

1. De Saussurean structuralism

Each human language is a composite of knowledge and abilities allowing speakers of the language to communicate with each other, to express ideas, hypotheses, emotions, desires, and all the other things that need expressing. Linguistics is the study of these knowledge systems in all their aspects: how is such a knowledge system structured, how is it acquired, how is it used in the production and comprehension of messages, how does it change over time? Linguists consequently are concerned with a number of particular questions about the nature of language. What characteristics do all human languages have in common? How do languages differ, and to what extent are the differences systematic, that is to say, can we find patterns in the differences? How do children acquire such complete knowledge of a language in such a short time? What are the ways in which languages can change over time, and are there limitations to how languages change? What is the nature of the cognitive processes that come into play when we produce and understand language? Ferdinand de Saussure is the first to say publically that language is a system, and it must be studied independently without referring to something else. He is the father of European structuralism and one of the founders of Contemporary Linguistics of the twentieth century. Saussure's presented his ideas in dichotomies : Diachronic vs. Synchronic Linguistics, Signifier vs. Signified, Langue vs. Parole, Paradigmatic vs. Syntagmatic Relations. His ideas had a major impact on linguistic theory in Europe and America and over the world. Saussure's most influential ideas are presented throughout the lesson.

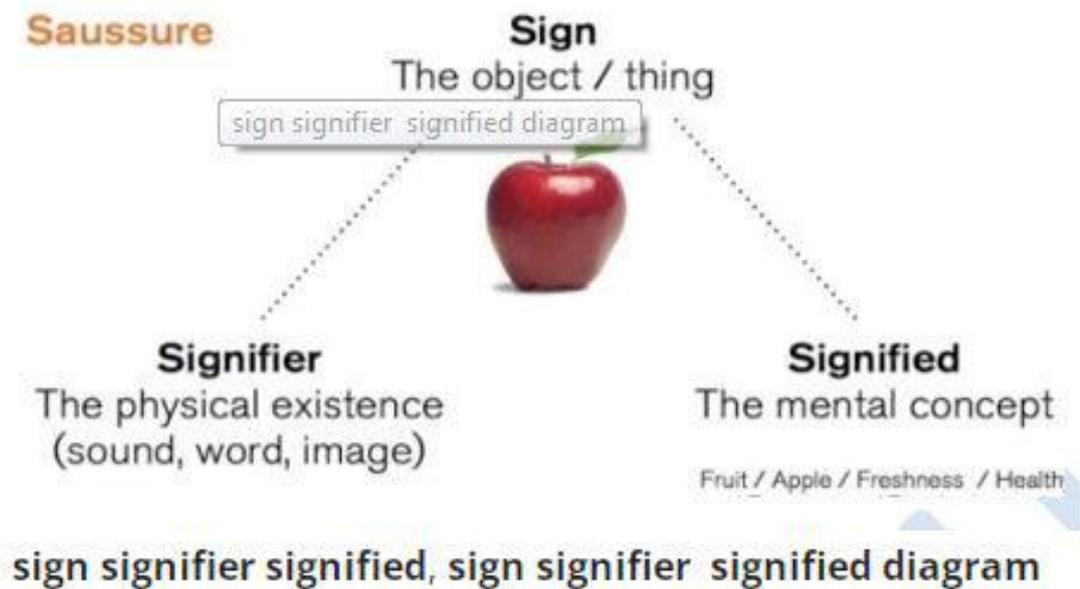
1.1 Definition of structuralism

It is a linguistic approach to study and describe language structure, which was introduced by the Swiss linguist De Saussure in his book entitled Course of General Linguistics. This most cited and influential book was based on lecture notes taken by Saussure's students at Geneva university and published in 1916. Structuralism provided the foundation for modern linguistics, starting first in Europe and then spread across mainly in America. The basic tenet in structural linguistics is that languages have certain structures, wherein linguistic items or elements form a working unit. This means that these elements exist in relation to one another.

1.2 Saussure's dichotomies

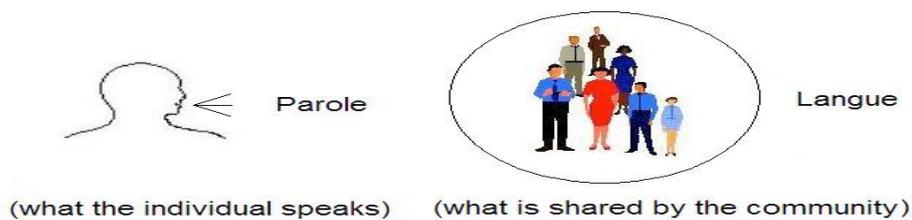
1.2.1 Signifier vs signified

According to De Saussure, language is a system of signs, i.e., words in a language are signs which carry meaning. So, a linguistic sign is an indicator of something or an idea and has two sides: a signifier (the form of the sign which can be touched, heard or seen), a signified (the mental concept or meaning of the signifier). The relationship between the signifier and signified is Arbitrary.



1.2.2 Langue vs Parole

Langue refers to the collective linguistic system shared by a particular speech community, e.g., all the rules of English language used by native speakers in England. Hence, langue is held to be a social product. On the other hand, Parole is an individual product that is unique to a given speaker, who applies to the rules of langue in everyday speech.



The distinction between langue and parole can be summed up as follows:

1. Langue is a language system shared by a community of speakers. Parole is the individual realization of that system.
2. Langue is a social phenomenon Parole is an individual phenomenon.
3. Langue is what is potential Parole is what is actual.

4. Langue is a static situation Parole is a dynamic situation
5. Langue is a concept. Parole is the sound image of that concept
6. Langue is a rule Parole is behaviour

1.2.3 Synchronic vs diachronic

The concept of the study of language in synchrony, which is opposed to diachronic studies of language, was introduced by Saussure in the early twentieth century. It aims to study a language at a given period of time as if the language was not evolving. In fact, this approach proposes to clearly and systematically state all the rules that govern the subject language at a certain time. Hence, diachronic is the approach of analysis and investigation of a particular language in its entire history.

1.2.4 Paradigmatic vs syntagmatic

Syntagmatic relations are "and" relations (**combination**) . Paradigmatic relations are "or" relations (**substitution**).

The sentence I work consists of two linguistic entities, a personal pronoun filling the role of subject and a verb filling the role of predicate. Sentence=Subject + Predicate. You do not have a sentence in English if you do not have a subject AND a predicate. Thus, the subject and the predicate are in a syntagmatic relation.

In the sentence The dog sleeps here. the phrase the dog can be replaced by the cat, the parrot, my pet, my uncle or many other noun phrases designating a singular entity that can sleep. In this particular sentence they are all equivalent: we can have the first OR the second OR the third...etc. In this particular pattern any noun phrase, but only one, designating an entity that can sleep in the place designated is syntactically equivalent. Thus, the noun phrases in question are equivalent but mutually exclusive and in a paradigmatic relation.

The following examples illustrate both dimensions:

We-must-respect-laws→syntagmatic relations

She should respect the law.

I will be happy.

You can leave now.

There is a syntagmatic relation between We+must+respect+laws, and a paradigmatic relation between (We, She), (must, should) and (respect, be).....etc. Thus, syntagmatic relations are seen according to a horizontal dimension or level and paradigmatic relations are viewed according to a vertical level or a vertical dimension. They exist at all levels of linguistic description: lexical, grammatical and phonological. Saussurean notion of paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations became the hallmark of the 20th century Linguistics: first, because it proposed that a single principle of structure unites all the levels at which language functions — sound, forms, and meaning; second, because it suggested a way of analyzing language that would not depend on a simple listing of elements with their "translation" into either another language or some sort of philosophical interpretation. Elements could henceforth be analyzed according to the relations they maintained with other elements, and the

language could be understood as the vast system — not of these elements — but of these relations. De Saussure's contribution to modern linguistics was responsible for three key directions in the study of language. He distinguished between Synchrony and Diachrony, between langue and parole, between signified and signifier. He also contributed by describing the distinction between syntagmatic and paradigmatic, the theory of associative value. Saussure's contributions to linguistics are given below: The contribution Saussure had on language was revolutionary. His work had a profound influence on many aspects of linguistics. Lastly the following statement from Benevise will reflect his contribution: "a forerunner in doctrines which in the post fifty years have transformed the theory of language, he has opened us unforgettable vistas on the highest and mysterious faculty of man... he has contributed to the advent of formal thought in the sciences of society and culture and to the founding of a general semiology". There is not a single general theory which doesn't mention his name. In sum, Major schools of linguistics in the world have incorporated the basic notions of Ferdinand de Saussure's thought in forming the central tenets of structural linguistics. The ideas are still valid and taught all over the world. Saussure's work in fact goes beyond linguistics and has influenced other disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and literary criticism. It has also influenced and inspired many different interpretations.