



European Structuralism

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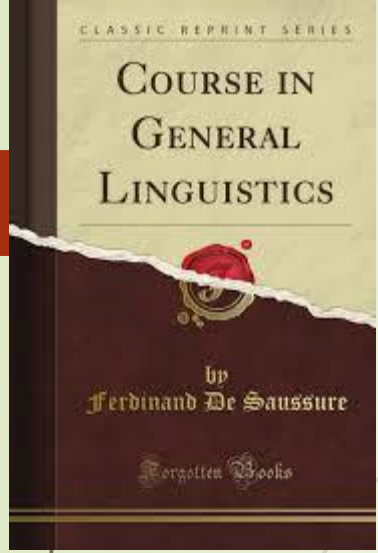


Ferdinand de Saussure
1857 - 1913

De Saussure was not satisfied with the historical comparison of language. He stated that such comparison only answered where a language comes from, but not what language is.



Pr. Saliha Chelli



Learning objectives

- In this lecture, students will be introduced to European structuralism:
- Structuralism: the Linguistic theory
 - Principles of the Saussurean linguistics (dichotomies)



Structuralism

- **Structuralism is an intellectual movement in human sciences with effects on linguistics, sociology, anthropology and other fields.**
- **Structuralism sees itself as a human science which tries to understand, in a systematic way, the fundamental structures that underlie all human experience and therefore, all human behaviour and production.**
- **It is used in different fields of study such as linguistics, psychology, anthropology, sociology and literary studies.**
- **Structuralism in Europe developed in the early 20th century, mainly in France and the Russian Empire, in the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure and the subsequent Prague, Moscow, and Copenhagen schools of linguistics.**

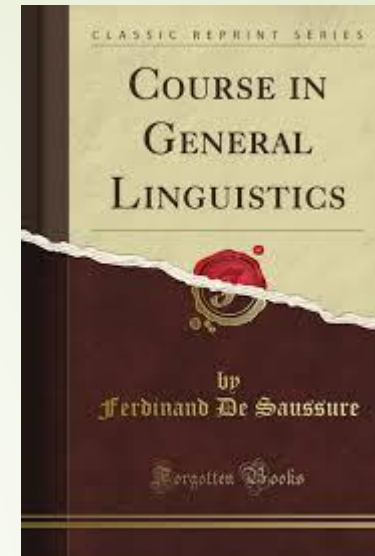
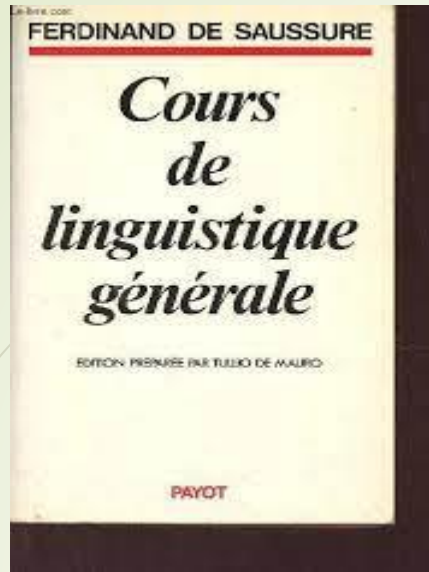
Ferdinand de Saussure

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913)


Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) was a Swiss linguist who occupies an important place in the history of linguistics.

He was the pivotal figure in the transition from the 19th to 20th century, and is generally considered the founder of modern linguistics.





He published little himself but his students reconstructed his ideas from his lecture notes and published them in 1916 as ***Cours de Linguistique Général (course of general linguistics)***. Many linguists also appeared and used his ideas as the approach in linguistics, such as Leonard Bloomfield, Charles Francis Hocke, Andre Martinet, Edward Sapir, and many more.


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- ▶ **Structuralism focuses on language structure/ form**
 - ▶ **Structural linguistics is based on the idea that language is self-contained.**



This means that it is a system whose interdependent parts acquire value through their relationship as a whole.

- ▶ **Structuralists focus more on the structure of language rather than on the meaning of words. This means that they are more interested in how words are used in a sentence and in the relationship between words.**



The key tenets of structuralism

- ▶ All languages have a common underlying structure
 - ▶ This structure is based on basic elements, or units, that can be combined in different ways to create meaning.
 - ▶ This structure is composed of small units called 'sign'
 - ▶ Language is a system that can be analyzed and described using the scientific methods
 - ▶ There is a direct relationship between the form of a certain language and its underlying structure.
 - ▶ The meaning of a sign is not inherent in the sign itself but determined by its relationship to the other signs in the system.
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- ▶ **Saussure** defines language as a system in which all the elements fit together, and which the value of any one element depends on the simultaneous coexistence of all the others
 - ▶ **David Crystal** (1980) said in his dictionary that structuralism is a term used in linguistics referring to any approach to the analysis that pays explicit attention to the way in which linguistic features can be described in terms of structures and systems.
 - ▶ **Colin's English dictionary** (2014): Structuralism is an approach to linguistics that analyses and describes the structure of language as distinguished from comparative and historical aspects.
 - ▶ Structuralism is an approach to the study of language that concentrates on its internal structure as opposed to the history of its development and its relationship with other languages.



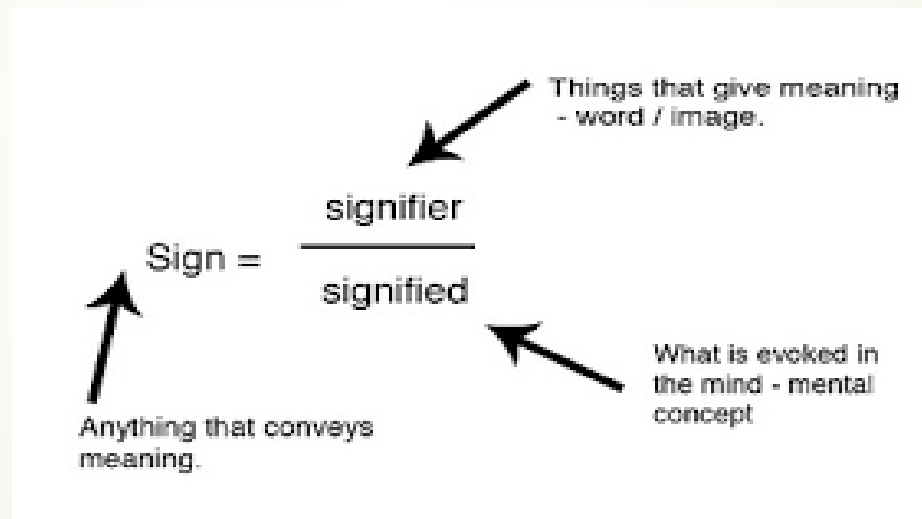
Principles of the Saussurean linguistics (dichotomies)

- **Synchronic versus diachronic**
 - **Signifier versus signified**
 - **Language, langue and parole**
 - **Syntagmatic versus paradigmatic relationship**
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Differences between the dichotomies

- **Synchronic** linguistics is the study of language at a particular point in time while **Diachronic** linguistics is the study of the history or evolution of language
- **The signifier** is any material thing that signifies, e.g., words on a page, a facial expression, an image while the **Signified** is the concept that a signifier refers to.







language, langue and parole

- ▶ **Language** is a human form of communication, which includes the phonetics, the phonology, the morphology, the syntax, the semantics, discourse context, as presented by a given speech community.
- ▶ **langue** is the system of language, coded in our minds, and it dictates how the things will come out of our mouths

It refers to the rules behind the way the language is arranged and used
- ▶ **Parole** refers to the actual language use (speech).

langue and parole

LANGUE

- Langue means **language or tongue**. It is the underlying system of rules in the language, conventionally accepted, fixed and **abstract** in nature.



PAROLE

- Parole means **speech or speaking**. Parole is individual variable and **concrete** aspect of language.



Langue and parole

Idea/concept of greeting and generation of the corresponding sound image



Brain sending the signal to the speech organs

Hi!

The brain will receive the sound-image and will conjure its corresponding concept

Sound waves travel to the ears



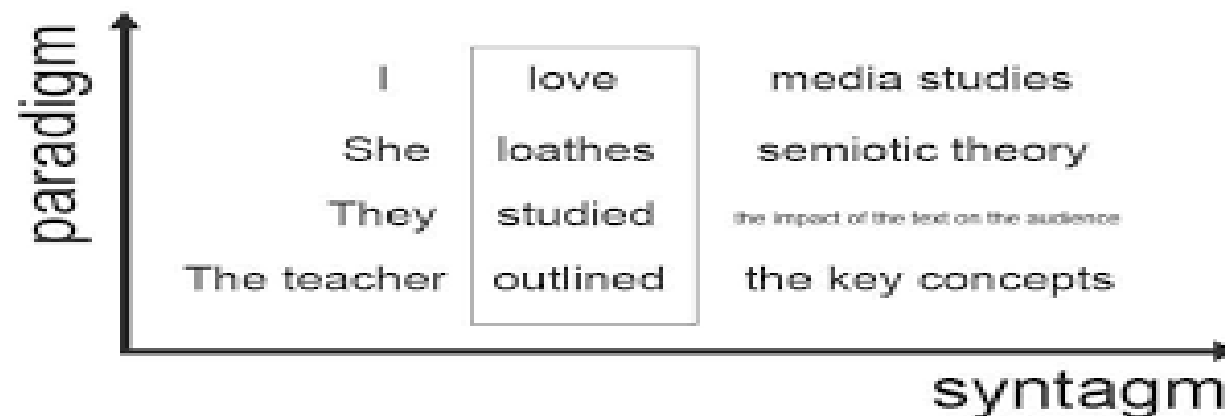
Syntagmatic vs paradigmatic relations

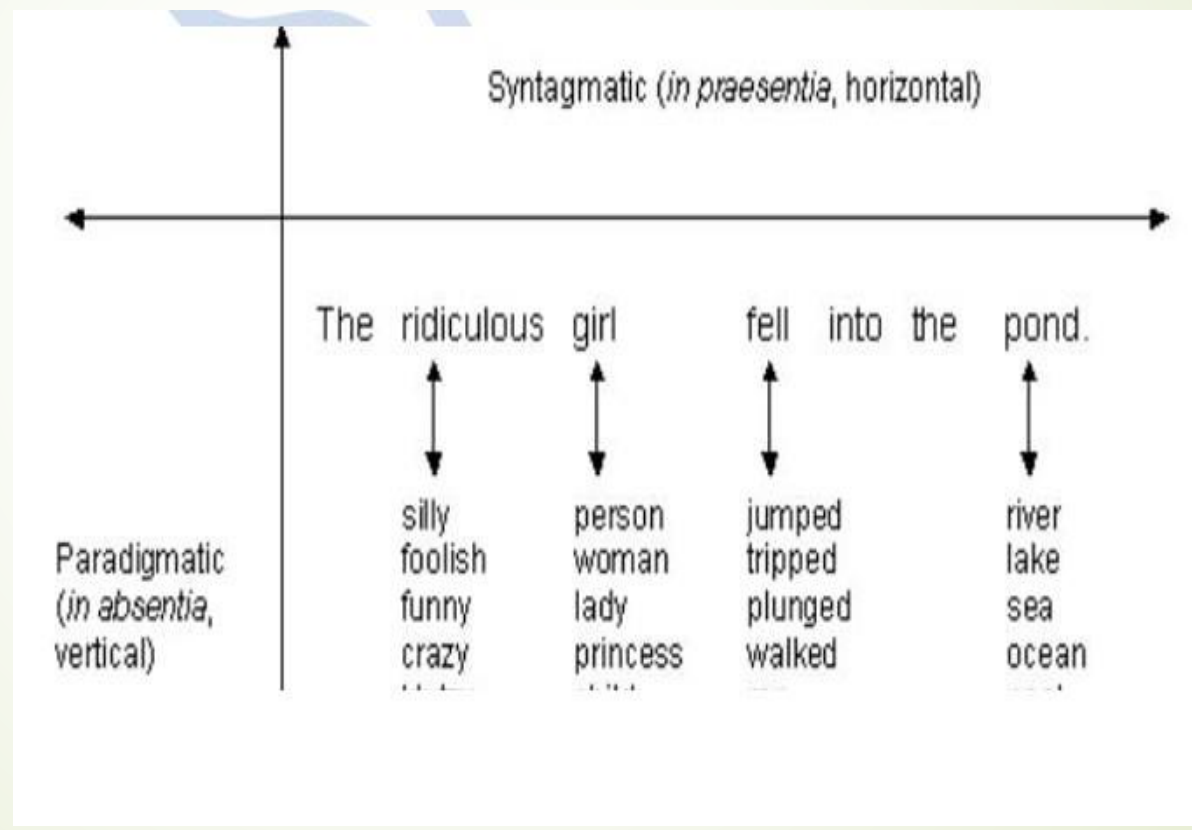
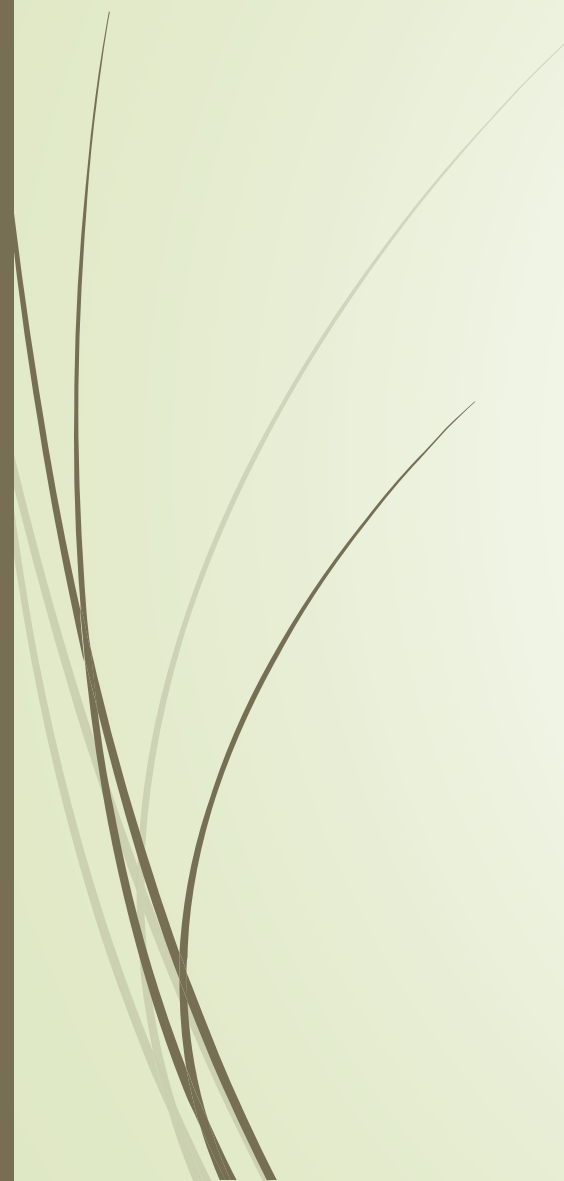
- **Syntagmatic relation** is a type of semantic relations between words that co-occur in the same sentence or text (Asher, 1994).

In other words, syntagmatic relation is about the relationship/position between words in a sentence. The syntagmatic relation occurs on the horizontal axis.

- **Paradigmatic relation** is a different type of semantic relations between words that can be substituted with another word in the same categories (Hjørland, 2014)

Paradigmatic relation describes a substitution relationship between words of the same word class. The substitution occurs on the vertical axis.





The	old	man	cried
Our		king	disappeared
That	pretty	woman	danced
John's		mother	laughed

Syntagmatic

Paradigmatic





References

▶ **An outline of modern linguistics:**

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▶ **Greenbaum, S. (1996).** The Oxford English grammar. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

▶ **Leech, G.N., Deuchar, M. & Hoogenraad, R. (2005).** English grammar for today (2nd ed.).

London: Macmillan. **Structuralism** : [https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ferdinand-de-](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ferdinand-de-Saussure)

[Saussure](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ferdinand-de-Saussure)