



American Structuralism




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Objectives

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- ☒ By the end of this lecture you will be able to:
1. understand American structuralism.
 2. differentiate between European and American structuralism.

American structuralism

- ❑ American structuralism appeared from a strong tendency of American anthropologists whose main interest was to study American Indian languages and cultures before their disappearance.
- ❑ Three important figures responsible for the emergence of American structuralism: Franz Boas (1858-1942), Edward Sapir (1884-1939) and Leonard Bloomfield (1887-1949)

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- ❑ Boas and Sapir maintained that languages should be described on their own. They studied languages from anthropological and psychological orientations believing that there is a connection between languages and the way of life and thought of its speakers (Linguistic relativity/Sapir-Whorf hypothesis).

Determinism : language determines/restricts human thoughts and perception

Influence : language only influences human thoughts and perception but doesn't limit or control it.

- ❑ Bloomfield tried to study language scientifically (behaviourism).

Main tenets of American structuralism

1. Linguistics is a descriptive science
2. The primary form of language is the spoken one
3. Every language is a system on its own right
4. Meaning should not be part of linguistic analysis
5. Language is observable speech, not knowledge.



Leonard Bloomfield

- ❑ His principal concern was to develop linguistics as a science
- ❑ He is considered the father of American structuralism
- ❑ He was strongly influenced by behaviourism in psychology
- ❑ Meaning is simply the relationship between a stimulus and a verbal response. No significant or interesting results could be expected from the study of meanings. Complete neglect of semantics

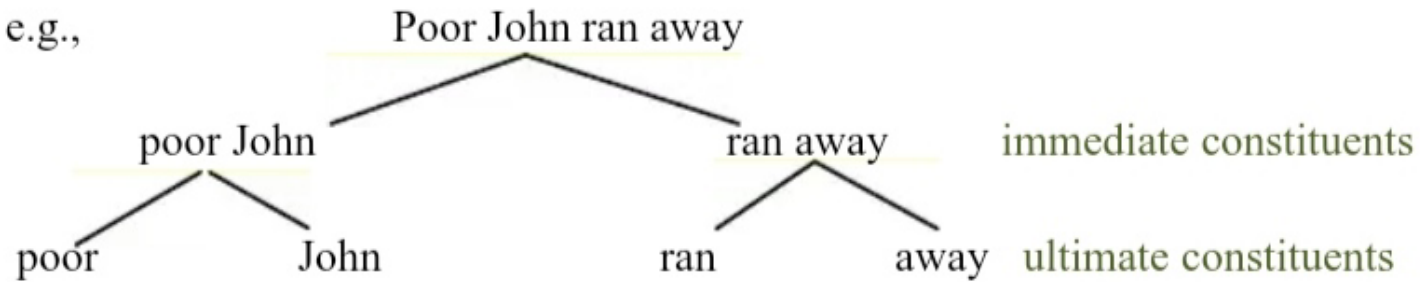


Immediate Constituent Analysis (ICA)

It is an explicit method of analysing sentences grammatically by **dividing** them into its **immediate constituents** (by using binary cutting) until obtaining its **ultimate constituents** . This technique is used to show the relationship of the main parts of a sentence to each other.

The aim of this approach is to exhaustively describe the “interrelationships” between the words in utterances and thereby to accomplish a description of “the syntax of the utterance in its whole”

e.g.,



So a sentence is not seen as a sequence of elements=poor+john+ran+away but as made up of layers of constituents

Conclusion

Difference Between American and European Structuralism

☒ Definition

American structuralism is a movement of linguistics that occurred in the US from the 1930s to 1960s. European structuralism is a movement of linguistics that developed in Europe during the 1920s.

☒ Prominent Linguists

Ferdinand de Saussure was the most prominent linguist in European structuralism. On the other hand, Leonard Bloomfield was the most prominent linguist in American structuralism.



☒ Languages

American structuralism involved the study of Native American languages. Since it was an unexplored area, linguists had to determine their rules and grammar structures first, before describing these language patterns and comparing them with English. However, European structuralism involved European languages, which had been extensively studied before.

☒ Meaning/ Semantics

In American structuralism, one can observe a complete neglect of semantics or meaning. However, in European structuralism, the study of language cannot be separated from the study of meaning.

☒ Type of Study

Moreover, European structuralism mostly involved abstract ideas and concepts. Meanwhile, American structuralism was comparatively more applied in nature.



☒ Nature

American structuralism began as an offshoot of anthropology and was influenced by behaviourism. On the other hand, European structuralism took a more pure linguistic approach.

☒ Conclusion

In brief, American structuralism and European structuralism are two main structural linguistics movements that developed independently of each other. American structuralism began as an offshoot of anthropology and was influenced by behaviourism. European structuralism, on the other hand, was directly inspired and influenced by the work of Saussure. Moreover, American structuralism focused on Native American languages, while European structuralism focused on European languages, which has clearly identifiable grammar rules and structures. Therefore, there is a distinct difference between American and European structuralism.