized beyond the individual language and afford no useful basis of comparison. All our inherited terminology suffers from this: the inductively obtained class concepts of grammar, such as "genitive", "passive" etc., are striking examples. Of none of them can a general definition be given: in one language, Latin for example, a genitive is something quite different from the genitive in another language, say Greek. Induction, says Hjelmslev, does not lead from fluctuation to a constant (see Ch. I), but to accident, it cannot ensure a self-consistent and simple description.

We ought, therefore, to carry out our analysis in the opposite direction, according to Hjelmslev. He thinks that when we start from experimental data we will get exactly the opposite procedure: "If the linguistic investigator is given anything ... it is the as yet unanalyzed text in its undivided and absolute integrity. Our only possible procedure, if we wish to order a system to the process of that text, will be an analysis, in which the text is regarded as a class divided into segments, then these segments as classes divided into segments, and so on until the analysis is exhausted". This procedure is "a progression from class to segment, not from segment to class, ... an analytic and specifying, not a synthetic
and generalizing movement, ... the opposite of induction”. Hjelmslev calls this deduction (OSG p. 13).

By “text” as used in the above quotation we should understand anything we ‘possess’ of a language, any utterances etc. (cf. p. 18 note 2). But on the other hand the text is to be thought of as limited, hence the use Hjelmslev makes of a special method of filling up the gaps that may occur, viz. catalysis (see Ch. X).

Very interesting in connection with what was said above as to a “process”, viz. that Hjelmslev understands by it a process already analyzed somehow (cf. p. 36), is what he says here about the text. It might be expected that in speaking of the “process” of a text Hjelmslev also meant: an analyzed textual process, thus, a text already analyzed in some way, by trial and error — to which a system is to be ordered by describing the various relations between the elements. But — in the above quotation we find the express statement that the only thing that is given the linguistic investigator is “the as yet unanalyzed text”. The only way to fit this into the rest is, as we saw above (p. 26, 27), to take the term “un-analyzed” in the sense of “not yet analyzed by Hjelmslev’s final controlling analysis”, and not in the sense most readers would give it: a text never yet analyzed, of which we do not know where one sentence or word ends and another begins.

This final analysis, then, Hjelmslev calls a deduction, adding: “This usage disturbs epistemologists, but we retain it here since we believe we shall later be able to demonstrate that the terminological opposition on this point is not insuperable” (OSG p. 13).

It surely is not the epistemologists only that are disturbed by this usage of the word ‘deduction’. On p. 15 I mentioned Hjelmslev’s use of this word as a striking example of a change of terminology and of principle. The different usages of this term cause confusion to everyone who reads more than one of Hjelmslev’s works.

If we follow Hjelmslev’s usage of the terms ‘inductive’ and ‘deductive’ from the beginning, we start with his first book, Principes. To facilitate reference the various quotations given will be numbered. The italics are mine. In Principes (1928) we find in Ch. 9, already mentioned, entitled “Grammaire inductive et empirique”, the following (p. 39):