

A form of binarism: Lévi-Strauss' definition on cultures

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a critical examination of Lévi-Strauss' methodology and its relation to concepts of binary oppositions. Lévi-Strauss argues for a methodological value of concepts of binary oppositional concepts. Yet, I argue that meanings of culture are circulated within Lévi-Strauss' own hypotheses in which meanings of cultures are given based on sets of binary oppositional terms. I also argue that such revision fails to provide social scientists with a better understanding of cultural differences.

Introduction

Lévi-Strauss argues that concepts of binary oppositions should be given a methodological value, not an ontological value. In other words, the importance of concepts of binary oppositions resides in their use to understand/analyse cultural phenomenon (i.e. methodological value), but these concepts cannot be assumed to have a fixed reference point to which all problems are traced back (i.e. ontological value). The purpose of this paper is to examine Lévi-Strauss' methodology and seek its possible theoretical association with Iris Young's (1990) thesis on cultural differences.

This paper begins with a brief discussion of Lévi-Strauss' account of binarism, abandoning the ontological value of binarism and favouring the methodological value. It goes on to discuss Lévi-Strauss' s idea of 'bricolage' in social sciences and introduce his 'functional' perspective on binary oppositional concepts. It follows with a discussion of Lévi-Strauss' whole approach in defining cultures. It is argued that meanings of cultures are given within sets of binary oppositional terms and, the significance of culture comes from its distinctiveness in a relationship of a set of binary subjects. This paper concludes with a discussion on the relationship between Lévi-Strauss' s thesis and Iris Marion Young' s theory on cultural differences and, also offers a short critique on the Lévi-Straussian approach.

Lévi-Strauss and concepts of binary oppositions

Derrida (1978: 284) summarises that Lévi-Strauss's double intentions toward concepts of binary concepts are 'to preserve [the binary oppositions] as an instrument something whose true value he criticises.' The problem of ontological truth of binary oppositional concepts could be understood, whether there are essences, discernible essential elements and meanings, attached to any set of binary concepts. Lévi-Strauss contends that definitions of binary concepts such as nature/culture, elementary/complex, and savaged/civilised are limited in discriminations. A hybrid vocabulary and

an ambiguous concept, simultaneously belonging to any set of binary terms, easily breaks(?) the argument that there are fundamental essences assigned to any binary terms.

In Lévi-Strauss' research, although portraying a picture about the elementary structure of kinship, he admits meanings of 'elementary' and 'complex' structures are nevertheless problematical. He explains that 'there is no absolutely elementary structure' (Lévi-Strauss, 1963: xxiii) and, 'elementary and complex structures ... cannot be wholly contrasted, and the line separating them is also difficult to define' (Lévi-Strauss, 1963: xxiv). Lévi-Strauss argues that the main purpose of writing *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1963) is simply to show that 'marriage rules, nomenclature, and the system of rights and prohibitions are indissociable aspects of one and the same reality, viz., the structure of the system under consideration' (Lévi-Strauss, 1963: xxiii).

The traditional 'ontological' perspective of binarism is about an assumption of a foundational or essential relationship between two (binary) subjects. A basic presupposition for the traditional ontological perspective of binarism is that any explanation for a binary term should resort to its essential components and/or, that any explanation for their relationship eventually refers to an assumed 'fixed centre of subject' or a 'specific' point of reference of its presence. With this centre in mind, for instance, historical data or materials are reduced and organised on the basis of the binary oppositional relations. Also, because of this centre, this structured discourse is formatted and oriented according to one major set of binary oppositions, as the guiding principle in translating historical data and arranging the structure of discourse. This ontological perspective of cultures becomes a power that legitimates 'some' discourse to be 'the' discourse about certain cultural phenomenon.

According to Lévi-Strauss, the binary oppositional concepts are of methodological value in social science research, because they offer a 'general theory.' He further explains that 'this distinction [of elementary and complex structures] will be largely retained, although several reservations must be made' (Lévi-Strauss, 1963: xxiii). These reservations are made in order(?) to define the scope of Lévi-Strauss's approach and to clarify the significance of binary terms within his discourse. A 'general' theory, thus, suggests tolerance of a vague boundary between the binary concepts in classifying cultures. A 'general' theory allows a compromise between the ontological value and methodological value of concepts of binary oppositions.

The methodological value of concepts of binary oppositions is reinstated in *The Raw and the Cooked* (1969). In the opening paragraph, Lévi-Strauss says,

The aim of this book is to show how empirical categories - such as the categories of the raw and the cooked, the fresh and the decayed, the moistened and the burned, etc., which can only be accurately defined by ethnographic observation and, in each case, by adopting the standpoint of a particular culture - can nonetheless be used as conceptual tools with which to elaborate abstract ideas and combine them in the form of propositions (Lévi-Strauss, 1969: 1).

Bricolage and 'functional' binarism

In order to resolve his ambiguous attitude towards binary terms and to justify the methodological value of binarism in social sciences Lévi-Strauss introduces the concept of 'bricolage.' Bricolage refers to work done by a 'bricoleur' and a bricoleur is someone 'who works with his hands and uses devious means compared to those of a craftsman' (Lévi-Strauss, 1966: 16-17).

Lévi-Strauss suggests that a bricolage work in social sciences involves work on 'sign', deconstructs what has already been added on the 'sign' and evaluates discourses on the 'signified.' In other words, it is a 'retrospective' way to look at not only those elements ascribed to a concept (i.e. the signified), but also the ways in which these elements are organised. In his own words, '[the bricoleur] has to nnn back to an already existent set made up of tools and materials, to consider or reconsider what it contains and, finally ... to engage in a sort of dialogue with it and ... to index the possible answers which the whole set can offer to his problem' (Lévi-Strauss, 1966: 18). Also,

bricolage would deconstruct those 'previously determined sets consisting of theoretical and practical knowledge' and 'of technical means' that 'restrict other possible solutions' (Lévi-Strauss, 1966: 19).

By ways of 'deconstructing the signified' and the findings of different possible meanings toward a 'sign', Lévi-Strauss concludes that the assertion of fixed definitions about binary terms confines us from other possible translations of the same materials and from other plays of the binarism. A bricolage research would free social scientists from playing the concepts of binary oppositions.

The tool for doing bricolage is the bricoleur's hand and, in fact, for Lévi-Strauss, this tool refers to the concepts of binary oppositions within social sciences. Lévi-Strauss has defined bricolage as 'an activity which on the technical plane gives us quite a good understanding of what a *science we prefer to call a "prior" rather than "primitive"*' (Lévi-Strauss, 1966: 16, italics mine). Binarism has to be the foundation for social sciences, mainly because binarism is a language as old as Western science and Western philosophy. For social scientists, this language of binarism is a necessary condition, consisting of the 'tools' and the 'knowledge', to which we have been confined. The bricoleur's hands refers to language of binarism in which social scientists have been long immersed and in which the social scientists' knowledge and methodology have been constructed. The tools and knowledge in doing bricolage are both confined to the language of binarism.

If the methodological value of binary oppositions is to distinguish differences (in cultures), the concepts of binary oppositions are given a 'functional' role as an 'useful tool', or a principle in defining cultures.¹ As functional, bricolage thus incorporates a series of 'new arrangement of elements' and 'continual reconstruction from the same materials.' A necessary result of this application would be multiple implications in understanding and defining cultures. Discourses of these implications could be contradictory with each other. Moreover, every discourse is conditional and its validity is provisional.² Lévi-Strauss summaries the practice of bricolage as follows,

[The bricoleur's] universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with 'whatever is at hand', that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed to any particular project, but is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock or to maintain it with the remains of previous constructions or destructions (Lévi-Strauss, 1966: 17).

Because there is no fixed centre or essential relationship of any binary terms, within a structure, the substitution of contents, elements, or terms is always possible and the permutation and, the transformation of elements are also possible. By assigning the methodological value of binarism, each discourse reflects only one possible structure in analysing cultures. Historical data and materials could be given with different interpretations. Thus, the notion of playing binary terms celebrates multiple locations in defining cultures. Lévi-Strauss' redefinition of the value of binarism reflects well in Derrida's words,

It has always been thought that the centre, which is by definition unique, constituted that very things within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality. This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the centre is, paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside* it. The centre is the centre of the totality, and yet, since the centre does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality has its centre elsewhere. The centre is not the centre.³ (Derrida, 1978: 279).

As far as functional binarism is concerned, every discourse is a partial and possible comprehension of cultures and, in Lévi-Strauss own terms, it is the 'mytho-poetical' nature of 'bricolage.' Lévi-Strauss argues that the mythico-poetical nature is partly due to limited means, power and knowledge. In other words, it is impossible, for the social scientist, to get away from the language of binarism and every discourse within social sciences has to be completed through binarism. For instance, Lévi-Strauss says, that the studies of mythology as one form of intellectual bricolage, is expressed by virtue of 'a heterogeneous repertoire which ... is nevertheless limited. It

has to use this repertoire ... whatever the task in hand because it has nothing else at its disposal' (Lévi-Strauss, 1966: 17). Elsewhere, he argues,

The elements which the 'bricoleur' collects and uses are 'pre-constrained' like the constitutive units of myth, the possible combinations of which are restricted by the fact that they are drawn from the language where they already possess a sense which sets a limit on their freedom of manoeuvre. And the decision as to what to put in each place also depends on the possibility of putting a different element there instead, so that each choice which is made will involve a complete reorganisation of the structure, which will never be the same as one vaguely imaged nor as some other which might have been preferred to it (Lévi-Strauss, 1966: 19).

Another way to show the mytho-poetical nature of the social sciences is through the examination of other methods apart from bricolage. Lévi-Strauss has distinguished the approach of bricolage from those of the engineer and physicist, but he comes to the conclusion that the engineer and physicist are indeed bricoleurs and their discourses all reflect this 'mytho-poetical' nature. According to Lévi-Strauss, the engineer, compared to the bricoleur, wishes, and is able to engage with plenty of resources, construct the totality of his language, syntax, and lexicon. However, like bricolage, the engineer's and physicist's discourses will be mytho-poetical if bricolage implies the necessity of borrowing one's own concepts from the text of a heritage.

As far as functional binarism is concerned, bricolage shows itself as a project of the impossibility of totalisation. If the concept of binarism is functional, it signals its role of 'application' in analysing cultural phenomena. As a result, a possible discourse about cultures will have to undergo(?) empirical testing. In this sense, 'totalisation no longer has any meaning' in that bricolage excludes the possibility of including infinite data. As Lévi-Strauss explains, the denial of totalisation 'is not because the infiniteness of a field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field - i.e. the language and a finite language - excludes totalisation' (Derrida, 1978: 284).

Binarism and hypothetico-deductivism

Lévi-Strauss once gave a brief, but useful summary of his methodology in which the place of concepts of binary oppositions is asserted.

The initial hypothesis demands therefore that from the outset we place ourselves at *the most concrete level* - that is, in the heart of a community or a group of communities sufficiently alike in regard to their habit, history, and culture. However, while this is undoubtedly an essential methodological precaution, it cannot mask or restrict my intention. Using a small number of myths taken from native communities which, should it prove successful, will be of universal significance, *since I expect it to prove that there is a kind of logic in tangible qualities, and to demonstrate the operation of that logic reveal its laws* (Lévi-Strauss, 1969: 1, italics mine).

It might be right to summarise Lévi-Strauss's approach as follows:

1. To set up a hypothesis that culture could be analysed through concepts of binary oppositions.
2. To verify this hypothesis is to apply the principle of binary oppositions in a deductive manner.
3. To reach the conclusion that concepts of binary oppositions hold universal significance and concepts of binary oppositions are the basis for understanding cultures (e.g. The structure of kinship represents a system of systems which are based on binarism).

Roman Jakobson, the leader of the Prague Linguistic Circle, argues concepts of binary oppositions as 'distinctive features' in distinguishing linguistic units from one another within language.⁴ These distinctive features are created as oppositional between sounds. Lévi-Strauss found that it is precisely

these distinctive features that appear as the specific defining features of human cultures and, provide the key to understand cultural meanings.

According to Jakobson, these distinctive features of sounds are results of psychological *a priori*, ie. the formal binary structuring capacity of the mind and that is expressed in the binary discrimination of distinctive features. Like the concept of bricolage, this psychological *a priori* makes language and meaning possible and, this *a priori* confines us in doing social sciences. For the same reason, concepts of binary oppositions become the principle and the defining features of human cultures.⁵

Lévi-Strauss found the similarities between the studies of phonology and anthropology.

Like phonemes, kinship terms are elements of meaning; like phonemes, they acquire meaning only if they are integrated into systems. 'Kinship systems' like 'phonemic systems', are built by the mind on the level of unconscious thought. Finally, the recurrence of kinship patterns, marriage rules, similar prescribed attitudes between certain types of relatives, and so forth, in scattered regions of the globe and in fundamentally different societies, leads us to believe that, in the case of kinship as well as linguistics, *the observable phenomena result from the action of laws which are general but implicit.*' (Lévi-Strauss, 1993: 34, italics mine).

'*The observable phenomena*' and '*the action of laws*', in the paragraph above, suggest, firstly, cultures are not for discovery of their essences, but for interpretation through a possible universal rule. In other words, the distinctive features are the basis of Lévi-Strauss's 'hypothesis' in analysing cultures. This is the inspiration that Lévi-Strauss first derived from Jakobson's theory in constituting his discourse. According to Clarke (1981: 166), Jakobson has sought to identify linguistic universals at two levels: 'implication universal' and 'substantial universal.' The search of for(?) an implicational universal depends on the search for a substantive universal. For Jakobson, the studies of language acquisition in children, of linguistic change and of aphasia help him develop a hierarchical structure in the system of distinctive features (i.e. the binary oppositions), underlying all phonological systems. This hierarchical structure takes its form as 'the presence of A implies that of B (or, its absence).'

To be sure, Lévi-Strauss is not concerned about the 'nomenclature' function of binarism, but the 'observable behaviour' in kinship studies. He distinguishes a 'system of terminology' from a 'system of attitudes.' The former studies consist of static classifications of kinship terms, e.g. father/son, husband/wife and so on. These studies lack 'real, simplifying and explanatory' significance according to Lévi-Strauss. He is more concerned about the informative function of binarism; that is, distinctive features of binarism are exemplified in terms of their relations to a discourse and within a discourse. Lévi-Strauss further argues that the study of a 'system of attitudes' should focus on 'a dynamic integration of the system of terminology' and he suggests the anthropological study begin with an observable anthropological problem.⁶ This anthropological problematic bears a methodological significance, referring to a hypothesis as a possible cultural pattern integrated by concepts of binary oppositions.

The validity of 'implication universal' and 'substantial universal', in fact, depend on each other. This validity of 'implication universal' and 'substantial universal' is reached only in terms of a strong methodological implication. In Jakobson's theory, firstly, the binary distinctions found across different languages provide a foundation on which Jakobson further develops a study of 'implication universal.' That is, a hypothesis of the phonological distinctiveness is formed through an inductive collection of features of a small number of languages. Then, this hypothesis is verified in a deductive way, by applying phonological distinctiveness to a large number of languages. If this distinctiveness could be said to be universal, we would be able to conclude that the principle of binary oppositions can be applied to identify and generate the sound system of every natural language.

This methodology seems self-proving in that the 'implication universal' and the 'substantial universal' exist within a symbolically dependent relationship. On the one hand, the validity of the

'implication universal' (i.e. the phonological distinctive features of sounds) cannot be discovered until it is examined through different language systems. On the other hand, the validity of 'substantial universal' (i.e. the 'fact' of the nature of language) is reached by applying these phonological distinctive features (i.e. 'implication universal').

Lévi-Strauss might be aware of this mistake. He carefully avoids justifying the binary distinctiveness as(?) a foundation for study. In his early work, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, he does not discuss the philosophical background of binarism. Later, he simply comes to echo Jakobson's phonology in anthropological studies and concern about a 'deductive' way to verify the methodological value of binarism. An example of this is evident in Lévi-Strauss' s account of conducting studies of kinship,

It has been shown that the complete set of marriage regulations operating in human societies, and usually classified under different headings, such as incest prohibitions, preferential forms of marriage, and the like, can be interpreted as being so many different ways of insuring the circulation of women within the social group or of substituting the mechanism of a sociologically determined affinity for that of a biologically determined consanguinity. Proceeding from this hypothesis, it would only be necessary to make a mathematical study of every possible type of exchange between n patterns to enable one almost automatically to arrive at every type of marriage rule actually operating in living societies and, eventually, to discover other rules that are merely possible; one would also understand their function and the relationships between each type and the others.

This approach was fully validated by the demonstration, reached by pure deduction, that the mechanisms of reciprocity known to classical anthropology... are but a special instance of a wider kind of reciprocity between any number of partners (Lévi-Strauss, 1993: 60).

This statement could be summarised as follows: firstly, Lévi-Strauss makes an assumption about the study of certain features of marriage rules and kinship system. Secondly, this problematic is set up as a hypothesis: 'to ensure the circulation of women within the social group or of substituting the mechanism of a sociologically determined affinity for that a biologically determined consanguinity.' Thirdly, the methodology to verify this hypothesis is deduction.

Simon Clarke (1981: 146) points out a 'teleological intention' of language in the discourse of the Prague Linguistic Circle. The teleological intention refers to an aim, 'to discover the system of language by relating it to the functions of language as a means of communication.'

In other words, linguistics is a teleological discipline that seeks the structure of language by means of relating linguistic form to linguistic function. These linguistic functions provide linguistics with an *a priori* on the basis of which its systems can be constructed. The functions do not derive from properties of the mind, but from the needs of communication. The nature of language is to be understood 'theoretically by showing it is a means of communication adapted to its function.' As a result, the presentation of 'language' is subject to, for instance, 'constraints of physiology (e.g. the discriminatory powers of hearing), of psychology (e.g. the capacity of the memory), and sociology (e.g. the channels of communication, the extent of shared information, the orientation of the communication)' (cited in Clarke 1981: 160, italics mine). As Clarke concludes, '*langue*, is therefore(?) not an inert object, but a teleological system, that teleology being a social teleology.'

As language is allocated (?)/alternatively/ endowed with a 'functional' meaning, language is a tool for communication. Linguistics composes itself as an intentional object and its structure is an expression of its function as an instrument of human communication. Thus, the nature of language cannot be separated from linguistic analysis. This teleological intention shows that the system of language (*langue*) is exactly reflected from the finding of the expressions of language (*parole*). The division of *langue* and *parole* is no longer oppositional, but dialectical because *langue* and *parole* refer to each other; *langue* consists of and is created by *parole* and, *parole* is an exploitation of *langue*; they are embedded within(?) each other.

Lévi-Strauss's discourse on mythology represents itself as a teleological discipline, which results from a teleological intention and results in a teleological approach. Social scientists, as bricoleur (i.e. the handyman), 'constantly thinking with heterogeneous objects - objects in which there was no clear distinction between concrete thought, aesthetic form-giving, and a subject's material practice' (Foucault 1994: xxxix). Lévi-Strauss once argues for his methodology with a teleological purpose in analysing cultural phenomenon; he says, 'I start with a myth chosen not so much arbitrarily as through an intuitive feeling that it was both rich and rewarding, and then, after *analysing it in accordance with rules laid down in previous works*, I establish the group of transformation for each sequence, either within the myth itself, or by elucidation of the isomorphic links between sequences derived from several myths originating in the same community' (Lévi-Strauss, 1969: 2).

The teleological intention distinguishes The Prague Linguistic Circle from other Saussurean structural analysis, for instance, phenomenology and positivism. Both of these approaches, following Saussure's basic principle of structuralism, assume *langue* as an unconscious collective entity. While phenomenology states that *langue* reflects psychological reality, positivism holds that *langue* is an ideal-object structure, which is a collective substance of linguistic performance (*parole*). For phenomenology, *langue* is an abstraction and the relations that make up the system of *langue* are abstract relations. These relations are not inherent in the object, but imposed on the object by the intention of the speaker and recovered by the hearer. *Langue* is neither an objective(?) reality nor purely a reflection by the subject. *Langue* is the intersubjective expression of a subjective intention.

Both phenomenology and the Prague Linguistic Circle agree on the point of view that language and culture are objective systems of symbols without any inherent meaning. Language is simply an objective instrument for communication. For phenomenology, the meaning of any symbol within the language system is given by those who are involved within any communicative world. The particular meaning of any symbol disappears immediately after it is isolated from those who expressed them. For phenomenology, 'language is not an object but a "gesture" by which the subject signifies the world' (Clarke, 1981: 176). Nevertheless, although adopting a phenomenological view(?) of language, the members of the Prague Linguistic Circle take *langue* as a subjective(?) intention. However, they do not take this notion to its limit. They see *langue* as the performative activity of those who use it. Instead of arguing that *langue* is the expression of intersubjectivity, they argue that 'linguistics' is an intentional object whose structure is an expression of its function as an instrument of human communication.

In summary, Lévi-Strauss' 'hypothetico-deductive' methodology is quoted in his own statements as follows,

Once we have defined these differential structures, there is nothing absurd about inquiring whether they belong strictly to the sphere considered or whether they may be encountered (often in transformed fashion) in other spheres of the same society or in different societies. And if we find these structures to be common to several spheres, we have the right to conclude that we have reached a significant knowledge of the unconscious attitudes of the society or societies under consideration (Lévi-Strauss, 1993: 87).

Bricolage and a politics of difference

Iris Marion Young (1990) argues for 'a politics of difference' in which concepts of binary oppositions are granted(?) methodological significance. Young's main concern is to argue for a 'heterogeneous public', in theory, wherein 'group differences of gender, age, and sexuality should not be ignored, but publicly acknowledge and accepted' (Young, 1990: 179). Concepts of binary oppositions are exemplified in definitions of social group and Young's discussion begins with particular significant meanings of social movements. The discussion is precisely based on aspects(?) of 'oppression' and 'domination.' One of Young's contributions to 'meanings of differences' is her theory of 'distributive injustice' by which definitions of 'oppression' can be discovered(?).

On the basis of her observations of the new social movements in the United States since the 1960s, Young suggests that 'oppression' should be viewed as conditions and that concepts of binary opposition function as the medium in classifying these conditions. Young argues,

The contexts in which members of these groups use the term oppression to describe the injustices of their situation suggest that oppression names in fact a family of concepts and conditions, which I divide into five categories: exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence (Young, 1990: 40).

'Distributive injustice' suggests that different social groups have different histories about 'oppression' and different political interests. To some extent, these oppressed groups may all be included in the discussion of 'oppression' and the conditions of 'oppression.' However, the respective suffering social groups are diverse, incommensurable and fragmentary. It is obvious, as Young explains, that '[in an] abstract sense all oppressed people face a common condition', nevertheless, 'it is not possible to define a(?) single set of criteria that describes(?) the condition of oppression of [these] groups' (Young, 1990: 40). The nature of the conditions of 'oppression' or 'injustice', and the according category of social group, are such that, in Young's words: '[d]istributive injustice may contribute to or result from these forms of oppressions, but none is reducible to distribution and all involve social structures and relations beyond distribution' (Young, 1990: 9). As a result, definitions of 'differences' and associated meanings of cultural differences are to be viewed as 'variations' and so that these differences may be preserved and affirmed in the public sphere.

Young's theory is widely espoused in social sciences and also in the field of educational research. Michael Peters (1995), for example, strongly supports Young's thesis on difference in which the notion of difference is no longer repressive. Peters argues that to view group difference as Otherness suggests a 'unity' which 'generates dichotomies of the included and the excluded.' Social groups or cultural differences are seen 'as non-interrelational, as mutually exclusive, as creating clear borders which mark one group off from another.' By contrast, a politics of difference, such as Young's theory, 'unfreezes fixed identities, recognising that they are both relational and contextual.' (Peters, 1995: 48-49).

Both Lévi-Strauss and Young give binary oppositional concepts a methodological value. Both of them refuse to see cultural differences as facts of arbitrary exclusiveness between groups and, acknowledge binary terms as useful devices in analysing cultural differences. To them, each explanation of culture on the basis of a binary oppositional term is a bricolage discourse; cultural and historical affinities are attached and, at the same time, alienated from a subject.

Any bricolage discourse of cultural phenomenon is a result of (Lévi-Strauss' and Young's) 'teleological discipline.' In other words, binary oppositional terms no longer are the tools in analysing cultural difference, but they are the only way in picturing the whole cultural world. Bricolage is an intentional object, which is structured on basis of the function of binary oppositional concepts as an instrument. For Lévi-Strauss, because of the teleological intention of bricolage, the focus has put on the verifying the universal possibility of binary oppositional terms as distinctive features in cultures. [I cannot make sense of this sentence - can you?] In Lévi-Strauss' bricolage discourse on culture, the intrinsic characteristics of the relationships within cultures become irrelevant. The bricolage discourse imposes a possible discourse in which the subject is inserted.

The teleological intention of Young's discourse is also evident. The meaning of cultural differences is reached through her first definitions of 'justice/injustice', then definitions of 'oppression', then definitions of 'a social group.' In Young's case, a subject is engaged with, and inserted in, many different discourses. The intrinsic relationships are claimed to be relational, because of their Marxian interpretation principle, and contextual, because of their incommensurability. These bricolage discourses are sometimes conflicting, and yet supplementary.

Moreover, this teleological character of bricolage suggests that every bricolage discourse is an autonomous reality. By focusing on the distinctive function, distinctive features work to distinguish

one subject from the other. Since it is analysed from the point of view of the distinctive function, the entire cultural system is therefore reduced to a series of functional distinctive relations. To Young, bricolage discourses are interpreted according to five specific politically interested (functional distinctive) relations. There are five faces of oppression; each is defined on the basis of binary oppositional terms and each face is independent and autonomous.

Every bricolage discourse is provisional. Due to the teleological intention of bricolage, every discourse represents but one aspect of human cultural existence, which is the result of a political or methodological decision. The autonomy of bricolage discourse is only a provisional autonomy. The hypothesis is 'verified' because of the substantial significance; i.e. the principle of binary distinctiveness has gained significant support because this principle has successfully been gone through a number of *langue*. However, this discourse could be said to be 'true' because it does not find significant problems. In other words, we may find another hypothesis contradictory to the initial hypothesis, and also verify it because of its substantial significance.

For both Lévi-Strauss and Young, cultural analysis starts with the help of binary oppositional terms, but their methodologies are by no means identical. Lévi-Strauss tries to argue for a 'universal principle' in understanding cultural differences and tries to draw a conclusion of cultural phenomenon among different cultural groups. By contrast, Young follows a Marxian interpretation of cultural differences and leaves these differences as unresolved, as the nature of the public. While Lévi-Strauss draws a convergence among these differences, Young simply leaves these cultural differences entangled. If Lévi-Strauss integrates some local bricolage discourse into a grand one, Young simply affirms 'differences of these local bricolage and treats them as relational and as variations. Despite Young's argument for multiple discourses of the cultural world, her analysis remains a Marxian one and her new theory on binary oppositional concepts as distinctive features does not keep her away from labouring over(?) Hegelian negations.

Finally, the provisional nature is also reflected in(?) methodological limitations(?). The bricolage discourse is the product of abstraction, an abstraction that ignores all but the distinctive function of the cultural system. The discourse is isolated on the basis of a functional argument and cannot be understood in isolation from that function. When Lévi-Strauss argues the impossibility of a neat binarism, he suggests that not all oppositions between sounds are ontologically significant. In other words, not all oppositions are distinctive, and it is only with(?) reference to the linguistic function of differentiating meanings, and to the linguistic context within which sounds are made, that one(?) can determine which oppositions define distinctive features of the sound system. In any particular context, one phoneme will be opposed to others not as a whole, but only by those phonetic features that define its functional distinctiveness.

Conclusion

Lévi-Strauss' discourse on cultures gives binary oppositional concepts a functional value. Every bricolage discourse is regarded as provisional, autonomous and every bricolage discourse accounts for only one aspect of cultural phenomena. Despite this new attempt, it is argued that the whole picture of cultures is created based on a series of binary oppositional concepts and that a bricolage discourse is a result of a bricoleur' s teleological intention. It is found that Iris Young's theory on cultural differences is construed on a similar theoretical base. The Lévi-Straussian approach on cultures offers a new meaning of concepts of binary oppositions, yet it is argued that it does not provide a sound ground for political and social movements.

Notes

1. Lévi-Strauss's intention is to show that, if we can successfully apply concepts of binary terms in defining cultures, gradually from one culture to the next, the universal significance of the principle of binary oppositional concepts will be verified.
2. It was mainly because of this point that Lévi-Strauss was once considered as a postmodernist. See Weinstein, D. & Weinstein, M. (1993).
3. However, Derrida goes further to argue that a new attempt, presumably the one like Lévi-Strauss's, does not go beyond Western philosophy. He says, '[b]y orienting and organising the coherence of the system, the centre of a structure permits the play of its elements inside the total form. *And even today the notion of a structure lacking any centre represents the unthinkable itself.*' (Derrida 1978: 279, italics mine).
4. For full discussion on relationship between Lévi-Strauss and Jakobson, see my section, 'Lévi-Strauss, Saussure and the Prague Linguistic Circle', in Chueh (1998).
5. Champagne, R. (1990) argues that 'Lévi-Strauss himself rejects the alliance of these names in a common venture called structuralism. He would rather have his name associated with a tradition beginning with Georges Dumezil and Emile Benveniste and continuing with Jean Pierre Vernant and his colleagues of the Centre de Recherches Comparees sur les Societes Anciennes at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (now called the Gernet Center).'
6. For instance, Lévi-Strauss (1993: 39) says, 'Granted the hypothesis (to which we wholeheartedly subscribe) of a functional relationship between the two systems, we are nevertheless entitled, for methodological reasons, to treat independently the problems pertaining to each system. This is what we propose to do here for a problem which is rightly considered the point of departure for any theory of attitudes - (that of the maternal uncle).'

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