



*Structuralism as a concept of language  
and as linguistic methodology*

**Done by: Abdali Asel**

# Content:

- **The most important ideas and methods that developed structuralism in the XX centuries**
- **Paradigmatic and syntagmatic language research methods.**
- **Structuralism as a methodology of linguistics and other humanities.**
- **Structural-semiotic methods in semiotics, cultural studies, literary criticism, film and theater studies, theory and history fine arts.**

The term *structuralism* in reference to social science first appeared in the works of [French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss](#), who gave rise in [France](#) to the structuralist movement, influencing the thinking of other writers such as [Louis Althusser](#), the [psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan](#), as well as the [structural Marxism](#) of [Nicos Poulantzas](#), most of whom disavowed themselves as being a part of this movement.

The origins of structuralism connect with the work of [Ferdinand de Saussure](#) on [linguistics](#), along with the linguistics of the [Prague](#) and [Moscow](#) schools. In brief, Saussure's structural linguistics propounded three related concepts.<sup>[1]</sup>

- Saussure argued for a distinction between *langue* (an idealized abstraction of language) and *parole* (language as actually used in daily life). He argued that the "sign" was composed of both a "signified", an abstract concept or idea, and a "signifier", the perceived sound/visual image.
- Because different languages have different words to refer to the same objects or concepts, there is no intrinsic reason why a specific sign is used to express a given signifier. It is thus "arbitrary".
- Signs thus gain their meaning from their relationships and contrasts with other signs. As he wrote, "in language, there are only differences 'without positive terms.'"

### Definition 1

Structuralism is the intellectual movement in the humanities and social sciences in the middle of the 20th century, revealing the models that underlie cultural and social phenomena.

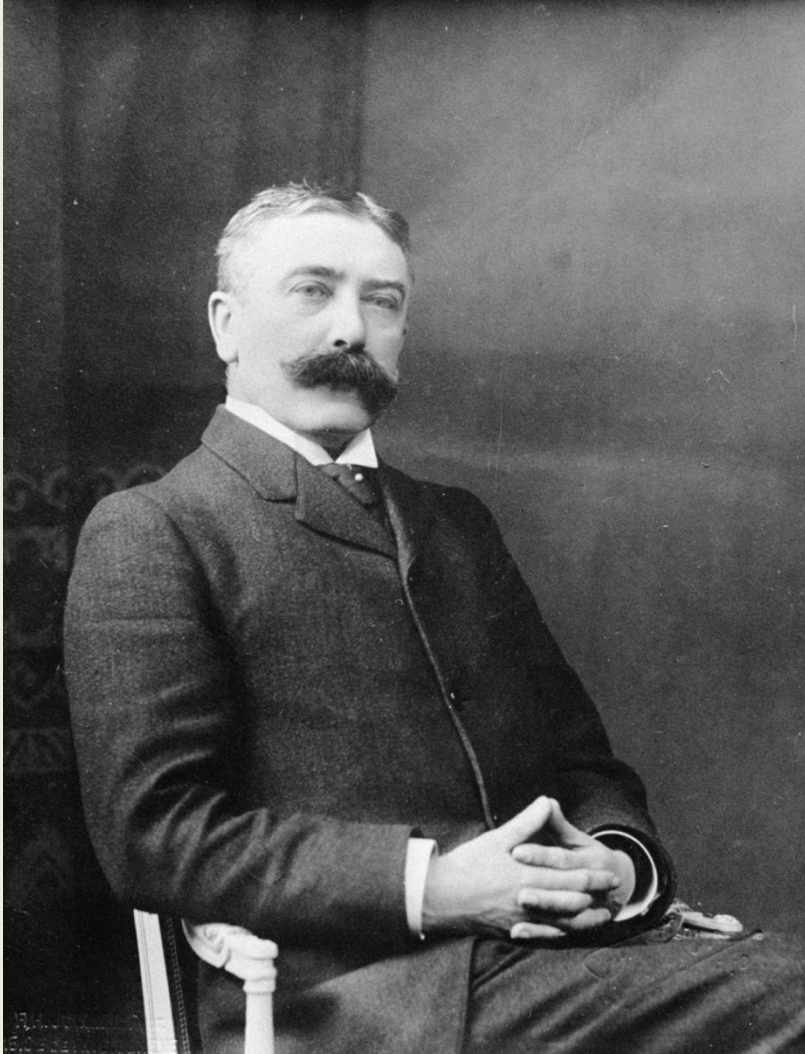
Later, this trend was distributed in other areas, extending the methods of linguistic-semiotic analysis to other areas of culture. This extension of linguistic-semiotic techniques to other areas of the humanities is not accidental, since linguistics in this period occupied the first place in humanitarian knowledge, language was understood as one of the most reliable fixators of thought and experience in any field. In addition, the general tendency of the entire 20th century was the desire for analysis and criticism of the language, and not criticism and analysis of consciousness.

## Definition 2

Structural linguistics is a discipline that studies the language that acts as its subject and is studied from the position of structure and organization in general and from the point of view of the structure of its components

Structural linguistics acts as a methodological model for structuralism. This is one of the most influential movements of the 20th century in the science of language.

- Linguists resort to a method of describing hidden oppositions, rules, structures that characterize language utterances, making them possible. Structuralists, in turn, make clothes, literature, myth, gesture an object of their study, trying to determine a hidden system of oppositions that will determine the structure of specific actions.
- The problem of structuralism is how a person perceives the world through a linguistic prism. In turn, the language grid is attacked by the world, because in the world there is what is in the language. Thus, the problem of language becomes central to structuralism.



- The founder of structuralism and modern linguistics is **F. de Saussure** (1857–1913). Linguistics is included in the scientific field, and Saussure's “**Course in General Linguistics**” has a great impact on representatives of linguistics. The merit of Saussure in linguistics is based on the fact that he deduced the difference between real acts of speech and the system that underlies them.

# The conceptual features of structuralism were finalized and finally took shape in three schools:

Prague Linguistic Circle - founded by Czech linguist Vilem Matesius in 1926, who theoretically put forward the principles of structural description of the language, and defined it as a system of means of expression, which was presented as a functional system that has its own target orientation, which led to a very true understanding of the functioning of the linguistic system.

Copenhagen Linguistic Circle - Glossematics, founded in 1931 by L. Elmslev and V. Brendahl developing Saussure's idea of a language that acts as a system of pure relations, without emphasis on the category of time.

American School of Structural Linguistics - Descriptivism, founded by L. Bloomfield in the 1920s, based not on abstract processes, but on the experience of describing a language, trying to study objects through a model of natural sciences.



- Structuralism grew out of structural linguistics, the origins of which stood Ferdinand de Saussure. French structuralists proclaimed a scientific revolution in the humanities, their reorganization and integration using linguistic methods. Structuralism declared the priority of unconscious structures over the subject and consciousness, relations over elements, synchronism over diachrony, holism over atomism. Culture was seen as a sign system, and society as a symbolic order. Structuralist ideas were applied in anthropology, psychoanalysis, semiotics, literary criticism, religious studies, history, sociology and other fields.
- In France, in the 1950s and 1960s, structuralism was an unprecedented success in the scientific community and the media, after 1968 its popularity declined, and by the 1980s had faded. Structuralism could not realize the stated goals, scientist and universalist ambitions, but had a noticeable impact on the further development of the humanities. The main figures in the history of the movement are Ferdinand de Saussure, Roman Jakobson, Claude Levy-Strauss, Roland Barth, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault.

- A) Opposition in linguistics is one of the concepts of structuralism: an essential difference in meaning between the units of the plan of expression (for example, sound contrast, which can differentiate the meanings of two words). This difference corresponds to the difference in units of the content plan.
- The concept of opposition is used to distinguish between linguistic units (invariants) and their variants: invariants are able to enter into oppositional relations with each other, and variants do not have this ability (their relations are non-positive).

B) The first experience in systematizing the types of oppositions belongs to Trubetskoy (1936), who classified them according to three criteria: 1) with respect to the opposition to the entire system of oppositions (including “dimension” and “occurrence”); 2) in relation to members of the opposition; 3) in terms of the meaning-discriminating power of the opposition.

- From the point of view of “dimension”, the opposition can be one-dimensional if the combination of features common to both its members is no longer inherent in any other member of the system (eg / t / - / d / in the German language, since these phonemes are the only ones dental ones that are disconnected in the German phonological system), or multidimensional, if the “basis for comparing” the two members of the opposition extends to other members of the same system (eg. German / b / - / d /, since the formation of a weak connection, inherent simultaneously to both members, it is also repeated in [g]).
- From the point of view of “occurrence,” the opposition can be isolated (members are in a relationship that is not found in any other opposition; for example, German / r / - / l /) or proportional (the relationship between members is identical to the relationship between members other or other oppositions; e.g. German / t / : / d / = / p / : / b / = / k / : / g /).
- From the point of view of the relationship between members, the opposition can be: 1) privative, when one member differs from another by the presence or absence of distinguishes. trait, which is called a correlative sign or brand of correlation, the members of the opposition are called featured and unmarked or marked and unmarked, respectively: / p / - / b /, / t / - / d /, etc .;
- 2) gradual, or stepwise, when the members differ from each other by different degrees of the same attribute; e.g., / a / - / o / - / u /, characterized by varying degrees of openness;
- 3) equipotent when members are logically equal (the most common type of opposition); e.g., / p / - / t /, / f / - / k /.
- In terms of volume, it will distinguish. forces of opposition can be constant if the action distinguishes. the sign is not limited and 2 units differ in all possible positions

- The term “isomorphism” is associated with the Polish linguist J. Kurylowicz, who used it to designate the structural analogies between phonic and semantic units—for example, the syllable and the sentence (both units are hierarchical structures with a central, obligatory component—for the syllable, a vowel, and for the sentence, a predicate—and marginal, optional components— consonants and other parts of the sentence, respectively).

- For a word to become fixed in a learner's mental lexicon, it needs to have associations with other words already acquired. The stronger and more stable the associations, the more firmly the word will be anchored. There are two main types of association: (a) paradigmatic and (b) syntagmatic. Examples of paradigmatic associations are: (1) musical instrument – piano / guitar / violin / drum, and (2) vehicle – car / bus / train / plane. 'Musical instrument' and 'vehicle' are hyper-ordinates, i.e. they are names of categories which help to group together the members of the category.
- Syntagmatic associations, on the other hand, refer to word combinations, such as 'play football', 'go shopping', 'film star', 'high temperature', etc. These associations are based on the ways words are used and on the patterns in which they typically occur. This type of association is related to productive vocabulary use

# Structuralism as a methodology of linguistics and other humanities

- 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.
- 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.
- 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).

**Semiotics** (also called **semiotic studies**) is the study of sign process (**semiosis**). It includes the study of signs and sign processes, indication, designation, likeness, analogy, allegory, metonymy, metaphor, symbolism, signification, and communication.

**Cultural studies** is a field of theoretically, politically, and empirically engaged **cultural** analysis that concentrates upon the political dynamics of contemporary **culture**, its historical foundations, defining traits, conflicts, and contingencies.

**Literary criticism** (or **literary studies**) is the study, evaluation, and interpretation of **literature**. Modern **literary criticism** is often influenced by **literary** theory, which is the philosophical discussion of **literature's** goals and methods.

**Theatre and Film Studies** is a liberal arts program that integrates critical analysis with experiential learning. We study performance in a range of media, cultures, and historical periods.

In European academic traditions, **fine art** is art developed primarily for aesthetics or beauty, distinguishing it from decorative art or applied art, which also has to serve some practical function, such as pottery or most metalwork.

# Conclusion

- In [sociology](#), [anthropology](#), and [linguistics](#), **structuralism** is the methodology that implies elements of human culture must be understood by way of their relationship to a broader, overarching system or structure. It works to uncover the structures that underlie all the things that humans do, think, perceive, and feel. Alternatively, as summarized by philosopher [Simon Blackburn](#), structuralism is "the belief that phenomena of human life are not intelligible except through their interrelations. These relations constitute a structure, and behind local variations in the surface phenomena there are constant laws of abstract structure".
- Structuralism is less popular today than other approaches, such as [post-structuralism](#) and [deconstruction](#). Structuralism has often been criticized for being ahistorical and for favouring deterministic structural forces over the ability of people to act.





**THANK  
YOU  
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