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THE PHILOSOPHY OF STRUCTURALISM IN LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

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Abstract. Structuralism is an intellectual movement to the human sciences with a profound effect on linguistics, sociology and other fields as well as philosophy which tries to analyze a specific field as a sophisticated system of interrelated parts. Structuralism believes that all human activity and its products are constructed and not natural. It also holds that everything has meaning. Structuralism underlies on the concepts that every system possesses a structure, that structure determines the position of every element of a whole, that structural rules deal with coexistence than changes, and that structures are the "real things" underlying the surface of meaning.

In language and linguistic studies, structuralism includes collecting a corpus of utterances and then attempting to classify all of the elements of the corpus at their different linguistic levels. It also tries to explain broad subjects by surveying their individual components and the way they interact to each other. Taking the structuralist's approach to language teaching will help the teachers and practitioners develop a methodology and then apply to any problem. It assists the students to learn through context. The structural approach views the language as being divided into various components interacting with each other and then forming the rules of the language.

Key words: structuralism, sign, types of structuralism, linguistics, semiotics.

Introduction

Before Saussure, language studies was limited to the syntactic studies as well as the historical or etymological studies of the words. In fact, this attitude derives from the philosophical approach of that era specially the school of nominalism. Based on the school of nominalism, "there is nothing general except names" (Mill, 1889) and any word is like a tag on the components and elements of the universe. He also claims that nominalism is a metaphysical view in philosophy according to which general or abstract terms and predicates exist, while universals or abstract objects, which are sometimes thought to correspond to these terms, do not exist (Mill, 1889). Conceptual combinations, adjectives and phrases are all the names referring to the various situations and phenomena. In this attitude, any word is immediately related to an object or part of the world and summons it quickly (Teichman ,2001). There are at least two main versions of nominalism. One version denies the existence of universals – things that can be instantiated or exemplified by many particular things (e.g., strength, humanity). The other version specifically denies the existence of abstract objects – objects that do not exist in space and time (Rodriguez-Pereyra, 2008).

Saussure introduced an entirely new attitude to linguistic approaches which later found philosophical and cognitive aspect (Tabeei, 2005).In "Course in General Linguistics" (Harris, 1983), he described the structure of language in relation with the reality. The basis of his thoughts focused on the relationship between the signifier and the signified respectively (Tabeei, 2005).

In other words, Saussure rejected the inherent communication of any word with objects but he claimed that the words are arbitrary symbols having nothing to do with the nature of things and the only thing that can link them to each other is a kind of contract and an optional admission. He said "the relationship between linguistic sign t-r-e-e and the image we have of it in the mind is arbitrary and in other words is unreasonable", "the word 'tree' has no characteristics of tree on his own. Their relationship is the result of a contract (Rodriguez and Garat, 2001) He also remarks that "linguistic sign does not relate a thing to a word but rather a concept to the phonetic image" (Cahoone, 2003)

In Saussure's view, a word or a linguistic sign is composed of a phone and a conceptual image, are related to each other like the two sides of a coin, and refined each other with their presence. They are distinguished as signifier and signified, and together

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make up the sign set. The relationship between the sign and the universe is actually done through the signification. This relationship is quite an arbitrary relationship and in the meantime, the signifier is the link between the object and the concept. The process of signification relates the signified or conceptual image to an object or a phenomenon and this relationship is not created unless by the signifier.

The most important consequence of Saussure's view was that language is a separate and independent set of reality which can survive independently through the relationship between the signifier and the signified. From his view, language is formed in a way that language use manifests itself in its integrity, that is, language generalization. It means that the concept (signified) is attached to the phone (signifier) establishes itself and is understood through a distinction between the signifiers.

In fact, meaning is the offspring of the relationships between all signifiers. A phone outside of langue does not play a role in the signs unless there is a natural relationship between the phone and the concept like gurgling which naturally implies water fall. In fact, the main thing is that linguistic signs play symbolic functions only in a system based on convergence and distinctions along with the other signs.

What Saussure means when he says, "in language there are only differences without positive terms" is that language has a system that is created by negative signifiers put together. When the negatives are put together a positive is created. Without these negatives to create the positives, language would not have the parallelism between the signified and the signifier (Adams, 2012). "The sound pattern is not actually a sound; for a sound is something physical. A sound pattern is the hearer's psychological impression of a sound, as given to him by the evidence of his senses" (CGL 66). So the minimal unit of the language system is the sign, which is made up of two sides—an abstract image of a sensible form (the signifier) and an idea or concept (the signified) ("Commentary on Saussure", 2015).

Hence, Saussure distinguishes between language –the set of interpersonal rules and norms—the institution of language—language as a system (Langue) and language as any actual manifestation of the system in speech or writing, in short, any actual utterance (Parole) (Ahmadi, 2001). You couldn't have an utterance (which was coherent and meaningful) without the institution of norms that Saussure called langue. So it is this that forms the object of study for modern linguistics. Now it should be clear that such an object could not ever be made

visible (as a stretch of text can) but you can establish the rules and conditions that make it possible to speak and write in meaningful ways. The fundamental distinction between langue and parole has been influential for a range of disciplines in the social sciences, allowing us to distinguish institution from event and to analyze institutions quite generally.

Saussure offers an analogy between language and chess: "The respective value of the pieces depends on their position on the chessboard just as each linguistic term derives its value from its opposition to all the other terms. . . . Language is a system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others . . . .Signs function, then, not through their intrinsic value but through their relative position" (Bertens, 2007, pp. 82-86). Hans Bertens (2007), writing about Claude Lévi-Strauss, is helpful here: "Cultural signs position themselves somewhere on a gliding scale between pairs of opposites and in so doing express a relation between two terms, one of which represents a presence while the other represents an absence" (Bertens, 2007, pp. 63-64).

The position of sign in structuralism

The sign, the signifier, and the signified are concepts of the school of thought known as structuralism. In Saussure's view, the fundamental elements of a language and all human mental products and cultural treatments are signs (Howarth et. al., 2000). The central tenet of structuralism is that the phenomena of human life, whether language or media, are not intelligible except through their network of relationships, making the sign and the system (or structure) in which the sign is embedded primary concepts. As such, a sign -- for instance, a word -- gets its meaning only in relation to or in contrast with other signs in a system of signs. In general, the signifier and the signified are the components of the sign itself formed by the associative link between the signifier and signified. Even with these two components, however, signs can exist only in opposition to other signs. That is, signs are created by their value relationships with other signs. The contrasts that form between signs of the same nature in a network of relationships is how signs derive their meaning (Hoenisch, 2005).

Nonetheless to say that language is a product of social forces does not automatically explain why it comes to be constrained in the way it is. Bearing in mind that a language is always an inheritance from the past, one must add that the social forces in question act over a period of time. If stability is a characteristic of languages, it is not only because languages are anchored in the community. They are

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also anchored in time (De Saussure, 1983, p. 74). The question of the socio-historical role of the linguistic sign rewards considerable examination, as recent development in the social sciences show, and once we acknowledge that the "top" part of the sign (the concept) is no less constrained and arbitrarily founded than the "bottom" part (the pattern) we learn to take seriously the historicity of our institutionalized patterns of thinking ("Commentary on Saussure").

The purpose of the structural analysis is the revealing of the deep structures of texts. Structuralism is based on semiotics, that is, the theory of signs. On semioticians' beliefs, all of the systems are made of arbitrary signs. As an example it may be pointed out to a driver who reacts against the green light: "Green means go. The

lights as signs that can allow an action or reaction. Semiotics studies the signs actions within the systems and the codes dominating on their meanings. The sign systems are absolutely complex; the traffic lights are less grammatical in comparison with the narratives and texts; but the pattern of reaction to the signs make the base of their applications (Sim, 2009).

Structuralism as a method

Although structuralism had the greatest impact in the field of literary theory and literary criticism, it is more considered as an approach or methodology, not a distinct field.

The concepts of structuralism can be theoretically used in different areas. The ideas were at the center of interest with the works of Claude Levi Strauss, and it also affected on the thoughts and ideas of Lacan. Among the other structuralists are Michel Foucault, Umberto Eco, Levi Strauss, etc (Ward, 2005).

Structuralists equipped with a theory and a method of linguistic analysis, and have examined a whole variety of texts, such as fairy tales and myths. Such cultural phenomena as wrestling matches, regarded as 'texts' from the structuralist point of view, have also been examined. In the study of literature, structuralists have employed linguistic analysis to reveal how structures are formed. Indeed, structuralism does not so much focus on the "meaning" of a literary work as on its linguistic structure. Moreover, structuralists are principally concerned not with the uniqueness of literary works as aesthetic objects but with basic structures of "possible" works; traditional criticism, on the other hand, is more generally involved not only with

meaning but also with value in literature (Pradeep, 2011).

In its most general concept, structuralism questions about the meaning, representation and authorship and studies the relationships between language and cognition. Structuralists try to explain the human activities scientifically through discovering the basic elements of those activities (such as concepts, actions and the lexicons) and the rules, or their combination laws (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 2000).

For example, Michel Foucault as one of the most famous structuralists believed in different elements in the evolution of meaning and never limited this process to internal structure. He believed that the intertextual factors and history are the crucial affecting the meaning of the texts and should never be deleted from the scope of surveys.

Michel Foucault also addressed the question of the author in critical interpretation. In his 1969 essay "What is an Author?" he developed the idea of "author function" to explain the author as a classifying principle within a particular discursive formation. Foucault did not mention Barthes in his essay but its analysis has been seen as a challenge to Barthes' depiction of a historical progression that will liberate the reader from domination by the author.

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Foucault turned the concept of "author" inside out by examining the text points to the author and not, as is assumed, vice versa. He began by quoting Samuel Beckett, who wrote, "What matter who's speaking, someone said, what matter who's speaking?" The question connoted an "indifference," Foucault noted, towards writing that had become an "immanent rule" that precluded expression. Like Barthes, Foucault was acting against Structuralism or a formal reading of a literary work and was opposed to the concept of expression, a holdover of Romantic thinking. Foucault understood writing to be "freed" from the need to "express" and was able to represent only itself (Willette, 2014).

Types of Structuralism

Generally, there are two kinds of structuralism:

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a) Atomistic structuralism in which the elements are completely specified apart from their role in some larger whole like folk tale elements in the Vladimir Propp theory. Propp believed that it is possible to do a research based on his concepts in any territory of the narrative structure. In this manner, he could specify particular functions and roles for different characters of a narration according to an exact analogy of the narrative elements. Thus, he not only could include different characters of various stories in these structural patterns but also could extrapolate their relationships with each other in mathematical relations, and could realize the common aspects of hundreds of popular legends through a careful attention to the relationships and inattention to the content (Propp, 1997).

b) Holistic or diachronic structuralism in which what counts as a possible element is defined apart from the system of elements but what counts as an actual element is a function of the whole system of differences of which the given element is a part. For holistic structuralists such as Levi-Strauss, all possible terms must be defined (identified) apart from any specific system; the specific system of terms then determines which possible terms actually count as elements, that is, the system provides the individuation of the elements (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982; Dreyfus and Rabinow, 2014).

Levi-Strauss succinctly states this method:

The method we adopt . . . consists in the following operations:

1) define the phenomenon under study as a relation between two or more terms, real or supposed;

2) construct a table of possible permutations between these terms;

3) take this table as the general object of analysis which, at this level only, can yield necessary connections, the empirical phenomenon considered at the beginning being only one possible combination among others, the complete system of which must be reconstructed beforehand (Levi-Strauss, 1963; Dreyfus and Rabinow, 2014).

For example, for Levi-Strauss in The Raw and the Cooked, raw, cooked, and rotten are identified as three possible elements; each actual system of elements then determines how in that system these three possible elements will be individuated. For example, they can be grouped into binary oppositions such as raw vs. cooked and rotten, or raw and rotten vs. cooked, or each of the three elements can count on its own (Levi-Strauss, 1969; Dreyfus and Rabinow, 2014).

Approaches of Structuralism

The three approaches to structuralism are:

1. Semiology Derived from Saussurian linguistics and developed as a sociological tool (especially in film and media studies) through Barthes. It hinges on the analysis of the 'mythical' level of sign systems. See Semiology.

2. The search for deep structures. Levi-Strauss, Piaget, Jameson and, to some extent, linguistic structuralism in general, all are involved in a search for the underlying structures of society, language, myths and even thought. Thus structuralism is a theory of general meanings: ideas have an underlying (rational) structure that determines what we think. See Types of Structuralism (especially Anthropological Structuralism)

3. Marxist structuralism, which owes most to Althusser's endeavours. It draws on the long tradition of French sociology as well as epistemological debates in the philosophy of science. It sees social structures existing independently of our knowledge of them and of our actions (Encyclopedia of Marxism, 1999–2008).

Aspects of Structuralism

1. Structuralism is a metaphysical system (i.e. 'statements about the world which cannot be proved but must be taken on faith' (Craib, 1984))

These metaphysical assumptions are:

a. The world is a product of our ideas. This is a 'distortion' of Kant. In extreme form is anti-empiricist.

b. A logical order or structure underlies general meanings

c. The subject is trapped by the structure.

The idea that there is an unconscious logical structure is common to all structuralist approaches (Larrain, 1979). Thus ideology becomes an unconscious phenomenon whose meaning is received but not read (as in Barthes) or a set of images, concepts and structures subconsciously imposed upon people (as in Althusser) or a psychological structure of mind that determines the logic of myth (as in Levi-Strauss).

2. Structuralism is a method. As a method it sets out to show structural relationships. Various methodological devices are used:

a. Linguistic model: based on the work of Saussure and Pierce, it sees language as the underlying structure behind speech. This relies on an analysis of signs and their relationships.

b. The anthropological method of Levi-Strauss, which is based on a notion that the human mind arranges world into binary pairs (opposites).

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c. Semiotics, principally the adaptation of Saussurian semiotics by Barthes.

Sometimes these, or elements of these, are combined and labelled the 'structuralist method'.

In general, a structuralist method allows for a way to classify what is an apparently infinite number of variations by analyzing structure.

Conclusion

Linguistically, structuralalism refers to two independent movements. The first one is European and recognized as post-Saussurean. It claims that various elements of a language (sounds, words, meanings) present themselves as a system and can be identified through explaining their relations to other elements of the same language. Hence, they are not independent of the system of their language. As a language is composed of a system of signs, the study of language is not independent of its meanings. This reveals that the relation of expression-elements (sounds, words) is not separable of that of the content-elements (meanings). The second movement, the American one, developed from the Leonard Bloomfield's ideas and revolves around the methodological rigour. It rejects mentalism and is profoundly influenced by behaviourist psychology. The American movement separates the study of meaning from the study of grammar and describes any corpus based on the distribution of its expression-elements relative to each other. Unlike the American one which dealt with the development of formal models of language, the European one provided a model for structuralist thought and had great influence on Barthes, Lacan and Lévi-Strauss.

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