

The Impact of the Linguistic Shift on the Formation of Modern Critical Thinking

أثر التحول اللساني في تشكّل التفكير النقدي الحديث

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Article abstract:

It has become an acknowledged fact that contemporary linguistic studies have enjoyed a great position in the field of human research, as it has become a scientific model to be followed for analysing various psychological, social, literary and other phenomena. Modern criticism is one of those research fields that resort in one way or another to the scientific analyses produced by linguistics. What is the nature of the relationship between linguistic principles and the arguments of the most important modernist textual critical approaches? Among the most important findings of this study is that there exists a strong relationship between linguistics and criticism. Linguistics has enabled critical approaches to focus more closely on the internal dimension of the text (phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics), thus allowing them to discern its complete structural system which reveals its true meanings.

Keywords : Linguistic Dimension; Critical Approach; Postmodernism; Textual Criticism; Linguistic Principles.

ملخص المقال:

لقد غدا مقروراً أن ما حظيت به الدراسات اللسانية المعاصرة من ازدهار وتطور، احتلت بهما مركزاً عظيماً في ميدان البحوث الإنسانية، حيث أصبحت نموذجاً علمياً يحتذى به لتحليل مختلف الظواهر النفسية، والاجتماعية، والأدبية، وغيرها. والنقد الحديث واحد من تلك المجالات البحثية الذي يلجأ بطريقة أو بأخرى إلى ما تفرزه هذه الأخيرة من تحليلات علمية. فماهية العلاقة التي تربط المبادئ اللسانية بمقولات أهم المناهج النقدية النصية الحديثة؟ من أهم ما توصلت إليه هذه الدراسة أن هناك علاقة وطيدة بين اللسانيات والنقد، فاللسانيات سمحت للمناهج النقدية بالتركيز أكثر على الجانب الداخلي للنص (صوت، صرف، نحو، دلالة)، فمكنتها من معرفة نظامها البنوي الكامل الذي يفصح عن معانيه الحقيقية.

كلمات مفتاحية: التحول اللساني; المنهج النقدي; ما بعد الحداثة، نقد النص، مبادئ لسانية.

Introduction

It is well known that linguistics has become a model of measurement and application, and an example of research into the levels of scientific phenomenon, and all sciences of all kinds have resorted in one way or another to it and its scientific results and methods of research and extraction, thus becoming the founding movement in human knowledge, both in terms of establishing methods and theorising ways to fertilise them, thus forming a reference from which all human sciences borrow and rely on its sayings.

Modern and contemporary criticism started from the linguistic sciences, and if the latter has been very concerned with the study of language itself, textual criticism has taken language as its main reference point from which it has received the most attention and care, based on this idea, critics' attention began to focus more on the linguistic aspect of the text, and since textual scholars start from different perceptions and carry different ideologies After the modern linguistic study laid its first foundations, it soon became a methodology with its own rules and origins, so critics transferred it and invested its principles, especially the linguistic ones, in the study of texts.

Given the position that criticism occupies, and because linguistics is one of its main pillars, this study aims to find out the nature of the relationship between linguistics and modern critical approaches by trying to identify the most important linguistic features that modern critical trends have recognised and on which they have built their most important critical arguments.

1. The early beginnings of modern critical approaches

The science of linguistics, shaped by Ferdinand de Saussure, reached a level of accuracy, objectivity, and breadth in the modern era that gave it a leading role among the human sciences (**Zeid, Introduction to Constructivism, 1995, p. 67**). In a short time, it offered core concepts that supported nearby fields, especially viewing language as a coordinated system and setting aside historical becoming as a primary lens. Linguistics became scientific when it distinguished comparative- historical study from descriptive study of linguistic structure, shifting from a macro view to a micro view of language (**Zeid, 1995, pp. 93–94**).

This view soon influenced criticism and changed the methods used in modern and contemporary literary study. Although literary criticism had long drawn on linguistics, modern linguistics gave it concepts that changed how texts are handled and how their linguistic structures are read (**Youssef, 2007, p. 69**). Before the twentieth century, most approaches looked for meaning outside the text; Saussure's shift treated language as internal functional relations, reducing the need to appeal to external reference or history for significance.

Based on Saussure's view, debate grew about how textual criticism relates to linguistic science more generally. In 1960, Indiana University hosted a major international symposium on style with leading linguists, critics, sociologists, and psychologists, where R. Jakobson's "Linguistics and Poetics" called for tighter links between linguistics and literature (**Cabanas, 1982, pp. 88–108**).

After this, criticism adopted new ways to read texts: structuralism used the linguistic model for description and analysis; semiotics opened new paths to meaning; and deconstruction sought what is absent in philosophical, literary, and historical discourse, together challenging pre-twentieth-century assumptions and enabling contemporary linguistic readings of discourse. The first of these critical approaches to emerge is the structuralist approach, and structuralism as a critical current originated from several sources, the first source being Russian Formalism (Fadl, 1998, pp. 37-38), and it is known that the school of Formalists

Russian formalism emerged in Russia between 1915 and 1930 (Ibrahim & Ghanemi, pp. 11-12). This school focused its concepts on the study of literary form and its connotations, and its analyses of the concept of form were very close to the concept of structure (Fadl, *Approaches to Contemporary Criticism*, 2002, p. 70). Later on, the Russian formalists became the most prominent influenced by the linguistic views of De Saussure, as they provided them with tools for an objective study of literature away from the metaphysical connotation that the symbolists drowned poetry with (Ibrahim & Ghanemi, p. 12).

Led by Shklovsky and Roman Jakobson, the formalists worked to build a science of literature from the intrinsic features of the material, language in its aesthetic function, so they oriented research toward linguistics (Ibrahim & Ghanemi, p. 12). To understand a text's aesthetic and creative language, they first sought the internal laws that govern it, the pattern, specifically the literary pattern, which differs from political, historical, or social patterns (Khali, 2002, p. 76). This reframed the linguist's task around literariness: what makes one work literary and another not (Khali, 2002, p. 76).

From here, Russian Formalism called for attention to internal relations, rejecting psychological and sociological approaches, and treated literature as a linguistic system that signals reality rather than mirrors it (Khali, 2002, pp. 42-43). It bracketed links to ideas, philosophy, and society, and kept focus on the text's inner relations, seeing literature as a symbolic image insulated from external contexts (Khali, 2002, pp. 42-43). Literary works were viewed as self-contained abstract objects, detached from time and culture (Ibrahim, *Deconstruction, Origins and Arguments*, 1990, p. 12).

A second key source was linguistics itself, especially Saussure's lectures, which helped shift from language to literature with ease. Though Saussure preferred "system" to "structure," his model, language as a system of signs organized by binaries such as language/speech, signifier/signified, synchronic/diachronic, and form/substance, prepared the ground for a structuralist approach to linguistic phenomena (Ibrahim, *Deconstruction, Origins and Arguments*, 1990, p. 42). Meaning was seen as an effect of internal relations, making external reference and the historical dimension less central and giving rise to the idea of structure (Ibrahim, 1990, p. 42). In short, Saussure's outcomes shifted criticism from social and psychological concerns to the text's internal workings.

On this basis, *Structuralisme linguistique* took shape in the mid-twentieth century as "a general approach that takes language as a construction or structure, like a geometric structure whose units are intertwined with internal independence, and whose values are united by internal relations, independent of external elements such as the author or non-linguistic context; analysis thus rests on two views: independence from external conditions and internal interconnection of units" (Bishr, 2005, p. 240).

Among the approaches linked to linguistic advances was semiotics; it emerged mid-century as structuralism began to decline under charges of abstraction and formalism. Saussure had already announced Semiology, a science of signs, arguing that the linguistic sign is part of a larger system of signs; if a word signifies a thought or object, it resembles other auditory and visual signs that point beyond themselves (**Benkrad, 2003, Introduction; Fadl, 1998, p. 97**). In this sense, linguistics belongs to a larger science that governs it, semiotics (**Fadl, 1998, p. 97**).

For De Saussure, language gets its meaning from patterns of relations among signs, not from direct links between words and objects; a sign joins a mental concept to an auditory image (signified/signifier) in a binary relation, so language is a system of arbitrary signs, and the sign's tie to the real world is not what grounds meaning (**Sarghini, 1987, p. 56**). He rejected the view of language as a mere pile of words that accumulate to point at things, insisting instead that each sign works through this binary bond rather than by joining an object to its name (**Sarghini, 1987, p. 56**).

De Saussure's call for a science of signs coincided with the work of the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce on the other side of the Atlantic, where Peirce likewise heralded a logic-based Sémiotique and declared that he "cannot study anything in this universe such as mathematics, ethics, metaphysics, gravity, thermodynamics, optics, chemistry, comparative anatomy, astronomy, acoustics, economics, history of science, speech and silence ... and the science of measurement and scales except as a semiotic pattern" (**Al-Ahmar, 2010, pp. 253, 254; Al-Halwani, 2005, p. 26**). In this view, semiotics is a theory in which a sign is anything that stands for something and represents it; the whole universe can be read as signs, and semiotics studies this sign universe (**Sarghini, 1987, pp. 56, 57**).

In addition to these two main sources, Todorov mentions further contributors who nourished the semiotic method, especially pioneers of structural linguistics such as Sapir, Troubetskoy, Jacobson, Hjelmslev, and Benveniste, who took up the semiotic perspective and worked to place language among other sign systems.

A key feature of the semiotic approach is its neutrality toward the text's external frame: it treats the text as an independent linguistic entity, a linguistic body or a system of symbols and connotations that arise and function within it, without necessary connection to what lies outside the text (**Al-Halwani, 2005, p. 29**).

Thus, semiotic analysis follows the structuralists in prioritizing the internal structure and relies mainly on structural linguistics in theory and practice, while also seeking to map the full communicative space of the text, linguistic and non-linguistic, to reveal hidden social, psychological, and cultural phenomena, including the nature of signs, their patterns, and characteristics, so as to maximize possible readings and keep the text open to further interpretations (**Al-Jilali, 2001, p. 43**).

This sets the stage for deconstructionism, associated with the French critic Jacques Derrida, who is considered among the earliest founders of deconstructionist criticism (**Taweret, 2006, p. 11**).

The deconstructionist movement challenged preceding critical traditions on the grounds that they concealed and restricted meaning, advancing instead an alternative critical framework wherein each reading constitutes a dual operation: initially establishing the text's overt significations, subsequently destabilizing them through a counter-reading that uncovers latent meanings which stand in contradiction to its explicit

declarations, thereby exposing the gap between textual articulation and textual silence. (Zine, 2021, p. 140) It overturns metaphysical habits, fixed meaning, continual truth, identity, unified self, and advances arguments such as the absence of cognitive reference centers, difference and postponement, the proliferation and infinity of signification, every reading as misreading, and the free play of functions (Al-Ruwaili & Al-Bazai, 2002, p. 108).

2. The linguistic origins of modern critical approaches

Textual approaches spread when critics who knew linguistic trends understood their scope and methods, adopted them, explained their arguments, and used their concepts in practice; the following points present the main linguistic bases for each approach.

2.1 Linguistic Origins of Structuralism:

Structuralism attempted to capitalise on a number of linguistic principles that were essential to its approach; (Azzouz, 2021, p. 172) we will select the most influential, most frequent, and most widely applied among them in its foundation:

- Whereas de Saussure posited language as the object of linguistic inquiry, structuralism extended this principle by establishing language as the fundamental object of structural textual analysis. (Soltan, Tarablusi, & Yasmin, 2024, p. 1191)
- Following Saussure's view of language autonomy, structuralism isolated the structure and analyzed it internally, away from external contexts; this closure means the structure is self-sufficient and controls its parts without needing outside aids (Taweret, 2006, p. 23; Khali, 2002, p. 83).
- In line with modern linguistics' phenomenological bent, removing the metaphysical and focusing on what is observable, structuralism aimed to turn criticism into a human science that follows the spirit of scientific method (Fadl, *Approaches to Contemporary Criticism*, 2002, p. 76).
- Saussure's inside and outside binary was central, internal linguistics studies laws that arise from language itself, while external linguistics studies relations, conditions, and environments; structuralism chose the internal pole and treated the text as a linguistic mass whose meanings come from relations among its units, moving value from historical, social, and psychological frames to what emerges from the work itself (Fadl, 2002, p. 70; Taweret, 2006, p. 24; Fadl, 1998, p. 74).
- Like linguistics, structural analysis moves from smaller to larger units, Phoneme, Morpheme, Lexim, the unfinished phrase, the Phrase, and the sentence, all by grammatical rules (Khali, 2002, p. 74).
- Structuralists used the signifier and signified binary; because the relation is arbitrary, one signifier in the text can point to many meanings, which supports structural comparison in poetry (Khali, 2002, p. 83; Taweret, 2006, p. 24).
- The concept of system or structure derives from linguistic relationality; the value of any lexical unit is determined by its relational network—its syntagmatic and paradigmatic positions—such that each component derives its significance from its location within the totality; consequently, analysis must adopt a comprehensive perspective rather than confining itself to isolated aspects such as semantics or stylistics. (Allah, 2023, p. 25)

- Following Saussure's synchronic focus, structuralism studies language as it is and judges it by its own laws, temporarily setting aside the historical axis to study literature as a system at a given moment (Fadl, 2002, p. 76).
- Based on descriptive study, structuralists raised the slogan the death of the author to stop psychological and social readings and to focus on the text itself regardless of the author or era (Fadl, **Constructivism in Literary Criticism**, 1998, p. 70).

In short, structuralism developed by investing necessary linguistic preliminaries and relied in text analysis on almost all Saussurean ideas; linguistic analysis works at the sentence, while structural analysis extends to the whole discourse (summary of the section's claims).

2.2 The linguistic origins of the semiotic approach:

Saussurean and Peircean ideas were turned by semioticians into working positions, showing the overlap between linguistics and semiotics and confirming that semiotics, in its different forms, is grounded in linguistic thinking; the following points had special influence.

- Semiotics declared the linguistic phenomenon independent from other human and rational phenomena, copying linguistics' separation of language from other sciences (Taweret, 2006, p. 115).
- Language is the richest field for semiotics; the linguistic sign is very clear, highly structured, and keeps its contextual, semantic, and communicative elements; non-linguistic signs are measured against it (Al-Bashir, p. 18).
- Semiotics studies the sign's life inside the text treated as a closed entity, and often treats the sign formally to reduce extra-textual influence (Al-Ruwaili & Al-Bazai, 2002, p. 185).
- It frees the words of the text from fixed dictionary limits, as linguistics earlier suggested, and favors new meanings that arise from context and relations (Taweret, 2006, p. 115).
- Taking Saussure's arbitrariness, semiotics studies textual events as networks of arbitrary relations that produce many connotations; the analyst brackets the external context and derives new meanings from relations among words, different from their dictionary senses (Taweret, 2006, p. 119; Fadl, 2002, p. 101).
- Semioticians stressed relational value; a unit's value appears by its proximity and contrast with other units; analysis focuses on relations among words, not on fixed lexical meanings (Taweret, 2006, p. 117).
- Semiotics benefited from Saussure's analogical method; meaning is an effect of a network of relations among elements; the external referent is set aside while internal conditions of signification are mapped (Hamdaw, 1997, p. 87).
- It pushed arbitrariness further and held that signs can hold many meanings when creators move language into new contexts; it also used the substitutionary and compositional axes across social signs, where words and material objects symbolize beyond themselves (Fadl, 2002, p. 97).
- SAs a new method, semiotics borrowed techniques and binaries from structural linguistics, especially in Roland Barthes' semiotics of signification, such as language and speech, signifier and signified, compound and system, and report and suggestion, and applied them to non-linguistic domains like clothing and food (Hamdaw, 1997, p. 86).

These points show how semiotics focused on sign systems in culture (Al-Ruwaili & Al-Bazai, 2002, p. 179), stressed multiple interpretations, and gave the reader a stronger role in uncovering hidden meanings; this set it apart from structuralism and at the same time linked it to deconstruction, as explained later in the study.

2.3 Linguistic Origins of Deconstruction

Deconstruction called for openness of meaning and multiplicity of signification through difference and deferment, and relied on autonomy and a descriptive gaze; the following summarizes what it took from linguistics and what it developed later:

- Saussurean linguistics affirmed language's independence from other knowledge, and deconstruction similarly studied texts apart from other sciences (Taweret, 2006, p. 29).
- Derrida followed Saussure in creating a set of terms, signifier and signified, arbitrariness, difference, and others, as a working lexicon (Abdullah, 1997, p. 37).
- While accepting the two-sided sign, deconstruction criticized signifier primacy; for Derrida the sign is continual postponement between signifier and signified; there is no fixed mental content, and the signified keeps shifting, which unsettles the bond (Mohammed, 1999, p. 48; al-Darkawi, 2011, p. 70).
- Deconstruction adopted the Saussurean practice of binary oppositions, constructing conceptual pairs such as presence and absence, as well as writing and difference. (Tamin, 2017, p. 175)
- It borrowed linguistics' descriptive approach to map heterogeneous textual systems and affirmed the saying there is nothing outside the text, which has a structuralist origin and was later adopted in other approaches (Taweret, 2006, p. 29; Al-Ahmar, 2010, p. 345).
- By widening the gap between signifier and signified, deconstruction multiplied meanings; reading keeps chasing deferred senses; postponement is tied to absence, so signification becomes elusive and unstable (Taweret, 2006, p. 27; al-Darkawi, 2011, pp. 70, 71).
- It used difference to negate intrinsic value and to make elements depend on relations and regularities within the pattern (al-Darkawi, 2011, p. 74).
- Deconstruction kept the Saussurean idea of the text as a self-contained linguistic structure and held that meaning arises from the free movement of signs within that structure, apart from external media (Mohammed, 1999, p. 48).
- Derrida's orientation engaged Saussure's data to critique the metaphysics of presence, centrality of the word, by stressing language as a differential system of signs and turning arbitrariness against logocentric assumptions (Abdullah, 1997, p. 37).
- It recast oppositional dichotomies under deferment; where structuralists highlighted meaning by opposition, deconstruction emphasized meaning's constant absence through differences and postponement (Taweret, 2006, p. 27).

In conclusion, deconstruction seeks to go beyond fixed meanings by letting words play freely, searching inside the text for what it does not say, and opposing the logic of the overtly declared; Derrida tracks signs of absence, God, man, truth, history, in a revolt against presence and the centrality of reason and logic. These linguistic ideas supplied these approaches with their terms and tools and helped their rise and modern applications in critical work.

Conclusion:

In conclusion to this study, the following findings can be reached:

- Structuralism attempted to capitalize on a number of linguistic principles upon which it built its approach, including treating language as the subject of textual analysis, the autonomy of the text from external contexts, and the existence of harmonious relations among the words of the text

- Semiotics focuses more closely on the linguistic sign within the text, treating it as a closed entity that does not refer beyond itself
- Deconstruction seeks, through linguistic principles, to transcend fixed significations by means of destabilization and the free play of words

Any discussion of structuralism, stylism, semiotics, or deconstruction will not be without addressing the projects of these approaches at their core; namely, the close relationship between linguistics and their critical approaches; starting from linguistic principles, modern critical approaches began to pay more attention to the internal aspect of the text, with the aim of exploding its internal structures and looking at their relationships, and their phonological, syntactic, and especially semantic functions. Linguistics has become the most important analytical approach in critical textual practices, and has become the pole of modern critical thinking in terms of its crystallisation, and has even become the key to each of its modernist approaches. In the light of structuralism, the text became a complete structural system, in semiotics, the textual structure became a sign structure, and in deconstruction, texts became a free play of words in which the reader reveals the infinity of the signifier, while the death of the author was proclaimed and replaced by a new authority, the authority of the reader who reads the text through its textual or intertextual differences.

The purpose of this talk was to show that linguistic studies and the various linguistic theories, despite their dispersion in the modern linguistic study, can be considered a major and effective contribution from which modern critical trends have benefited in all their diversity and can be utilised in any future critical work.

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