Good morning, all! Hope, you are doing fine. After the Introduction on Structuralism (which I delivered on last Saturday), today I shall try to make a thorough appraisal on the subject. Please don’t hesitate to put across your feedbacks on it.

\*Structuralism does not treat literature as something mysterious, inexplicable, something that can only be felt.

\*The structuralists are opposed to imposing the critic’s subjective opinion or view on literary works.

\*To them, Literature is a creation of language (Literature is a construct).

\*As a movement of thought structuralism emerged in the 1950s and 1960s in Europe.

The movement covered a number of intellectual disciplines such as anthropology, cultural studies, history, literary criticism and philosophy.

\* Structuralism deals with all such and cultural phenomena including folk and fairy tales, myths, literary texts, advertisements, films, fashions in clothes, patterns of social conducts and so on.

\*Structuralism studies the ways in which those achieve their cultural significance.

\*(It studies the systems behind all those phenomena.

\*You may wonder what is the significance of ‘structure’ in Structuralism. Some linguists use the term ‘structure’ in two senses:

(a) ‘Structure’ may be taken as synonymous with ‘system’(In regards to the linguists, it is language system) (b)’Structure’ also relates to the system of relationship of the elements of language.

\*When we talk of ‘sentence structure’, we mean the way the sentences are formed by the interrelations of their constituent parts or elements (sounds, words etc.)

\*Now, what are the constituent elements of a sentence? These are like: phrases, words, morphemes, phonemes…

\*The importance of these different elements for a sentence can be further realized when we take for example the role played by the phonemes.

\*Phonemes (different sound units) combine to form words; words combine together to form phrases and clauses, phrases and clauses combine to form sentences.

\*Certain key concepts of Structuralism have been borrowed from Saussure. His lecture notes were collected and edited by his students who later got them published as a book, ‘’Cours de Linguistique Generale’’ in 1915(Its English version was published in 1959).

\*According to Saussure, there are two distinguishing basic dimensions in the linguistic study: 1. Synchronic study; 2. Diachronic study

\*Synchronic study means the study of a language at a particular point of time, taking it as a self-contained system of communication. Diachronic study means study of language over a period of time, taking into account the changes that had occurred over time. Diachronic is a historical approach to the study of a language, while, the other is apart from the historical existence of a language.

\*Two important terms in regards to Structuralism are also: ‘langue’ and ‘parole’. These are linguistic terms distinguished by Saussure in his ’Cours de Linguistique Generale’. Langue encompasses the abstract, systematic rules and conventions of a signifying system. It is independent of individual users. Langue involves the principles of language, without which there is no meaningful utterance. Parole means speech- that is both written and spoken language as experienced in everyday life. Parole, unlike langue is as diverse and varied as the number of people who share a language.. Further, Parole changes in a number of ways and causes like time, social groups and age of users.

\*langue : system of interrelated elements; is social and communal(belonging to a speech community)

\*Parole: individual(dependent on the individual)

\*According to Saussure, language is a system of ‘signs’ that should be studied synchronically(we have already had ideas about Sig,, Signified, Signifier etc.. Yes, for your convenience of recalling, I should say- a signifier can be an audible sound-image or a visible written symbol; Signified is the though, idea or meaning behind what is said and written).

\*According to Saussure, the relation between a Signifier and its Signified is not natural or inherent (It is arbitrary). Let’s take the example of the word-‘hot’ in this context; there is no sensation of hotness in the word ‘hot’. Any other word could have conveyed the same sensation. Another example; the traffic light ‘red’ means ‘stop’. There is no natural or inherent relation between the red light and the direction-‘stop’. It gets its meaning from the system of traffic lights to which it belongs.

\*Saussure showed to the world that the society and its conventions give the values and meanings of the signs in a language.

\*Saussure speaks of 2 types of relationship between the signs:

1. Sequential 2. Selectional

\*The first is about the sequential arrangement of the elements in a sentence. In the sentence: ‘She is a teacher’, the relationships between ‘she’ and ‘is’, ‘a’ and ‘teacher’ are sequential.

\*The second is about replacing one element by another.

She is a teacher

Mr. Hazarika is a businessman

They are students

Above, the relationships between ‘she’, ‘Mr. Hazarika’ and ‘they’ and those between ‘teacher’, ‘businessman’ and ‘students’ are selectional.

\*The Russian Formalists: You all have already had some prior knowledge about the Russian Formalism. The Formalists aimed at developing what they called;”science of literature’. Jakobson was one of the forerunners in this context. For Jakobson, the aim of the science of literature was the study ‘literariness’ that is the qualities and characteristics that make a literary work ‘literary’.

\*According to the Formalists the literary devices are basically linguistic. They have more importance to the form rather than the content of literature… A critic’s function, according to them, is to study the interrelationships within a particular work or among different literary works; in other words, their formal relationships. They accepted Saussure’s concept of sequential relations.

\*Vladimir Popp: studied Russian fairy tales as structural units (a fairy tale is parole).

\*A few years later the revolution in Russia Jakobson left for Prague and joined Mukarovsky and other Czech linguists in setting up the Prague Linguistic Circle. The members of the Circle internalized the influence of Saussure and Russian Formalism. In 1929 Jakobson used the term ‘structuralism’ in a paper(written in Czech) and said that a concept can be explained by its position in the system of concepts. He treated literary text as message. He also elaborated the concepts of binary opposites present in the linguistic system.

\*Levi Strauss: Jakobson later settled in the US where he continued his research in linguistics and poetics. He treated poetics as a part of linguistics. In the US he came in contact with Claude Levi-Staruss and influenced the latter. In 1945 Levi-Starusss studied ‘kinship relations’ prevalent in different societies. In his analysis he utilized Jakobson’s concept of binary distinctive features.

\*To illustrate upon binary distinctive features, I would ask you to take the words “pin’ and ‘bin’. ‘pin’ and ‘bin’ ae different words as their meanings indicate. But /p/ in ‘pin’ can’t be understood unless it is contrasted with and differentiated from /b/ in ‘bin’.

\*Similarly, hot/cold, black/white, good/bad, male/female.. etc.

\*Levi Strauss regarded all cultural phenomena as signs. They are part of a cultural sysyeem. All human activities, beghaviours are ‘parole’, underneath there is ‘langue’.

\*Levi Strauss applied structuralist concepts in studying social customs, kinship relations. He was a cultural anthropologist, who showed the way to study the system underlying the cultural organizations and artefacts (including fairy tales) of different societies.(According to him, myth too is structured like a language).

\*The French theorist- Roland Barthes was influenced by the thoughts of Claude Levi-Strauss. He wrote a seminal book titled: ‘Anthropologic Structurale’ (Structural Anthropology).

\*Among the intellectuals who played significant roles in the emergence of literary structuralism were: Roland Barthes, Gerard Genette, Jacques Lacan, A.J. Greimas, Tzretal Todorov and Umberto Eco.

\*In the later (post-1960s) wittings, Barthes however moved towards post-structuralism.

[Well then, that’s all for today. Tomorrow, I am going to wind up this unit by referring to the opinions of Culler on the subject and by discussing the impacts, limitations and strengths of this theory. Until then, goodbye and take care!]