Mohamed Khider University, Biskra
Faculty of Arts and Languages
Course: linguistics   *Semester One*
Level: second year   *Teacher: Dr. SAIHI H.*

Unit two: American structuralism

Lesson 08: Post-Bloomfieldianism

Lesson 09: Post-Bloomfieldianism

Overview: Bloomfield had immense influence–the so-called Bloomfieldian era lasted for more than 20 years. During this time, linguists focused mostly on writing descriptive grammars of unwritten languages. Bloomfield and his followers were interested in the forms of linguistic items and in their distributional arrangement. Meaning, according to Bloomfield, was not observable using rigid methods of analysis, and it was therefore the weak point in language study

The 'post-Bloomfieldians' dominated American linguistics in the 1940s and 1950s. One of their most prominent members was Chomsky's teacher Zellig Harris. For American structuralists, the ultimate goal of linguistics was the perfection of the discovery procedures–a set of principles which would give them a foolsproof way to discover the linguistic units of an unwritten language. Their goal was explicitly to 'discover' a grammar by performing a set of operations on a corpus of data.

One of the most characteristic features of "post-Bloomfieldian" American structuralism, then, was its almost complete neglect of semantics. 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.

Four main post-Bloomfieldian linguists

2. **Zellig Harris (1909-1992**): Harris's Methods in Structural Linguistics (1951) established his scholarly reputation as a theorist. In subsequent work on discourse analysis, Harris suggested the use of transformations as a means of expanding his method of descriptive analysis to cross sentence boundaries. A transformation relates surface structure-sentence forms and is not a device to transform a deep structure into a surface structure, as it is in transformational grammar.
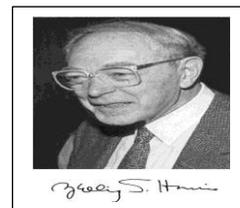
1. **Charles Francis Hockett (1916 – 2000):** Hockett proposed a widely acknowledged comparative approach of language by using a zoological method to identify the main points of connection, especially those found in animals. He invented a set of 18 design features of communication using spoken language including auditory vocal channel, broadcast transmission and directional reception, specialisation, semanticism, and arbitrariness.
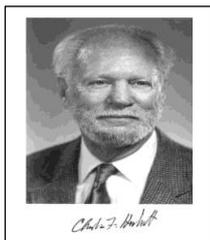
3. **Kenneth Lee Pike (1912 –2000):** Tagmemics is an outgrowth of Bloomfieldian immediate constituent analysis and of Pike's own general theory of human behaviour, described in his Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior.
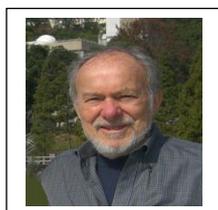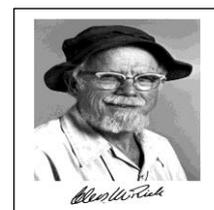
3. **Sydney MacDonald Lamb (1929):** is an originator of stratificational grammar, an outgrowth of glossematics theory. (Glossematics theory is based on glossemes, the smallest meaningful units of a language.)

Key concepts of post-Bloomfieldian era

- **Stratificational grammar**:
  System of grammatical analysis in which language is viewed as a network of relationships and linguistic structure is considered to be made up of several structural layers, or strata. Stratificational grammar derives in part from glossematics and in part from American structuralism. It was put forward in the United States as one of the principal **alternatives** to transformational grammar, but it has had much less impact elsewhere on linguistic theory and practice.

- **Tagmemics**:
  A system of linguistic analysis developed by the American linguist Kenneth L. Pike in the 1950s and applied to the description of a very large number of hitherto unrecorded languages. **Tagmemics** differs from alternative systems of grammatical analysis in that it defines the basic units of language (tagmemes) as composite elements, one part being the "**slot**," or "**function**," and the other the "**filler**," or "**class**." For example, one such **tagmeme**, at the syntactic level of analysis, might be the noun-as-subject (in which the noun is a class that "fills" the subject "slot" in a construction).