



The Structuralist Promise

Zygmunt Bauman

The British Journal of Sociology, Vol. 24, No. 1. (Mar., 1973), pp. 67-83.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0007-1315%28197303%2924%3A1%3C67%3ATSP%3E2.0.CO%3B2-7>

The British Journal of Sociology is currently published by The London School of Economics and Political Science.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/lonschool.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

The JSTOR Archive is a trusted digital repository providing for long-term preservation and access to leading academic journals and scholarly literature from around the world. The Archive is supported by libraries, scholarly societies, publishers, and foundations. It is an initiative of JSTOR, a not-for-profit organization with a mission to help the scholarly community take advantage of advances in technology. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

The structuralist promise

'If, as we believe to be the case, the unconscious activity of the mind consists in imposing forms upon content, and if these forms are fundamentally the same for all minds—ancient and modern, primitive and civilized (as the study of the symbolic function, expressed in language, so strikingly indicates)—it is necessary and sufficient to grasp the unconscious structure underlying each institution and each custom, in order to obtain a principle of interpretation valid for other institutions and other customs, provided of course that the analysis is carried far enough.'¹ This programmatic statement by Claude Lévi-Strauss, since it has been made public in 1949, excites continuous and keen curiosity of the learned public; it has raised high, almost millenarian hopes, and inspired intense, almost religious resistance.

The attractions of the Lévi-Strauss programme seem to be irresistible indeed. The pledge to get rid once and for ever of the troublesome ghost of relativism was only one, though the most obvious, of its advantages. The others are:

1. The chance to grapple, for the first time in a serious manner, with the problem of veritable cultural universals. So far the only approach available was that of Murdock's²: the peculiar mixture of 'butterfly collectors'³ methodology and a classified telephone directory's inspiration. Now it has become clear that not only different cultural systems can be 'classified' ex-post-facto into the same institutionally discriminated divisions, but that they are built up according to the same 'transformational rules' or 'generative meta-grammar'. The search for universals means not so much stepping over the borders of cultural communities, as discovering construction principles common to the spheres of the human praxis apparently belonging to entirely different realms. In other words, universal principles instead of common denominators; theory instead of endless rearrangement of disarrayed empirical records.

2. The new look on the problem of function of the cultural phenomena. By the time the structuralist manifesto appeared anthropologists and sociologists were getting increasingly weary of diminishing returns and self-defeating tautological common to all available varieties

* Zygmunt Bauman B.A. M.A. PH.D. Professor of Sociology, University of Leeds.

of functionalism. The Parsons' substitute of 'system's prerequisites' has too much smelled of anthropomorphism for some, too much tasted of conservatism for others and has been too remote and irrelevant of daily problems of the profession for others still. For these disenchanted with enforcing functionality of every single cultural item or institution taken apart, assumptions like 'a single term-object has no meaning at all; any meaning presupposes the existence of a relation; it is on the level of structure where we should seek the elementary meaningful units, not on the level of elements'⁴ meant a genuine stroke of good fortune. If 'discriminating' and 'delimitating'⁵ are essential functions accountable for what the cultural phenomena are, several exciting conclusions follow immediately. First, it is quite possible that in non-linguistic cultural sub-systems, like in language, the value of each element 'depends entirely on their opposition to other elements, on their being different from other elements. They are therefore characterised not by any positive quality of their own but by their oppositional quality and differential value.' If so, then a social scientist may avail himself at will of the unquestioned achievements of theory of information and semiotics. From behind despairingly chaotic diversity of cultural forms, suddenly emerges an ordered structure of relationship.

3. It looks as if the controversial culture-social structure paradigm can now find finally a satisfying solution. True, some people hope still that something reasonable can be said on culture-society relationship while the paradigm remains in the analytical framework where it was put more than a century ago: this of 'what determines what' (whether on the societal or on a single 'social action' plane is of minor importance). There seems to be, however, a growing understanding that if the indispensable analytical distinction of culture and social structure is to be salvaged at all (many a social anthropologist seems to doubt, disillusioned, whether the rescue operation is worth the effort) it must be put on a more updated and less metaphysical foundation. This new basis is offered by linguistic, or—more generally—by the semiotic departures. It is likely that in a socio-cultural act (like in any other act of semiosis) the two intimately linked though existentially and analytically distinct sides, these of 'signifiant' and 'signifié' (the famous terms coined by Ferdinand de Saussure, but descending back to 'sēmainon' and 'sēmainomen' of the ancient Stoics⁸) can be located and organized respectively into two isomorphic structures: the one, called usually 'culture', and the second, dealt with under the name of 'social structure'. If the second is the web of energy channels (it is related to availability of resources which determines degree of the freedom of action), then the first is the code through which information on the second is articulated, conveyed and deciphered. The two aspects join together in the basic human endeavour of reducing incertitude of the human universe, ordering it, making it more predictable and so more

manageable.⁹ If it is so, then the relation between culture and social structure is one of signification, and the exact methods, elaborated for analysing isomorphic sets, can be employed for its study.

4. Common misinterpretations notwithstanding, a chance to bridge the conceptual chasm between statics and dynamics, synchronic and diachronic dimensions, is also built into the analytical equipment of the modern linguistics. The numerous statements to the contrary, frequent as they have been, have been born out of the understandable, though not necessarily convincing, passion of the devout preachers of an undoubtedly revolutionary idea. Since the heresy long ago turned into respectable routine, it has become manifest that the most sophisticated synchronic analysis does not require abandonment of the diachronic perspective; on the contrary, 'some connection between diachronic process and synchronic regularities must exist since no change can produce a synchronically unlawful state and all synchronic states are the outcome of diachronic processes'.¹⁰ Moreover, genetic and structural aspects are understandable only in their reciprocal processual and analytical interdependence,¹¹ and socio-cultural change as well as the structure of social and cultural systems are analysable with the same conceptual set.¹² The conceptual tool which most readily comes to mind in this connection is this of 'unmarked' and 'marked' signs (the 'privative' opposition of Troubetzkoy between 'merkmalträgend' and 'merkmallos' members).¹³ The 'unmarked' sign, usually simpler and more sketchy of the two, denotes initially the whole class of phenomena indiscriminately; then an attribute possessed by a sub-class only, becomes for some reason important, and then part of the unmarked sign's applications receive a 'mark' to distinguish just this sub-class. The heretofore monopolistic unmarked sign stands now in opposition to the new marked one; so far neutral toward the marked feature, now conveys the information on its absence. V. V. Martynov¹⁴ has developed recently a fairly convincing theory employing the concept of 'markers' showing how diachronic processes of change are constantly generated by synchronic structure in virtue of its endemic rules. There is no doubt that no serious consideration impedes substituting cultural items for linguistic terms in the Martynov model.

There is much more to the structuralist promise than we have succeeded in showing by enumerating only some of its main points. No wonder that in spite of the outspoken criticism voiced by the more traditional representatives of anthropology and sociology¹⁵ the ranks of scholars who try to apply achievements of linguistics to socio-cultural analysis are getting wider every year. In anthropology the application of structuralist ideas brought remarkable accomplishments to which works by Edmund Leach and Mary Douglas in Britain testify convincingly.

Still the case is being reinforced again and again against the linguistic

analogy and not all of it can be dismissed as a tribute paid to the conservatism of institutionalised science. Those who tried it and those who did not warn against attaching exaggerated hopes to applications of linguistic methods to non-linguistic though human phenomena. As it is usually the case, the ontological language is preferred to a methodological one; adversaries of the Lévi-Strauss programme make a point first of all of the qualitative peculiarity of the non-linguistic cultural realms, which allegedly thwart any attempt in extrapolating structuralist methodology to the general cultural analysis.

Two issues are mixed up hopelessly in most of the criticism. The first whether the non-linguistic realms of human culture are constructed in the same way the language is, and so we proceed properly when trying to distinguish in them the same type of units and relationships which were discovered by de Saussure, Jakobson, Hjelmslev and others in language. And the second—whether all human culture, language including, stems from the same universal human effort to decipher the natural order of the world and to impose an artificial one on it, and whether in doing this all fields of culture are submitted to the same logical principles which have evolved to suit the properties of the universe; and so we are justified in applying to the socio-cultural analysis the general methodological principles, which have achieved the highest level of elaboration and sophistication in structural linguistics. It goes without saying that a negative answer to the first question does not necessarily presuppose rejecting the second proposition. Unfortunately, to many a critic it does.

There were so far only few cases of defending the scientific relevance of the first issue. One of the most influential has been that of Kenneth L. Pike.¹⁶ Pike is concerned with exactly the opposite problem than the students of the second issue are: not with what is signified by cultural items, how cultural items, how cultural phenomena organise and order the cognitive and operational field of human behaviour, etc., but with proving that—regardless of their semiotic function—there are, in all institutionalised human behaviour, elementary units analogous to those of language. The Pike contention is that all culture *is* language in the formal meaning of the word. What Pike chooses as a task to be solved is ‘the apparent irreconcilability between the fact that a behaviour event is often a physical continuum with no gaps in which the movement is stopped’ and the discrete character of linguistic elements. The solution lies in the fact that ‘the human beings react to their own behaviour and to that of other individuals as if it were segmented into the discrete elements’. The part of behaviour to which human beings react can be taken as a ‘behaviourema’—an elementary meaningful unit of culture analogous to a ‘semema’ in structural semantics. A set of behaviouremae which may be put into the same place (‘spot’) in the action-string are in paradigmatic relationship between themselves,

exactly as sememae are; and each behaviourema consists of a peculiar combination of a limited amount of elementary (constructing meaningful entities, but meaningless in themselves) building elements which Pike proposes to name 'emes' or 'emic units'. So, Pike is convinced, the main obstacle has been overcome, we have in all human behaviour the two levels of articulation which constitute the defining feature of any linguistic structure, and now the way is cleared to organise the cultural facts into a system of many paradigmatic oppositions built up out of few phone-like bricks.

The trouble with Pike's argument is that although language is a part of culture (specialized in conveying information alone), culture *is not* a language. If not for other reasons—so at least because cultural phenomena perform many other functions besides informing somebody about something. What follows is that it would be very odd indeed were the culture built according to constructive principles made to measure of communicative function alone. It is true that human beings, whatever they do, always build plenty of different things out of a limited amount of basic materials (the endless variety of each national cuisine, for instance, is achieved usually with the help of relatively few basic components). But stating this fact would not bring us any closer to the understanding of human culture. The one possible result is likely to be a new version of the spurious classification-comparison feats of butterfly collectors: the 'knowledge' that, say, the 'cuisine language' is built of salt, sugar and pepper 'phonemes', while the 'language of gestures' is constructed of raising hands and lowering heads. It is doubtful whether moving along this way we can achieve something other than discrediting the very idea of the linguistic analogy. The fate of this analogy does not depend, furthermore, on whether Pike will succeed in discriminating 'emic units' everywhere, or whether Charles F. Hockett is right when declaring that 'it can be demonstrated very easily that not all cultural behaviour consists of arrangements of discrete units of the kind that we find in language when we analyse speech into arrangements of discrete phonemes'.¹⁷

What seems to be really important and fruitful is the second issue of the two mentioned above. This issue had probably Norman A. McQuown in mind when stating that 'the general principles which I cite are of such generality that they are probably attributes of the universe and not of human beings in particular, or human culture in particular, or of the structure of language in particular . . . After all, all things have structure of some kind, and the elements within that structure contrast or complement each other, or are in free variation with each other, or show pattern congruence, or look elegant when we find out what the thing is like overall.'¹⁸

The chance offered by the structural principles discovered by linguists consists, briefly, of this: in search of the necessary general laws govern-

ing human culture we can now descend to the unconscious system which precedes and conditions all specific empirically approachable, socio-cultural choices. Thus we can grasp the necessary relations where they really are. The only alternative available is the programme typified by Margaret Mead's statement: 'More widespread similarities in cultural behaviour which occur in different parts of the world, at different levels of cultural development'—should be made understandable by assuming hypothetically a possibly biological organization which no cultural imagination may overstep or ignore.¹⁹ What we have been proposed here is to relate the ex-post-facto similarities, located on the level of cultural usages and performances, directly to the pre-human, universal biological nature. A procedure which can result only in Murdock's conviction of the biological foundation of the apparently universal human interest in sun, moon, rain and thunder. Instead of trying to discover the general cultural laws in the sphere of necessary endemic and generative relations, we have been asked to locate them in the field of the accidental and external.

Having thus delineated the dimensions of linguistic analogy, we can proceed now to enumerate some of the differences between non-linguistic and linguistic sub-systems of the human culture (only a few of them, regretfully, since the limited space does not allow a fuller discussion), which lay off the limits of its possible applications. The author is convinced that the maximum of clarity as to the limitations constitutes one of the foremost conditions to the analogy's fruitful application.

1. It is generally assumed that the linguistic process is a 'pure communication'; the only reason why people use linguistic devices at all is that they wish to transmit to each other some information they consider useful or important. The more radical version of the above opinion says simply that each speech event has no other function but transmitting a message; thus it is a highly specialised activity and everything it consists of can be interpreted in the light of intended communication or intention to elicit a specific response.

Not all linguists and psycho-linguists are prepared to sign this statement. To give an example of rather forceful objections raised against radically 'communicative' image of language we can quote the A. T. Dittman and L. C. Wynne list of omnipresent attributes of speech events which however cannot be considered as parts of the language system *sensu stricto*.²⁰ The authors distinguish, among others: vocal characterizers (voice breaking, laughing, background, etc.), segregates (sounds which are not words), qualifiers (crescendo or piano, etc.), voice quality (tempo, rhythm, precision of articulation, etc.), voice set (fatigue, etc.). All these phenomena cannot be treated as parts of the language proper (so we can add) because of their defectiveness: instead of being arbitrary signs, deserving their meaning to their

relations with other signs, they are much closer to what was meant by Charles Peirce when he spoke on 'indices'; they can be read by the receiver, if he is acquainted with some kind of psychological and physiological knowledge, as information on the sender's state; but the knowledge of language would hardly help in their decoding. We would say with Karl Buhler,²¹ that though they possess the *Ausdruck* quality (*fonction émotive*, according to Giulio C. Lepschy²²), they have not been bestowed with either connotative or denotative *intentions* as have linguistic signs. But they do participate in each act of speech and thus make it much less homogeneous than it would seem at the first sight. Another departure of natural languages from the purely communicative model has been pointed to by a distinguished Soviet linguist S. K. Shaumian: 'We would not expect to arrive at the causes of linguistic change through immanent exploration alone. The structure of language is acted upon by psycho-physical and social factors, which are from its point of view external; their influence cannot be taken into account because—as far as the linguistic structure is concerned—it is accidental.'²³

If even linguistic process cannot be looked upon as 'pure communication', doubly so the non-linguistic fields of culture. With few exceptions (like language of gestures and etiquette; it is not by accident that the word 'language' has been spontaneously applied to these phenomena) the non-linguistic culture operates with material which by itself is directly related to non-informative, in some way 'energetic' needs. Although we can justly consider the non-linguistic cultural events as information-transmitting, the ratio information/energy is in their case much less favourable to information than in the case of purely linguistic acts. Which means that the role of the non-informative elements in these events is much greater than in speech-acts, and so, almost by definition, much more influential in shaping the events themselves. First, the 'energetic needs' set the limits of freedom in adjusting uses of a given material to semiotic purposes. Secondly, in case of clash or a friction between informative and energetic functions it is not always the informative one which gains the upper hand.

At least in one of his recent papers²⁴ Edmund Leach seems to imply that a direct extrapolation from structural linguistics to analysis of human culture in its entirety is warranted by the fact that 'the patterned conventions of culture which make it possible for human beings to live together in society have the specifically human quality that they are structured like' human language and 'that the structure of human language and the structure of human culture are in some sense homologous' (although it can always be argued what do the quotation marks in the word 'like' mean and what is the sense of 'in some sense . . .'). Leach's analysis avoids crucially important distinctive feature of non-verbal, though semiotic, sub-systems of culture—that, to use Ronald

Barthes' words, they 'have a substance of expression whose essence is not to signify'; Barthes proposes to call 'sign functions' these semiotic signs, whose origin is 'utilitarian and functional'.²⁵

The most important point is that the non-linguistic branches of culture cannot be exhausted by any description or modelling organized around the informative function alone. Two autonomous functions interfere constantly with each other and no cultural phenomenon is reducible entirely to one function only. Each cultural system, through choices it makes, orders the world in which members of the respective community live; performs a clearly informative function, e.g. reduces uncertainty of the situation, reflects and/or moulds the structure of action through signalling/creating the relevant portion of the web of the human interdependencies called 'social structure'. But it also shapes the world of *concrete beings*, who—to survive—must satisfy their irreducible individual needs. This double aspect is clearly discernible in shelter, dress, cuisine, drinking, means of transport, leisure patterns, etc.

One more remark, however, is in place in this context. It is quite possible that the basic materials which serve as the object of human ordering activity have been in the first place pulled into the orbit of the human universe in virtue of their 'energetic' applications. But the variety of forms they subsequently acquire, the lavish abundance of sophisticated and elaborate usages which cluster around them, have little in common with their primary uses. We can risk a hypothesis that although the fact that artifacts of some kind are being produced by human beings at all is likely to be accountable for by basically non-informative human needs—the differentiation of their form and most of the intricacies of their genealogical tree must be referred, to be explicable at all, to semiotic function they perform in relation to the social structure (i.e. in relation to the task of ordering the human environment). The most recent illustration has been supplied by the wild and technologically (energetically) wasteful and senseless outburst of imagination of the car producers. Were there no stratifying function attached to the cars in their role of signs, we would hardly be able to understand the fact that sophisticated products of the modern industry become worn out after two years of use.

To sum up—contrary to the case of language, in analysing the non-linguistic sub-systems of culture we have to apply two complementary though independent analytical frames of reference. No single and qualitatively homogeneous model can account for all empirical phenomena of culture.

2. The second limitation concerns the 'law of parsimony'. It is frequently assumed that in historical development of natural languages the most active factors are those of increasing economy; not only the distinctions not backed by isomorphic discriminations of meaning tend

to shrink and gradually disappear, but alternative types of expressive oppositions tend to congeal thus diminishing the total number of oppositional patterns. Louis Hjelmslev has even defined the language, in opposition to other cultural phenomena but few (like art or games), '*comme une structure où les éléments de chaque catégorie commutent les uns avec les autres*'.²⁶ The central term "commutation" means a correspondence between distinctions appearing on the level of 'expression' and those discernible on the level of 'content'. It is Hjelmslev's contention that expressive oppositions not backed by isomorphic differentiations of meaning and vice versa are simply 'extra-model' phenomena and are not linguistic facts proper.

Even in natural languages the amount of this type of redundancy (which should not be mixed up with another, eufunctional type of redundancy safeguarding the proper deciphering of messages) seems to be however quite impressive. B. Trnka, one of the founders of the famous Prague School, points out that there are in each language plenty of phonemes which 'are in complementary distribution with each other and there is no environment in which both of them occur'. This means that 'their ever-present and potential capacity for differentiating words remains unutilized'. Trnka goes as far as concluding that 'strictly speaking, the true function of phonemes is not keeping the meaning of words from each other, but only distinguishing phonemes between each other'.²⁷ Much of the phonemes' potential distinguishing power remains unused in every living language. Which means, that whenever facing an opposition on the level of expression, we are entitled to suspect a 'commuting' opposition on the level of content, but we cannot be certain that there is one. Harry Hoijer has attacked the same issue from the point of view of relics and archaisms abundant in every language: 'There are structural patterns like that which, in many Indo-European languages, divides nouns into three great classes: masculine, feminine and neuter. This structural pattern has no discernible semantic correlate . . . Whatever the semantic implications of this structural pattern may have been in origin, and this remains undetermined, it is now quite apparent that the pattern survives only as a grammatical device, important in that function but lacking in semantic value.'²⁸

Whatever can be said in this connection in relation to language, the exemptions from the 'law of parsimony' are much ampler in the case of non-linguistic cultural sub-systems. Discriminating capacity of cultural items available at any given time to any given community overgrows as a rule their actual use. The empirical reality of each culture can be said to be full of 'floating' signs, waiting for meanings to be attached to. This is, at least partly, determined by the particular situation of non-linguistic codes: while every geographically condensed community uses basically one language only, it is exposed to many criss-crossing

cultural codes, institutionally separated but employed by the same people, though in different role contexts. The signs float freely over institutional boundaries, but when cut off from their intra-institutional systemic context they lose the 'commuting' bond with their original meanings. The only set available as a common semantic frame of reference for all sub-codes used by the members of a given community is the social structure of the community as a whole. It is true that some signs meaningful inside specialized 'institutional' sub-codes acquire also an additional discriminating quality in the communal 'over-code' (as it happens, for instance, to the signs originated in the framework of 'professional' sub-codes, usually indicative also of the position occupied in the overall societal stratification)—but it is by no means a general rule. On the other hand, though the human creativity is to a very great extent inspired by the demand for new signs to replace the older ones, worn out because of their frequency, it could not be reduced to this cause alone. Due to its, at least in part, spontaneous and unmotivated character, the human creativity produces cultural items in numbers exceeding the actual semiotic demand. These are 'would-be' signs, potential signs, which for the time being do not 'commute' with any real distinctions in the structure of human reality. Thirdly, there is also the tremendous role played by tradition—by the delays in the cultural 'forgetting'. The development of any culture consists as much in inventing new items as in selective forgetting of the older: of those, which in the course of time grew out of their meaning, and having not found any new semiotic function linger as an inexplicable and meaningless relic of the past. Some of the items however refuse to disappear long after they have been shorn of their meaning. Surviving sometimes only because of de-synchrony between system's change and socializing institutions, they defy the functionalists' belief in universal utility of everything real and feed the Durkheimian myth of collective soul.

In short, not all elements in a cultural empirical reality are explicable by referring to their semiotic role. Once again, what may be said on a culture from the point of view of its actual semiotic function does not exhaust the richness of its empirical existence.

3. One further conclusion from the communicative nature of language is that speech acts can be defined as events arising from an *intention* to convey a message. The French team of linguists led by Andre Martinet went far enough to define the language as one of the 'very wide, and so far not very well delimited, kind of social phenomena which define themselves through intention to communicate, which can be checked with behavioural criteria.' Though the above sentence suggests that according to the authors' opinion the intention to communicate does not discriminate the language alone, another sentence testifies to the contrary: 'Before it will be decided that the art is a language, it is reasonable to investigate carefully whether the artist has

in the first place sought to communicate, or only to express himself.’²⁹ The idea of intention to communicate as the defining feature of linguistic phenomena has been so deeply entrenched in scholars’ minds that Lévi-Strauss, when trying originally to expose the linguistic nature of the kinship system, seemed to assume that what this system is an attempt, in its own symbolic way, to achieve, is transmitting women or exchanging them by men.³⁰

Now it seems doubtful whether the communicative function is indeed the most general one, to which all more specific functions pursuable in human society remain in the relation of subordination and particularity. It might be, but on condition that we had defined communication more in the spirit of the modern system theory than in the ‘exchange’ tradition of ‘passing something to somebody by somebody’. The modern system theory relates the notion of ‘communication’ to the concepts of ‘dependence’, ‘orderliness’, ‘organization’. These concepts in their turn have been defined as some kind of limitations imposed on the otherwise unlimited (e.g. unorganized, chaotic) space of events.³¹ Two elements are members of the same system (= they communicate with each other) if not all states of one are possible while the second remains in a given state. In a more descriptive language we can say that one element ‘influences’ the values the second may assume.

In short, we speak of communication whenever there are some limits imposed on what is possible or what can happen and what the probability of its occurrence is. We speak of communication whenever a set of events is ordered, which means—to some extent predictable. If we now start from the sociological perspective to structural linguistics and not the other way round, we look at the totality of human activity as an endeavour to order, to organize, to make predictable and manageable the living space of human beings, and the language discloses itself to us as one of the devices developed to serve this over-all aim: a device cut to measure of the communication in the narrower sense. Instead of all the culture being a set of particularizations of the communicative function embodied in language, the language turns into one of the many instruments of the generalized effort of ordering, laboured on by the culture as a whole. This sociological approach to language and its functions is not alien to the original intentions of de Saussure himself, at least according to some of his followers, A. Meillet³² in the first place.

It seems that to avoid misunderstandings caused by equivocality of the term ‘communication’, it is better to speak of ‘ordering’ as the superior function of the culture as a whole. The direct effect of a linguistic act is to order in a way the cognitive field of the recipient of the message; as a result some other behavioural acts can follow, which organize the action space itself—but these acts, though consequences of speech, do not belong with the sphere of the language proper. On the

other hand, the cultural events in the broader sense (of which purely linguistical acts can be a part) are accomplished only when the particular ordering has been achieved. The culturally institutionalized ceremony of addressing and greeting organizes the behavioural space for the interaction which follows—through signalling what patterns of behaviour are appropriate and stimulating the participants to choose these patterns instead of others. Each participant is aware of the fact that particular patterns are likely to be chosen by his partner, and this knowledge enables him to play his own actions and to manipulate the global situation in the framework of the options which are open to him.

The specific socio-cultural way or ordering-through-limitation is intimately correlated³³ with one paramount characteristic of the human condition: the link between an individual's position inside the group and his biological, 'natural' equipment is *mediated*. Which means that the 'social' status of any individual is not determined ambiguously, if at all, by his natural attributes in general, and his physical power and prowess in particular. Which means in turn that the inherited or developed, but in both cases biological indices of an individual's quality in the framework of *Nature* becomes *socially* irrelevant if not misleading. Impressive brawn of a docker would surely guarantee him a most respected status were he a member of a herd of deer or of a birds' pecking order. They are, however, utterly misleading as signs of his position in a human society.

The mediation began with production of tools: ever since human beings have surrounded themselves with artifacts not to be found in natural conditions, products of their modelling activity. Once created and appropriated, these artefacts destroyed the previous homology between the natural and the social order by changing entirely the action-capacity of individuals and so creating a new arrangement of environmental opportunities and probabilities. Thus a decisive adaptive value was conferred on ordering of and orienting in the web of specifically social (which in this context means primarily 'non-natural') relations.³⁴

These two requirements of the specifically human condition—ordering and orientation—are as a rule subsumed under two separate headings: social structure and culture.³⁵ A historical study of circumstances which led to petrification of two inseparable faces of one coin into two, for a long time unconnected, conceptual frameworks—remains to be written. Whatever the reasons, however, a disproportionately time-consuming effort has been invested by scholars into solving of what under closer scrutiny appears to be a sham and artificial problem. In keeping with the notorious human tendency to hypostatize purely epistemological distinctions, the two analytical concepts coined to describe the two indivisible aspects of the human ordering activity have been taken for two ontologically distinct beings.

The primary fact we propose to start from is that substituting an artificial environment for the natural one means that an artificial (not Natural, not created independently of human activity) order is substituted for the natural one. 'Order' is a graded notion: the level of orderliness is measured by the degree of predictability, e.g. by the discrepancy between probability indices of events admitted by the system and those which the system is an attempt at eliminating. In other words, ordering means dividing the universe of abstractly possible events into two sub-sets of—respectively—events which occurrence is highly probable and those which hardly can be expected at all. Ordering dissipates a certain incertitude as to the expected course of events, which existed heretofore. It cannot be accomplished but through selecting, choosing a limited amount of 'legalized' options from unlimited multitude of sequences. This understanding of the way the orderliness of a system is being achieved stands behind the classic, though forgotten, Boas' remarks on the intimate link between statistical and moral meanings of the 'norm' in the order-generating and order-maintaining process: 'The simple fact that these habits are customary, while others are not, is sufficient reason for eliminating those acts that are not customary . . . The idea of propriety simply arises from the continuity and automatic repetition of these acts, which brings about the notion that manners contrary to custom are unusual, and therefore not the proper manners. It may be observed in this connection that bad manners are always accompanied by rather intense feelings of displeasure, the psychological reason for which can be found in the fact that the actions in question are contrary to those which have become habitual.'³⁶ Let us turn our attention to the fact that Boas does not distinguish between order-establishing and orientating-in-order faculties, probably assuming tacitly that we somehow like and evaluate favourably the habitual and expectable while disliking and rejecting the unusual and sudden (a conjecture which was granted a full corroboration by psychologists); and that this single human capacity is accountable for both need of order and efficiency of the culture's guiding function. A single vehicle is enough to achieve both aims—as ordering (structuring) means making the ordered sector *meaningful*, e.g. arriving at a situation in which some concrete events follow usually a particular condition, and (2) some beings to *whom* the sector is meaningful know that these events do follow it indeed. In other words, the sector is meaningful to those to whom it is if and only if they possess some information on its dynamic tendencies. The divergence between the information actually needed to determine the sector completely and the amount of information which would be necessary were the sector entirely 'unorganized' measures the degree of its 'meaningfulness'.

We have arrived this far without having distinguished conceptually

the two aspects of the human ordering effort: introducing meaning into the otherwise meaningless universe and supplying it with indices able to signal and reveal this meaning to those who can read. Both sides of the two-pronged endeavour—it looks—can be described and understood in a single analytical framework. The question arises, whether any other frame of reference or conceptual set, besides the one necessary to analyse the ordering activity itself, ought to be brought in to explain the social structure-culture relationship. Orderliness of the world they live in is so vitally important to human beings that it seems entirely justified to ascribe to it an autothelic value. It is hardly necessary, if not redundant, to seek a further explanation to the above need by pointing to a purpose which ‘making the world meaningful’ allegedly serves.

Consequently, it seems that the logic of culture is the logic of the self-regulating system rather than the logic of the code or of the generative grammar of language—this latter being a peculiar case of the former rather than the other way round. The most important conclusion is the following: we are justified in extrapolating (to the non-linguistic spheres of culture) the most general features of language only; exactly these features, which characterize the linguistic interaction in its capacity of a case of a more inclusive class of self-regulating systems. Therefore we had better turn for inspiration directly to the system theory. Which does not necessarily mean that borrowing from the impressive achievements of the linguistical analysis of the nature of signifying should stop. What it does mean is that while allowing ourselves to be inspired by linguistics’ achievements we ought to be aware that they have no more proving power than analogies usually do.

If asked to express the ‘structuralist promise’ in one brief sentence, I would point to the unique chance of overcoming the notorious duality of sociological analysis while avoiding simultaneously the temptation to slip into one of its two extremist alternatives. There were recently attempts to adopt structuralist method to traditional spiritualist idioms through a single device of postulating the realm of mentalistically interpreted ‘meaning’ as the semantic field of cultural signs. It is my conviction that the structuralist promise can materialize only if it is understood that the role played in linguistical analysis by the semiotic field is assumed, in the world of human relations, by social structure. Only then shall we be able to exploit the opportunity of uniting in one conceptual framework the notions as diverse as freedom and necessity, degree of voluntariness of human action and degree of its determination; and to bring together the allegedly irreconcilable poles of empirically accessible empirical flow on the one hand and the ‘necessary relations’ on the other. After the epoch of Diltheyan ‘unaccomplished world’ and this of the positivistic reductive minimalism, we can now try to understand how it comes that—in words of

the outstanding Polish semiologist Stefan Zolkiewski—‘the controlled *praxis* does not create action patterns at will, but employs the patterns which have been already modelled up, chooses between them. The structures of culture provide the man with an inventory of unconscious alternatives, which never appear in unlimited quantity.’³⁷

Notes

1. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, translated by Claire Jacobson, New York, Doubleday and Co., 1967, pp. 21–2.

2. Cf. George P. Murdock, ‘Cultural Universals’, in E. Adamson Hoebel *et al.* (eds.), *Readings in Anthropology*, New York, 1955. Also by the same author ‘The Common Denominator in Cultures’ in Ralph Linton (ed.), *The Science of Man in the World Crisis*, Columbia University Press, 1945.

The well-nigh opposite epistemological status of the Murdock-like universals and the type Lévi-Strauss is after is well illustrated by the Bloomfield–Chomsky controversy in linguistics. In keeping with the nominalistically particularist tradition of Boas-inspired study of languages, Bloomfield coined in 1933 the phrase which was to become the uncritically accepted idiom for most linguists aiming at general statements: ‘The only useful generalizations about language are inductive generalizations’ (*Language*, New York, p. 20). This minimalist programme was challenged implicitly, if not explicitly, by Chomsky’s concept of ‘deep-rooted formal universals’, based on a theoretical assumption that ‘all languages are cut to the same pattern’, and that ‘real progress in linguistics consists in the discovering that certain features of given languages can be reduced to universal properties of language, and explained in terms of these deeper aspects of linguistic form’ (*Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, M.I.T. Press, 1965, pp. 30, 35). The new approach had been anticipated, though somewhat inconsequentially and vaguely, in Kluckhohn’s idea of ‘underlying determinant

factors’ of language-entities located on an entirely different plane than empirically accessible phenomena of language proper. The idea was sweepingly vast on an almost Lévi-Straussian scale: invariant, underlying factors ‘are to be found in the nature of social systems, in the biological and psychological nature of the component individual, in the external conditions in which they live and act, in the nature of action itself, in the necessity of its correlation in social systems’ (‘Universal Categories of Culture’, in A. L. Kroeber (ed.), *Anthropology Today*, Chicago, 1953, p. 513).

3. The term applied by Edmund Leach to the admirers of ‘classificatory methods’, inspired by Radcliffe-Brown. Cf. his *Rethinking Anthropology*, London, 1961, pp. 2–3.

4. A. J. Greimas, *Sémantique structurale*, Paris, Librairie Larousse, 1966, pp. 19, 20.

5. Cf. ‘distinktive’ and ‘delimitative’ ‘Funktionen’—N. S. Trubetzkoy, *Grundzüge der Phonologie*, Gottingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1967, p. 241.

6. Maurice Leroy, *The Main Trends in Modern Linguistics*, translated by Glanville Price, Basil Blackwell, 1967, p. 55.

7. Some less moderate enthusiast of ‘ethnomethodology’, keen on drawing ontological conclusions from what was initially conceived as a methodological choice, provide recent examples of revived interest in old paradigm. Cf. ‘The member’s sense that he lives in a real world shared in common with others is the foundation of his being in the world’ (Thomas P. Wilson, in Jack D. Douglas (ed.), *Understanding Everyday Life*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971, p. 19); ‘Texture of the scene, including its

appearance as an objective, recalcitrant order of affairs, is the accomplishment of member's methods for displaying and detecting the setting's features' (Don H. Zimmerman and Melvin Power, *ibid.*, p. 195). Which reminds me again of the innocent zeal of a verse printed in the times of La Grande Revolution:

*Les grands ne nous paraissent grands
Que parce que nous sommes à genoux—
Levons nous!*

The rhymes were used in 1846 by Marx to ridicule Bruno Bauer.

8. Cf. 'A la recherche de l'essence du langage', *Diogène*, 51, 1965, p. 22.

9. Cf. Z. Bauman, 'Marx and the Contemporary Theory of Culture', in *Marx and Contemporary Scientific Thought*, The Hague, Mouton, 1969, pp. 483-97.

10. Joseph H. Greenberg, 'Language Universals', in Thomas A. Sebeok (ed.), *Current Trends in Linguistics*, vol. III, The Hague, Mouton, 1966, p. 61.

11. Cf. Lucien Goldman, 'Introduction Générale', in *Entretiens sur le notion de genèse et de structure*, The Hague, Mouton, 1965, pp. 12-16.

12. Cf. Z. Bauman, 'Semiotics and the Functions of Culture', *Social Science Information*, 5, 1968, pp. 69-80.

13. *Op. cit.*, p. 67.

14. *Kibernetika, semiotika, lingvistika*, Minsk, Nauka i Technika, 1966, pp. 118 ff.

15. There was a whole spectre of reactions ranging from contemptuous silence, through as trenchant as ignorant summary sneer, up to bringing into relief the French structuralists' one-sidedness without mentioning one's own. For a sociologist of science in general, of scientific revolutions in particular, it may be illuminating that even some converts to the Lévi-Strauss programme (brought up initially in the Boas-Malinowski or Durkheimian tradition) thought it necessary to voice in public their restraint and to pretend that no qualitative shift has happened.

16. The fullest version of his theory is contained in the three volumes of his *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behaviour*, Glendale, Cal., Summer Institute of Linguistics,

1954-60. The quotations which follow have been taken from Pike's paper 'Towards a Theory of the Structure of Human Behaviour', in Dell Hymes (ed.), *Language in Culture and Society*, New York, Harper and Row, 1964, pp. 54-62.

17. In *Language in Culture*, Conference in the Interrelations of Language and other Aspects of Culture, 23-27 March 1953. Published by the Chicago University Press in 1960, ed. by Harry Hoijer, p. 163.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

19. Cf. 'Anthropological Data and the Problem of Instinct', in Clyde Kluckhohn and C. Murray (eds.), *Personality in Nature, Society and Culture*, New York, 1949, p. 111.

20. Cf. 'Linguistic Techniques and the Analysis of Emotionality in Interviews', *J. Abnor. Soc. Psych.* 1961.

21. Karl Bühler, *Sprachtheorie*, Jena, 1934.

22. *La Linguistique structurale*, translated to French by Louis-Jean Calvet, Payot, Paris 1968, p. 28.

23. *Strukturnaja Lingvistika kak immanentnaja teorija jazyka*, Moscow, 1958, p. 29.

24. Noel Minnis (ed.), *Linguistics at Large*, Victor Gollancz, 1971, pp. 139-58.

25. *Elements of Semiology*, Jonathan Cape, 1969, p. 41.

26. *Le langage*, translated to French by Michel Olsen, Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1966, p. 135.

27. B. Trnka *et al.*, 'Prague Structural Linguistics', in Donald E. Hayden *et al.* (ed.), *Classics in Linguistics*, New York, Philosophical Library, 1967, p. 327.

28. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, in *Language in Culture*, pp. 97-8.

29. *La linguistique, sous le direction d'André Martinet*, Paris, Edition Denoël, 1969, p. 165.

30. Cf. *Structural Anthropology*, pp. 44-5.

31. Cf. for instance, W. R. Ashby, R. W. Sperry and G. W. Zopf, Jr., in Heinz von Foerster and George W. Zopf Jr. (eds.), *Principles of Self-Organization*, 8-9 June 1961, London, Pergamon Press, 1962.

32. Cf. 'Le développement des langues', in *Linguistique historique et linguistique générale*, vol. II, Paris, 1936, pp. 75 ff.

33. I wish to stress that I use the term 'correlated' instead of 'determining' or 'determined'. The discussion on 'determination' seems to be as barren as it has been long. The real relationship between the two factors reminds much more of what has been named by cyberneticians the 'positive feedback'.

34. Apart from the tight bond between tools and *emergence* of socio-cultural order—there is also an intimate link between the level of tools' development and the types of the socio-cultural regulating system. A good modern illustration has been pointed to by William G. Elliot Jr.: 'Without the motor vehicle, highway signs might have well remained primitive, local and highly *individualistic*. The motor vehicle that tremendously expanded the range of travel and brought an era of individual travel for masses also created new hazards and a need for vastly improved guidance for the strangers who were following new highways into distant places' ('Symbolology of the Highways of the World', in *Symbolology*, by

Art Directors Club of New York, 1960, p. 50).

35. What follows is one of the many recent manifestations of the traditional paradigm: T. O. Beidelman discusses 'the interplay between culture and society' ('Some Sociological Implications of Culture', in John C. McKinney & Edward A. Tiryakian (eds.), *Theoretical Sociology*, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970, p. 500) as this 'between ideology (as exhibited in cosmology and moral norms) and social action (as exhibited both in adherence to and divergence from such norms)'.

36. Introduction to the Handbook of American Indian Languages, Smithsonian Institution 1911; reprinted in Donald E. Hayden *et al.* (eds.), *Classic in Linguistics*, Philosophical Library, New York, 1967, p. 220.

37. *Zagadnienia stylu* (Problems of style), Warsaw, PWN, 1965, p. 248. These topics are more widely discussed in my *Culture and Praxis*, Routledge and Kegan Paul (forthcoming).