DECODING THE UNDERPINNING ASSUMPTIONS OF LINGUISTIC THEORIES: THE LENS ON STRUCTURAL LINGUISTICS

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ABSTRACT: *Linguistic theories are frameworks about language and language use. Linguistic theories seek to outline the parameters of operations in any given language. They are developed by linguists who study language over a period to arrive at specific assumptions about the nature of human communication. Among others, the most prominent linguistic theories today include generative linguistics, systemic functional linguistics and structural linguistics. This paper dwells on the inherent assumptions of structural linguistics as a theory. Structural linguistics is defined as a study of language based on the theory that language is a structured system of formal units such as sentences and syntax. An example of structural linguistics is phonetics. It is also defined as a language study based on the assumptions that a language is a coherent system of formal units and that the task of linguistic study is to inquire into the nature of those units and their peculiar systematic arrangement, without reference to historical antecedents or comparison with other languages (Chomsky 1972).*

KEYWORDS: Linguistic Theories, Assumptions, Structural Linguistics, Language

INTRODUCTION

Research Objective

A linguistic theory should include not only a set of assumptions about the essential nature of language but also assumptions about the goals of linguistic description, assumptions about the methods by which it is appropriate to achieve these goals and assumptions about the relations between theory, description and application. In the light of this, the study focuses attention on one of the popular contemporary linguistic theories-structural linguistic theory-regarding how the theory spans out along these defining parameters of every linguistic theory.

Structural Linguistics: Brief History

Structural linguistics starts with the posthumous publication of Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* in 1916, which was compiled from lectures by his students. The book proved to be highly influential, providing the foundation for both modern linguistics and semiotics. Structuralist linguistics is normally seen as giving rise to independent European and American traditions.

European Structuralism

In Europe, Saussure influenced: (1) the Geneva School of Albert Sechehaye and Charles Bally, (2) the Prague School of Roman Jakobson and Nikolai Trubetzkoy, whose work would prove

hugely influential, particularly concerning phonology, (3) the Copenhagen School of Louis Hjelmslev, and (4) the Paris School of Algirdas Julien Greimas.Structural linguistics also had an influence on other disciplines in Europe, including anthropology, psychoanalysis and Marxism, bringing about the movement known as structura-lism.

American Structuralism

First, in America, linguist Leonard Bloomfield's reading of Saussure's course proved influential, bringing about the Bloomfieldean phase in American linguistics that lasted from the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s. Bloomfield "bracketed" all questions of semantics and meaning as largely unanswerable, and encouraged a mechanistic approach to linguistics. The paradigm of Bloomfieldean linguistics in American linguistics was challenged by the paradigm of generative grammar, initially articulated in the publication of Noam Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* in 1957.

Leonard Bloomfield (April 1, 1887 _ April 18, 1949) was an American linguist who led the development of structural linguistics in the United States during the 1930s and the 1940s. His influential textbook *Language,* published in 1933, presented a comprehensive description of American structural linguistics. He made significant contributions to Indo-European historical linguistics, the description of Austronesian languages, and description of languages of the Algonquian family.

His approach to linguistics was characterized by its emphasis on the scientific basis of linguistics, adherence to behaviorism especially in his later work, and emphasis on formal procedures for the analysis of linguistic data. The influence of Bloomfieldian structural linguistics declined in the late 1950s and 1960s as the theory of Generative Grammar developed by Noam Chomsky came to predominate.

Structuralism as a Lnguistic Theory and its Underlying Assumptions

The Kantian Background Assumptions

1. What defines the form of human experience?

a. Space and Time (a *priori* forms of *Intuition*). b. Categories (*concepts* of the *Understanding*).

2. For Kant, these concepts are fixed and universal, i.e. ahistorical.

3. Problems: Kant's categories seem arbitrary and their universality is merely assumed by Kant, not proven.

4. In a post-Darwinian world, it seems more likely that such concepts and categories of human experience are historical, i.e. subject to change - contingent.

5. In response to this shift in emphasis, Husserlian phenomenology demands that we look and see what the status of such categories are independent of our theoretical presuppositions.

6. Social scientists, who approach this issue empirically through observation and prediction, suggest that there may be significant variations in conceptual frameworks culturally and historically. But the evidence is not entirely conclusive. So, from a scientific standpoint, the issue remains open.

Assumptions about the Relations between Theory, Description and Application

The French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure studied language from a formal and theoretical point of view, i.e. as a system of signs which could be described synchronically (as a static set of relationships independent of any changes that take place over time) rather than diachronically (as a dynamic system which changes over time).

For Saussure, the basic unit of language is a sign. A sign is composed of signifier (a sound-image, or its graphic equivalent) and a signified (the concept or meaning). So, for example, a word composed of the letters p-e-a-r functions as a signifier by producing in the mind of English-speakers the concept (signified) of a certain kind of rosaceous fruit that grows on trees, that is, a pear.

According to Saussure, the relation between a signifier and a signified is arbitrary in at least two ways. First, there is no absolute reason why these particular graphic marks *(p-e-a-r)* should signify the concept pear. There is no natural connection or resemblance between the signifier and the signified (as there would be in what Saussure calls a symbol, i.e. an iconic representation such as a descriptive drawing of a pear). After all, it's not as if the word "pear" looks or sounds anything like a pear. In fact, a moment's reflection makes it clear that the connection between the signifier and the signified is due to a contingent historical convention. It didn't have to happen the way it did. In principle, the word "*pare*", "*wint*", or even "*apple*" would have worked just as well in associating a word with the concept pear! But given that the word "pear" has come to signify the concept pear in English, no one has the power to simply change it at will. In other words, the relationship between a word and a concept is arbitrary in one sense (in terms of its origin) but not in another sense (in terms of its use).

Saussure makes a second point about the arbitrariness of the sign. He points out that the relation between the sign itself (signifier/signified pair) and what it refers to (what is called the referent, i.e. the actual piece of fruit-the physical object) is also arbitrary. This claim is less plausible than the former. For example, one might object that the concept in the mind of the speaker is formed, either directly or indirectly, by actual pears. Ideally then we would expect it to be the case that the properties of actual pears would be causally related to our concept of a pearthat the characteristics of pears produce in one's mind the concept of a pear either directly through experience with pears, or indirectly through pictures of pears, descript-ions, or some such thing. Thus, the concept pear might be thought of as some basic information and set of beliefs about actual pears, e.g. what they look like, how they feel and taste, what they're good for, etc.

Saussure's way around this obvious objection is to say that his interest is in the structure of language, not the use of language. As a scientist, Saussure limited his investigation to the formal structure of language (langue), setting aside or bracketing the way that language is employed in actual speech (parole). Hence, the term structuralism. Saussure bracketed out of his investigation any concern with the real, material objects (referents) to which signs are presumably related. This bracketing of the referent is a move that enabled him to study the way a thing (language and meaning) is experienced in the mind. In this sense, his motivation was similar to Husserl's. And in the end, Saussure never offered a method for investigating how language as a system hooks up to the world of objects that lie outside language. As we shall see, this was to have far-reaching effects.

Thus, according to Saussure's structural linguistics, each sign in the system of signs which makes up a language gets its meaning only because of its difference from every other sign. The word "*pear*" has no meaning in itself or in the intention of the speaker, but only due to the fact that it differs from other possible graphic images such as *p-e-e-r, p-e-a-k, f-e-a-r, b-e-a-r*, etc. In other words, it doesn't matter how the form of the signifier varies, as long as it is different from all the other signifiers in the system (langue). To the structuralist, meaning arises from the functional differences between the elements (signs) within the system (langue).

An economic analogy helps to illustrate Saussure's theory of meaning. The signs of a linguistic system are like the coins of a monetary system or currency. Thus, a system of signs (words of a language) is analogous to a system of values.

A quarter has a certain monetary value determined by its exchange value. Quarters can be exchanged for other things because they have a designated (but flexible) value. Quarters can be used to buy goods or commodities. But they also have a fixed value in relation to other coins. So, for example, *a quarter is equal to two dimes and a nickel; it is more than a penny; it is less than a dollar*, etc., etc.

Linguistic signs also have values in relation to other signs. For example, the word "*bachelor*" can be "*exchanged*" for the term "*unmarried man*". This is, in many ways, an equal exchange. That's what it means for words to be synonymous - they have the same meaning or linguistic value. They can be substituted or exchanged for one another just as the quarter can be exchanged for two dimes and a nickel.

The foundation of structural linguistics is a *sign*, which in turn has two components: a "signified" is an idea or concept, while the "signifier" is a means of expressing the signified. The "sign" is thus the combined association of signifier and signified. Signs can be defined only by being placed in contrast with other signs, which forms the basis of what later became the paradigmatic dimension of semiotic organization (i.e., collections of terms/entities that stand in opposition). This idea contrasted drastically with the idea that signs can be examined in isolation from a language and stressed Saussure's point that linguistics must treat language synchronically.

Paradigmatic relations hold among sets of units that (in the early Saussurian renditions) exist in the mind, such as the set distinguished phonologically by variation in their initial sound *cat, bat, hat, mat, fat*, or the morphologically distinguished set *ran, run, running*. The units of a set must have something in common with one another, but they must contrast too, otherwise they could not be distinguished from each other and would collapse into a single unit, which could not constitute a set on its own, since a set always consists of more than one unit. Syntagmatic relations, in contrast, are concerned with how units, once selected from their paradigmatic sets of oppositions, are 'chained' together into structural wholes.

One further common confusion here is that syntagmatic relations, assumed to occur in time, are anchored in speech and are considered either diachronic (confusing syntagmatic with historical) or are part of parole ("everyday speech": confusing syntagmatic with performance and behaviour and divorcing it from the linguistic system), or both. Both paradigmatic and syntagmatic organizations belong to the abstract system of language *langue* (French for "Language;" or an abstract, Platonic ideal). Different linguistic theories place different weight on the study of these dimensions: all structural and generative accounts, for example, pursue

primarily characterisations of the syntagmatic dimension of the language system (syntax), while functional approaches, such as systemic linguistics, focus on the paradigmatic. Both dimensions need to be appropriately included, however. Syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations provide the structural linguist with a tool for categorization for phonology, morphology and syntax. Take morphology, for example. The   signs *cat* and *cats* are associated in the mind, producing an abstract paradigm of the word forms of *cat*. Comparing this with other paradigms of word forms, we can note that in the English language the plural often consists of little more than adding an *S* to the end of the   word. Likewise, through paradigmatic and syntagmatic analysis, we can discover the syntax of sentences. For instance, contrasting the syntagma *je dois* ("I should") and *dois je?* ("Should I?") allows us to realize that in French we only have to invert the units to turn a statement   into a question. We thus take syntagmatic evidence (difference in structural configurations)   as indicators of paradigmatic relations (e.g., in the present case: questions vs. assertions). The most detailed account of the relationship between a paradigmatic organisation of language as a motivator and classifier for syntagmatic configurations is that set out in the systemic   network organization of systemic functional grammar, where paradigmatic relations and syntagmatic configurations each have their own separate formalisation, related by realization constraints. Modern linguistic formalisms that work in terms of lattices of linguistic signs, such as head-driven phrase structure grammar, similarly begin to separate out an explicit level of paradigmatic organization.

Saussure developed structural linguistics, with its idealized vision of language, partly because he was aware that it was impossible in his time to fully understand how the human brain and mind created and related to language:

Saussure set out to model language in purely linguistic terms, free of psychology, sociology, or anthropology. That is, Saussure was trying precisely not to say what goes on in your or my mind when we understand a word or make up a sentence. [...] Saussure was trying to de-psychologize linguistics.

Ferdinand de Saussure is the originator of the 20th century reappearance of structuralism, specifically in his 1916 book Course in General Linguistics, where he focused not on the use of language (parole, or talk), but rather on the underlying system of language (langue) and called his theory semiotics. This approach focused on examining how the elements of language related to each other in the present, that is, 'synchronically' rather than 'diachronically'. Finally, he argued that linguistic signs were composed of two parts, a signifier (the sound pattern of a word, either in mental projection - as when we silently recite lines from a poem   to ourselves or in actual, physical realization as part of a speech act) and a signified (the concept or meaning of the word).

This was quite different from previous approaches which focused on the relationship between words and the things in the world they designated. By focusing on the internal constitution of signs rather than focusing on their relationship to objects in the world, Saussure made the anatomy and structure of language something that could be analyzed and studied.

Saussure's Course influenced many linguists in the period between WWI and WWII. In America, for instance, Leonard Bloomfield developed his own version of structural linguistics, as did Louis Hjelmslev in Scandinavia. In France Antoine Meillet and Émile Benveniste would continue Saussure's program. Most importantly, however, members of the Prague

School of linguistics such as Roman Jakobson and Nikolai Trubetzkoy conducted research that would be greatly influential.

The clearest and most important example of Prague School structuralism lies in phonemics. Rather than simply compile a list of which sounds occur in a language, the Prague School sought to examine how they were related. They determined that the inventory of sounds in a language could be analyzed in terms of a series of contrasts. Thus in English the words 'pat' and 'bat' are different because the /p/ and /b/ sounds contrast. The difference between them is that the vocal chords vibrate while saying a /b/ while they do not when saying a /p/. Thus in English there is a contrast between voiced and non-voiced consonants. Analyzing sounds in terms of contrastive features also opens up comparative scope - it makes clear, for instance, that the difficulty Japanese speakers have differentiating between /r/ and /l/ in English is due to the fact that these two sounds are not contrastive in Japanese. While this approach is now standard in linguistics, it was revolutionary at the time. Phonology would become the paradigmatic basis for structuralism in a number of different forms.

Assumptions about the Essential Nature of Language

The first thing to notice is that, according to structuralist theory, meaning is not a private experience, as Husserl thought, but the product of a shared system of signification. A text is to be understood as a construct to be analyzed and explained scientifically in terms of the deep-structure of the system itself. For many structuralists, this "deep-structure" is universal and innate.

If we consider the application of structuralism to art and extend the monetary analogy, we can think of paintings as comprised of many languages or sets of conventions that play a role in the exchange of signs. For example, the language of western academic painting can be contrasted with the language of African sculpture or Japanese brush painting. Just as one word in the English language is paired with a concept, so a visual image, icon, or symbol is paired with a concept or idea that it is said to "express". Such a study of signs in the most gen-eral sense, whether visual or verbal, is called semiotics. In the West, art schools are the instit-utions that have the function of passing on these visual conventions.

Secondly, we should note that in structuralism, the individual is more a product of the system than a producer of it. Language precedes us. It is the medium of thought and human expression. Thus, it provides us with the structure that we use to conceptualize our own experience.

And third, since language is arbitrary, there is no natural bond between words and things, there can be no privileged connection between language and reality. In this sense, reality is also produced by language. Thus, structuralism can be understood as a form of idealism.

It should be clear from what we've just said that structuralism undermines the claim of empiricism that what is real is what we experience. It can also be seen as an affront to common sense, esp. to the notion that a text has a meaning that is, for all intents and purposes, straightforward. This conflict with common sense, however, can be favorably compared with other historical conflicts (e.g. Copernicus' heliocentric system). In other words, things are not always what they seem. Thus, the idealist claim of structuralism can be understood in the foll-owing way: Reality and our conception of it are "discontinuous". This view has important implications, as discussed below.

According to structuralist theory, a text or utterance has a "meaning", but it's meaning is determined not by the psychological state or "intention" of the speaker, but by the deep-structure of the language system in which it occurs. In this way, the subject (individual or "author") is effectively killed off and replaced by language itself as an autonomous system of rules. Thus, structuralism has been characterized as antihumanistic in it's claim that meaning is not identical with the inner psychological experience of the speaker. It removes the human subject from its central position in the production of meaning much as Copernicus removed (de-centered) the Earth from its position at the center of the solar system. And since language pre-exists us, it is not we who speak, as Heidegger was to say, but "language speaks us".

Assumptions about the Methods of Achieving the Goals of Linguistic Description

There is a shift from a pre-structuralist to a structuralist theory of language and there are implications drawn from it by poststructuralists. A. Pre-structuralist theory assumes that there is an intimate connection between material objects in the world and the languages that we use to talk about those objects and their inter- relations.

B.Saussure puts this connection between the material object and the word in brackets, i.e. he sets it aside in order to study the very structure of language. Thus,

According to Saussure's structuralist theory of language, the meaning of a term (a word or expression) does not begin and end with the speaker's experience or intention (as it does in Husserl's theory). The act of speaking and intending presupposes a language already in place and upon which the speaker must rely in order to say anything at all. Concepts or meanings are picked out (signified) because of the differences in the network of words (sound or graphic-images) that make up the language (langue). Thus each word-each structural element of the language-finds its own relative position or node within the network of differences.

In other words, the meaning of a particular term in a language is due to its relative difference from all other terms in the language. A signified, i.e. a concept or idea, is properly understood in terms of its position relative to the differences among a range of other signifiers (words with different positions in the network (langue) and, hence, different meanings).

C. Poststructuralist theory denies the distinction between signifier and signified. According to the poststructuralist, concepts are nothing more than words. Thus, signifiers are words that refer to other words and never reach out to material objects and their interrelations. To indicate this shift in theory, the French philosopher Jacques Derrida introduces the word "différance" to indicate the relation between signifiers as one of difference and deferral.

If a word's meaning is solely the result of its difference from other words, then the meaning (the concept or signified) is not an additional thing "present" in the sign itself. On the contrary, "meaning" (if it can be called that at all) is the ever-moving play of difference from signifier to signifier; a slipping from word to word in which each word retains relations to ("traces" of) the words that differ from it.

Thus, according to poststructuralists such as Derrida, the specification of meaning is an infinite and endless process. Meaning, to some extent, always escapes one's grasp-it is always just out of reach, ungrounded, with no origin in the intention of the speaker, contrary to what Husserl thought. In other words, when a speaker uses certain words ("This is a pear"), then according to the theory she does not have a nonlinguistic object or concept in mind-there is   no additional thing or "object" outside of the language (i.e. no "meaning") that could be trans-

mitted or made "present" to her listener or reader. There is nothing there in her speech but language, i.e. a network of signification.

Thus, "meaning" is the result of a play of différance-a movement which brings about both difference and deferral. (It may help here to bring in the traditional distinction between the denotation and the connotation of a term. The connotation may be thought of as the aura of suggestion, the echo or trace of other words to which it is related by such things as association, common usage, similarity, etc. The denotation, the relation (reference) between the word and the actual thing denoted by the word, from structuralism on, is bracketed and never brought back. Its absence, however, leaves its own "traces" in the form of problems for a poststructuralist theory of language. (See below.)

So the poststructuralist draws the following consequences from the study of language:

1. Meaning is never fully present in any one signifier, but is infinitely deferred or suspended.

2. Meaning is contextual, i.e. affected by related words. 3. There is always an excess of meaning.

But there is another, more radical, consequence that can be drawn from our analysis. If the meaning associated with an expression is not present in the expression itself, and if the speaker must make his own presence felt by communication through words, then it follows that the speaker is never fully present in the act of using language. And if, as a human being, I can only think and experience a world through language, then "I" and "my presence" are as much deferred as the meanings I attempt to grasp when I try to understand and explain myself. In other words, I am never present even to myself. Rather, it is language that speaks, not a unified and autonomous ego or self. (How is this related to Kant's theory of knowledge?)

One final note. On p.60 of *Literary Theory*, Eagleton makes use of the following argument:

1. All experience depends on language. 2. Since, to have a language is to be part of a whole form of social life, there is no possibility of a private language. 3. Therefore, all experience is social experience, i.e. there are no private experiences.

This argument presupposes the notion in Saussure (and Hjelmslev in Prolegomena to a Theory of Language) that language is constitutive of experience. [4]

Notice the central role played by the premise that experience itself "depends on" or is structured by language. Without this assumption, the slide into the de-centered self is not so easily motivated. (Cf. Heidegger's notion of the de-centered self. Derrida himself says that consciousness is an effect of language.) This poststructuralist view of language undermines the theories of Descartes, Husserl and most of western metaphysical thinking about the primacy or centrality of the subject and reinforces the notion of the "decentered self" as characteristic of the human condition.

What alternatives can we imagine as a challenge to the poststructuralist position? One strategy would be to start by agreeing with Kant that we must have categories or concepts of some kind to organize human experience. But we might also disagree with Kant over the nature and a priori character of those concepts. In doing this, we could borrow from Heidegger the view that the categories of human experience are historical in nature and potentially in fluxnot fixed and universal. But then we might question Heidegger's emphasis on the linguistic

nature of these concepts by drawing on Gestalt psychology to argue for the existence of certain "struct-ural" and hard wired components of human perception and thought of a pre-linguistic nature. This is just one tentative direction one might take in challenging the view presented by the form of poststructuralism that we've been considering.

Other problems are raised if we consider language not simply as an object but as a practice. Suppose I say to you, "Open the window" in a situation where there is no window in the room. You might ask, "What do you mean?" This would be to question my "intentions" - what am I trying to accomplish by saying what I've said? Perhaps I am making a point about the fact that there is no window in the room. My paradoxical statement - inexplicable in Saussure's structuralist terms - might be meaningful to you in another practical sense. This is because understanding is recognizing what effects one might seek to bring about through the use of certain words. My obscure command might be a request that we move to a room that has a window.

In other words, speech is not just an object, it is a form of behavior, and as such it can only be understood contextually, i.e. in a situation. This realization of the pragmatics of language signals a shift from language to discourse, and a concomitant change in emphasis away from a text's meaning to its function.

In the end, we may want to say not so much that reality is linguistic but that language is real, and not necessarily all there is to human reality and experience.

Assumptions about the Goals of Linguistic Description

Two main versions of **structural linguistics** have influenced thought and discourse about language and culture since the mid-20th century: the French school, modeled on **Ferdinand de Saussure**_s concepts of linguistic signs and phonology, and the American school, based on **Noam Chomsky**'s theory of generative grammar and syntax. It's important to understand the different starting points and key concepts, and the kind of further work that these schools of thought have enabled. (That is, the *heuristic potential* of each approach, both for forming a tradition of thought and today for continued work modeled on these approaches.) For **semiotics**, the major traditions have come from the French tradition of semiology and **Claude Levi-Strauss**, and from the American tradition of **C. S. Peirce**. This overview is an abbreviated (an overly-generalized) description of the conceptual models in both fields to help students understand some of the common questions and assumptions, and also consider the areas open for productive new research.

Both the French/European and Chomskyean/American traditions attempted to map out different kinds of abstract and necessary structures that determine possible linguistic behavior-sign functions from phonology, in Saussure's starting point, and language formation through internalized abstract rules for syntax, in Chomsky's breakthrough. Chomsky inaugurated a research agenda to define a "formal grammar" by means of which any specific sentence in any natural language could be generated and understood. In Chomsky's model, a "deep struc--ture" of internalized abstract rules and codes (termed the "I-language," the internalized langua-ge rule set) enables and generates the "surface structure" of actual expressions and usage conventions in all varieties of dialects in any language (an "E-language" or external expressions).

Both schools of thought approach language (that is, the universal human capacity for language, not any specific language) and language communities (specific languages) as things that cannot be explained empirically (the data and facts of language use and extrapolations from these), but according to rules and abstract schema internalized by language users that define how a language works (that is, the models for how any language, all languages work) and allow the production and recognition of new expressions in any language.

For linguistics in the 1960s-80s, the research paradigm remained mainly at the level of sentences and phrases, and until recently was not as concerned with additional levels of cultural meaning surrounding sentences, large bodies of discourse, or the formal units of written cultural genres. Many forms of discourse studies, sociolinguistics, and semantics are part of the field of linguistics today. French and European semiology adapted Saussure's linguistic model for analysis of larger cultural formations (especially for the study of literature, anthropology, and popular culture). Unfortunately, Anglo-American and European disciplinary identities and boundaries have separated the research agendas and starting premises in areas of common concern (how human cultures use language and all kinds of meaning-systems and communicate meanings across space and time), though there are now many areas of cross-disciplinary research with many areas open for new convergence.

Semiotics focuses mainly on units of meaning and the generalizable conditions for encoding across symbolic systems (linguistic, visual, auditory), and, in general, uses language as the modeling system for other "second order" systems that function according to systematic rules (e.g., visual art, music, literature, popular media, advertising, or any meaning system). We now have methods for merging the "generative" approach of linguistics with the "networks of meaning" approach in semiotics. The next step is to develop models for a "generative grammar" and "generative semiotics" of culture, describing the rules for producing new cultural forms from our established base of meaning and content systems (in language, images, music, digital mixed media, or any transmittable cultural genre). The models developed by Peirce and Bakhtin have allowed for new research on this central question.

The Structures in *Structuralism*

The term structuralism refers the method that proceeds from a description of systems of abstract, generalizable rules that govern actual instances of expression. This starting point is considered the best explanation for how actual expressions in any symbolic form (linguistic, visual, etc.) are formed, generated, and understood.

Thus:

a language =expressions formed from an internally complete system of abstract rules =structures

In this context, structure = *a priori* rules systematically followed for any expression; that is, the structures that must be in place and presupposed before any new expression can be uttered or understood. Structures in this sense form an *a priori* (lit., from what is prior), that is, rules or codes not given in any direct experience of instances of language use, but required as the precondition for the possibility of any linguistic expression.

American linguistic theory in all of its schools and sub-schools rarely uses the term *structure* or *structuralism* (although Chomsky acknowledges the European tradition). In most descriptions of language theory and semiology, structuralism refers mainly to the theory and

philosophy arising from European and French thought, with its main developments in the 1960s.

The structural model, however, is common among several schools of thought even though the kinds of work and specific problems are different.

De Saussure_s starting point is a structural description (the abstract and necessary rules) of the learned (conventional) abstract codes that link speech sounds (phonology) and linguistic meaning; that is, how acoustic stimuli (sounds, signifiers) get mapped onto meanings (signified "content") in any language. For de Saussure, a linguistic (or any cultural meaning-unit) is a "sign," specifically defined as the arbitrary--but internally necessary--coupling of a sensory vehicle (speech sounds, printed words) and a mental concept. This model of abstract and necessary learned, conventional conditions for expression and meaning influenced linguistics, semiology (models for a grammar of meaning applicable to all cultural forms like writing, images, and music), and anthropology.

Chomsky, beginning in the 1950s-60s, takes the abstract system of both phonology and grammar as necessary, but starts with the problem of syntax, language acquisition, and language productivity. His model of syntax as the internalized rules for generating expressions solves the empirical problem of "the poverty of stimulus" when seeking to explain the rapid acquisition of grammar from few experiences; that is, trying to explain how humans learn language by induction from experienced examples (i.e., how any child in any language community from around age 3-4 is capable of generating an infinite set of new grammatically formed sentences which the child has never experienced). For Chomsky, humans have an innate capacity for language and the ability to internalize a grammar from a very small set of examples, and are soon able to generate an infinite number of new expressions in their native language. From this observation, he was able to map out a rigorous set of syntactic phrase structures capable of many transformations.

Chomsky explains in his influential book, *Language and Mind* (1968, 3rd edition, 2006). The person who has acquired knowledge of a language has internalized a system of rules that relate sound and meaning in a particular way. The linguist constructing a grammar of a language is in effect proposing a hypothesis concerning this internalized system. The grammar proposed by the linguist is an explanatory theory; it suggests an explanation for the fact that (under the idealization mentioned) a speaker of the language in question will perceive, interpret, form, or use an utterance in certain ways and not in other ways.... Continuing with current terminology, we can thus distinguish the *surface structure* of the sentence, the organization into categories and phrases that is directly associated with the physical signal, from the underlying *deep structure*, also a system of categories and phrases, but with a more abstract character. [pp. 23-25]

Where de Saussure distinguishes between *langue* and *parole* (the underlying grammar and rules of a language vs. spoken and written expressions in any concrete instance), Chomsky distinguishes between "deep structures" and "surface structures" and "competence" versus "performance." The observations here allow us go beyond the experiential data of language in use to the underlying rules everyone shares in making new expressions and participating in a system of meanings.

At all levels, then, for language to be **language**, it must be:

· rule-governed (expression and understanding reflect the same necessary code base)

· collective (shared, not private or individual)

· conventional or arbitrary (that is, not natural)

· and learned (arises from being in a language community, not spontaneous).

These assumptions form the presuppositions of all work in **semiology** or **semiotics**, which maps out ways to analyze any meaning system as a "second-order" language; that is, for semiotics to proceed, we must presuppose that the structural features of language also operate in other language-like systems (for example, visual art or music) and are assumed or incorporated in a different level of operation like the system of other linguistic levels, a computer network "protocol stack" of layered functions, or the nested and embedded functions in computer programming.

Semiotics: Basic Assumptions

Contemporary semiotic theory merges the thought of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce in many variations. Here are some of the most important starting assumptions.

1. Cultures are formed through **language**. Language is public, social, and communal, not private or personal. (If anyone used a private language, it would be very uninteresting to the rest of the world.)

2. Users of a common language form what is called a "speech community," though we use "speech" in this context to include many kinds of communication communities (subcultures, dialects, ethnic groups, social-class specific communities, etc.); any individual can participate in multiple "speech communities".

3. Language is a **system** with rules (its own internal structure). Language as a system is multi-leveled, from speech sounds, words, and sentences to longer units called **discourse**. Discourse circulates through a culture, providing meanings, values, and social identities to individuals.

4. Discourse is the level studied by most cultural theory and semiotics. All of our cultural statements--from "mainstream" and official "high culture" products to popular culture genres and emerging new cultural forms--can thus be studied as forms of discourse, parts of a larger cultural "language."

5. Communication and meaning are formed by **mediation**s--representative or symbolic vehicles that "stand for" things, meanings, and values. The mediating vehicles are called "signs". For example, words in a language, images, sounds, or other perceptible signifiers.

5.1. Thus signs and sign-systems never present a copy of "reality"--the order of things external to language and our mediated way of knowing thinning-out a socially interpreted and valued representation.

6. The study of how a society produces meanings and values in a communication system is called **semiotics**, from the Greek term *semion*, "sign". (Here "sign" has a specialized meaning, referring to our social and cultural vehicles for **signification** or meaning.) Languages, and

other symbolic systems like music and images, are called **sign systems because** they are governed by learnable and transmittable rules and conventions shared by a community.
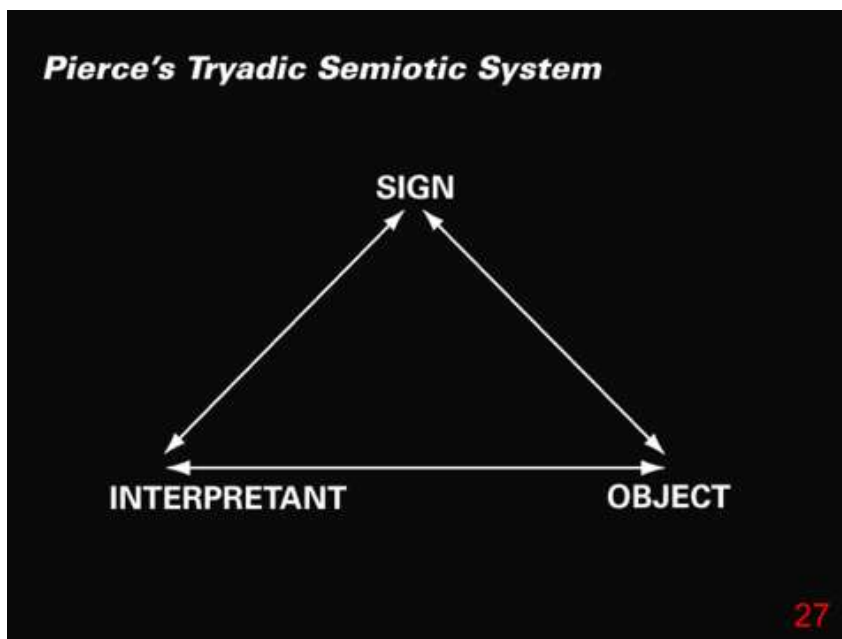
Semiotic Models: Dyadic and Triadic

Ferdinand de Saussure
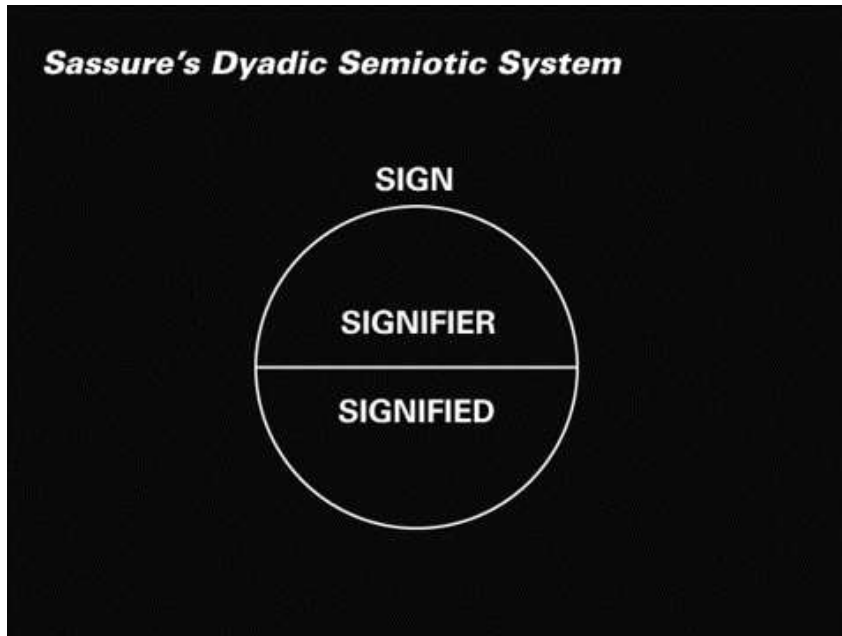
Simple two-part model of the sign: a signifier (sign vehicle; material perceptible content like sound or visual information) and the signified (a conceptual and abstract content)

De Saussure: Descriptive model

Charles Sanders Peirce: Triadic Model

Peirce used a different set of terms to describe sign functions, which for him were a conceptual process, continually unfolding and unending (what he termed "unlimited semiosis," the chain of meaning-making by new signs interpreting a prior sign or set of signs).

In Peirce's model, meaning is generated through chains of signs (becoming *interpretants*), which is parallel with Mikhail Bakhtin's model of *dialogism*, in which every cultural expression is always already a response or answer to prior expression, and which generates further responses by being *addressible* to others.

7. Semiotics isolates **sign functions** for social analysis. French semiotics distinguishes two main sign-functions, the **signifier** (the level of expression, like the bare acoustic impression of speech sounds or the visual impression of written marks and images) and the **signified** (the level of content or value, what is associated with the signifier in a language). But what allows the sign to work as a whole unit of social meaning is a **code**, the rule for combining a sensory impression with a mental content, and the basic signifiers in a language into a system of meanings.

7.1. The relation between signifier and signified is not natural, but arbitrary, part of the internal rules of a language. Having an arbitrary relation to things signified, the signs of a culture can be analyzed for how societies construct, produce, and circulate meanings and values.

8. Sign systems are often described as organized into sets of **differences** (differential values) and hierarchies that structure meanings and social values. The form that these differences take is governed by **ideology**. (For example, the large set of socially constructed meanings for things considered "masculine" and "feminine," a pervasive set of **binary oppositions**. "Masculine" and "feminine" are meaningless apart from their mutual definition in a socially encoded binary structure.) The majority of our complex social use of signs reveals a **network of relationships**, rather than simple binaries.

9. Signification is therefore a process, a product, and a social event, not something closed, static, or completed one and for all. All members of a society are interpreters or decoders.

9.1. Signification occurs in the encoding and decoding process.

9.2. Position of the interpreter/receiver of communication is inscribed in the system itself. Ability to decode and understand signification is based on **competence** with the sign system and with a larger **cultural encyclopedia** of codes and correspondences.

10. Semiotics, however, moves beyond language to study all the meaning systems in a society--fashion, advertising, popular culture genres like TV and movies, music, political discourse, all forms of writing and speech. Semiotics contributes to communication studies by providing a **method** for uncovering and analyzing how a whole system of signification   like a movie genre, fashion images, or TV works in a culture.

10.1. Semiotics, then, looks at culture broadly **as a language considered as a sign system,or the ways signs and language map onto culture as a whole.**

CONCLUSION

At the base of the structuralist position is an assumption that certain structures are innocent of meaning. Meaning is determined by the differences between the structures and, not the structures themselves(Hassan,1971).This assumption clearly plays out in the discussion above.

Saussure's underpinning standpoint in this theory is the study of the structure of the language and not the use of the language.

In the 1950s Saussure's ideas about structural linguistics were appropriated by several prominent figures in continental philosophy, anthropology, and from there were borrowed in literary theory, where they are used to interpret novels and other texts. However, several critics have charged that Saussure's ideas have been misunderstood or deliberately distorted by continen- tal philosophers and literary theorists and are certainly not directly applicable to the textual level, which Saussure himself would have firmly placed within parole and so not amenable to his theoretical constructs.

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