Karavayskaya O.S.
Structuralism in linguistics

Omsk State Transport University
(Russia, Omsk)

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Abstract

The aim of the study is to identify the features of structuralism in linguistics in the second half of the XX century. The article considers structuralism as a methodology of humanitarian knowledge, discloses the concept of «linguistic structuralism», defines the features of structural linguistics in the second half of the XX century and its influence on the development of subsequent directions in linguistics.

Key words: structuralism, linguistics, humanitarian knowledge, structural analysis, synchronous language analysis

Structuralism is one of the philosophical directions of the XX century, which originated in the humanities. Linguistics, literary criticism, psychology, anthropology and many other sciences accumulated a rather large amount of material that was not structured by the 1920s. To reach the abstract-theoretical level, a method was required that would allow to order the existing knowledge. Structuralism has become such a method.

The aim of our study is to identify the features of structuralism in linguistics in the second half of the XX century. To achieve the aim, we have to solve the following tasks:

- 1) To consider structuralism as a methodology of humanitarian knowledge;
- 2) To reveal the concept of «linguistic structuralism»;
- 3) To identify the features of structural linguistics in the second half of the XX century;
- 4) To trace the influence of linguistic structuralism on the development of subsequent directions in linguistics.

Structuralism as a direction in the philosophy of science arose at the beginning of the XX century. Initially, it was widely used in the humanities.

I.T. Krasavin notes that structuralism is «a direction in the humanitarian knowledge of the XX century, associated with the identification of structure, that is, the totality of such multi-level relationships between elements of the whole that are able to remain stable under various changes and transformations» [4, p.936].

The encyclopedic dictionary of modern Western philosophy gives the following definition: «Structuralism is a set of directions in the social and humanitarian sciences of the XX century, based on the concept of structure as a whole, formed by interdependent and interdependent elements in such a way that each of them can be what it is only thanks to relationships with other elements» [5, p. 77-80].

Among the prominent representatives of structuralism are F. de Saussure, Claude Levy-Strauss, Michel Foucault, Roland Barth, Umberto Eco, Yuri Lotman, Jacques Lacan.

It is worth noting that structuralism is considered both as a direction and as a methodology. As rightly remarks N.V. Bryanik «structuralism is most often assessed not as a certain concept or theory of science, but rather as a special methodology that is specific in different areas of humanitarian knowledge. Indeed, there is no single, holistic concept of structuralism, and yet there is a certain invariant conceptual core that can be distinguished from different representatives of structuralism at different stages of its development» [1, p. 239].

One of the central concepts of this direction is the term «structure». It is the identification of the structure, its description, consideration of various relationships is one of the main goals that representatives of various fields of knowledge sought to achieve. Thus, they sought to make humanitarian knowledge accurate and rigorously scientific.

As a rule, structural analysis reveals traits that determine the structure. Then comes the definition of elements (minimal, as a rule), their comparison with each other, and classification. When identifying more complex structures, a determination is made of how to construct them from the simplest elements. The result is not only a structure, but also a set of rules and laws by which it is built.

Structuralism has become widespread in humanitarian knowledge and has become a kind of «humanitarian methodology». In addition to linguistics, structuralism methods were widely used by such sciences as literary criticism, anthropology, and psychology.

Consider the features of structuralism in linguistics.

It should be noted that F. de Saussure, the founder of modern linguistics, is rightfully considered the founder of structuralism. He was the first to consider language as a system, to study its structure. That is, the subject of the study was language (and not speech) at a certain point in time.

As rightly noted by I.T. Frolov, «structural analysis involves distraction from the development of the system, its interactions and changes at different points in time (diachronic), it focuses on the study of the internal mechanisms of a static system, the internal interactions of elements coexisting at the same time (synchronization)» [2, p. 224].

It is in linguistics that the methods of structuralism gained widespread use, and then moved on to other areas of humanitarian knowledge (psychology, anthropology, etc.)

In addition to F. de Saussure, representatives of structuralism were Czech linguists (Prague Linguistic School of V. Matesius and R. O. Jakobson), they made attempts to describe the system of language; the Russian linguistic school implemented the ideas of structuralism (N.F. Yakovlev, P.S. Kuznetsov, R.I. Avanesov, A.A. Reformatzky, V.N. Sidorov, M.P. Sukhotin created a phonological theory), despite the fact that the term «structuralism» in the USSR appeared only after 1950.

In Denmark, there was a Copenhagen linguistic circle, which developed the ideas of F. de Saussure about a synchronous and diachronic approach to language learning, examined paradigmatic and syntagmatic connections.

American structuralists founded descriptive linguistics, which accurately and formally described language. The London School of Structuralism (J. R. Förs, W. Allen, M. Kirkwood Halliday, Robert H. Robins, W. Haas) tried to comprehend and explain the individual characteristics of languages, rethought the functions of language. Structuralism is also present in literary criticism. For example, V.Ya. Propp was involved in the structural analysis of fairy tales (*Morphology of a Tale*, 1928).

Representatives of structuralism developed methods for studying linguistic phenomena by differentiating individual units of different levels (phonemes, morphemes, words, sentences); then there was their description, comparison among themselves, classification. Each unit of language had its place in the common system.

The ideas of structuralism in linguistics can be expressed as follows:

1. Language is a sign system consisting of separate elements that are interconnected with each other.
2. Elements of the lower level, phonemes, are morphemes and words. Phonemes are the minimum carriers of meaning, the basis for building the structure of the language. The highest level is the syntax, that is, the level of sentences.
3. There are other sign systems (in cultural studies, literary criticism), the study of which can use the methods of structural linguistics.

Having examined the main schools of structural linguistics, we single out its features that are characteristic of the second half of the XX century.

In the early 1950s of the twentieth century, the ideas of structuralism remained relevant and many linguistic schools (American and London) continued their research in this vein.

The specificity of structuralism of linguistics in this period is expressed in the following:

1. The study of linguistic phenomena through the prism of language. An example is the phonological theory (N.V. Yakovlev) – this is a consideration of phonemes not in the context of speech, but through the difference in the semantics of words formed by certain sounds (for example, bow – meadow). Research in this area helped to structure existing knowledge in phonetics and make the «theory of sounds» more accurate and rigorous.

2. A departure from the diachronic approach and focusing on synchronous language analysis. For example, glossematics (L. Elmslev) is essentially a synchronous approach to language learning. The purpose of this direction is to build an accurate, «mathematical», linguistic theory. Language acted as a link between the plane of content and the plane of expression.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to achieve great successes in this area, since it is impossible to use a purely linguistic method to reveal a plan for the content of the speaker's speech. But, nevertheless, glossematics made a great contribution to the development of a synchronous analysis of the language posited by F. de Saussure.

3. Paying much attention to empirical experience (descriptivism is an approach in structural linguistics). Descriptivists made a great contribution to the study of individual languages, enriched the terminological apparatus of structural linguistics.

4. The specificity of structuralism in linguistics in the second half of the XX century is the emergence of generative linguistics. This direction is associated with the name of Naom Chomsky, an American linguist, philosopher and theorist.

Taking into account the ideas of structuralism, he began to develop language models. Subsequently, his theories were set forth in the work «Syntactic Structures» (1957), which was considered a revolution in linguistics, since familiar ideas were greatly changed. This revolution is sometimes called the «Chomsky revolution» in linguistics.

Generative linguistics remained the dominant concept in the 50-70s of the XX century, then, especially in Europe, began to receive more and more widespread trends based on the cognitive experience of man.

5. Since the 1970s, on the basis of structuralism, post-structuralism has arisen, which «can be assessed, on the one hand, as a result of the consistent development of structuralism, and on the other hand, as its overcoming or denial» [3, p.569].

But, despite great successes in the field of structural linguistics, semantic analysis and the practical achievements of generative linguistics (computer translation), it has become impossible to resolve issues related to the functional side of the language (with communication) using purely linguistic methods. Structuralists studied language, not speech, and many contradictions have accumulated in this connection.

In linguistics, a special role was assigned to extralinguistic factors, as a result of which terminologies began to be studied in the sociolinguistic aspect.

Having studied the specifics of the principles of structuralism in linguistics, we can conclude that structuralism had a huge impact on the development of linguistics. First, language, as a structure, has been accurately described. Secondly, many subsequent studies relied on the ideas of structuralists (cognitive linguistics).

But most importantly, the structuralist concept of science has become a prerequisite for the emergence of linguistic concepts in the second half of the XX century. In linguistics,

several directions developed in parallel, which took their foundations in structuralism, but then separated. These are communicative-active theories of language (psycholinguistics, neuro-linguistics, cognitive linguistics).

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