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An Analysis of Metaphorical Thinking and Its Flaws in the Synchronic and Diachronic Linguistic Sections of Saussure's Institutes of Linguistics

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ABSTRACT

The famous Swiss linguist Saussure, the founder of modern structuralist linguistics, first distinguished between diachronic linguistic and synchronic linguistics in his Course of General Linguistics. The most characteristic feature of this tutorial is that he used metaphorical thinking to clarify problems. His dualistic philosophical ideas about language are almost entirely articulated through metaphorical thinking, and some issues are even thought experiments through metaphorical thinking. The elaboration of metaphors in the process of studying tutorials is very useful for understanding knowledge. At the same time, it has been pointed out that certain metaphors make another evaluation. In this paper, we will analyze the use of two metaphors in this chapter through the tutorial chapter on Diachronic Linguistic and Synchronic Linguistics.

Keywords: Saussure; Diachronic Linguistic; Synchronic Linguistics; Metaphorical Thinking

1. Overview

One of the major contributions of Saussure, a famous Swiss linguist, is the distinction between synchronic and diachronic linguistics. Synchronic linguistics is the study of a language or multiple languages at a certain stage in their historical development, i.e., the state of the language, without considering how this state evolved, also known as static linguistics. Symbiotic linguistics concentrates on the changes that a language undergoes over a longer historical period, also known as evolutionary linguistics. Saussure was good at using metaphors to make complex and abstract concepts simple and concrete. In the Course of General Linguistics, almost every pair of concepts containing dichotomies is explained by metaphors. In particular, when distinguishing between Synchronic Linguistics and Diachronic Linguistics, the author spares no effort in using four metaphors to illustrate the concepts and relationships between the two.

1.1 Diachronic Linguistics and Symbiotic Linguistics

The static observation and study of a language system from a certain historical period is also called diachronic linguistics. Synchronic linguistics, also known as static linguistics, is a discipline of linguistics founded by Saussure, for the use of cross-methods to distinguish between two languages or whether the speech is the same, or whether two words in the same language are the same. This discipline is characterized by its insistence on independent analysis of two languages at the same stage to solve or understand the problem of similarity and difference between the two languages.

Diachronic linguistics is a branch of language study that studies the development of a language from one era to another from the perspective of vertical development. Diachronic linguistics, also known as evolutionary linguistics or historical linguistics, is a linguistic classification founded by Saussure, which refers to the study of the historical evolution of a

language carried out by most linguists before the emergence of modern linguistics, and it mainly studies the changes that a language undergoes in a certain time span (Zhang & Shi, 2003).

1.2 Difference between Synchronic and Diachronic Linguistics

Synchronicity can span different languages and even look for possibilities in coincidences, and such associations may yield new results in continued development, whereas diachronicity focuses on a single species and compares it with traces of language change before and after. Synchronicity studies the characteristics of language as it manifests itself in a particular period as well as its intrinsic connections, whereas diachronicity studies the changes in language throughout the long course of history, the similarities, and differences with the characteristics of language in other eras. Synchronic linguistics is the study of the logical and psychological relations between elements that exist simultaneously and constitute a system perceived by the same collective consciousness. Diachronic linguistics is the study of the relations between successive elements that are not perceived by the same collective consciousness, that replace one another and that do not constitute a system among themselves (Saussure, 1980). The object of diachronic linguistics is not everything that exists at the same time, but only all the facts equivalent to each language, which can be divided into dialects and subdialects if necessary. Not only does diachronic linguistics have no such need, but it does not allow for such a specification, and it considers elements that do not necessarily belong to the same language, and it is the succession of diachronic facts and their spatial value-added that creates the divergence of languages (Saussure, 1980).

While the distinction between the two is important in linguistic research, many researchers today also point out that the differences and connections between the two must be viewed from the perspective of material dialectics. An overly absolute understanding of the dichotomy between synchronic and temporal linguistics must be avoided. In linguistic research, the use of synchronicity and chronolinguistics must be considered and differentiated from each other to avoid violating the scientific rules of linguistic research (Pan, 2009).

1.3 The Significance of the Distinction between Synchronic and Diachronic Linguistics

Saussure's distinction between synchronic and diachronic linguistics is extremely significant in the history of linguistics. According to Saussure (1980), synchronic linguistics is static linguistics, which is the study of the state of language in each situation. Diachronic linguistics, on the other hand, is evolutionary linguistics, which studies the historical evolution of language. Saussure's distinction between diachronic and synchronic linguistics aims to emphasize the importance of synchronic linguistics. synchronic linguistics is different in nature from diachronic linguistics. They study different things in a language, the difference between point and surface, between horizontal and vertical. This therefore dictates that the study of these two kinds of linguistics is bound to take different approaches. Saussure himself came from the study of historical comparative linguistics, but he was not satisfied, but

expanded his field of study ever deeper and deeper, and he opened a new chapter in the study of language, contributing to the flourishing of various structuralist currents of thought since then. Saussure's establishment of the importance of synchronic linguistics became a classic theory of linguistics and pointed the way forward for various subsequent linguistic studies. His distinction between diachronic and copula has likewise made its way into other disciplines (Pan, 2009).

1.4 Metaphorical Thinking

Metaphorical thinking is the most important way of thinking other than logical thinking. Metaphorical thinking has both figurative thinking and abstract thinking, which makes people imagine things in the abstract. Metaphorical thinking breaks up the natural order created by the Creator and then re-mixes it together, and does not categorize things according to their common attributes, but looks for similarities among different things based on perceptual experience, which reflects the creative intelligence of human beings, and metaphorical thinking selects the symbols of imagery dynamically, and blends the farthest away things together surprisingly, placing objects in more and more relations, making necessity into freedom and nothingness into existence (Deng, 1993).

2. The Use of Metaphor in Synchronic and Diachronic Linguistics

We usually think that metaphors are linguistic forms with a high degree of redundancy (Yeh, 2004). Because metaphors are images, as the old saying goes, “Words have no meaning, but images have no meaning”, and the “meaning” contained in “images” is perceptual rather than analytical, metaphors often have more meaning than words. Metaphors are generally used with caution in the scientific field, as they can be counterproductive if not used properly. The Tutorial, however, makes extensive use of metaphors, and most of the metaphors are aptly chosen (Yeh, 2011). In the section of Symbolic and Diachronic Linguistics of the Tutorial, there are four uses of metaphors, and the first two more controversial metaphors are briefly described and analyzed below.

2.1 To Depict the Alpine Panorama - the Fault of History

"It would be absurd to depict a panorama of the Alps and yet take it from several peaks of the Jura at the same time; a panorama can only be taken from a certain point. (Saussure, 1980)” Obviously, Saussure is insinuating that the depiction of language should follow the rule that it can only be depicted by focusing on a certain - state. A linguist cannot follow the language and memorize it as it goes along. In fact, strictly speaking, this analogy Saussure aims to illustrate the problem of historical linguistics (Guo, 2010).

2.2 Object Projection - Independence and Dependence

Saussure's analogy tells us that linguistic copula and diachronic tense are both independent and related, and their independence is like projection and object; Diachronic tense is the object and copula are the projection. The relationship between the two is that the copula

depends on the diachronic tense, and there is no copula without the diachronic tense, just as there is no projection without the object (Yeh, 2012).

3. Flawed Metaphors in Synchronic and Diachronic Linguistics

The above metaphors use different objects to provide readers with various experiential information from different perspectives, so that the abstract philosophical ideas of language can be externalized into a series of concrete images that can be perceived by most people, which makes A Course in General Linguistics different from other masterpieces of linguistics. As a professor of linguistics at the University of Geneva, using metaphors to teach students an epoch-making academic idea is undoubtedly half the battle (Yeh, 2012).

3.1 Painting the Alpine Panorama

According to scholar Yeh Nam, Saussure explains the special problems in linguistics with the universal methodology of philosophy because standing on a higher level of abstraction, he can confidently discard the preconceptions of his predecessors by taking a panoramic view of what is right and what is wrong from the past to the present day. As the saying goes, “to look across the mountains and see the peaks”, to make a comprehensive and correct description of the state of the language, we must use a static approach. In fact, at a deeper level, the method of historical comparative linguistics is fundamentally an erroneous establishment of the object of linguistic research (Yeh, 2012). As Saussure (1980) said, “Comparative linguistics does not have a true scientific study of linguistics, does not specify the nature of its object of study.”

3.2 Object Projection

Synchronic to diachronic has been compared to an object to its projection in the plane. So the copula is indeed dependent on the diachronic. But an object is not the same as a projection, and the coprime has independent properties from the diachronic. Being able to recognize the synchronic state is not based on the study of the diachronic state, and the projection of an Ortho-hexahedron cannot be the same as the object itself. Therefore, the study of diachronic time does not lead to the understanding of the synchronic state; it is at best a means to an end. Of course, understanding past processes helps to understand the present, but the two must not be confused (Guo, 2010).

4. The Inspirational Role of Metaphorical Thinking in the Course

The metaphors chosen for metaphorical thinking in the Courses of Study are mostly vivid things or events, which, through similarity of exposition, cause students to make associations and gain insights. As a teacher, metaphorical thinking is a more effective method in classroom teaching. To inspire students' understanding of new knowledge and concepts, Saussure makes extensive use of metaphorical thinking to inspire students to comprehend abstraction from the concrete. This is one of the reasons why the Tutorial is different from some other masterpieces of modern linguistics (Yeh, 2011).

5. Conclusion

On the one hand, we must recognize the great value of Saussure's distinction between synchronic and diachronic linguistics in the Course and on the other hand, we have to avoid understanding the opposition between synchronic and diachronic linguistics in too absolute a way. In the Tutorial, Saussure is good at using metaphors to make complex and abstract concepts simple and concrete and uses many metaphors that encompass the concepts of dichotomy to make explanations. When distinguishing between synchronic and diachronic linguistics, the author wastes no time in using four metaphors to illustrate the concepts and relationships between the two (Yeh, 2012). When learning the concepts, associating them through these metaphors make one realize a lot, and the use of these metaphorical thinking has become one of the characteristics of this book. However, in terms of the informational value of the metaphors, the expressive value of Saussure's metaphors on linguistic co-occurrence and diachronic tense is thought-provoking.

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