

## Course Four: **European Schools in Linguistics since Ferdinand de Saussure**

### Introduction

Structuralism as a linguistic theory inspired many scholars all over the world and this influence could be clearly seen through the creation of many schools such as: Prague school, Copenhagen school and the London school.

#### 1- Prague School

The Prague school in linguistics was led by Vilém Mathesius, Nikolay Trubetskoy, Roman Jakobson and other scholars based in Prague in the decade preceding World War II. The main characteristic feature of the Prague school approach is its combination of structuralism with functionalism. Functionalism is mainly interested in the role of language as a tool of communication and structuralism main focus is the language structure. To understand the functions of language, we can consider three general kinds of function that the German psychologist Karl Bühler stated: The cognitive function, the expressive function and the conative or instrumental function.

- a- The cognitive function of language refers to its employment for the transmission of information.
- b- The expressive function is the indication of the mood or attitude of the speaker or writer.
- c- The conative function of language means its use for influencing the person one is addressing or for bringing about some practical effect.
- d- The Prague school contribution was mainly in stylistics and literary criticism. One of their key principles was that language is being used poetically or aesthetically when the expressive aspect is predominant, and that it is typical of the expressive function of language that this should be manifest in the form of an utterance and not merely in the meanings of the component words.

#### 2- The Copenhagen school

The Copenhagen School was a centre of structural linguistics founded by Louis Hjelmslev (1899-1965) and Viggo Brøndal (1887-1942).

Brøndal emphasized that formal properties of a system should be kept apart from its substance. Accordingly, Hjelmslev presented, as the key figure of Copenhagen School in the 1930s, a formal linguistic fundament, which was later known as Glossematics that means the double duality of the

linguistic sign. He formulated his linguistic theory together with Hans Jørgen Uldall as an attempt to analyze the expression (phonetics and grammar) and the meaning of a language on a coherent basis. He assumed that language wasn't the only instrument of communication (cf. the communication of deaf-mutes), and he was interested in a general theory of the signs of communication, semiotics or semiology.

The principal ideas of the school are:

- \* A language consists of content and expression.
- \* A language consists of a succession and a system.
- \* Content and expression are interconnected by commutation.
- \* There are certain relations in the succession and the system.

**Glossematics**, system of linguistic analysis based on the distribution and interrelationship of glosseemes, the smallest meaningful units of a language it might be a word, a stem, a grammatical element, a word order, or an intonation.

### 3- The London School

A British school in linguistics that was led by J.R Firth in the 1950's. The other key figures of this school are Henry Sweet, Daniel Jones, Michael Halliday, and R.A. Hudson.

The main focus of the London School is on phonology and the semantic aspect of language. It rejects the concepts of the speech collective and social experience and studies the speech of the individual person. The London School of Linguistics has a major role to play to establish linguistics as an academic discipline.

J.R. Firth is an important name in the London School of Linguistics as he contributed to the phonology with his theory of prosodic analysis that was an accurate phonetic observation (phonemic principle and relation between phonetics and phonology). Firth states:

*"It is not easy to determine what are the units of speech. Some would say speech sounds, others phonemes [...] The general opinion is, however, that words, not phones or phonemes or phoneme systems, are the units of speech." (Firth 1930:182-3)*

Moreover, meaning must be sought 'at all levels of linguistic analysis' through the context of situation. He states that there is, therefore, an association of social and personal attitude in recurrent contexts of situation with certain phonological features. Which means that to understand a statement we need to know who is speaking, how he/she is speaking and in which context or situation he/she is speaking. Thus meaning is context-dependant.