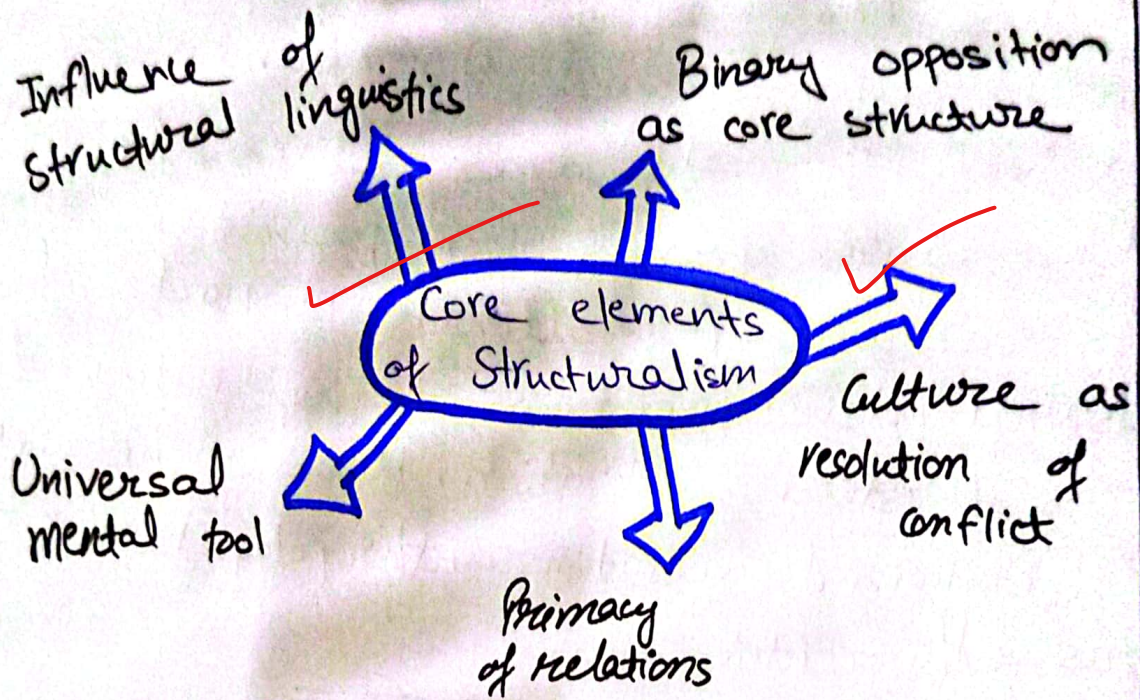


# Structuralism

Structuralism is a theoretical approach in anthropology which analyzes culture by understanding universal cognitive structure and relationship between different elements within a system. Claude Levi Strauss argued that all cultures share universal, unconscious cognitive structure and cultural phenomena i.e. myths, rituals and kinship are an expression of these mental patterns which are fundamentally organized by binary oppositions such as nature and culture; sea and mountain; human and divine; raw and cooked.



# Fig: Core Elements of Structuralism



## 1- Influence of Structural Linguistics

Claude Lévi-Strauss drew an analogy between language and culture, borrowing concept from linguists such as Ferdinand De Saussure.

## i- Analogy between language and culture

Ferdinand De Saussure argued that language is composed of two parts:

- a- Parole : Observable speech
- b- Langue : Underlying, abstract system

Similarly Lévi-Strauss argued that culture surface level variations in culture such as myths, rituals and kinship (parole) are an expression of universal



## i- Primacy of Relations

Linguists argued that phonemes gain their meanings through their relationship with other phonemes within a system. Similarly, Levi Strauss argued that cultural elements gain their meaning through their relationship with other elements within a cultural system.

## 2- Binary Opposition as Core Structure

### i- Universal Mental Tool

Claude Levi Strauss argued that the most fundamental way in which human mind categorizes information is by creating pairs of opposites. This tendency is not culturally learned in fact it is an innate cognitive structure.

### ii- Culture as Resolution of Conflicts <sup>x Contradictions</sup>

While binary opposition is a universal structuring tool, it causes inherent tension and culture serves to mediate and resolve these contradictions.



### 3. Cultural Elements Studied by Claude Levi Strauss

#### i- Food Preparation

Claude Levi Strauss argued that food preparation reflects universal cognitive structure based on binary oppositions such as <sup>elaborated and unelaborated</sup> nature and culture; ~~raw and cooked~~.

#### Culinary Triangle

Strauss argued that culinary triangle provides powerful model for this universal cognitive process.

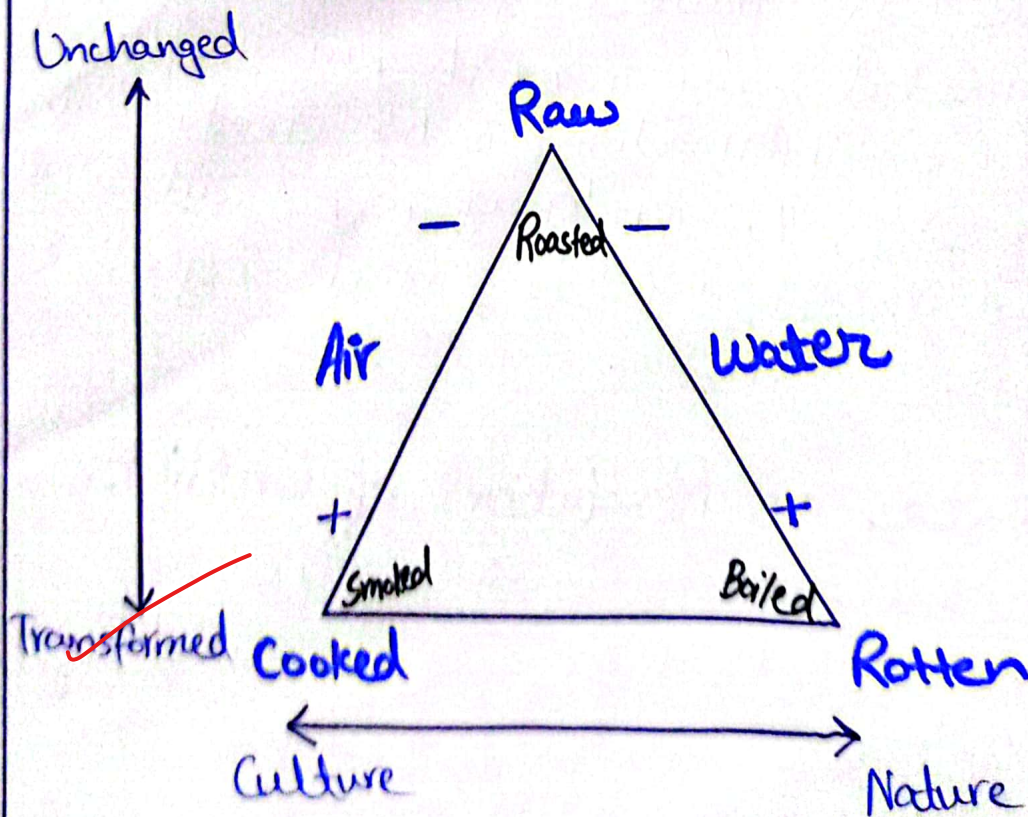


Fig: Culinary Triangle



## Mediation and Contradiction:

~~Culinary~~ triangle provides mediation by showing how cooking acts as a bridge between nature and culture. Raw food is part of nature but once it is cooked it becomes part of culture.

## Components of Culinary Triangle

There are three points of this model that form ~~semantic~~ field of food preparation based on two core oppositions i.e. nature and culture; ~~raw and cooked~~ elaborated and unelaborated.

### i- ~~Raw~~:

Food as it exists in nature. It represents an 'unelaborated' form of food.

### ii- ~~Rot~~

ii- ~~Cooked~~: ~~Cultural~~ transformation of food where raw materials from nature are processed using cultural techniques. It is an 'elaborated' form of food.

### iii- ~~Rotten~~:

Natural ~~transformation~~ of food. The food decays naturally over time. It represents an 'unelaborated' form of food.



# Mediation between core Oppositions using Cooking Techniques

Levi Strauss used different examples of cooking techniques to show how culture mediates between nature and culture; elaborated and unelaborated.

## i. Roasting

Roasting mediates between nature and culture by imitating a more natural cooking process.

→ Less elaborated: It uses direct, unmediated relationship between ~~pot~~ food and fire without pot (cultural object) ~~and water~~.

## ii. Boiling

Boiling mediates between nature and culture by imitating a more cultural cooking process.

→ More Elaborated

It is a process mediated by container (cultural object) and water.



## 2. Mythology of Asdicwal

Claude Levi Strauss studied mythology of Asdicwal famous among Tsimshian people of Pacific Northwest Coast and demonstrated that myths act as mediation and resolution of tensions in society caused by binary oppositions such as sea and mountain; human and divine. This myth tells about a hunter (Asdicwal) who marries a woman from the skyworld.

### Tensions in the life of Tsimshian

The people of Tsimshian divided into two ecological worlds:

- a- Coastal zone (sea): People practised fishing and trade. They were communal and living settled life.
- b- Inland zone (mountain or forest): People did hunting. They were more individualistic and living a mobile life.

This led to tensions in society due to following binary oppositions.



Category	Binary Oppositions	
<del>Social</del>	Communal	Individualistic
Economic	Fishing	Hunting
Cosmic	Human	Divine
Geographic	Sea	Mountain

The journey and marriage of Asdicwal mediated between these contradictions, symbolizing an attempt to unite opposite realms ~~therefore~~ restoring balance between nature and culture.

DEAR STUDENT CONTENT IS FINE BUT THERE IS  
ISSUE OF PRESENTATION  
CONTENT IS RELEVANT  
NEED IMPROVEMENT IN NEATNESS AND  
COHERENCE OF ANSWER 12/20

## Conclusion

Structuralism is a vital theoretical approach in anthropology that analyzes culture by understanding universal cognitive structure and relationship between elements within a system. Claude Levi Strauss argued that all cultural phenomena i.e. myths, rituals are an expression of these mental patterns shaped by binary oppositions.