Lesson 3: Prague School (Prague Linguistic Circle)

Second year (L2) - Linguistics and Phonetics - Term 3

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What is structuralism?

What is structuralism?

- It is an approach to linguistics which treats **language** as an **interwoven structure (interrelated signs)**

- every item acquires identity and validity **only in relation to the other items** in the system.

What is structuralism?

Example

1. "He aims to *perfect* his painting skills"

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2. "His painting was perfect"

What is structuralism?

Example

1. "He aims to _per**FECT**_ his painting skills"

Verb

---

2. ""His painting was _**PER**fect_"

Adjective

???????????????????

- Studied at

- Major works:

- Considered a brilliant

???????????????????
18?? – 19??
Born: ???????

Ferdinand de Saussure

- Studied at **Leipzig University** under notable linguists

- Major work: '**Cours de linguistique Générale**'

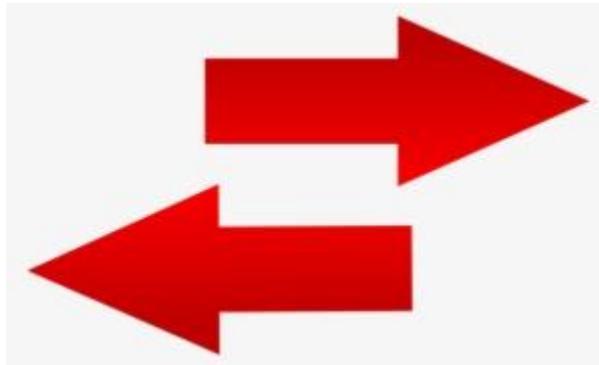- Considered a brilliant historical linguist

Ferdinand de Saussure
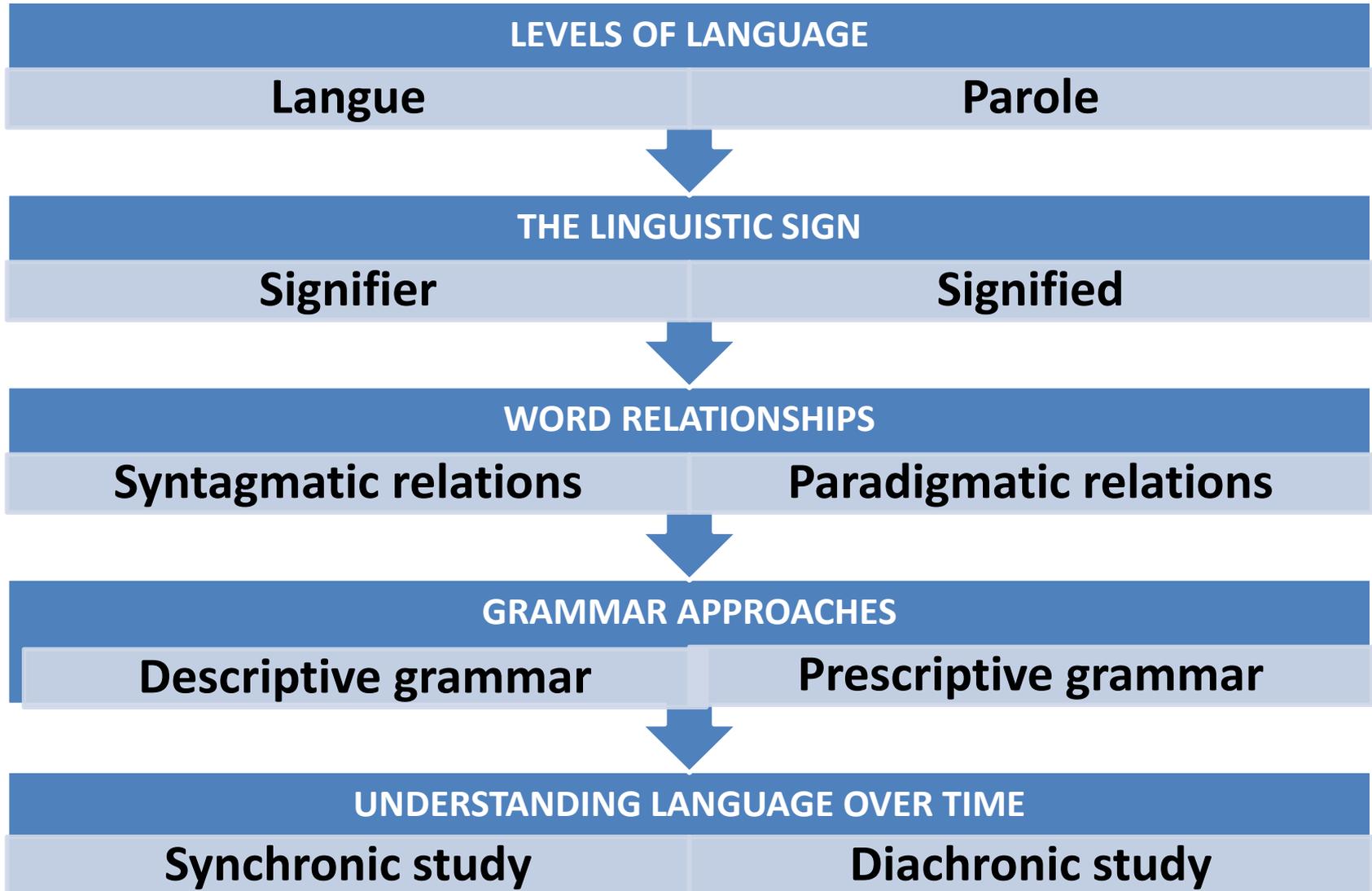**1857 – 1913**
Born: Geneva, Switzerland

Saussurean Dichotomies?

Saussurean Dichotomies

Saussurean dichotomies are pairs of **complementary concepts** that distinguish different aspects of **how language is structured** and **studied**.

Saussurean Dichotomies

LEVELS OF LANGUAGE	
Langue	**Parole**

THE LINGUISTIC SIGN	
Signifier	**Signified**

WORD RELATIONSHIPS	
Syntagmatic relations	**Paradigmatic relations**

GRAMMAR APPROACHES	
Descriptive grammar	**Prescriptive grammar**

UNDERSTANDING LANGUAGE OVER TIME	
Synchronic study	**Diachronic study**

European Schools in Linguistics since Ferdinand de Saussure

Ferdinand de Saussure, the founder of Structuralism as a linguistic theory, **inspired** many scholars all over the world and the creation of many schools such as:

1. Prague school
2. Copenhagen school
3. London school

The Prague School of Linguistics

The Prague School of Linguistics

Also known as the "***Prague Linguistic Circle***", was an influential group of linguists founded in **1926** in **Prague, Czech Republic**.

Founders:

Founder
Vilém Mathesius
1882 – 1945
Czech Republic

Founder
Roman Jakobson
1896 – 1985
(*Russian/ naturalised American*)

Key Contributions of the Prague School

The Prague School contributed to Modern Linguistics with the following ideas:

1. **Functional Approach to Language**

2. **Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP)**

3. **Communicative Dynamism**

4. **Distinctive Feature Analysis**

5. **Markedness Theory**

1. Functional Approach to Language

Core idea:

The Prague School saw language as a structured system, but

They viewed **language as a structure** where every element has a **function** in **communication**.

1. Functional Approach to Language

Core idea:

Linguistic structure should be studied in terms of **their purpose**, **not their form**

1. Functional Approach to Language

Example

- "Pat" /**p**æt/
- "Bat" /**b**æt/

- The **function** of these sounds (distinguishing between words like "pat" and "bat") is more crucial to communication than just how they're pronounced (i.e., **form**)

1. Functional Approach to Language

Example

Would you please open the window?

Grammatical form: [Modal + Subject + Politeness marker + Verb + art + Object]

Function: Polite request ✓

2. Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP)

Information is organized within a sentence according to its **communicative function** including:

a **theme** (the known or given information)
and **rheme** (the new information).

2. Theory of Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP)

Example:

"**The cat is sleeping on the mat**."

Theme: "The cat" is the theme, as it refers to the known or established information.

Rheme: "is sleeping on the mat" is the rheme, as it provides new information about the theme.

3. Communicative Dynamism

A concept that describe how the **structure** of a sentence is **shaped** by its **communicative purpose**.

3. Communicative Dynamism

Example

1. "John finally solved the problem."

2. "The problem was finally solved by John."

3. Communicative Dynamism

Example 1

In **Sentence 1**, "John" is the focus (the topic of interest), so he appears at the beginning.

In **Sentence 2**, "the problem" is emphasized by being placed first.

4. Distinctive Feature Analysis

- In phonology, Prague School members like Trubetzkoy introduced the concept of **distinctive features**.

- **No two distinct phonemes are the same.**

4. Distinctive Feature Analysis

Phonemes are made up of distinctive features (like **voicing**, **place,** and **manner** of articulation) that differentiate one sound from another.

4. Distinctive Feature Analysis

Example

- "fan" /**f**æn/
- "van" /**v**æn/

- The two sounds are quite similar in how they're produced but differ **voicing**

5. Markedness Theory

Markedness describes how one linguistic element can be

marked (having a distinctive feature) while another is **unmarked** (neutral or default).

5. Markedness Theory

Example

Past tense marked by –ed:

1. Unmarked/ Neutral/ Default: "**Jump**"
2. Marked/ Special: **"Jump<u>ed</u>"**

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5. **Markedness Theory**

Influence and Legacy

The Prague School's contributions extended beyond linguistics, influencing **semiotics**, **literary theory**, and **cultural studies**.

Its ideas laid the foundation for **structuralism** and **functionalism** in linguistics and inspired later scholars.

Questions?