

Structuralism: The Linguistic Turn in Literary Theory



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Abstract

Criticism plays a very important role along with literature. Literature and criticism complement each other. Different theories have come up if we see the tradition of criticism but there are some rule breaking theories that came into existence in 20th century. These theoretical schools shaped our ideas about literary and cultural phenomena since 20th century. 'Literary theory is the organised, systematised analysis of literary texts, the Institution of Literature and a reflection on interpretative strategies applied to these texts.' The path breaking theory which is quite different from classical criticism is New Criticism. It forms the basis to understand how literature should actually be critiqued. It diverted its attention from biographical records of an author to the properties of texts. New Criticism provided the base for Structuralism. Structuralism focuses on textual analysis paying close attention to language and form. Every theory comes in reaction to an earlier one. It also emerged as a shift away from all the critics emphasizing on the biographical records of author, analyzing text through the context, taking consideration of social, political and cultural milieu. Structuralism created a movement in philosophy and critical theory and helped the rise of new forms of thinking in other sociological contexts. It opened a domain to do the analysis of the text rather than the text writer. It unpacks the structures present in the text through textual analysis and deals it scientifically. The words on the page is mere concentration of structuralism. The text is an end in itself according to this theory. This revolutionary thought changed the priority of theorists from author to text. It elaborates newer critical theories. The aim of structuralism is to explain rather than critique, to define rather than discern.

Keywords: New Criticism, Structuralism, Diachronic And Synchronic Study, Arbitrary Relationship, Signifier, Signified, Russian Formalism, Prague School, Metaphor, Metonymy

Introduction

Structuralism is one of the most influential theory of 20th century. It emphasizes on the language and formal properties of texts. It takes into account structures and frames of the text. New Criticism can be seen as a base to structuralism. Earlier biographical accounts matter a lot. Texts are studied in the context as well as life history of author is equally important. New criticism has been associated with Cleanth Brooks, R.P.Warren, I. A. Richards, R.P. Blackmur, Monroe Beardsley etc. The major works which are associated with the new criticism are the key essay by Wimsatt and Beardsley 'the Intentional Fallacy (1954), William Empson's Seven Types of Ambiguity (1930), Cleanth Brooks' The Well Wrought Urn, Richards' Principles of literary criticism (1924) and Practical Criticism (1929).

New criticism has a new approach in itself. It is new in terms the way it sees the text. It focuses on form, style, paradox, images metaphors, ambiguity, sounds, rhythm etc. It provides autonomy to the text. The text is itself self reflexive. It doesn't need the other sources to describe itself. It is autotelic in nature. The classical criticism examines the other details like author's class, race, gender, sexual preference, economic condition, incidence of life etc. New Criticism revolves around the text only and centres on the words on page. It pays close attention to the language and form of text.

Research Problem

This paper shows

1. What structuralism is
2. How it has come up as a reaction to earlier theories.
3. The Moves of Saussurean Linguistics

4. How structuralism appropriated by other linguists

Research Methodology

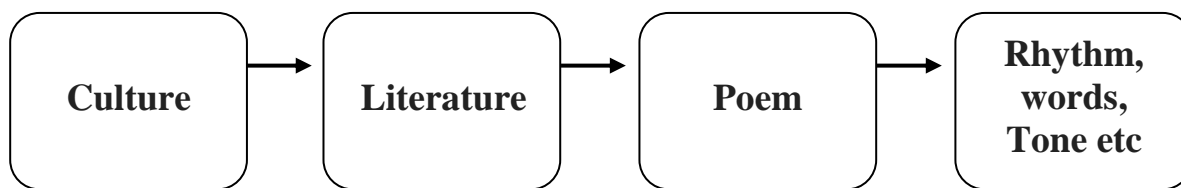
My research methodology is to understand what structuralism is by developing an insight into this theory. Comparing with traditional critical theories, Sassure's contribution has been described. Additionally how Saussurean ideas are appropriated by linguists have been shown in it.

Basic Understanding of Structuralism

We have already stated that structuralism is the extension of new criticism. Structuralism is derived from the word 'structure'. It describes that world is organised in one or other forms of structures. These structures are made up of units arranged in specific

manner. These structures have particular rules how they are organised or how they are related to each other.

Literature is a system or structure which includes several genre like novel, poem, story etc. This is a larger structure and if you talk about poem, it distinguishes itself from other structures. Poem uses several units like rhythm, words, metaphor, simile, paradoxes, contradictions, tension. So, these units are organised in a particular way to form a poem. Culture is a wider structure which comprises of literary and non literary texts (cinema, myths etc). It can be concluded that world is organised in one form or other structures as we have seen-



Structuralists analyses how these large structures can be broken into smaller ones and it interprets how these smaller structures derive meaning of the text. Structuralism basically breaks down the text into its constituents to have a clear understanding how the elements of structures are arranged to produce meaning. Voice, character, setting are the elements of the text and they are combined to show its meaning.

Saussure and Structuralism

Saussure's 1915 work 'A Course in General Linguistics' brought structuralism to forefront. He did analysis of the components of language and found out their relation to each other. Before Saussurean linguistics came into existence, there used to be the diachronic study of language. Diachronic study shows how word acquired meaning over time but Sassure brought into picture the Synchronic study of language. It shows how word is taken in the current form of language. It defines the current usage rather than tracing the roots of the word. It gives the direction how to rethink the language radically.

A) Langue and Parole

Saussure described the two main components of language as Langue and Parole. Langue is the set of rules governing language. It tells how language follows rules to combine words into language. Parole is the particular speech formed of combination of words uttered by speaker in the certain context. P K Nayar calls 'parole' as 'a live language'.

B) Relational Theory of Language

Saussure defined that language works on relational theory. Every word is in relation to the other ;not only they are related but their sole existence depends on the other word. Words are coined to differentiate itself from others. Suppose cap, tap, map are the three words. Cap is 'cap' because it is not tap or map; we can distinguish cap from other words despite these are rhyming words because meaning emerges in opposition to each other. The principle of language is the difference and opposition. We

understand a word in opposition to the other words. These differences help us to generate meaning.

C) Arbitrary Relationships between Signifier and Signified

Saussure later came to the point that there is purely arbitrary relationship in the language. Word does not consist of meaning. We attribute meaning to the word by repeated usage and conventions. Logically, we see that word is hollow in itself. It is, we who while coining words for our usage assigns particular meaning to the word. Word for Sassure is signifier and what we attributed to that word is signified. There is no relationship between signifier and signified. Signifier and signified together constitute a sign. It can be concluded that the phonetic form of word is signifier and the concept or meaning that we understand for that word is signified.

Russian Formalism

Many linguists appropriated Saussure's ideas. In Russia, a mode of literary criticism developed around theories of language and it is known as the Russian Formalism. The Moscow linguist circle of 1920 and 1930s laid the ground of Russian Formalism. It is associated with Osip Brik and Eichenbaum and Shklovsky's key essay Poetics(1990) Jacobson's Modern Russian Poetry (1921), Shklovsky's On the theory of Prose (1926,1929)and Vladimir Propp's Morphology of the Folktale (1928). Formalists think that literature is a special form of language and it has its literariness which makes this language different from every day speech. Literature, according to this formalists have certain structures and these structures are made up of devices. Its analysis is accurate and precise as science.

Literariness is actually the formal property of the text. The main purpose of Criticism is to study about those properties. Literariness has ability to just transform everyday language into such a unique way that it looks extraordinary or strange even sometimes. Ordinary things appear to be different because of this

property of transformation through literariness. This process is what Victor Shklovsky termed as Defamiliarization. It tells how reality is modified through language giving a different outlook to it. It can be one of the means to distinguish between literary and non literary texts. Sometimes, a word may refer to multiple things and thus destabilizes meaning itself.

Prague School

Along with Russian Formalism, there is Prague School of Structuralists. A Russian immigrant, Roman Jakobson was an eminent figure of Prague School. He defined that language is a coherent system fulfilling a range of functions in society. Poetic language is not intended to convey information but it draws attention to itself the way it makes utterances.

Jakobson paid attention on the two major rhetorical figures; these are metaphor and metonymy. Both these figures show the equivalent terms for words as a substitute. The substituted words can be formed by using two concepts- Selection and Association. These words are replaced with the other words by considering analogous situation. Roman Jakobson finds out that language operates through two ways selection and combination. For instance

I use	phone
	Device
	Telephone

We can select any of the words from the list of possible words. It shows vertical paradigm of options from which we have to select the appropriate one. The Other operation is to see the arrangement of words in horizontal sequence

- Phone is used by me.
- I use phone.
- Phone is used.

We have to combine the selected words in horizontal sequence to understand how they make sense

Conclusion

This paper aims to describe how structuralism is quite different from the other theories. It has started with new criticism. Later on, Sassure had given a direction to this theory. The theory of arbitrariness, relational theory and theory of systematicity help linguists and readers to understand what actually the criticism is. This theory describes how the text is autotelic and the words, form, content, devices used in text is only the parameter that is needed to be taken care of. Structuralism sees not only language but form paradoxes, contradiction,

tension metonymy, metaphor help to understand what actually the text is. This paper distinguishes structuralism as a Theory from the traditional criticism and it also gives a wide range of of scope in order to understand the text by analyzing its constituent parts. Structuralists see that the world is organised into structures and these structures are divided into basic units and these basic units are further analysed by structuralist to understand the meaning of the words written on the page.

Structuralism formulated a model of reading texts and cultural artefacts. It generates new schemes in order to unpack the elements constituting the meaning of text. It is a textual analysis paying close attention to language and form. It assumes that text would reveal its meaning as we unravel its core elements. Structuralism is an attempt to describe the language of literature in linguistic terms in order to understand what the world implies which is used in sentence. It identifies the constituents of narrative and their various combinations. It depends upon the codes used in the language. It promotes the role of reader in producing meaning. It examines the genre, the medium, the language and the register of novels, stories etc. Therefore, structuralism can be called as radical rethinking of the nature of language.

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