**Lecture Three**

**American Structural Linguistics**

Franz Boas (1858- 1942) is considered the founder of American linguistics and American anthropology. His major concern was to obtain information on Native American languages and cultures before they disappeared.

Edward Sapir -Boas' student- (1884–1939) did first-hand fieldwork on many American Indian languages, contributed to historical linguistics (in Indo-European, Semitic, and numerous Native American families). Sapir defended the perception that each language has its own sound system, within which a determinate set of speech sounds are distinguished by specific features. The Whorf (or Sapir-Whorf) hypothesis (known also as linguistic determinism/ linguistic relativism) holds that a speaker's perception of the world is organized or constrained by the linguistic categories his or her language offers, that language structure determines thought, how one experiences and hence how one views the world. Whorf (1956 p. 20) claimed that “ people who use languages with very different grammars are led by these grammars to typically different observations and different values for outwardly similar observations”.

Leonard Bloomfield (1887–1949) is credited with giving American structuralism its fundamental form, making linguistics an autonomous field of science. Bloomfield's (1933) “*Language”* is considered a milestone in linguistics in which he put rigorous methods ‘discovery Procedures’ (Immediate Constituent Analysis ICA) which are rules and principles that would enable a linguist to discover in an exact way the description of any language. This book showed that Bloomfield was influenced by both De Saussure's thinking and behaviorist psychology. He defended that language study should deal objectively and systematically with observable data and describe what is being seen -external not internal-, hence, linguistics should focus on form not meaning. Henceforth, Bloomfield’s ICA was criticised for neglecting meaning, not being able to give clear directions in the case of binary cuttings such as: (That nice, efficient, old-fashioned secretary) and the problem of pre-position and post-position, not being able to show the relationship between sentences (passive/ active, affirmative/ negative…), not being able to explain ambiguities in sentences.

Till then, structural linguistics was influenced by psychological behaviourism; in other words, the psychologist can account for mental states through observing behaviour, the linguist similarly can discover and describe language through describing already produced patterns. However, this linguistic model was rejected by Chomsky who clarified that the corpus may contain errors as it may not include enough illustrations of the phenomenon under investigation (Sadiqi &Ennaji, 1999).