Saussurian Structuralism in Linguistics

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Abstract
This research article focuses on the basic assumptions about structuralism as proposed by Ferdinand Saussure through his ideas of structure, language signs, synchronic and diachronic study of language and langue and parole. It also incorporates the criticism on Saussurean thought from different intellectual quarters. The background view of the life of Saussure and his intellectual legacy and attempts have been attempted to explain in simple terms before indulging into the technicalities of the topic.

Introduction
Structuralism, since its inception has extended itself to the various other fields and disciplines due to its wider applicability. However, this article only covers its relation to the field of Linguistics where it was born. The work undertaken here is aimed at focusing the interpretation of structuralism theory as proposed and discussed by Saussure and his school of thought as well as the emergent new concepts about structuralism. The sign system in language, langue and parole and other related concepts would be taken into consideration.

Structuralism owes its origin to Ferdinand Saussure (26 November 1857 – 22 February 1913). He is renowned for his revolutionary ideas about the fields of linguistics and semiology. His founding role in semiology is only compared with the role of Charles Sanders Peirce. Saussure gave a new status to the understanding of language. He believed that language should be approached not from the view of rules and regulations for correct or incorrect expressions rather it should be looked from the angle of how people actually use it. He asserted that linguists should find out fact about language. He thought upon the language facts of meaning changes and sound changes. He discovered the internal sign system within the language. He regarded language as an integral part of human's existence. He mentioned that language permeates every action, feeling and experience of humans. It is inescapable. Humans are prisoners of the language. Unfortunately he never wrote any book. It was only through the notes of lectures his students took that we came to know his linguistic theories in detail.

Structuralism has undergone significant changes and modifications over time. It has bred post-structuralism to inform new learnings on its own system of ideas. Later the structuralism theory was extended to philosophy, psychology, sociology and anthropology. In linguistics many linguists are still called as Sausurean, anti Saussurean, post Saussurean or non Saussurean. This proves that Saussure has laid such foundation mark upon the linguistics that no new theory can escape the given orbit of Saussure.

Saussure structuralist view was controversial as well. The fundamental belifs in Sausurean structuralism is that language has a system which is made of various uinits. And these units are determined by their place in the system and not some outside point of reference such as reality (Beedham, 2005: 3). He had actually focused on phonemes which don't have meaning. However, letter, he concentrated on meaning producing units like morphemes and syntagms. He opposed in his theory the referential account of meaning. To him Language distinguishes one reality from the other. When we call a place as home it helps us distinguishing it from school. However, reality exists before language. It is later that humans have invented words for reference to various beings and materials. There is a debate however if language creates the reality or reality creates the language.
Roy Harris, the translator of his works, talks about Saussure's role in linguistics:
Language is no longer regarded as peripheral to our grasp of the world we live in, but as central to it. Words are not mere vocal labels or communicational adjuncts superimposed upon an already given order of things. They are collective products of social interaction, essential instruments through which human beings constitute and articulate their world. This typically twentieth-century view of language has profoundly influenced developments throughout the whole range of human sciences. It is particularly marked in linguistics, philosophy, psychology, sociology and anthropology. ;l
(Roy Harris, 1988)

Structuralism and Taj Mahal
Every physical and non physical entity has a structure as we all humans know and recognize. Let us take example of Taj Mahal, built by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his wife, Mumtaz Mahal. This mausoleum is made up of various beautiful white marbles. We cannot deny that every element that it is formed of has a value and part to fill the void it occupies. Suppose Prince William of Britain, visits along with his family a museum in India. He is holding his son Prince George of Cambridge during the visit. In museum, he sees a historical picture of Taj Mahal and asks to see it closer by taking it into his hands. The picture is taken out of the

show case. However, the little George tears some part of it out of naughty struggle to see it himself. The torn picture would look incomplete. But the still intact presence of Taj Mahal or any other photos from different angles can help repair the damaged parts of the historical picture. So we can infer that parts make a whole. And we can understand that a whole exists independently and can get back its part to be whole again. Hence parts of any system or whole can't claim to be an entity alone because they are just the fillers of whole. Hence, in structuralism it is the whole that is given preference over the part. Hence the whole system and not the part is important. Structuralism believes in the existence of structure in everything from material to abstract. It tries to understand every phenomena from the concrete to abstract explanation and interpretation. Meaning, however abstract it is, doesn't escape the structure phenomenon. We can say there is meaning and there is matter in our most lived experiences. For American linguist structuralist grammar is at the centre of creating meaning (Sturrock, 2008, p.30). In this way language is regarded by Structuralist to have a structure. With this view of language arise the interesting debates. If language has structure do the humans use it perfectly or use all of it? Sturrock (2008, p. 31) says that language is a structure which is realized only partially and imperfectly in those who use it.

Language versus reality and idea: background debates before Saussure
Humans have the ability to express themselves through the agency of language. There may be various factors while relating the experience or interpreting the phenomena. There would be the different working elements like reality, idea, and sound, image, activity, et cetera. Language may mislead. This skepticism about language is quite an interesting debate in philosophy. There may occur failure between the word used and the reality. Let us think that we talk about anything does our expression precisely or correctly present our idea. Does our idea confirm to the reality? Here is an example:

In previous times earth was thought to be flat. In those days its dictionary meaning was "a flat terrestrial body inhabited by the human race." Now we know this definition is the example of a geological error. We can say there was no failure between the idea of that generation and the language. But the problem was between language and reality

In English language definite article is used with the nouns as to distinguish them from other nouns of the same kind. Hence it is a way to save it disappear in the plurality of that noun. Hence houses may be many but adding *the* with the house gives it limitation: *the computer, the school, the star, the car (to pick one for reference out of many.* But when we know the singular existence of a thing or person there is no need of adding *the* in this way. Hence in English, Earnest Hemingway wrote Farewell to Arms. No adding of *the* with Hemingway or Farewell to Arms, both being proper nouns. However, Italians do employ definite article with certain proper nouns like *Dante.* This is not because there are many authors of *Divine Comedy* but because of certain queer usage of Italian language.

Roy Harris (1988: p.4) calls the former instance as factual misrepresentation *and* the latter as conceptual misrepresentation. Therefore for the nineteenth century linguists there was double gap between languages and the truth. One was between idea and the language expression and the other was between idea and the fact. It was also believed that languages were accidental byproduct of the culture. They established that there was no connection between thought and the linguistic expression. The language was arbitrary and dynamic. It keeps changing so how it could be reliable to approach the truth. How could one repose trust in rational debates of philosophy? To approach truth through human language has always been a matter of debate among philosophers. . In the same way how could linguists call it a scientific study if the language itself as a tool was unreliable scientifically? Saussure worked upon these problems and came forward with his theory on signs and abstract structures in languages.

Diachronic and Synchronic study of language
Saussure compared language with game of chase to stress on the synchronic way of studying the language. During the game of chase the state of the chase board constantly changes. But at any given point in time during the game one can easily describe the position of the board by looking at the position of the items of the board at that time. There would be no need to understand that state of the board by bringing back in mind the previous moves of the items on the chess board. This is same with the studies of the languages when choosing between diachronic or synchronic approaches.

His major concern was to reconstitute the science of linguistics as systematic study which focuses on both the structural and functional features of the language. The basic of that systematic studies, he believed, should be the synchronic analysis of the state of the language at any given point in time, the formal and functional description of the regularities and laws which govern speech. Linguists must also engage, however, in diachronic study, he argued, in the examination of the dynamic forces which produce language evolution.
  (Susan Witting, 1975, p.145)

Saussure on sign system in Language

Humans live life to make sense of their every activity and experience. And prominent linguists have termed their thinking process as an effort to create sign for everything that humans do or feel. Peirce (Peirce 1931-58, 2.302) says that humans think only in signs. Saussure exactly thought like that. He gave more attention to the synchronic study of language than the diachronic studies which were prevalent in the field of philology of that time.

Language, Saussure, defined as a twofold thing: 1) an inherited social system of arbitrary signs and 2) the active individual use of that system. Sign (word) he defines as the bond joining a concept and an acoustic image. The sign is arbitrary because the meaning of the word is not inherent in the sounds comprising that word but depend solely upon the conventional use of the word by the community.

(Waterman , 1956, p. 307)

Saussure in his book, Course in General Linguistics, forms the central ideas about his structuralism in the first six chapters. He talks about linguistic sign, which according to him is the basic unit of the language. He regards language as a large body of signs related to one another. The internal system of these signs is binary. It comprises a sound segment (signifier) and another segment, "thought" he termed as "signified". Signifier is essentially a sound image than merely a sound. A particular sound image relates to a particular thought.
We can also say that every name that we think of any activity or entity is simply a sign. A sign is composed of:

- Sound, image, flavor, act, smell, any other sensory experience termed as signifier; and
- the concept that we attach with that signifier

Saussure further thinks that how a same sign is used for different purposes. He gives the following example to understand the phenomenon:

We speak of the identity of two 8:25 p.m. Geneva to Paris trains that leave at twenty four hour intervals. We feel that it is the same train each day, yet everything, the locomotive, coaches, personnel, is probably different. Of if a street is demolished, then rebuilt, we say that it is the same street even though in a material sense perhaps nothing of the old one remains. Why can a street be completely rebuilt and still be the same? Because it does not constitute purely a material entity; it is based on certain conditions that are distinct from the materials that fit the conditions, e.g., its location, with respect to other streets. Similarly what makes the express is its hour of departure, its route, and in general every circumstance that sets it apart from other trains.
(Saussure. et al, 1974)

Langue and Parole

Saussure goes beyond the concept of sign and further thinks of two broader aspects of language. He divides language into langue and parole. The more recent comparison between the two terms can be seen in Chomsky's terms of competence and performance or that of information theorists: "code" and "message".

According to Saussure langue is the system of signs and is an integral part of linguistics. It resides in parole. Historically, parole precedes langue. If langue is situated in parole then it should be historically and culturally situated thing.
By langue he meant the forms and system of language that included grammar, syntax and spelling.

La langue is what individuals assimilate when they learn a language, a set of forms (D.Culler, 1986, p.40), or" hoard deposited by the practice of speech in speakers who belong to the same community, a grammatical system which, to all intents and purposes, exists in the mind of each speaker"(Saussure, 1974, p.40). By parole Saussure means speech acts of the people. However, the difference between the two is quite difficult. Saussure mainly relies on the psychological and social theories of Durkheim which can account for its ambiguity. Language too is a very ambiguous word when we consider the translation of *la langue* into English. The relationship between langue and parole is also complex enough.

Suppose we were to propose as a provisional definition of "English" the following: the English may be defined as the set of utterances produced by speakers of English when they are speaking English. We see the ambiguity immediately. When we say of someone that he "speaks English" (or is a "speaker of English") we do not imply that he is actually speaking English on any one occasion. It would be quite reasonable to say of a parrot, in the appropriate circumstances, that it is speaking English", but not that it "speaks English". Let us follow de Saussure, and say that all those who "speak English" (or are "speakers of English') share a particular langue and that the set of utterances which they produce when they are "speaking English" constitute instances of parole.
(Lyons, p. 51)

Therefore, langue is a matter of multi-intelligence capacity in humans. It is a collective ability of all humans. On the other hand parole is individual intonation, pitch of voice, particular set of words of the habit of an individual which makes his or her identity. These utterances or acts of speech combine the thought of the individual with the sound pattern of the words. In this way in structuralism every utterance has underlying laws which run those processes of utterances. However, the intimate correlation of those underlying laws is inexplicable as to why are

they the way they are.

The linguist Roman Jakobson suggested that we can understand language functions through the phenomena of interaction of paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes of language. However in the coming years more comprehensible terms were created to understand the difference between langue and parole like, language as a system and language in use, or competence and performance as by Chomsky.

Criticism on Saussurean Structuralism

Bakhtin gave a longer life to the legacy of Saussure by criticizing him. Bakhtin's method was polemical. He was a literary critic and philosopher. He was interested in matters of aesthetics. His approach was Marxist opposed to the Russian Formalism and Sassurean Linguistics. He said that Saussure presents language as abstract and static which ignores its social and dynamic dimensions. Saussure construed the role of language in society as irrelevant. This assertion comes from the Saussure's last sentence of the Course in General Linguistics where Saussure says that "The true and sole object of linguistics is language considered in and for itself."

This statement of Saussure earned for him the denouncement of Marxists.

However, it provided an easy target for the Marxist philosophers and the theoreticians of linguists who were keen on denouncing Saussure an icon of bourgeois intellectual order. This attitude was to be perpetuated by the subsequent literature inspired by Marxism in which it became commonplace to refer to Saussure as the repulsive pole of ideological error and intellectual sin.

(Bouissac, 2010, p. 133)

Derrida, a philosopher, rejected all the philosopher icons of his day, including Saussure whose popularity was increasing at the time.

Derida who had only a superficial knowledge of linguistics, brashly reversed the hierarchical relationship of spoken to written language that was the basis of Saussure's linguistic stand, and paradoxically claimed for writing an absolute primacy over speech.

(Bouissac, 2010, p. 133)

Conclusion

Sassure, clearly gave a new beginning to the field of linguistics. He introduced it as a science and; hence, gave it a new epistemological foundation.

The young Sassure entered linguistics at the time of a paradigm shift, at the point of divergence between the naturalistic view of language and a novel, scientific approach to languages conceived as directly and indirectly observable phenomena.

(Bouissac, 2010, p. 127)

It is unfortunate that Sassure never himself wrote a book. All we get about his views on language is either through his notes or the students who preserved his ideas while his lecture. While he was still a young man he had become a very active member of the Neogrammarian movement of his time. He just made a wave when he published his monograph on the system of Indo-European vowels. His ideas, in this regard, had to lead to the theory of phoneme. . Greimas developed semio-linguistics whose seeds he claimed to have found from the theory of signified of Saussure. Saussure would attract large attendance of students and foreign scholars in his lectures. It was due to his innovativeness in his thoughts. His ideas are not a kind of well-organized theory which can constitute an authoritative book.

Thus, when during the 1960s, in the wake of Structuralism, semiology (semiotics) became the order of the day in France, Saussure was celebrated as the founding father of the new philosophy signs that stimulated a massive wave of publications in cultural analyses from architecture to music, and from literature to film, advertisement and fashion, to name only a few of the domains that were construed as system of signs to which structural linguistic models could be productively applied.

(Bouissac, 2010, p. 132)

In this way the structuralist view of Saussure in linguistics has broader impact on various generations of linguists and scholars of diverse fields.

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Developments in Structuralism. How Structuralism Works. Saussure's Course has had many different kinds of influence on Humanities scholarship in the 20th Century. He seems to have touched on so many different concerns that his influence is indicative of a fairly general condition. An Exercise in Structuralism. Synchrony/Diachrony. A distinction must be made between the way languages appear to us (as changing through time) and as they are at any given time (governed by systematic relations not affected by time passing). Synchronic linguistics is supposed to study the systematic aspects of language rather than the diachronic aspects. This will not be the only occasion where an attempt at a scientific understanding of something finds it convenient to discount time. In fact, 'structuralism' refers to the works of structural linguists like Saussure, Jacobson, structural anthropologists like Levi Strauss and structural semioticians like Grimes and Barthes. These critics share a characteristic way of thinking about structures. They have followed the Saussurian principle of binary division like nature/culture, raw/cooked, wet/dry and noise/silence etc. Barthes denounces the romantic idea of genius 'Author-God'. If structuralism is taken to be an effort to link up the culture mind and universe, then it has suggested that culture can be understood semiotically. Besides these, Jonathan Culler in his "Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature" (1975) explains 'structuralism'. He gave the readers more important than the text. 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 stuctures of society, language, myths and even thought. Thus structuralism is a theory of general meanings: ideas have an underlying (rational) structur