

Literature review on how does it relate to the fields discussed in the chapter

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As a mode of literary criticism, structuralism gained popularity in the late 1950s when the work of Ferdinand de Saussure was translated into English. In chapter 7 Structuralist Criticism of her brilliant book *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, Lois Tyson states that before Saussure, the changes of words through time were studied to analyze language. In fact, words were studied in a diachronic manner. Additionally, every word in some represented the object itself.

In the entire context of the chapter, as in to say, keep reading the rest of what she says, what does she mean by this?

On page 211 in her book, Tyson is basically defining structuralism as the study of the elements of consciousness. What she is saying that structuralism is a method in which human experience is structuralized; in search of general, principles or structures that form and underlie surface phenomena (classification), or in search of how these underlying principles are displayed by a specific “ texts” (how a text belongs to a particular class. She says that these innate structures are imposed by us from our minds (our consciousness) as a means of limiting chaos. Thus, she defines structuralism as the “ innate structures of human consciousness” that are created by us in this world. She also writes that structures or structural systems are not physical entities but conceptual systems, and she later says that a structure or structural system should have “ the following three properties: (1) wholeness, (2) transformation, and (3) self-regulation” (Tyson 211). She also says that in human consciousness, an inner observer who is experienced perceives a world of separated objects as an undivided feeling of one-self. What she means by all that she has written on page 211 is that

consciousness has a structure that exists before all knowing and before all formulation of what is known. Hence this absolute structure is the basis of all human experience. Quintessentially, the structure is universal to every human consciousness. Self-reflective consciousness emerges only through language and only language can mediate it. Language is based on the structures of consciousness and it is language that mediates them as its deep structures. The deep structures of language are correlated to the structures of consciousness. Also, her idea seems that it is possible to break conscious experience down into basic elements, just like it is possible to view a physical phenomenon as comprising of chemical structures. She also seems to be implying that human beings interact with, observe and participate in things which have no classification or structure, which she calls surface phenomenon.

Relating what Tyson has said on page 211 to the rest of her chapter, apparently she is stating that the most fundamental structure of humankind is language, and as all other structures depend on language, and as mentioned, our experienced is also mediated by language. However, it can be added, as she has written, that the structure of language comprises of sign systems. What she means by a sign system is that it is a non-linguistic behavior or object that can be analyzed as if it were a language. How can we understand what a non linguistic object is “telling” us? Just like the underlying principles or structures that Tyson refers to on page 211 of this chapter, a number of signs in a sign system have an underlying message that helps interpret that they are saying. She also states that signs consist of signifiers, which are a mental imprint or sound-image of linguistic sound.

What she is apparently trying to say is that language is seen as the most fundamental sign system by structuralist insights. She is explaining that although anything is a text that can be “read”; but in semiotics only the symbolic function of sign systems is analyzed.

In this chapter of her book *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, Lois Tyson seems to be implying that one must not concentrate on the surface phenomena. Instead of concentrating on things that life is made up of, they should concentrate on how they relate to each other. Everything is a social text that can be analyzed to reveal how surface phenomena arose from the structure of society. Everything is relationship to everything else. In a structural system, if everything is a text, and there is a single major overarching structural system, then everything that is in that system is related to each other. For instance, romance languages have a connection between each other through Latin, and Latin itself originates in Sanskrit.

Work Cited

Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.