Q:write the detail note on Ferdinand de Saussure theories of structuralism

Ferdinand de Saussure

Ferdinand de Saussure,He was a Swiss linguist whose ideas on structure in language and the foundation for much of the approach to and progress of the linguistic sciences in the 20th century.

Hiss theories on the structure of language, the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) is often known as “the founder of modern linguistics”

In order to understand Saussure’s linguistic theories, we have to be able to grasp the basic of his psycho-linguistic terminology and his explanation of the nature of language units.

Understanding the basic concepts of his linguistic theory is not only essential for linguistic students, but for anyone studying semiotics, or the use of various types of signs to communicate. Semiotics is also a basic element in film theory studies.

What is Structuralism?

Structuralism is the name that is given to a wide range of discourses that study underlying structures of signification. Signification occurs wherever there is a meaningful event or in the practice some meaningful action. Hence the phrase, "signifying practices." A meaningful event might include any of following: writing or reading a text; getting married; having a discussion over a cup of coffee; a battle. Most (if not all) meaningful events involve either a document or an exchange that can be documented. This would be called a "text." Texts might include any of the following: a news broadcast; an advertisement; an edition of Shakespeare’s King Lear; the manual for my new washing machine; the wedding vows; a feature film. From the point of view of structuralism all texts, all meaningful events and all signifying practices can be analyzed for their underlying structures. Such an analysis would reveal the patterns that characterize the system that makes such texts and practices possible.

Where does structuralism come from?

Structuralism first comes to prominence as a specific discourse with the work of a Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, who developed a branch of linguistics called "Structural Linguistics." Saussure died before he was able to publish his material but we have the meticulously recorded notes of several of his students made during the 2nd course of 1908-1909. The theory was still at a developmental stage then--and has remained in a developmental stage ever after. There is nothing authoritative about Saussure’s theory and even now it is open to debate and controversy. Yet there has been an extraordinarily diverse and fecund range of work, including a number of schools of thought in Eastern Europe, the United States, and thriving today in Japan, based upon readings of his initial insights as documented by his students. The reconstruction of his lecture courses can be found in The Course in General Linguistics.

Development of Structuralism theories by Ferdinand de Saussure

Structuralism was developed by Ferdinand de Saussure in the mid-twentieth century (Cuddon and Preston 923). This creation was brought on, in part, by the French existentialism period and is often combined with the semiotic theory of literary criticism; both are the source of development for other literary criticisms from the formalist schools of thought. As the name suggests, structuralism examines the structure of the work, investigating the ramifications of the organizations of literatures (McManus, 1998). As an image to portray this idea is examining the structure of a building and comparing it to the structures of other buildings in its surroundings, and then subsequently comparing the common features of those buildings to buildings from other cultures and what those architectural discrepancies represent (Brizee and Tompkins, 2011).

The crucial first step in understanding semiotics is to understand structuralism, and the first step to understanding structuralism is to understand that the "sign-real world" model of understanding has certain problems with it. For one, we have spent much of this term arguing that we come to the "real" world with a set of expectations, strong enough that we "see" what we expect to see. We automatically move from the familiar to the unfamiliar, and in doing so bring not only our past experience, but our interpretations, ruminations, partial memories, emotions, and a host of other things that get mixed in to our memories of the past experience. We rarely remember "objectively", and there is a good question whether that objectivity actually even exists.

Structuralism substitutes another way of understanding, that which supposes that our words and images (called "signs"), point not at an external reality, but at each other. Our signs make sense in the context of other signs, not in the context of an external governing reality.

Saussure's semiotics depends on a binary system, that is, on the notion that there is a relationship between signifier and signified. This requires that we take seriously the statements (or images) that are made, and the context in which they are made. At the most basic level, the context that is relevant is the language. In fact, Saussure's most basic distinction is between langue and parole, or between the language something is in and the message that is being uttered at any time. "Langue" seems to be a kind of shadowy presence, in that, while no message can be spoken except in English, you can never get to "English" without the messages that are spoken. There's just more and more messages, more and more "parole". On the other hand, langue is what continues, while the messages themselves are uttered, and disappear. This means that for Saussure, the important thing about language is that it is synchronic, that is, it is related to other signs that co-exist with it, rather than diachronic, understandable in terms of history and changing over time.

Structural linguistics in Europe

Structural linguistics in Europe is generally said to have begun in 1916 with the posthumous publication of the Cours de Linguistique Générale (Course in General Linguistics) of Ferdinand de Saussure. Much of what is now considered as Saussurean can be seen, though less clearly, in the earlier work of Humboldt, and the general structural principles that Saussure was to develop with respect to synchronic linguistics in the Cours had been applied almost 40 years before (1879) by Saussure himself in a reconstruction of the Indo-European vowel system. The full significance of the work was not appreciated at the time. Saussure’s structuralism can be summed up in two dichotomies (which jointly cover what Humboldt referred to in terms of his own distinction of inner and outer form): (1) langue versus parole and (2) form versus substance. By langue, best translated in its technical Saussurean sense as language system, is meant the totality of regularities and patterns of formation that underlie the utterances of a language; by parole, which can be translated as language behavior, is meant the actual utterances themselves. Just as two performances of a piece of music given by different orchestras on different occasions will differ in a variety of details and yet be identifiable as performances of the same piece, so two utterances may differ in various ways and yet be recognized as instances, in some sense, of the same utterance. What the two musical performances and the two utterances have in common is an identity of form, and this form, or structure, or pattern, is in principle independent of the substance, or “raw material,” upon which it is imposed. “Structuralism,” in the European sense then, refers to the view that there is an abstract relational structure that underlies and is to be distinguished from actual utterances.

There are two important points arise here: first, that the structural approach is not in principle restricted to synchronic linguistics; second, that the study of meaning, as well as the study of phonology and grammar, can be structural in orientation. In both cases “structuralism” is opposed to “atomism” in the European literature. It was Saussure who drew the terminological distinction between synchronic and diachronic linguistics in the Course.

The most important of the various schools of structural linguistics to be found in Europe in the first half of the 20th century included the Prague school, most notably represented by Nikolay Sergeyevich Trubetskoy (died 1938) and Roman Jakobson (died 1982), both Russian émigrés, and the Copenhagen (or glossematic) school, centred around Louis Hjelmslev (died 1965). John Rupert Firth (died 1960) and his followers, sometimes referred to as the London school, were less Saussurean in their approach, but, in a general sense of the term, their approach may also be described appropriately as structural linguistics.

Structural linguistics in America

American and European structuralism shared a number of features. In insisting upon the necessity of treating each language as a more or less coherent and integrated system, both European and American linguists of this period tended to emphasize, if not to exaggerate, the structural uniqueness of individual languages. There was especially good reason to take this point of view given the conditions in which American linguistics developed from the end of the 19th century. There were hundreds of indigenous American Indian languages that had never been previously described. Many of these were spoken by only a handful of speakers and, if they were not recorded before they became extinct, would be permanently inaccessible. Under these circumstances, such linguists as Franz Boas (died 1942) were less concerned with the construction of a general theory of the structure of human language than they were with prescribing sound methodological principles for the analysis of unfamiliar languages. They were also fearful that the description of these languages would be distorted by analyzing them in terms of categories derived from the analysis of the more familiar Indo-European languages.

The impact of Saussure's ideas.

In Europe, Saussure's ideas were successfully utilized by the famous Prague School (most active during the 1920s and 1930s). Russian émigrés Nikolay Trubetzkoy and Roman Jakobson developed the methods of structural literary analysis, phonological theory, and semiotics. Louis Hjelmslev and the Copenhagen School was also instrumental in promoting structuralist approach in linguistics. In America, Saussure's ideas influenced the Leonard Bloomfield' distributionalism.

Perhaps most important resonances of Saussure's approach, however, were outside linguistics. Jacques Lacan used the framework of structural linguistics to redefine psychoanalysis. Claude Lévi-Strauss applied structuralist methods to the study of cultures (anthropology). Literary thinkers, such as Roland Barthes, applied the framework to the study of literary texts.