

Structuralism and post-structuralism research paper

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Literary work forms one of the major cultural influences and expressions of any society. Through literature, a society can posit its position on various issues and can attempt to influence others to see issues from their perspectives. Under such circumstances, any appreciation of a piece of literature requires the reader critically to examine the underlying structure that has influenced the writer. It is while viewing a piece of work with reference to the author that two major continental approaches arise. In structuralism, the various elements of people's culture (including literature) are viewed with reference to a larger over-arching system or structures. While Ferdinand de Saussure is accredited with the origin of structuralism, the Moscow, Prague, and Copenhagen linguistic schools have played a key role in the growth and spread of structuralism. Other structuralism advocates include Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roman Jakobson, Simon Blackburn, and Blending Freud. Some of the post-structuralism theorists like Derrida and Lacan initially were structuralists before they moved on. As such, some of the earlier works of Derrida and Lacan may be considered as structuralism. Simply put, structuralism is a way of looking at a culture, works of artists and languages to provide an organic account of realism and information. An organic view considers reality as an entirety; each fragment is only pertinent as far as it relates to other parts. All literary work has to be looked at as a whole, not at the elements themselves but the relationship amongst the elements. In looking at the underlying structures of signification, structuralism is associated with the notion of synchronism, syntagm, and paradigm.

In its analyses of the structures of things, structuralism tends to be

synchronic. The history of things is held to be insignificant since any study carried out of a piece of culture is with reference to a particular time. The evolutionary nature of any culture is diminished as cultures are viewed with reference to specific periods. As such, language rules are described as they were at a given period although they may have been dissimilar at a prior stage of the language. According to Jacques Lacan, structuralism is opposed to existentialism due to its focus on the individual. Such opposition is due to the immersion of the subject into the general structure as structuralism focuses on the symbolic order that de-emphasize the individual.

Another characteristic of structuralism is the notion of paradigm in languages. In analyzing words, there are usually two axis, the syntagmatic axis and the paradigmatic axis. The syntagmatic axis consists of the audible and visible expressions while in the paradigmatic axis the utterances remain connected to and controlled by the system to which they belong. Such an approach allows for the reading of the text as per the way in which systematic aspects are illustrated on the syntagmatic axis.

Post-structuralism, on the other hand, may refer to a series of work by French and continental theorist and philosophers on the instability of moral sciences due to the intricacy of human themselves. Post-structuralism may also be viewed as a response to structuralism that works against observing language as a stable and closed structure. Post-structuralism sees literature as a continuous play of signifiers which cannot be centered on a single essence or meaning . The difference in defining post-structuralism is due to the broad nature of works that may be attributed to the subject. Notable amongst the post-structuralism works are those of Jacques Derrida, Louis

Althusser, Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, and Judith Butler. While structuralism focuses on the notion that the relation that the relation between the signifier and the signified as being arbitrary, post-structuralism views the relationship as an endless play.

Any post-structuralism reading of the text is a form of deconstructing the text, reading the work to reveal the unconscious dimensions that are glossed over in ordinary reading. Therefore, deconstruction aims at uncovering the internal inconsistencies in the text. One of the characteristics of post-structuralism is the horizontal equivalence. The relation between people and the meaning of signifiers is never fixed but is always in flux. Such instability arises because of the difficulty of removing yourself from the setting. While structuralism strips all elements to the interior moment of the structure, post-structuralism stresses openness. By assuming that the connections between subjects and objects may emerge in a partially stable system, post-structuralism creates new nodal points of reference.

The distinction between structuralism and post-structuralism is of great importance in analyzing any culture. While structuralism and post-structuralism place equal emphasis on languages and the belief that all cultural structures can be represented as a coded system of meaning, there are a few differences amongst them. While structuralism posits that there exists a reality beneath ideas, post-structuralism advances the position that ideas and reality are two different concepts. In structuralism, ideas are supported by a social-economic substratum that may either be material or human. Such a framework and structures are the access nodes to the truth. In post-structuralism, a difference between reality and ideas is contrived

through ideas. As such, existence (or non-existence) of reality is taken to have no impact on the truth.

While structuralism tends to highlight the consistency of a system as that which permits meaning to be constructed, post-structuralism stresses the incoherence of the system of discourse. In structuralism, the system determines thoughts, ideas, words, and their implication. On the other hand, post-structuralism looks at the polysemy of words. Through looking at the various meanings that the word may have, post-structuralism highlights the tendency of the meanings burgeoning out of control. Therefore, the consistency view of structuralism is due to the singular meaning attached to words while the inconsistency in post-structuralism is due to polysemy of words.

When dealing with complex phenomena, structuralism attempts to strip down the phenomenal to their core elements which may then be used to explain the complexity. In their reduction, structuralism looks at the similarities in order to briefly parse the phenomenal. In deconstructing complexities, post-structuralism also attempts to reduce them to the core elements. However, instead of looking at the similarities, post-structuralism focus on the inconsistencies ignored during reduction.

The core differences between both linguistic theories of appreciation is their focus. Structuralism focuses on the system of meaning and its workings, post-structuralism, on the other hand, focuses on how the reader is operating within the structure. The difference on what both systems focuses on leads to the resultant differences as each theory require a unique approach in expounding it.

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