

:: STRUCTURE ::**14.0 Objectives****14.1 Introduction****14.2 Structuralism****14.3 Post-structuralism****14.3.1 Important Post-Structuralists****14.4 Let's Sum Up****14.5 Check Your Progress****14.6 Key Words****14.7 Books Suggested**

- **Answers**

14.0 OBJECTIVES

- To familiarize students with the literary theoretical activities during the second half of the nineteenth century.
- To introduce the concepts of Structuralism and Post-structuralism.
- To make students explore the differences between the two concepts.

14.1 INTRODUCTION

The advent of critical theory in the post-war period, which comprised various complex disciplines like linguistics, literary criticism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, Structuralism, Postcolonialism etc., proved hostile to the liberal consensus which reigned the realm of criticism between the 1930s and `50s. Among these overarching discourses, the most controversial were the two intellectual movements, Structuralism and Post-structuralism originated in France in the 1950s and the impact of which created a crisis in English studies in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Language and philosophy are the major concerns of these two approaches, rather than history or author.

14.2 STRUCTURALISM

Structuralism which emerged as a trend in the 1950s challenged New Criticism and rejected Sartre's existentialism and its notion of radical human freedom; it focused instead how human behaviour is determined by cultural, social and psychological structures. It tended to offer a single unified approach to human life that would embrace all disciplines. Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida explored the possibilities of applying structuralist principles to literature. Jacques Lacan studied psychology in the light of structuralism, blending Freud and Saussure. Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* examined the history of science to study the structures of epistemology (though he later denied affiliation with the structuralist movement). Louis Althusser combined Marxism and Structuralism to create his own brand of social analysis.

Structuralism, in a broader sense, is a way of perceiving the world in terms of structures. First seen in the work of the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss and the literary critic Roland Barthes, the essence of Structuralism is the belief that things cannot be understood in isolation, they have to be seen in the context of larger structures they are part of. The contexts of larger structures do not exist by themselves, but are formed by our way of perceiving the world. In structuralist criticism, consequently, there is a constant movement away from the interpretation of the individual literary work towards understanding the larger structures which contain them. For example, the structuralist analysis of Donne's poem *Good Morrow* demands more focus on the relevant genre (alba or dawn song), the concept of courtly love, etc., rather than on the close reading of the formal elements of the text.

The fundamental belief of Structuralism, that all human activities are constructed and not natural or essential, pervades all seminal works of Structuralism. Beginning with the trailblazers, Levi Strauss and Barthes, the other major practitioners include A. J. Greimas, Vladimir Propp, Terence Hawkes (*Structuralism and Semiotics*), Robert Scholes (*Structuralism in Literature*), Colin MacCabe, Frank Kermode and David Lodge (combined traditional and structuralist approaches in his book *Working with Structuralism*). The American structuralists of the 1960s were Jonathan Culler and the semioticians C. S. Peirce, Charles Morris and Noam Chomsky.

With its penchant for scientific categorization, Structuralism suggests the interrelationship between “units” (surface phenomena) and “rules” (the ways in which units can be put together). In language, units are words and rules are the forms of grammar which order words.

Structuralists believe that the underlying structures which organize rules and units into meaningful systems are generated by the human mind itself and not by sense perception. Structuralism tries to reduce the complexity of human experiences to certain underlying structures which are universal, an idea which has its roots in the classicists like Aristotle who

identified simple structures as forming the basis of life. A structure can be defined as any conceptual system that has three properties: “wholeness” (the system should function as a whole), “transformation” (system should not be static), and “self-regulation” (the basic structure should not be changed).

Structuralism in its inchoate form can be found in the theories of the early twentieth century Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure (*Course in General Linguistics*, 1916), who moved away from the then prevalent historical and philological study of language (diachronic) to the study of the structures, patterns and functions of language at a particular time (synchronic). Saussure’s idea of the linguistic sign is a seminal concept in all structuralist and poststructuralist discourses. According to him, language is not a naming process by which things get associated with a word or name. The linguistic sign is made of the union of “signifier” (sound image, or “psychological imprint of sound”) and “signified” (concept). In this triadic view, words are “unmotivated signs,” as there is no inherent connection between a name (signifier) and what it designates (signified).

Saussure’s theory of language emphasizes that meanings are arbitrary and relational (illustrated by the reference to 8.25 Geneva to Paris Express in *Course in General Linguistics*; the paradigmatic chain hovel-shed-hut-house-mansion-palace, where the meaning of each is dependent upon its position in the chain; and the dyads male-female, day-night etc. where each unit can be defined only in terms of its opposite). Saussurean theory establishes that human being or reality is not central; it is language that constitutes the world. Saussure employed a number of binary oppositions in his lectures, an important one being speech/writing. Saussure gives primacy to speech, as it guarantees subjectivity and presence, whereas writing, he asserted, denotes absence, of the speaker as well as the signified. Derrida critiqued this as phonocentrism that unduly privileges presence over absence, which led him to question the validity of all centres.

Saussure’s use of the terms *Lingue* (language as a system) and *Parole* an individual utterance in that language, which is inferior to *Lingue*) gave structuralists a way of thinking about the larger structures which were relevant to literature. Structuralist narratology, a form of Structuralism espoused by Vladimir Propp, Tzvetan Todorov, Roland Barthes and Gerard Genette illustrates how a story’s meaning develops from its overall structure, (*lingue*) rather than from each individual story’s isolated theme (*parole*). To ascertain a text’s meaning, narratologists emphasize grammatical elements such as verb tenses and the relationships and configurations of figures of speech within the story. This demonstrates the structuralist shift from authorial intention to broader impersonal linguistic structures in which the author’s text (a term preferred over “work”) participates.

Structuralist critics analyse literature on the explicit model of structuralist linguistics. In their analysis they use the linguistic theory of Saussure as well as the semiotic theory developed by Saussure and the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce. According to the semiotic theory, language must be studied in itself, and Saussure suggests that the study of language must be situated within the larger province of Semiology, the science of signs.

Semiology understands that a word's meaning derives entirely from its difference from other words in the sign system of language (eg: rain not brain or sprain or rail or roam or reign). All signs are cultural constructs that have taken on their meaning through repeated, learned, collective use. The process of communication is an unending chain of sign production which Peirce dubbed "unlimited semiosis". The distinctions of symbolic, iconic and indexical signs, introduced by the literary theorist Charles Sande Peirce is also a significant idea in Semiology. The other major concepts associated with semiotics are "denotation" (first order signification) and "connotation" (second order signification).

Structuralism was anticipated by the Myth Criticism of Northrop Frye, Richard Chase, Leslie Fiedler, Daniel Hoffman, Philip Wheelwright and others which drew upon anthropological and physiological bases of myths, rituals and folk tales to restore spiritual content to the alienated fragmented world ruled by scientism, empiricism and technology. Myth criticism sees literature as a system based on recurrent patterns.

14.3 POST-STRUCTURALISM

Like Structuralism, the term Post-structuralism also refers to a political, literary, and aesthetic expansion of continental philosophy that developed in the second half of the twentieth century in a fashion parallel to certain developments in analytic philosophy. The post-structural approach is known for its efforts to offer a critical review of normative concepts in classical philosophy, and it makes use of the linguistic turn (i.e., the re-evaluation of language in theories of knowledge), Phenomenology, and Hermeneutics alike.

As the term post-structuralism suggests, its representatives have been formed especially through critical discussion with structuralists, such as Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and the so-called Russian formalists. Among the most important representatives of post-structuralist philosophy are Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995), Jean-François Lyotard (1924–1998), Jacques Lacan (1901–1981), Michel Foucault (1926–1984), and Slavoj Žižek and his school. Though many of the representatives have French backgrounds, their theories have had influence all over the world, especially in the areas of philosophy of language, literary theory, and gender studies. In the United States, the works of Richard Rorty (1931–2007) and Judith Butler are often associated with post-structuralism. What distinguishes structuralism from

post-structuralism is not always easy to identify, but as a general rule poststructuralists see their theories as based on structuralism's philosophy of language (Saussure) and anthropology (Lévi-Strauss), but they apply those insights to a wider range of topics and radicalize some of structuralism's premises.

Post-structuralists differ among themselves in their specific approaches, for some proceed historically, some hermeneutically. In addition, some base their work on discourse analysis, and others combine critical theory with psychoanalysis. If there is a basic subject matter that connects these authors in addition to their use of the linguistic turn, it is the influence of phenomenology as found in the works of Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) and Martin Heidegger (1889–1976).

14.3.1 Important Post-Structuralists

Key figures include Foucault, Žižek, and Derrida, who is the most celebrated proponent of post-structuralist thought. Although Heidegger worked in phenomenology and not in structuralism, his thought is the essential reference point for Derrida, whose theory of Deconstruction was inspired by what Heidegger calls the “destruction” of philosophy's tradition. For both Derrida and Wittgenstein, no language game constitutes the core of language and logic; no one language game can be the origin of all others.

Critics of post-structuralism tend to argue that the world consists of entities, such as objects with various properties and relations between them. These entities exist independently of one's knowledge of them. For such critics, to understand truth only semantically leads to self-contradiction, and in their view, even an ideal epistemological theory could still be wrong. Truth must therefore be understood metaphysically, as the correspondence between semantically independent facts and proposition. According to a realist philosophical position, it is not language that makes a judgement objectively true but the objective conditions of reality, and realist philosophers hold that language can reflect (instantiate) this reality. Derrida's philosophy is opposed to this view. For him, meaning shifts because of a fundamental difference (*différance*) that undermines every necessary binary structure of conceptual thought. It is this difference that deprives every conceptual definition of the chance to find stability in relation to some absolute truth-value or truth-maker. The debate reflects, in some sense, the disparity between the philosophies of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as well as the disparity between Willard Van Orman Quine (1908–2000) and the logical POSITIVISM of the Vienna Circle in the 1950s.

Michel Foucault

The transition from structuralism to post-structuralism is also reflected in the work of Michel Foucault, and especially in his method of genealogy. He tried to develop a new understanding of historical developments as

processes of rupture, deviation, and contingency. Although his research area was not Post-Structuralism, philosophy of language or hermeneutics but history, he can still be regarded as a post-structuralist insofar as he understands history not as a matter of what subjects do but as a process of almost subject-independent discourses. These discourses appear in his interpretation as gravitational fields in which humankind is somehow entrapped. In contrast to a traditional understanding of historical events, his view of history allows for no rule directed or teleological processes. Rather, history is essentially characterized by constant changes and by the reorganization of various discourses and their practices. History so interpreted is not determined by monocausal sequences of large events (wars, disasters, etc.), nor is it animated by the actions of individuals (emperors, kings, popes, the people, etc.). Instead, Foucault examines the constitutive processes of certain types of knowledge (e.g. surveillance, punishment, hygiene) as the moving forces in the respective periods that he studies.

He examines various areas of knowledge in the humanities and shows how their knowledge procedures (administration, education, classification) conceive the human subject. History, at least in an early work such as *The Order of Things*, is a process piloted not by individuals but by the order of discourse that constitutes (almost accidentally as a necessary by-product) subjects in dependence to these discourse processes and their categories. Discourse is not a tool of individuals but the frame within which subjects emerge. Going back to Friedrich Nietzsche's (1844–1900) concept of a "genealogy of morals," Foucault reflects some of the central themes of post-structuralistic thought: a criticism of philosophical realism; a questioning of the Western subject, who is decentered by the very language-frame within which he is constituted; and a critique of history as rational totality. Just as for Heidegger people are subject to language, for Foucault they are subject to administrative powers. Exposing these networks of interacting relationships between knowledge, language games, political power, and administration is what Foucault calls "archaeology." In this post-structuralist perspective, power is no longer guaranteed by a single subject, the sovereign or the elected government, but is dispersed more and more into modern biopolitical expert administrations where the border between private and public life seems ever-more indistinguishable. Foucault is interested in this nexus of knowledge and power; in his later works he calls this "biopolitics." This is his focus when he considers the system of mental illness, the criminal justice system, biopolitical delinquency, or sexuality.

Slavoj Žižek

This Slovenian philosopher is one of the leading figures of contemporary post-structuralistic thought, even though he repeatedly criticizes the epistemic premises of post-structuralist philosophy, especially in regard to the philosophy of subjectivity. Inspired by the works of Alain Badiou,

Žižek has become famous for propagating Lacan's psychoanalysis and introducing it into philosophy and cultural studies. Žižek's writings revolve around the question of identity and its interpellation by the symbolic networks of political and social institutions that act on the subject's unconscious. These interpellations can have a deeply enigmatic nature, but they exert a decisive influence on the development of the subject's most intimate desires and aspirations. Žižek's work focuses on the philosophical aspects of Lacanian theory and leaves the clinical dimensions of psychoanalysis aside. His reception of Lacan is therefore based on a separation of psychoanalysis from its ancestral medical context. This approach has contributed to his reputation, and his numerous publications are influential in a variety of disciplines, including the philosophy of the subject, critical theory, and psychoanalysis. Žižek describes being a subject along the lines of Lacan and Hegel as a process of constant struggle to react to the various identifications and (enigmatic) appeals that are presented to the subject from birth on. For Žižek, following the investigations of Louis Althusser (1918–1990), the subject is necessarily subject to ideological interpellation. Being a subject means always being subjected, and thus ideological. Hence, the ideological appeal succeeds as a condition of the constitution of subjects. Culture and politics as the normative frameworks in which subjects interact always maintain their normative claims with the help of techniques of idealization, homogenization, and the repression of internal antagonisms. These techniques are of interest for Žižek, since they generally tend to defend the political status quo and to reduce anxiety over new political (radical) options. For Žižek, living with these idealizations as unquestioned, fact-establishing certainties means underestimating the political potentialities of the subject, who is capable of setting the same techniques against what the established political doxa (rule) defines as fact.

14.4 LET'S SUM UP

The complexity and heterogeneity of structuralism, which is reflected even in the architecture of this period (eg., structuralist artefacts like Berlin Holocaust Memorial, Bank of China Tower, etc) paved the way to post-structuralism which attacked the essentialist premises of structuralism. Post-structuralism argues that in the very examination of underlying structures, a series of biases are involved. Structuralism has often been criticized for being ahistorical and for favouring deterministic structural forces over the ability of people to act. As the political turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s (especially the student uprising of May 1968) began affecting the academy, issues of power and political struggle moved to the centre of people's attention. In the 1980s deconstruction and its emphasis on the fundamental ambiguity of language—rather than its crystalline logical structure—became popular, which proved fatal to structuralism.

14.5 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1.Name the prominent Post-structuralists.

2.What is the essence of Structuralism?

3.Explain 'Signifier' and 'Signified'.

4.Name important Structuralists.

5.What is the difference between Structuralism and Post-structuralism?

14.6 KEY WORDS

Anthropology	Scientific study of Humanity
Psychoanalysis	Series of theories that deal with the unconscious mind
Hermeneutics	Theory and methodology of interpretation
Phenomenology	Philosophical study of the structures of experience and consciousness
Deconstruction	form of philosophical and literary analysis that questions the fundamental oppositions of Western philosophy

14.7 BOOKS SUGGESTED

- Habib, M.A.R. *Literary Criticism from Plato to the Present: An Introduction*. New Delhi: Blackwell, 2011.
- Selden Raman, Widdowson, Peter & Brooker, Peter. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. New Delhi: Pearson, 2006.
- Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms-Tenth Edition*. Delhi: Wadsworth, 2012.

Answers

Ans.1

Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, and Slavoj Žižek.

Ans.2

It's the belief that things cannot be understood in isolation, they have to be seen in the context of larger structures they are part of.

Ans.3

The linguistic sign is made of the union of "signifier" (sound image, or "psychological imprint of sound") and "signified" (concept). In this triadic view, words are "unmotivated signs," as there is no inherent connection between a name (signifier) and what it designates (signified).

Ans.4

Claude Levi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, A. J. Greimas, Vladimir Propp, Terence Hawkes, Robert Scholes, Colin MacCabe, Frank Kermode and David Lodge.

Ans.5

Structuralism is a theoretical approach that identifies patterns in social arrangements most notably language, while Post-structuralism builds on the insights of Structuralism. It holds all meaning to be fluid rather than universal and predictable.