

Structuralism: A linguistics Theory

Section 1: Work of Ferdinand de Saussure

Introduction

Ferdinand de Saussure was born on November 26th, 1857 at Geneva, Switzerland, from French Protestant family who emigrated from Lorraine when the religion war on the end of 16th century. His language talent had been shown up since he was a child. In the beginning, he learned physics and alchemy at Geneva University as his family tradition, and then he learned linguistic at Leipzig from 1878 until 1899. In this university, he learned from great linguists that time, Brugmann and Hubschmann. In 1897, when he was 21 or two years before he achieved the doctor title, he proved that he was a brilliant historical linguist. His work under the title 'Memoire sur le Systeme Primitive des Voyelles dans les Langues Indo Europeennes' (The notes about ancient vowel system in Indo-European) was the proof of his talent. In such young age, de Saussure was already viewed as a great figure in historical linguistics.

Ferdinand de Saussure and Structuralism

Ferdinand de Saussure is the founder of Structuralism, he is one of the most influencing figures in linguistics. His view of linguistics is considered as 'new' because of its difference with traditional linguistics i.e. historical linguistics. It is consisted of the study of phonology principal, structural and historical linguistics, etc. After his appearance with those influential ideas, many linguists also appeared and used his ideas as the approach in linguistics, such as Leonard Bloomfield, Charles Francis Hocke, Andre Martinet, Edward Sapir, and many more. These people are as many as who oppose him in linguistics. Even so, structural linguistics is still most influencing view of linguistics in this era, and the Course in General Linguistics of Saussure has a huge role in it.

He is the first person who formulates the way to analyze the language systematically which also can be used to analyze signs system. He said that language is a system of signs to express the idea then can be compared with the written record, symbolic ceremony, manner, etc. Structuralism analyzes how a person thinks from the concept until the appearance of signs and makes the form a language system.

De Saussure' Definition of Language

In de Saussure's Course in General Linguistics, a book that summarizes his lectures at the University of Geneva from 1906 to 1911, he explained the relationship between speech and the evolution of language, investigating language as a self contained system. For him:

“A language is a system in which all the elements fit together, and which the value of any one element depends on the simultaneous coexistence of all the others.

De Saussure' s Language Characteristics

1. Language is a well-defined object in the heterogeneous mass of speech facts. It can be localized in the limited segment of the speaking-circuit where an auditory image becomes associated with a concept, it also the social side of speech, outside the individual who can never create nor modify it by himself.
2. Language is something that can be studied separately. Even dead languages are no longer spoken; its linguistic organism can be easily assimilated.
3. Whereas speech is heterogeneous, language is homogeneous. It is a system of signs in which the only essential thing is the union of meanings and sound-images.
4. Language is concrete, no less so than speaking; and this is a help in our study to of it.

Structuralism: The Linguistic Theory

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary states that structuralism in literature and language is a method which concentrates on the structure of system and the relations between its elements, rather than on the individual elements themselves.

David Crystal (1980) said in his dictionary that structuralism is a term used in linguistics referring to any approach to the analysis that pays explicit attention to the way in which linguistic features can be described in terms of structures and systems.

Sanders (2006) said that structuralism was a school of thought or a method which for several decades of the second half of twentieth century dominated some disciplines such in linguistics, literary criticism, anthropology, film and media criticism, to mention but a few, and which had a strong impact on others, from psychology and philosophy to economics.

Influence

Saussure's ideas were consonant with his compatriots such as Claude-Levi Strauss and Emile Durkheim, pioneer of new field of sociology. Saussure's influence spread all through the new social sciences in the early and mid-

twentieth century, and ultimately, to literary theory and modern cultural studies. They still exert a very strong intellectual force in all these disciplines (probably most in Linguistics and the disciplines most influenced by literary theory such as traditional Anthropology, Sociology and Psychology)