



## FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE'S CONTRIBUTION TO LINGUISTICS

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### ABSTRACT

*Listening to second language has been regarded as the most widely used long skill in normal daily life. It involves a complex process that allows us to understand and interpret spoken messages in real time by making use of a variety of sources such as phonetic, phonological, lexical, syntactic, semantic etc. Given the complexity that underlines this process of listening has been considered most difficult skill to learn o Men have speculated on the origin of the speech from the very early times. The Hebrews considered it a gift from creator and similar views were held by ancient Egyptians, the Hindus, the Chinese, and others. Linguistics developed as a subject in late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Before this language study was the property of philosophers and grammarians. A serious interest in the origin of language was taken by number of scholars in the late 18th and 19th century. This came to be prominence in 1876, when an English man sir William Jones delivered a paper demonstrating that an ancient Indian language of Sanskrit bore striking structural similarities to Greek, Celtic, Latin and German languages. These discoveries compelled/ forced scholars to trace out the original ancestral language. Comparative linguistics became the dominant branch of linguistics enquiry. This branch compares the two different languages in terms of their phonological, morphological and syntactic aspects. These types of discoveries laid the linguistics to form an independent separate branch of study. If, we were to award credit of turning linguistics into a broad intellectual discipline, today there would be little disagreement in awarding it to the Swiss Linguist the Ferdinand De Saussure ut of the four skills.*

### INTRODUCTION

**Ferdinand De Saussure:-**



He is a 19<sup>th</sup> century Swiss Linguist, who had the vision to see a larger role for his subject. Saussure sometimes is called as the father of 'Modern Linguistics'. He never published any major work on linguistics. However after his death his students collected together his lecture notes and published them in a small volume in 1916.under the title 'Cours De Linguistique Generale (A course in General Linguistics). Despite its slimness it had and continues to have a seminal influence on linguistics. Saussure compared a language to the game of chess in which piece is defined by both its situation on the board and its relationship with the other pieces. Saussure made very valuable contribution to linguistics. His contribution to linguistics helped it to form a separate independent branch of language study. We can summarize Saussure's contribution to linguistics as follows.

### **1] Langue and Parole:-**

#### **1] Langue:-**

Saussure has introduced these two terms to distinguish the sense of the word 'language'. .Language refers to the language system shared by native speaker of a language. In other words 'langue' means the abstract knowledge of the language which Saussure feels is known by the social group of particular language community. .in some respect 'Langue is similar to Chomsky's term 'Competence'. Chomsky's 'Competence' refers to the abstract knowledge of the native speaker about the language. According to Chomsky native speaker knows the rules of language intuitionally. This abstract knowledge is in the mind of the native speaker where Saussure places it in a society that uses a language. The concept of langue is inevitably tied up with Saussure's view of language as a sign system in which words are symbolically related to events, processes and things in the outside world.

The concept of langue emphasizes the systematic relationship between items in a language when viewed as a vast signaling system. These operate at all levels such as semantic, syntactic and phonological level. The notion of langue emphasizes the importance of language as a social phenomenon. This again makes it different from the Chomsky's term 'competence' where the tendency to see language as a biological and genetically inherited faculty.

#### **2] Parole:-**

The term 'Parole' refers to the actual use of language by the speaker of a particular social group. 'Parole' is in some respect similar to Chomsky's term performance. Term performance refers to the actual use of language by the native speaker .parole is dependent on langue as performance is dependent on competence. Parole specifies the users linguistic



behavior i. e. what they do with language where as Chomsky's performance specifies the individual's use of language.

The term 'parole' is frequently used in pragmatics where it can be used to describe that area of meaning which is not recoverable from the system itself. Historically linguists have been more concerned about langue than parole but with the developments in pragmatics and the revolution of language in use the interest of parole have been more widely promoted.

## **2] Language is a system of systems:-**

This is one of the major contributions of Saussure to linguistics. He said that every element in a system derives its significance from its relationship with the other element in the system. Thus the tense system in English has two formal contrasts in it past tense and present tense. Many Indian languages have three tenses 1] past tense, 2] the present tense, 3] future tense. The present tense in English cannot be equated with the present tense in Indian languages therefore the grammatical category tense must be defined separately for each language. The structure of language as a system i.e. there are interrelations between the linguistic units in a language whether sounds, words or meaning the way in which the individual element of a particular language are related, determines the structure of particular language. Separate items in a system can be understood only in the light of the system as a whole.

## **3] Sign, Signified, Signifier:-**

The term sign is frequently used by people studying communication theory to characterize the way in which meaning is communicated symbolically via certain objects within individual cultures. Thus, the cross operates as a sign within Christian culture. Saussure is closely associated with the concept of linguistic sign. He argued that word comprised two elements a sound image i.e. a pronunciation form or signifier and a meaning or sense (termed as the signified) so to use the example Saussure himself used the word tree is made up of a sound image or signifier /tri/ and a sense (or signified) indicating treeness. The relation between them is conventional not a natural one. There is no reason why society calls it as a tree. Why society shouldn't use any other sequence of sounds to represent treeness if it so wished. The signifier then acts as a label but for a concept not an actual object. It is the signifier and signified together, the complete word or sign which is used by us as a speaker of the language to refer to actual trees.

The following tree diagram will clarify the notion sign, signifier, signified

Sign: - tree

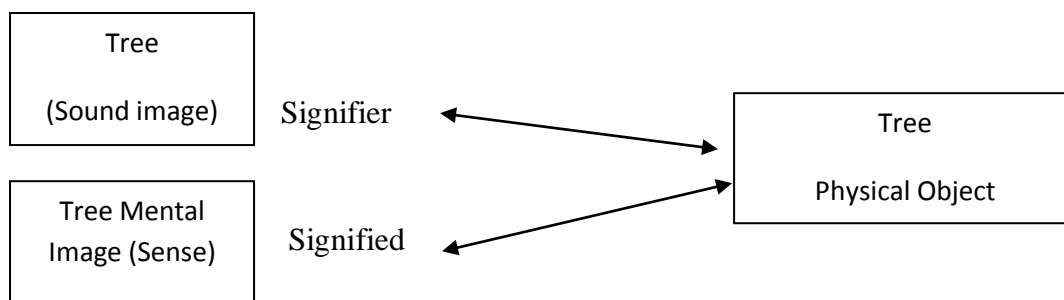


Diagram of the sign for tree

Other examples: -

Sign is an object for example table is a sign the pronunciation of the word table to show the concept / object table is this is signifier and the understanding of the concept table by the listener is termed as signified the term table.

#### 4] Synchronic view and Diachronic view: -

Saussure emphasized the importance of seeing language from two distinct and largely exclusive points of view to which he called synchronic view and diachronic view.

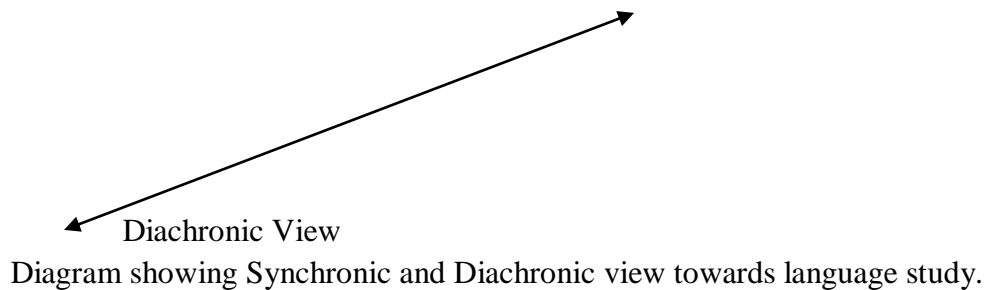
##### 1] Synchronic view:-

Synchronic linguistics sees a language as a living whole. Existing, at a particular time i. e. the language of the present day working class in Manchester. In order to study language of a particular time the linguists will collect the samples from the stated period and will describe that language's characteristics without considering the historical developments.

##### 2] Diachronic view:-

Historical change in a language is studied under the domain of Diachronic linguistics. Diachronic linguistics deals with the evolution of a language through time as a continuously changing medium a never ending succession of language states. Then we may wish to study the change in an old English to middle English or the way in which Shakespeare's styles changes from youth to maturity both would be the examples of diachronic study of language. A historical linguist is associated with the diachronic view of a language study. Following diagram will help us in understanding these two views

Synchronic view



## 2] Syntagmatic and Paradigmatic:-

Saussure imagined sentence as showing two axes on which items would be sorted in following ways. To the axis of substitution he termed paradigmatic and to the axis of combination he termed 'Syntagmatic'.

*'Syntagmatic' is the liner arrangement of units, sounds, letters, words etc.*

*'Paradigmatic' is the vertical arrangement of units, sounds, letters words, etc*

The following diagram will make it clear.

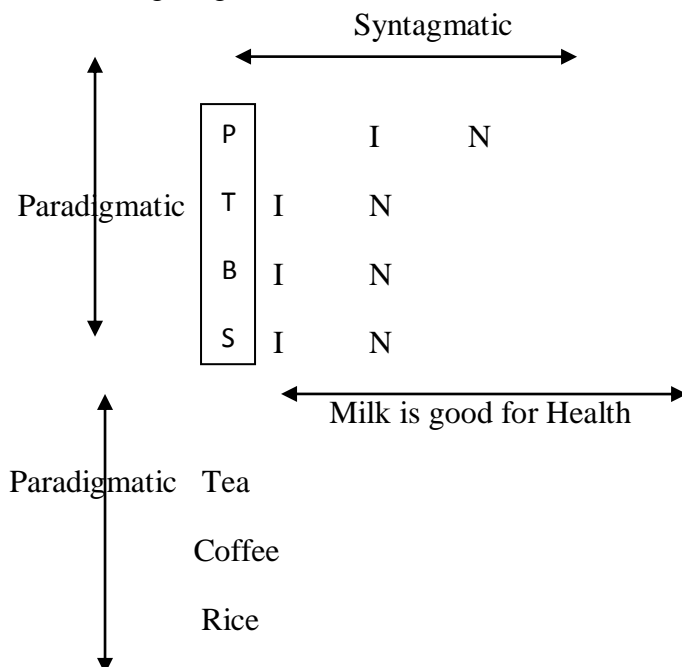


Diagram of the axes of language (Based on Saussure's notion)

## 1] Paradigmatic:-



A term paradigmatic describes the substitutable relationship that a linguistic unit has with other units. In the sentence milk is good for health. For example each of the word can be exchanged with a number of others without changing the basic syntactic arrangement.

Substitutability is one of the certain important in the classification of words into various categories such as noun, adjective, pronoun etc. Most of us became aware of paradigmatic relations when we are searching for the right word to use in a particular context paradigmatic relations are best visualized as the vertical dimension of language

## 2] Syntagmatic:-

A term, 'syntagmatic' that refers to the sequential characteristics of language, where we construct words and sentences. We follow a certain order in arranging the individual item to form the word/pit/ for example. We are obliged to utter the particular phonemes in that order. Any other order would either make an entirely different word or be nonsense. The phonemes which in this instance are the constituent of the word are referred to as syntagms and the relationships that they enter into with the phonemes or either side are referred to as syntagmatic relations.

To the conclusion, we can say that Saussure's methodology typically involves working with two term oppositions such as paradigmatic and syntagmatic, langue and parole diachronic and synchronic. This binary model of language in which two opposing term interact dynamically is distinctively of Saussure and has had wide spread influence beyond linguistics. Saussure's work comes at a time when a number of scholars in eastern European universities were turning their attention to the systematic study of language. Saussure's idea's fell on fertile ground such as at the Moscow linguistics circle and the Prague school of linguistics. So the Saussure's contribution to linguistics is very valuable and significant from the point of language study.

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