

A Study of Saussure's "Langue" and "Parole" from Marxist's the Law of the Unity and Opposites

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Abstract

The foundation of language theory's construction is the distinction between "langue" and "parole", which became the starting point of modern linguistics. This article mainly analyzes the Saussure's "langue" and "parole" based on the Law of the Unity and Opposites of Marx, that is, the relationship between them is in line with the Law of the Unity and Opposites. On the one hand, "langue" and "parole" relate and transform to each other. On the other hand, "langue" and "parole" repel and fight each other. Finally, according to the methodological principles, it will discuss the application of "dichotomy" in foreign language teaching.

Keywords

Langue, Parole, The Law of the Unity and Opposites, Dichotomy

1. Introduction

Saussure, the father of modern linguistics, thought that the distinction between "langue" and "parole" is the starting point of modern linguistics. It has a huge and far-reaching influence on the linguistics in China. As a pair of very important concepts, grasping and distinguishing their differences are helpful for language learners to clarify their relationship and obtain some enlightenment and references for language learning. Over the years, different scholars have held different views on the relationship between them. To a certain extent, the relationship between "langue" and "parole" is in line with the Law of the Unity and Opposites of Marxist philosophy. On the one hand, "langue" and "parole" relate and transform to each other. On the other hand, they repel and fight with each other. Based on previous research, this article aims to apply "the Law of the Un-

ity and Opposites” to analyze their relationship and discuss “dichotomy” in foreign language teaching. To a certain degree, it can not only make the argument credible and persuasive, but also answer the students’ doubts appropriately.

2. The Connotation of the Law of the Unity and Opposites

The Law of the Unity and Opposites holds that everything in the world is made up of contradictions. The two aspects of the contradiction are both opposite and unified, mutually exclusive, fighting, interdependent and interpenetrating; and under certain conditions, they transform into each other, which constitutes the true content of the contradictory movement, and promotes the movement, development and change of things.

According to Marx and Engels (2012), the Law of the Unity and Opposites is also the principle of identity and struggle of contradiction. The identity of the contradiction refers to the nature of the mutual connection between the two parties, that is, mutual dependence, mutual presupposition, mutual penetration, and the existence of a bridge between this and the other. The establishment of this relationship keeps things in a stable, united and unified state, which is conditional, temporary and relative. The struggle of contradiction refers to the nature of mutual exclusion, mutual denial and opposition between opposing parties, which makes things appear turbulent, unstable and transformative. The struggle of contradiction runs through the whole development process of things, and it is unconditional and absolute. Identity contains struggle, struggle resides in identity, and it also restricts struggle. Many conditions of identity are established through struggle, so without struggle, there is no identity. The Law of the Unity and Opposites can help people to understand world correctly and rationally.

3. The Connotation of Saussure’s “Langue” and “Parole”

In the *Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure (2004) made distinction between “langue” and “parole”, which is a basic starting point of modern linguistics. At the same time, as a basic theoretical issue of linguistics, domestic scholars have not yet had a fixed analysis between them, and there have been different interpretations. Saussure (2004) believes that human speech behavior includes “langue” and “parole”, which is a pair of key concepts often mentioned in linguistics.

3.1. The Connotation of “Langue”

Regarding “langue”, Saussure (2004) once had a clear definition: “It is a treasure house stored in all members of a social group through the practice of speech or a grammatical system stored in the minds of a group of people”. That is to say, “langue” is a system that is combined by certain vocabulary and grammatical rules in accordance with the agreed rules and internalized by the speaker; or a latent and abstract grammatical system and the sum of language habits. “Langue” uses speech as a medium and it regards semantic content as meaning.

Under different conditions, “langue” plays different roles. When spreading

and inheriting culture, “langue” is the carrier and tool of culture. When understanding objective world, “langue” is a tool that helps people to perceive and understand world rationally. When communicating with others, “langue” is a set of mature grammatical system. As the main form of the expression of speech activities, “langue” is a set of recognized, abstract and internalized language rules. Yin (2020) thought that “langue” is social, universal and regular. Generally speaking, individuality is not a feature of “langue”, but there are also some differences caused by regions, environments and living habits. In the whole, “langue” is a symbolic system with universal rules.

As an internalized and conventional rule, “langue” plays a pivotal rule and subtle influence on the speaker in the process of speech practice. Because the language rule system established in a specific area or a specific group has a guiding role for the speaker, the speaker can express his or her views clearly and concisely. And the recipient can also understand speaker’s meaning to a greater extent. Therefore, if people want to master a language, they must master its corresponding “langue” rules firstly.

3.2. The Connotation of “Parole”

Compared with “langue”, “parole” is the embodiment or actualization of “langue”. It refers to a real and concrete speech act in which individuals express their abstract “langue” symbols according to the rules under the guidance and influence of the internalized grammar and lexical rule systems. It is the application of symbolic systems. “Langue” is abstract, while “parole” is specific. Therefore, to a certain extent, it doesn’t possess the universality and regularity that “langue” emphasizes. “Langue” will change with the expressing individuals, and the factors such as speaker’s attitude, position, experience and even the context in which the speaker locates will affect the actual speech. Therefore, “parole” reflects more individual differences, uncertainty and instability.

3.3. The Relevance of the Relationship between “Langue” and “Parole” with the Law of the Unity and Opposites

According to above analysis, “langue” is a set of generalized grammar and lexical symbolic rule system internalized by the individuals, while “parole” is a specific speech act that an individual expresses orally according to this potential rule system.

“Langue” is the premise of “parole”, and “parole” is the result of “langue”. The realization of “parole” depends on the guidance and influence of “langue”. If there is no speech act, “langue” will lose its existing value. Therefore, in a certain sense, both of them are interrelated and interdependent. Besides, speech act has strong individual differences and uncertainty. Under the dual influence of individual differences and specific contexts, sometimes it contradicts with the underlying language rules. At this time, they are mutually opposing and exclusive. Therefore, it corresponds with the Law of the Unity and Opposites of Marxist philosophy. For a long time, the distinction between “langue” and “parole” has

been controversial in academic fields. Different scholars have explained it from different perspectives, but there are relatively few studies about it based on philosophical theories.

4. The Unity and Opposites of Saussure's "Langue" and "Parole"

4.1. "Langue" and "Parole" Are Identical

4.1.1. "Langue" and "Parole" Are Interrelated and Interdependent

"Langue" is an internalized set of grammatical and lexical symbolic rules. In specific language expression, the speech act should be guided or restricted by "langue", and it is impossible to occur the "parole" phenomenon separated from the "langue". The implementation of the specific speech act depends largely on the "langue". "Parole" is the externalization, concretization and result of "langue". And "langue" lacking actual "parole" is practically meaningless. The language of any country has its own set of grammar and vocabulary symbolic rules, that is, the "langue" system. If asking a Chinese without any foreign language foundation to understand a foreign language, the result will be unsatisfactory naturally. However, Chinese dialects, due to geographical differences and long-term different living habits as well as other factors, it is sometimes difficult for northerners to understand southern dialects, such as the dialects of Yunan, Guizhou, Guangdong and other places (except minority languages, Cantonese, etc.), but this does mean that northerners can not understand any meanings among it. The essential reason for the understanding difficulty is the difference in accent. However, the southerners have no problem understanding standard Mandarin. Therefore, the "langue" system is the same, but the differences in accents cause difficulty in understanding directly or indirectly. In fact, no matter the north or the south, they have the same set of language symbolic rule system, and it is the premise for us to understand speaker's meaning and make appropriate "verbal" communication behaviors. In addition, it is precisely because we do not have the same "langue" rules as other national languages, so we cannot understand its meaning without any foreign language foundation. Therefore, the premise of mastering a language is to master its corresponding "langue" system. "Langue" serves "parole". And the application of "langue" system is aim.

Therefore, "langue" is the premise of "parole", and the "parole" is the externalization and result of "langue". Without the guidance of "langue", the speaker's expression will be affected and hindered, that is, "langue" is the basis for the realization of "parole". "Parole" is the value of the existence of "langue". "Langue" is a system of rules, while "parole" is the application and product of this system. "Langue" exists in "parole", and it is the premise and basis for the realization of "parole". "Langue" and "parole" are the relationship between tool and usage. Saussure (2004) once compared "langue" to movement, and "parole" to performance, which reflects the relationship between them vividly. Therefore, from the perspective of Marx's the Law of the Unity and Opposites, they are interrelated.

4.1.2. “Langue” and “Parole” Are Transformed into Each Other under Certain Conditions

“Parole” is a specific behavior that expresses the rule systems of “langue”, such as vocabulary and grammatical symbols, and individual difference is an evident feature of “parole”. “Langue” and “Parole” are interrelated and interdependent. Besides, according to the Law of the Unity and Opposites, under certain conditions, they can also be transformed into each other.

For example, in the classroom, teacher’s teaching is a process of mutual transformation between “langue” and “parole”. When the teachers teach a poem in the classroom, they will tell their own thinking process and understanding of the poetry to students through specific speech acts, which in itself is a real and specific “verbal” expression process. According to their early thinking, the content expressed by the teacher will be understood and digested by students in the classroom. Then, the students will learn from the teacher’s ideas, and then express it after their own thinking and processing. During this process, the teacher’s verbal expression acts as both “langue” and “parole”. Therefore, “langue” and “parole” can be transformed into each other under certain conditions.

4.2. “Langue” and “Parole” Are in Conflict

4.2.1. “Langue” and “Parole” Are Opposed to Each Other under Certain Conditions

“Langue” is abstract, while “parole” is specific. “Parole” is an actual verbal communication behavior in different contexts. Therefore, compared with “langue”, “parole” is more easily affected by specific contexts and individual differences, and it has a large degree of uncertainty. For the same “langue” system, there are many different speech acts. Then, naturally, some “langue” systems are not suitable for the smooth progress of verbal communication behavior in certain contexts. And the internalized and conventionalized “langue” system even hinders the advancement of verbal communicative behavior. At this time, “langue” and “parole” are mutually exclusive.

French and Chinese are completely different in terms of grammar and vocabulary. If a Chinese who has no French learning foundation is required to understand French, his Chinese grammar and vocabulary possessed for a long time can no longer be used to understand French. At this time, the language system of Chinese and the speech act of French is contradictory. If we still use the Chinese language system to understand or guide French communication, it is extremely unscientific and completely impossible to achieve.

4.2.2. “Langue” and “Parole” Fight Each Other under Certain Conditions

“Langue” and “parole” are opposed to each other if the “langue” system hinders the conduct of “parole” acts. If they want to continue to promote verbal communication acts, the individual must break free from the shackles of the known or inherent “langue” system framework, and find an appropriately similar “langue” rule system within a reasonable range for the current context. A “langue” individual, is undoubtedly a language user who masters a system of lexical

grammar rules, not a natural object without the ability to judge and think. Therefore, their speech behaviors and activities will be controlled and influenced inevitably by the grammatical rules latent in their brains, that is, the control of “langue”. The “langue” rule system is stable and universal. Once an individual is branded, it is difficult to make changes in a short period of time. Therefore, even in certain contexts, the new system of “langue” rules will not be completely insulated from the existed ones. However, if it has to be changed according to needs of the contexts, the language individual will show a relatively strong struggle force and break through the known “langue” rule system. At this point, “langue” and “parole” are both fighting each other.

5. “Langue” and “Parole” Teaching under the Dichotomy

The law of the Unity and Opposites requires us to take a holistic view and adhere to the dichotomy. As a pair of key theories, “langue” and “parole” are not only interrelated and interdependent, but also mutually exclusive and fighting each other. According to the methodological principle under the Law of the Unity and Opposites, the dichotomy theory of “langue” and “parole” is widely used in second language teaching researches.

Xing (1993) distinguished the role of “langue” and “parole” in foreign language teaching earlier, and he also made relative discussion. Dong (1997) focused on discussing the relationship between “langue” and “parole”, and he divided the “langue” teaching and “parole” teaching. The former focuses on the mastery of vocabulary and grammar knowledge, while the latter pays more attention to the cultivation for “listening, speaking, reading and writing” abilities. Dong regarded the “parole” teaching as the primary task of foreign language teaching, and he believes that cultivating “parole” skill is the primary purpose. Han (1995) gave new meanings to “langue” and “parole” in foreign language teaching. In general, according to the generally accepted definition of “langue” in academic field, “langue” is a tool that can help learners learn, strengthen memory, and serve specific speech acts. Compared with “langue”, “parole” in foreign language teaching is a practical and specific communication activity, which is perceptual and subjective. On the basis of the dichotomy, Han proposed the tasks of foreign “langue” and “parole” language teaching, as well as the teaching objectives at different stages and teachers’ roles and functions.

Based on the Saussure’s distinction between “langue” and “parole”, Zhang, Zhou (2002) made a distinction between “langue” and “parole” language teaching. “Langue” teaching focuses on the cultivation and improvement of language knowledge and ability, while “parole” teaching is more inclined to communicative ability and practical application of language. From “langue” teaching to “parole” teaching, it is a process from inside to outside, and from theory to practice. Zhang and Zhou (2002) also expounded the differences between “langue” and “parole” in different teaching systems and links and they believed that it is necessary for teachers to allocate teaching courses and time scientifically and

reasonably.

From what we have discussed above, the united and opposed relationship between “langue” and “parole” determines the use of dichotomy in foreign language teaching. Therefore, for foreign language learning, we must allocate the “langue” and “parole” teaching resources scientifically and rationally, so as to make overall plans and promote each other.

6. Referential Significance

“Langue” and “parole” are a pair of very important concepts, which occur frequently in language learning. Therefore, this study aims to help students clarify their relationship and master correct ways for learning. Besides, it also discusses the “dichotomy” in foreign language learning, which can offer some strategies for teaching appropriately that teachers should allocate the teaching resources and time between “langue” and “parole” scientifically and rationally. The value of the theory lies in practice. Therefore, the distinction between “langue” and “parole” based on the Law of the Unity and Opposites made by this study is relatively helpful for language teaching and learning more or less.

7. Conclusion

The distinction between “langue” and “parole” is the starting point of modern linguistics. This article takes the Law of the Unity and Opposites in Marxist philosophy as main theoretical framework, and discusses the relationship between “langue” and “parole” objectively. For a thing, “langue” and “parole” are inter-related and interdependent, and they can be transformed into each other under certain conditions. For another, “langue” and “parole” are mutually exclusive and fight each other. “Langue” is universal, conventionalized and stable, while “parole” has strong individual differences. The united and opposed relationship between “langue” and “parole” determines the use of dichotomy. During foreign language teaching, both “langue” and “parole” teaching should be taken into account. And teachers should allocate teaching resources, contents and time scientifically and reasonably.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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