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**Modern Linguistics (Structuralism)**

1. **European Structuralism**

* **Ferdinand de Saussure**

Structural linguistics in Europe was initiated with the publication of Cours de Linguistique Générale (General Course in Linguistics) of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). The book was edited and published by his students in 1916. It presents a series of lectures that Saussure gave in Geneva. It was a novelty in linguistic thinking during 1920s and 1930s. despite being originally a comparative philologist himself, Ferdinand de Saussure is considered the founder of structuralism. Saussure’s work was principally non-historical and descriptive. This linguist is well distinguished for his ‘view of language’ and for his dual concepts presented in the form of ‘dichotomies’, which have become a tradition when discussing Saussure’s theory.

**Saussure’s Dichotomies**

**A. Descriptive vs. Prescriptive:** linguistics is ‘descriptive’ in the sense that it describes how speakers actually speak/write, it is not concerned with telling them how to speak/write, or with changing how they speak/write. In other words, it is not ‘prescriptive’. This is basic in linguistics and universally accepted. The idea that linguistics is a science rests upon its being descriptive rather than prescriptive. Saussure did think of linguistics as a science as most contemporary linguist do.

**B. Langue vs. Parole:** for Saussure, langage is composed of two aspects langue and parole. Langage is the hereditary propensity of human speech present in all normal human beings. Langue refers to the abstract system shared by all the speakers of the same language, like English, Arabic, English, etc. It is an underlying system of abstract rules of lexicon, grammar and phonology which is implanted in each individual’s mind resulting from his nurture in a given speech community. And parole refers to the real speech of the individual (the actual performance/ realization), an instance of the use of the system. It is the concrete side of langage. According to Saussure, it is langue that should be the primary concern of the linguist.

**C. Synchronic vs. Diachronic:** diachronic linguistics (‘philology’ in Saussure’s time) is concerned with language change (through the centuries); reconstructing the historical sources of languages, explaining how particular languages came to be as they are. In Sassure’s time all linguistic theory was philological (diachronic). He insisted that synchronic linguistics is possible: looking at a language at a point in time, regardless of how it got like that. Synchronic linguistics is thus non-historical; it generally concentrates on contemporary language.

**D. The sign and its arbitrariness:** for Saussure, a language is a system of arbitrary signs. What is a sign? A sign has two parts: **signified** and **signifier**. The first refers to an idea or a concept, the second refers to a form or an acoustic image. The sign is a meaningful entity, and it is the basic unit of communication. Arbitrariness of the linguistic sign means that there is no inherent or logical link between the signifier and the signified: it is a matter of convention within a speech community.

**E. Syntagmatic vs. Paradigmatic:** syntagmatic relationships exist between items in a sequence. They are also called linear, co-occurrence, sequential or horizontal relations. By contrast, paradigmatic relationships hold between existing items and other items in the same language that can take the same position in the sequence (i.e., between actual elements and their substitutes). These relationships are also called associative, sustitution, vertical relationships.

**Structural Schools in Europe**

1. **The Linguistic School of Prague (Synchronic linguistics/ Functional linguistics)**

Synchronic linguistics originated with de Saussure (Swiss) and Boas (USA). The third impulse in the same direction came from Mathesius (1882-1945). It was in 1911 that Mathesius published his first call for a non-historical approach to language study. Around him, there came into being a circle of linguistic scholars who began to meet in regular discussion from 1926 onwards and came to be recognized as the Prague School. Although most of the linguistic scholars worked in Prague, the term ‘Prague School’ is also used to cover certain scholars elsewhere who adhered to the Prague settle. The whole mark of Prague linguistics was that it saw language in terms of ‘functions. We mean by this not only that members of the Prague school thought of language as serving a purpose but that they analysed a given language with a view to showing the respective functions played by the various structural components in the use of the entire language. Prague linguists look at language as one might look at a motor seeking to understand what jobs the various components were doing and how the nature of one component determines the nature of others. They wanted to go beyond description to explanation: saying not just what languages were like, but also why they were the way they were. A fairly example of functional explanation in Mathesius’ own work concerns his use of terms commonly translated ‘THEME’ and ‘RHEME’, and the notion which has come to be called Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP): most sentences are uttered in order to give the hearer some information but obviously we do not produce unrelated pieces of information chosen at random. Rather, we carefully taylor our statements with a view not only to what we want the hearer to know but also to what the listener knows in relations to the context of discourse. According to Mathesius, the need for continuity means that s sentence will commonly fall into two parts: the THEME which refers to something the hearer already knows and the RHEME which states some new facts about that given topic. Very often, the THEME and the RHEME division corresponds to the syntactic division between ‘subject’ and ‘predicate’ (‘topic’ and ‘comment’).

* **Functional Approach to Phonology by Nicholas Trubetskoy (1890- 1938)**

A member of the Prague school who lived in Chekeslovakia, he belonged to the Russian nobility. He was a student of Indo-European languages. His ideas are better developed in a book entitled – Principles of Phonology’. Trubetskoy’s phonology is functional. He gives a central role to the phoneme. But he and the Prague scholars were interested primarily in the paradigmatic relationship between the phonemes, i.e., in the nature of the opposition between the phonemes that contrast with one another at a given point in the phonological structure:

**a.** **Prevative Opposition:** when phonemes are identical in terms of the place of articulation but different in the manner of articulation (e.g., fricative voiced and voiceless)

**b.** **Neutralization:** the opposition between ‘T’ and ‘D’ is neutralized in word final position at the pronunciation level (e.g., worked).

* **Jackobson’s Theory of Phonological Universals**

Like Trubetskoy, he is interested in the analysis of phonemes into their component features rather than into their distribution. The essence of his approach to phonology is the notion that there is a relatively simple, orderly and universal ‘psychological system’ of sounds underlying the chaotic wealth of different kinds of sounds observed by the phonetician. The differences between the phonologies of different languages are just superficial variations.

1. **The London School**

The man who turned linguistics proper into a recognized, distinct academic subject in Britain was J.R. Firth (1890-1960). Firth’s own work concerned manly phonology and semantics. One of the principal features of Firth’s treatment of phonology is that it is POLYSYSTEMIC. For Firth, the phonology of a language consists of a number of systems of alternative possibilities which come into play at different points in a phonological unit such as a syllable. Fithian phonological analysis recognizes a number of ‘systems’ of prosodies operating at various points in structure (e.g., at the levels of consonant clusters, of syllables, of words, etc) which determine the pronunciation of a given form. One result of this is that utterances are represented as having a phonological structure, in addition to the syntactic structure.

The final point worth mentioning about Firthian phonology is that sound and meaning in language are more directly related than they are usually taken to be. For Firth, a phonology is a structure of systems of choices, and systems of choices were systems of meaning of course, it is true that we can use language meaningfully only because we can opt to say one thing rather than another.

1. **American Structuralism**

It is agreed upon that the American linguistic studies emerged from the institutes of anthropology rather that from the institutes of languages. The American scholars were anthropologists who developed structural ideas far away from European work. The leading figures of the American structural studies were Franz Boas, Edward Sapir, and Leonard Bloomfield.

* **Features of American Structuralism**

**A.** To describe current spoken languages, not dead ones.

**B.** To focus on language form as a sole objective, thus neglecting meaning to subordinate place.

**C.** To perform the description of language using an organized, unprejudiced and meticulous method which allows the analyst to extract the grammar of a language from a corpus of recorded data in a quasi-mechanical way following four steps:

**1.** Field recordings of a corpus of data

**2.** Segmentation of the utterances of the corpus at different levels: phoneme, morpheme, word, group, clause and sentence.

**3.** Listing an inventory of forms that are obtained from each level and stating the distribution of the forms

**4.** Classifying the forms (by giving them names) and utterances of the language being studied.

* **American Structuralists**
* **Franz Boas (1859-1942)**

Boas was the leading figure in the anthropological work in early 20th century. Interested in describing the Amerindian cultures, particularly American Northwest ones. He focused on languages because they represented the best channel for classifying the aboriginal cultures. He objected to the use of grammatical categories of the Indo-European languages in describing Native American languages. For him, such a tradition would distort the features of these languages. The most important publication of Boas was ‘The Handbook of American Indian Languages’ (1911).

* **Edward Sapir (1884-1939)**

He was one of the students of Boas. Ha was himself an anthropologist and a linguist at the same time. His important publication was his book ‘Language’ (1921). Aadopting a descriptive approach, he studies, together with Boas, a number of Amerindian disappearing languages. Sapir’s approach was based on the exploration of the relations with literature, music, anthropology and psychology. His outlooks on language insist on its impact on every part of human life. Sapir is well known for a theory called ‘Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis’. Developed after his death in the 1950s, it the product of the beliefs of both Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897-1941) on the relationship of language to thought. According to the strong version of the theory, our vision of the world is heavily determined by our language.

* **Leonard Bloomfield (1887-1949)**

He is the father of modern American linguistics. His masterpiece in linguistic studies ‘Language’ (1933), established the track of the scientific study of language in the US till the early 1950s. crucial in Bloomfield’s work was his influence by behaviouristic psychology, which rejects all that is non-physical or non-observable in search of being empiricist in approach. He conceived of language basically as couples of stimuli and responses. Bloomfield maintained that language should be studied like a natural science.

* **Immediate Constituent Analysis (ICA)**

Basically, ICA is an explicit method of analyzing sentences grammatically by dividing them into their component parts. It is structural in nature because it does not consider a sentence as a sequence or string of isolated elements, but it is made up of layers of groups or constituents. A CONSTITUENT is a group of words or morphemes with closer relationships between one another than between the elements of the other groups or constituents within the same sentence. The methodology of ICA consists in splitting a sentence up into two immediate constituents, which are analysable into further constituents. This process of segmentation continues until the smallest indivisible units, the morphemes, are reached. The latter are called the ‘ultimate constituents’, and each is given an identifying label. As a principle, the partition in ICA is ‘BINARY’. According to ICA, a sentence is not seen a string of elements but it is made up of layers of constituents (or ‘nodes’). Thus, constituent structure is ‘HIERARCHICAL’.

* **Weaknesses of ICA**

**1.** In some sentences, it is not always clear where the division should be.

**2.** In ICA division is arbitrary binary, while some sentences may have alternative analyses.

**3.** The analysis in ICA does not go beyond the morpheme?

**4.** Because it focuses only on the surface structure (formal properties), ICA cannot show the syntactic relationship between sentences which are superficially different (active/passive; positive/negative) and fails to show the differences between the sentences which are superficially similar.

**5.** ICA cannot handle lexical and syntactic ambiguity in the sentence.

**6.** ICA does not demonstrate how to form new sentences.

**7.** ICA cannot handle complex sentences.