Roots of Functionalism: From Aristotle to Michael Halliday

Muhammad Farukh Arslan[1], **Attia Rasool[2]**, **Esha Muhammad[3]**, **Marryam Shakeel[4]**,

Hira Haroon[5],

1. PhD Scholar, Department of Applied Linguistics, Government College University, Faisalabad, Pakistan. Corresponding Author Email: farukhgill99@gmail.com

2. PhD Scholar, Department of Applied Linguistics, Government College University, Faisalabad, Pakistan/Lecturer, Higher Education Department, Punjab, Pakistan.

3. MPhil Scholar, Department of English, Government College University, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

4. MPhil Scholar, Department of English, National University of Modern Languages, Pakistan

5. Lecturer, Department of Applied Linguistics, Government College University, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Abstract

This study traces the roots of functionalism from Aristotle to Michael Halliday, highlighting its evolution and impact on various disciplines. Functionalism, a school of thought that emphasizes the function of elements over their structure, has its roots in Aristotle's concept of form and function. The study explores how functionalism influenced biology, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and linguistics, shaping our understanding of living organisms, human behavior, social structures, cultural practices, and language. Key figures like Darwin, Hobbes, James, Dewey, Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, Saussure, Jakobson, Trubetzkoy, and Halliday have contributed to the development of functionalism, which has led to significant advancements in their respective fields. This analysis demonstrates

the significance of functionalism in understanding the complexities of human experience and its relevance in contemporary scholarship.

INTRODUCTION

Functionalism

Man and universe has strong and complicated kind of relationship with each other. Since the birth of man, he tried to understand, to evaluate,to sort out this maze with different perspectives such as with rationalism, with empiricism and behaviorism and structuralism and functionalism. These different kinds of thinking approaches arecoined, proposedand explained by different philosophers and thinkers throughoutthe history of man. These have strong connection with each other because some schools of thoughts have similarities and some have counter approaches to each others.

Functionalism is one of them and here the main focus is on it.

Functionalism is a school of thought that creates impact in every discipline of life. The meaning of function is not rigid one. It has changed and carried different meanings time to time and discipline to discipline. It was explicitly appeared at intellectual forum in 19th and 20 century. This approach is not the outcome of sudden revolutionary idea. It has its intellectual roots in distant history such as in Greek era. The philosophers of that time have very versatile approaches towards epistemology and functionalism is one of branches of it.

One thing that we mustconsider in our minds is that Functionalism isnot defined in any specific sense varies according to discipline to discipline. As Ned Block (1996) in his article Introduction: What Is Functionalism? Narrated this is

uncertain whether the disciplines known as **"functionalism"** in fields as disparate as literary criticism, psychology, anthropology and philosophy of psychology contain anything as common except the name."

First and thebasic idea of functionalism is directly or indirectly associated with Aristotle. Although he proposed functionalist ideas as counter argument of structuralism that was discussed by different philosophers in different fields such as study of soul and body and biology. Let's begin with, the understanding of the functionalist approach with the lenses of biological perspective, the mother of all functionalist discipline.

Study of Functionalism in biology, takes us back towards Greek philosopher: the Aristotle who more or less single handedly dislodged the most prominent structural school of thoughts of his time. First one is *Empedocles* and second one is *Democritus* who proposed that explanation and understanding ofliving organism can be done only by their **component parts and elements**ie; structure. On the other hand Aristotle put forward his idea of **form and function** to study the living organism.

 In *De PartibusAnimalium,* Aristotle initiallyreasoned against Empedocles' elemental approach, indicating the relation ofthe anatomicaland histological macro-structure:

"*...But if men and animals are natural phenomena, then natural philosophers must take into consideration not merely the ultimate substances of which they are made, but also flesh, bone, blood and all the other homogeneous parts; not only these but also the heterogenous parts, such as face, hand, foot...*"

(McKeon ed. 1941, p. 647)

Secondly, Aristotle also proposed the theory of soul that was totally opposite to the Plato's dualism theory: independently existence of soul from the body is also considered as astart upof the functionalism winds. According to him, soul is not temporary entity which enters into anorganism for function and departs out. IT has every kind of capacity that body required to live, to perform, to perceiveand to act. Hence, in simple words, soul is a function. These ideas of functionalism revealed us that seeds of functionalism are spread by Aristotle's philosophy in the human history

Another philosopher of 16th century Thomas Hobbes is famous for his account of reasoning. He argues, reasoning is "nothing but *reckoning*, that is adding and subtracting, of the consequences of general names agreed upon for the *marking* and *signifying* of our thoughts." (*Leviathan*, Ch. 5) He considers human mind as calculating machine that performs its function

Darwin theory of Evolution

Darwin (1985) proposed the idea of natural selections that is first and global macro functionalism.This concept of Adaptive / natural selection also has resemblance withthe Greek idea**"scale of nature"**: represents a progression from the most imperfect to the most perfect. Darwin theory of evolution creates the global impact on the social step up and people now tried to accept this revolutionary idea explicitly that challenged the grounds of Christianity. (Waddington 1942, 1953; Odling-Smee et al. 2003)

Functionalism and Psychology

The purpose of William James (1980) and other associates of the school of functionalism were *to comprehend why "animals and humans have developed the*

particular psychological aspects that they currently possess" (Hunt, 1993). They all were directly influenced by Darwin theory which revealed us physical characteristics of living organism are developed and evolved due to their utilization and functionality. Functionalist has applied this concept into psychology. They believed that the physical muscles of body adapt according to its use and function similarly human brain must also be adapted to perform the functions according to human experiences. The work of functionalist in psychology appeared in the form of individual discipline named as evolutionary psychology.

Another psychologist who did work in this area was John Dewey (1986) but he moved a one step ahead. He tried to incorporate the theoretical framework with application. He directly negated the concept of atomatism and theory of elementrianism and started work on the progressive school moments which attempted to apply functionalist principles to education.

20th century behaviorist theories also provide the dimensions to the contemporary functionalism, although these both are significantly different to each other.These contain both the empirical psychological theories linkedchiefly with Skinner and Watson, and the "logical" or "analytical" behaviorism of the philosophers like Ryle (1949) and Malcolm (1968) (and, debatably, Wittgenstein 1953). The problems of empirical and analytical behaviorism are tried to rectify in the form of two basic functionalist strains: psycho-functionalism and analytical functionalism

Functionalism and Sociology

According to this field of study, functionalism is theory that based on this premised that society is a "system of interconnected parts that work together in

harmony to maintain a state of balance and social equilibrium for the whole" (Knox and Schacht, 2007) Each and every institution perform a specific function in society and have a different kind of impact on each other. Basically social functionalist also got influence by Darwin evolution theory and considered the society as an organism and societies progressand develop in the same manner as living beings grow. Spencer (1870) was one of the key figure who took the theory of evolution and applied it on society and termed it as social Darwinism.Emile Durkheim(1890) also defined the society with the respect of functionalism. He believed in social equilibrium. Collapse of any part of society creates the effect on society and tries to fill the void in the form of new institution, must be established. This approach gets prominence in sociology when critics viewed the society as **organism**and function of difference parts in the form of different institutions such as family, government, economy, media, education,

Talcott Parsons and Robert Mertonare also key prominent sociologist who work on functional aspects of society.

Functionalism and Anthropology

The impact of functionalism is also observed in the field of anthropology. It has similarity with social functionalism.Malinowski is a key proponent of this field and proposed the Bio-Cultural (or psychological) functionalism. He claimed that all aspects of culture function together to support the society and to fulfill the needs of man**.**His student Raymond Firth (1901)also got the influence by him and continued work in the same dimension of Malinowski.

Anotherdominated figure of this approach is Radcliffe-Brown(1960). He focused on social structure rather than biological needs. He suggested that "a

society is a system of relationships maintaining itself through cybernetic feedback, while institutions are orderly sets of relationships whose function is to maintain the society as a system."(Goldschmidt 1996)

Functionalism and Linguistics

Functionalism in language study can be characterized with the functional study and description of the functions performed with the help of language in a context (Nuyts, 2007). Before functionalist approach language was studied according to perspective of structuralism. Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) father of linguistics was the major proponent of structuralism. Aristotle defined language as speech dependent in the same way while Saussure followed same the description but gave the idea to semiology in this direction. Saussure gave the idea of synchronic (study of language at specific time) and diachronic (study of language at different time) linguistics. He gave the idea of syntagmatic (chain) and paradigmatic (choice) relations. He also proposed the idea of sign (combination of signifier and signified).

Basically, Saussure was influenced by Wilhelm von Humboldt (died 1835). He gave the idea that language is dynamic not a static one. On the other hand, Humboldt followed the German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803), he gave the idea that national languages are linked with the national character. Humboldt gave the theory of inner and outer forms of language. Outer formincludes sounds in rough form and inner material includes structures and grammar.

Aristotle's Form and Function and Darwin theory of evolution led the way for functionalism. In this perspective, one may reflect language as

arevisioncarefully chosen for a specificplace in which the communication improved sociality and conversednumerous adaptive-reproductive benefits (Darwin 1871; Washburn & Lancaster 1968; Greenfield 1991; Lieberman 1984; Knight 1998; Dunbar 1992, 1998;Tomasello et al. 2005; Számadó and Sathmáry 2006;Givón 2009; Bickerton 2005). Prague school is termed as the key element of Functional linguistics, it is a point from which functional linguistics started it journey. Pague school (1930's) mainly focused on how linguistic elements perform specific grammatical and phonological functions in the given context.

One of the influential figures in prague school were Roman jakobson (1896-1982). Jakobson gave the model of the functions of the language. This model comprised upon six elements. (1)addresser (the sender), (2) context, (3) addressee (the receiver), (4)message (5) common code and (6) contact and tends to perform the following functions: (1) referential ("The Earth is round"), (2) emotive ("Yuck!"), (3) conative ("Come here"), (4) phatic ("Hello?"), (5) metalingual ("What do you mean by 'krill'?"), and (6) poetic ("Smurf") jakobson (1960).

NikologyTrubtzkoy (1890-1938) is mainly considered as the founder of morphophonology. He is termed as the founder of the science of phonology. It deals with the phonemic representation of morphemes. Its main focus is how changes in sound occur in morphemes when these morphemes are used to combine words. The most available work is Anderson (1985) who explains the impact of Trubetzkoy on the Prague Circle. Earlier but significant work is Baltaxe (1978) whoconcentrates on the phonological matters. Toman (1995) considers a chapter on the work ofTrubetzkoywhicharranges his linguistic interests in the broader context of Eurasianism.Andre Martinent (1908-1999) gave the theory of Functional syntax (Martinent, 1960).

Simon Dik (1940-1995) proposed the theory of Functional Grammar (Dik,1997). This theory has undergone several changes and latest is available in 1997 model. The theory includes semantic function (Agent, Patient, Recipient, etc.), Syntactic functions (Subject and Object) and Pragmatic functions (Theme and Tail, Topic and Focus). Prague school also coined the pair term theme and rheme which was later employed by Halliday.

Karl Bühler (1897-1963) was a German psychologist and linguist. Organon model of communication (Bühler 1990) and treatment of diesis were his key contribution. This model proposed three functions of language expressive, cognitive and conative. The expressive function refers to the indication of the mood or attitude of the speaker (or writer);moreover thecognitive function of language refers to its employment for the transmission of factual information; and on the other hand conative function of the language shows theapplication to manipulate the person who is making a speech tocreate some applied effect.

J. R. Firth (1890-1960) was an English linguist. Firth published his two famous works, *Speech* (1930) and *Tongues of Men* (1937). Firth gave the idea of "Context of situation" according to him whole situation and circumstances are important for creating the meaning of the utterance. He put a lot of emphasize on this inference that meanings are context dependent.

Filmore (1929-2014) proposed the idea of "Case Grammar". Itexamines the surface syntactic structure of the sentences by analyzing the grouping of deep cases (like the semantic roles) Object, Agent,Location, Benefactor or the Instrument— which are obligatoryforverb. According to Fillmore, every verb chosesfirm number of deep cases todevelop its case frame. Thus, the case frame definessignificant

aspects of semantic valency of adjectives, nouns and verbs. Case frames are related to certain restraints, such as deep case can befall only once in a sentence. Few are obligatory and rest are optional.

Robert Van Vallin (1952) is an American linguist. Role and Reference Grammar (1993) is proposed by him. In RRG, the explanation of a sentence in a specific language is framed in terms of (a) communicative functions andits logical (semantic) pattern (b) the grammatical processeswhich are available in the language to expressthe meanings.

Last but not least, Michael Halliday (1925-2018) was the active functional linguist. He developed Systematic Functional Linguistic Grammar which proved influential internationally. Halliday proposed three basic functions of language; Ideational, textual and interpersonal. Halliday drew inference from the contribution of Bühler and Malinowski. Halliday's Systematic Functional Linguistic Grammar is opposite to the approach of chomskey's Universal Grammar. Chomsky is of the view that language is built in: Halliday is of the view that language is learned. Chomsky advocatesthe idea that human beings carry a grammatical programbuilt in into the brain while Halliday opposes it. He said that grammar mirrors function which is graspedwith the help of experience. Chomsky promotes 'Universal Grammar' in contrast to Halliday. Chomsky claims that language occursindividually from experience: Halliday is of the view that language develops with the help of experience of people and the world around them. Theory of Chomsky is Cartesian – it means: mind is existing separately from the matter: Ideas of Halliday are Darwinian – it means: the language and the mind follow the same rules as all the other aspects of the reality. Theories of Chomskyare metaphysical and of Halliday are scientific.

References

Anderson, S. R. 1985. *Phonology in the twentieth century: Theories of rules and theories of representations*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.

Anderson, A., S.C. Garrod and A.J. Sanford (1983) "The accessibility of pronominal antecedents as a function of episodic shift in narrative text", Quarterly J. of Experimental Psych., 35A

Baltaxe, C. A. M. 1978. *Foundations of distinctive feature theory*. Baltimore: Univ. Park Press.

Beakley, B. and Ludlow, P. (ed): 2007: The Philosophy of Mind, Classical Problems/ Contemporary Issues, second edition, New Delhi.

Block. N, (ed.) 1980S , Readings in the Philosophy of Psychology, Vol. 1 Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press

Bühler, K. (1990). The model of Language as Organon.*Bühler, K. Theory of language*, 30-39.

Dik, S. C. (1997). *The theory of functional grammar: the structure of the clause*. Walter de   Gruyter.

Filmore, C. (1968). Universals in Linguistic Theory.In *The case for case*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston Norwood, NJ

FIRTH, J. R. (1966).Speech (1930).*The Tongues of Men and Speech (Oxford University Press, London, 1964)*.

Firth, J. R. (1937). 1964. The Tongues of Men and Speech.

Givón, T., & Ranch, W. C. (2013).On the intellectual roots of functionalism in linguistics. *Functional approaches to language*, *248*, 9.

Hobbes.T, 1651: Leviathan,ch.-5

Jakobson, R. (1960). Linguistics and poetics.In *Style in language* (pp. 350-377). MA: MIT Press.

Martinet, A. (1960).Elements of a functional syntax.*Word*, *16*(1), 1-10.

Nuyts, J. (2007). Cognitive linguistics and functional linguistics. In *The Oxford handbook of cognitive linguistics*.

Radcliffe-Brown A (1952) Structure and Function in Primitive Society . Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

Toman, J. 1995. *The magic of a common language: Jakobson, Mathesius, Trubetzkoy, and the Prague Linguistic Circle*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Van Valin, R. D. (1993). A synopsis of Role and Reference Grammar.*Advances in role and reference grammar.*