

Introduction to Theoretical and Applied Linguistics

FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE

/1857-1913/



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FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE

- **Ferdinand de Saussure** (/soʊˈsjʊər/; French: [fɛʁdinã də sosyʁ]; 26 November 1857 – 22 February 1913) was a Swiss **linguist** and **semiotician**/ˌsemɪəˈtɪʃən/ or **semiotician** (ˌsemɪˈɒtɪsɪst). His ideas laid a foundation for many significant developments in both linguistics and **semiology** in the 20th century.
- He is widely considered one of the founders of 20th-century linguistics and one of two major founders (together with **Charles Sanders Peirce** (/pɜːrs/ "purse"; 10 September 1839 – 19 April 1914)) of semiotics/ semiology.

SAUSSURE'S SYSTEM OF SCIENCES

General Psychology

Social Psychology

Semiology

Linguistics

External

Internal

Synchronic

Diachronic

SAUSSURE'S SYSTEM OF SCIENCES

The structure of linguistics and its relationship with other sciences (as follows from Saussure's concept) can be represented as follows:



SEMIOLOGY

- Beginning with the Greek word *sēméion* meaning "sign", Saussure proposes a new science of "**Semiology**":
"a science that studies the life of signs within society"

SYNTAGMATIC AND PARADIGMATIC RELATIONS

- **Syntagmatic** means one element selects the other element either to precede it or to follow it. For example, the definitive article "the" *selects* a noun and not a verb. “

SYNTAGMATIC AND PARADIGMATIC RELATIONS

- **Paradigmatic** analysis is the analysis of paradigms embedded in the text rather than of the surface structure (syntax) of the text which is termed syntagmatic analysis.

SYNTAGMATIC AND PARADIGMATIC RELATIONS

- In semiotics, the **commutation test** is used to analyze a signifying system. The test identifies signifiers as well as their **signifieds**, **value** and **significance**.

'STONE WALL PROBLEM'

- According to Daniel Chandler, the **commutation test** may involve any of four basic transformations which, to a greater or lesser extent, involve modification of the **syntagm** ['sɪntəm] or **syntagma** :
- **Paradigmatic transformations**
 - a) Substitution: pit- bit – big – dig – dug – mug – rug - rub
 - b) Transposition: bulk [bʌlk] - club klʌb]; 36 – 63;
- **Syntagmatic transformations**
 - a) Addition: law l [lɔ:] - lawyer ['lɔ:jə];
 - b) deletion: Claw [klɔ:]– law [lɔ:];

'STONE WALL PROBLEM'

- **Syntagma in British English**
- (sɪn'tægmə) or **syntagm** ('sɪn,tæm)
- **NOUN Word forms:** plural **-tagmata** (-'tægmətə) or **-tagms**
- **Syntagma in American English**
- (sɪn'tægmə)
- **NOUN Word forms:** plural **syn'tagmata** (sɪn'tægmətə) or **syn'tagmas**
- *Linguistics* – a unit in a sequential linguistic structure
- : also **syn,tagm** ('sɪn,tæm)

THE SIGN (LE SIGNE)

- The focus of Saussure's investigation is the *linguistic unit* or *sign*.

The sign (*signe*) is described as a "double entity", made up of *the signifier*, or sound pattern (referred to by Saussure as a 'signal'), and *the signified*, or concept (referred to by Saussure as 'signification').

THE SIGN (LE SIGNE)

- The **sound pattern** is **a psychological**, not a material concept, belonging to the system.

THE SIGN (LE SIGNE)

- The sign (signe) is described as a "double entity", made up of the signifier /**S**/ and the signified /**s**/.
- Both components of the linguistic sign are inseparable. One way to appreciate this is to think of them as being like either side of a piece of paper – one side simply cannot exist without the other.

ARBITRARINESS* OF SIGNS (LES SIGNES)

- The signifier /**S**/ and the signified /**s**/ relationship is arbitrary and based on convention.
- For Saussure, there is no essential or natural reason why a particular signifier should be attached to a particular signified. Saussure calls this the "*arbitrariness of the sign*" (l'*arbitraire du signe*')*.
- [**'a:bitr(ə)ri:nəs**]

ARBITRARINESS OF SIGNS (LES SIGNES)

- * This may not fit well Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) approach.

E.G. English 'snowdrop',

German 'Das Schneeglöckchen'.

Danish 'vintergæk'.

French 'perce-neige'

Italian 'Bucaneve'

Polish 'przebiśnieg' , 'śnieżyczka'.

SEMIOLOGY

- Beginning with the Greek word *sēméion* meaning "sign", Saussure proposes a new science of "semiology":
"a science that studies the life of signs within society"

THE LANGUAGE (FR. LANGAGE)

- According to Saussure, language is not a nomenclature [nəu'menklətʃə].
- Indeed, the basic insight of Saussure's thought is that denotation, the reference to objects in some universe of discourse, is mediated by system-internal relations of difference.

THE VALUE OF A SIGN (LE SIGNE)

- The value of a sign is determined by all the other signs in the language (French 'la langue').
- **Language is a system.** System comprises elements and relations between them. **Relations abstracted from the elements make the structure** of language.
- Elements are interchangeable.
- The **value** is of principal importance to a meaning management system. Values define and coordinate meanings.

THE VALUE OF A SIGN (LE SIGNE)

- Thus he argued that the sign is ultimately determined by the other signs in the system, which delimit its **meaning** and **possible range of use**, rather than its internal sound-pattern and concept.
- *Sheep*, for example, has the same meaning as the French word *mouton*, but not the same **value** /**French valeur [valœr]**/, for *mouton* can also be used to mean the meal *lamb*, whereas *sheep* cannot, because it has been delimited by *mutton*.

THE VALUE OF A SIGN (LE SIGNE)

- The **set of synonyms** redouter ("to dread"), craindre ("to fear"), and avoir peur ("to be afraid"), for instance, have their particular meaning so long as they exist in contrast to one another.
- But if two of the terms disappeared, then the remaining sign would take on *their roles*, become vaguer, less articulate, and lose its "extra something", its extra meaning, because it would have nothing to distinguish it from.

SYNCHRONIC VS DIACHRONIC L.

- Synchronic [sɪŋ'krɒnɪk] as it exists at one point in time
- Origin: mid 17th cent.: from late Latin synchronus (from Greek sunkhronos, from sun- 'together' + khronos 'time') + -ous
- diachronic [ˌdaɪə'krɒnɪk] Origin: mid 19th cent.: from dia- 'through' + Greek khronos 'time' + -ic
- To consider a language *synchronically* is to study it "as a complete system at a given point in time," a perspective he calls the AB axis.

SYNCHRONICAL VS DIACHRONICAL L.

- By contrast, a diachronic analysis considers the language "in its historical development" (the CD axis).

SYNCHRONIC VS DIACHRONIC L.

- Saussure argues that we should be concerned not only with the CD axis, which was the focus of attention in his day, but also with the AB axis because, he says, **language** is "**a system of pure values** which are determined by nothing except the momentary arrangements of its terms".

SYNTAGMATIC AND PARADIGMATIC RELATIONS

- Language works through relations of difference, then, which place signs in **opposition** to one another.
- Saussure asserted that there are only two types of relations: **syntagmatic** and **paradigmatic**.

LANGUAGES REFLECT SHARED EXPERIENCE

- Languages reflect shared experience in complicated ways and can paint very different pictures of the world from one another. To explain this, Saussure uses the word **bœuf** as an example. In English, he says, we have different words for the animal and the meat product: **Ox** and **beef**. In French, **bœuf** is used to refer to both concepts.

SYNTAGMATIC AND PARADIGMATIC RELATIONS

- To illustrate this, Saussure uses a **chess metaphor**. We could study the game **diachronically** (how the rules change through time) or **synchronically** (the actual rules).
- Saussure notes that a person joining the audience of a game already in progress requires no more information than the present layout of pieces on the board and who the next player is. There **would be no additional benefit** in knowing how the pieces had come to be arranged in this way.

WORDS ARE NOT JUST NATURAL SIGNS

onomatopoeia [ˌɒnəˌmætəˈpiːə]

- Saussure recognised that his opponents could argue that with onomatopoeia there is a *direct link between word and meaning, signifier and signified*. However, Saussure argues that, on closer etymological investigation, onomatopoeic words **can**, in fact, **be unmotivated** (not sharing a likeness), in part evolving from non-onomatopoeic origins. The example he uses is the French and English onomatopoeic words for a dog's bark, that is *ouaoua* and **Bow Wow**.

SOME AMAZING FACTS ABOUT F. DE SAUSSURE

- Ferdinand de Saussure was a comparative ([diachronic](#) [[,dʌɪə'krɒnɪk](#)]) linguist and contributed to development of **Laryngeal** [[,læɪn'dʒi:əl](#), [lə'rɪndʒɪəl](#)] (**hypothesis**) theory .
- Ferdinand de Saussure's made a discovery of **Hittite** [[,hɪ'taɪt](#)] – an **Indo-European-language** that was spoken by the *Hittites*, a people of Bronze Age Anatolia who created an empire, centered on Hattusa. The language, long extinct now, is attested in [cuneiform](#), in records dating from the 16th (Anitta text) to the 13th century BC.

SOME AMAZING FACTS ABOUT F. DE SAUSSURE

- While studying the phonology of Indo-European languages, **Jerzy Kuryłowicz** (Polish: ['jɛzɨ kɨrɨ'wɔvɨt͡ɕ]; 26 August 1895 – 28 January 1978) pointed at the existence of the Hittite consonant *ḫ* in his **1927** paper "ə indo-européen et ḫ hittite". This discovery supported **Ferdinand de Saussure's 1879** proposal of the existence of "**coefficients sonantiques**", elements de Saussure reconstructed to account for vowel length alternations in Indo-European. This led to the so-called **Laryngeal Theory**, a major step forward in Indo-European linguistics and a confirmation of de Saussure's theory.

SOME FACTS ABOUT F. DE SAUSSURE

- I. Ferdinand de Saussure's (1857-1913) "Course of General Linguistics" was first published in 1916. Ferdinand de Saussure did not write his world famous "Course of General Linguistics"!
- II. Saussure's most influential work, Course in General Linguistics (Cours de linguistique générale), was published posthumously in 1916 by former students Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, on the basis of notes taken from Saussure's lectures in Geneva.
- III. The Course became one of the seminal linguistics works of the 20th century for the innovative approach that Saussure applied in discussing linguistic phenomena. Its central notion is that language may be analyzed as a formal system of differential elements. Though the sign may also have a referent, Saussure took that to lie beyond the linguist's purview.

SOME FACTS ABOUT F. DE SAUSSURE

iV. Throughout the book, he stated that a linguist can develop a diachronic analysis of a text or theory of language but must learn just as much or more about the language/text as it exists at any moment in time (i.e. "synchronically"): "Language is a system of signs that expresses ideas".

V. A science that studies the life of signs within society and is a part of social and general psychology. Saussure believed that semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign, and he called it semiology.

LANGUE, LANGAGE, and PAROLE

- Saussure distinguishes between "language (**langue**)" and "**speech** (parole)".

"language (langue)"	"a system of signs that express ideas".
le langage	Discourse ???
"speech (parole)"	"individual speaking (parole)"

TRANSLATION ISSUES

DE	FR
Die Sprache	la langue «язык» + langage «речевая деятельность»;
Die Rede	la parole «речь»;

TRANSLATION ISSUES

LATIN	FRENCH
lingua	langue «язык»
sermo	parole «речь»; + langage «речевая деятельность»;

FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE'S WORKS

- (1878) *Mémoire sur le système primitif des voyelles dans les langues indo-européennes* (Memoir on the Primitive System of Vowels in Indo-European Languages), Leipzig: Teubner.
- (1881) *De l'emploi du génitif absolu en Sanscrit: Thèse pour le doctorat présentée à la Faculté de Philosophie de l'Université de Leipzig*, (On the Use of the Genitive Absolute in Sanskrit: Doctoral dissertation presented to the Faculty of Philosophy of the Leipzig University) Geneva: Jules-Guillamaume Fick.
- (1916) '**Cours de linguistique générale**', ed. C. Bally and A. Sechehaye, with the collaboration of A. Riedlinger, Lausanne and Paris: Payot; trans. W. Baskin, *Course in General Linguistics*, Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1977.

LEV SHCHERBA (RUSSIA)

- Lev Shcherba (1880 – 1944, Russian linguist and lexicographer specializing in phonetics and phonology) proposed another trichotomy [tri'kɔtəmi] model of Language viewed as **dynamic trinity**.
- In contrast to Ferdinand de Saussure, he recognized three rather than two objects of study: **speech activity**, **language systems**, and **language material**. He placed emphasis on the question of the capacity of the speaker to produce sentences never previously heard, a question which would become important to the linguistics of the later twentieth century

LEV SHCHERBA (RUSSIA)

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- Щерба рассматривает языковую систему, речевую деятельность и речь (как языковой материал) в качестве составляющих языка как динамического целого (ср.: Щерба 1974: 24-38).
- Щерба Л.В. Языковая система и речевая деятельность. Л.: Наука, 1974. 428с.

Lev Shcherba' classification of linguistic sciences

The Dynamic Whole of the Language

Speech
Activity

Language Systems

Language Material

THANKS FOR ATTENTION!