

**STRUCTURALISM VS. POST-STRUCTURALISM : A COMPARATIVE
ANALYSIS**

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Abstract: *Structuralism and Post-Structuralism are two of the most influential theoretical movements of the 20th century, fundamentally shaping contemporary thought in fields such as linguistics, philosophy, anthropology, and literary theory. Structuralism emerged in the early 20th century, grounded in the belief that human culture, language, and social practices are governed by underlying structures that are universal and objective. Led by figures like Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Lévi-Strauss, Structuralism sought to uncover these deep structures, which were thought to function independently of individual human experiences and historical contexts. In contrast, Post-Structuralism emerged as a critique of Structuralism in the 1960s and 1970s, challenging the idea that meaning could be stable or universal. Prominent thinkers like Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Roland Barthes argued that meaning is not fixed, but instead is fluid, subjective, and contingent upon context. Post-Structuralism rejects the notion of stable structures, highlighting the role of power, history, and culture in shaping meaning, and emphasizing the multiplicity and instability of interpretations.*

Keywords: *Structuralism ,Post-Structuralism , Binary Oppositions
Deconstruction ,Power and Knowledge , Meaning and Interpretation*

Main part

Structuralism: Core Principles and Key Concepts

Structuralism, emerging in the early 20th century, is grounded in the belief that human behavior, culture, and language can be understood through underlying structures. These structures are seen as universal, objective, and independent of individual experiences or historical context. Some of the key principles of Structuralism are:

Language as a System of Signs:

Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of language laid the foundation for Structuralism. He proposed that language is a system of signs, where each sign is composed of two parts: the signifier (the form of the word or symbol) and the signified (the concept or meaning it represents). Meaning is derived not from the sign itself, but from its relationship to other signs within the system. This idea emphasizes the importance of difference and opposition in creating meaning.

Binary Oppositions:

Structuralism relies heavily on binary oppositions to structure understanding. These oppositions (such as good/evil, light/dark, male/female) are seen as fundamental to how humans perceive and organize the world. According to structuralist theory, meaning is generated through these oppositions, with each element defined in relation to its counterpart.

Universal Structures:

Structuralists argue that beneath the surface of different cultures and languages, there are universal structures that govern human experience. These structures are thought to be inherent in human cognition and society, and by uncovering them, we can understand the common patterns that shape human behavior and culture.

Post-Structuralism: Critique and Key Concepts

Post-Structuralism emerged as a direct response to Structuralism, challenging its assumptions about fixed meaning and stable structures. The movement, associated with thinkers like Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Roland Barthes (in his later work), emphasizes the fluidity of meaning and the instability of knowledge. Key concepts of Post-Structuralism include:

Deconstruction:

Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction deconstructs the idea of stable meanings in texts. According to Derrida, meaning is never fixed, but always deferred. This process, called *différance*, refers to the endless deferral of meaning, where words can never fully capture the intended meaning because they rely on other words, creating an infinite chain of signification. Derrida argues that language is inherently unstable and that texts always contain contradictions that destabilize their supposed meaning.

Power and Knowledge:

Michel Foucault's work focuses on the relationship between power and knowledge, asserting that knowledge is always shaped by power dynamics. For Foucault, meaning is not just a product of language but is also influenced by historical and social contexts. In his analysis of institutions, Foucault highlights how power structures dictate what is considered "truth" and "knowledge," making meaning contingent upon social power relations.

The Death of the Author:

Roland Barthes, in his essay "The Death of the Author," argues that the identity and intentions of the author should not be privileged over the reader's interpretation.

Post-Structuralism shifts the focus from the creator of the text to the interpretive process itself, emphasizing that meaning is constructed by the reader, not imposed by the author.

Structuralism vs. Post-Structuralism: Comparative Analysis

View on Meaning:

Structuralism views meaning as fixed and determined by underlying structures, while Post-Structuralism argues that meaning is always in flux, deferred, and dependent on context and interpretation. Structuralists seek to uncover universal structures that determine meaning, while Post-Structuralists focus on how meaning is constructed and deconstructed through power relations, language, and context.

Role of Language:

For Structuralists, language is a neutral system of signs that reflects the structure of the world. Post-Structuralists, however, argue that language is not transparent or neutral, but is inherently unstable, with meanings shaped by social, historical, and cultural forces. Derrida's concept of *différance* highlights this instability, showing how language perpetually defers meaning.

The Concept of Truth:

Structuralism assumes that truth can be uncovered by identifying the underlying structures that govern human thought and culture. In contrast, Post-Structuralism challenges the very notion of objective truth, asserting that what is considered "truth" is always shaped by power, history, and context. Truth is seen as subjective, contingent, and ever-changing.

Conclusion:

While Structuralism and Post-Structuralism offer distinct approaches to understanding language, meaning, and culture, they are both critical to the development of modern critical theory. Structuralism's emphasis on universal structures has provided valuable insights into the ways human societies function, while Post-Structuralism's critique of fixed meanings and its focus on power, interpretation, and context have influenced contemporary debates in philosophy, literature, and cultural studies. By examining the differences and similarities between these two movements, we gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of language, meaning, and knowledge in human society.

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