

**University of M'sila/Faculty of letters and foreign languages**  
**English Department**  
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**Teacher: Mrs. Harizi**

## **Behaviourism & the main contributions of Leonard Bloomfield to linguistics**

Leonard Bloomfield (1887-1949) was an American linguistic and philologist, one of the most important representatives of American structuralism. Bloomfield rejects the application of all that was not “directly observable” for linguistic analysis; in the study of language he marginalizes the semantic aspect. Leonard Bloomfield left his mark on the fields of morphology and syntax. He was teacher and founder of antimentalism (a theory contrary to the Sapir’s mentalism which is an interpretation of language inextricably linked to acts of the mind), leads to its ultimate limits the dissociation of signifiers and meanings, to exclude these of his consideration. He claims that the linguist can only make assertions about the system of signifiers, because the facts of meaning, mental and conceptual in nature, are not his concern. His linguistic is concern only in analyzing formal features of language. The significance is only taken into account as a control, to be sure that the conclusions are not irrational.

Bloomfield was a colleague of Sapir at Yale University, after having worked in Ohio and Chicago, both of which were located in opposite theoretical positions, as Bloomfield rejected the possibility that linguistics analyze meaning, while for Sapir semantics is an essential part of the studies about the language and languages. Bloomfield’s main works is admittedly *Language* (1933), setting out his version of structuralism linguistics. Bloomfield says that his work draws on the three main traditions in the study of language: the comparative–historical, philosophical and empirical, descriptive and prescriptive.

Despite this triple, Bloomfield boosted mainly descriptive field studies. That descriptivism is limited by the fact that as he admitted, speaking communities are often not homogeneous, an observation that history has placed as required of all socio and ethnolinguistic studies today. One of the major concerns of Bloomfield is to give linguistics a similar character to that of the natural sciences, which explicitly considers an epistemological model. To do this, Bloomfield proposes to eliminate all mentalist or psychological studies of language, focusing on materials and mechanical aspects, that is, language is conceived by Bloomfield as a visible human behavior. Behaviors are described in terms of response and pair of stimulus on typical situations and that’s way Bloomfield is considered a representative of behaviorism, which has had expressions in various social sciences and humanities.

Behaviorism requires Bloomfield's to reformulate the place of semantics within linguistics, since this conception of language does not have place for any kind of concept or mental image (the definition of significance of Saussure): all that can be seen is a set of stimuli and reactions that occur in certain situations. Bloomfield accepts the Saussure premise that language study involves studying the correlation between sound and meaning, but technically, the meaning is too difficult to "see", so you should be outside the scope of linguistics. For Bloomfield, then, the language "begins" with the phonetics and Phonology.

Bloomfield argues that are two components that should focus the study of the correlation between sound and meaning: the lexicon and grammar. While the lexicon is the total inventory of morphemes of a language, grammar is the combination of morphemes in any "complex form". That is, the meaning of a statement follows from the sum of the meaning of lexical items plus "something else" that is the meaning provided by the grammar. Grammar includes both syntax (e.g. the construction of phrases) and morphology (e.g. the construction of words). Each individual language morpheme is an "irregularity" as far that represents an arbitrary relationship between form and meaning that must be memorized. Thus, the lexicon is defined as "a list of basic irregularities", a notion that has been recovered in various theories. Bloomfield's interest was to make linguistics a true science of language. This defined the task of the linguist as one that would address to study the emissions corpus, discovering regularities and structures.