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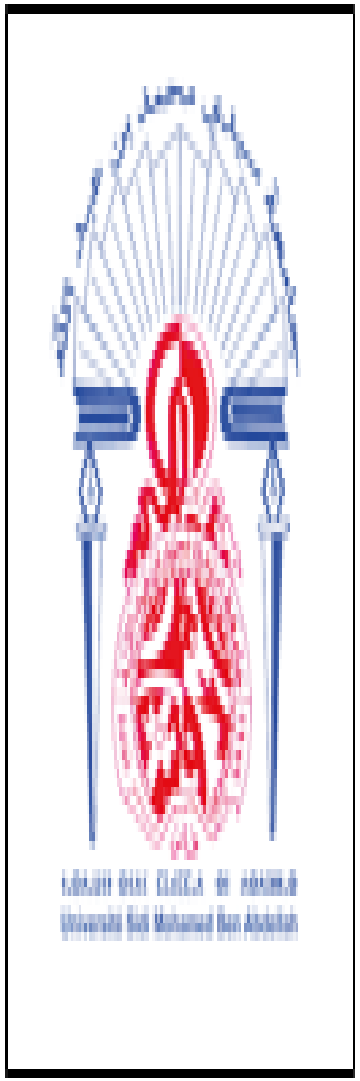

English Studies

Module: Introduction to Linguistics

Semester 4 / Group 1

Professor: Abderrahim El Karfa

DEFINING LINGUISTICS

- **The scientific study of language / The science of language**

- **A scientific / academic discipline the goal of which is the construction of a theory of language or an extended definition of language**

Historical Linguistics

- **Historical linguistics** is The study of change in individual languages and in language generally. It is concerned essentially with how the language had developed from an earlier form or what happened to it later.
- **Historical linguistics** is diachronic in nature: In a ***diachronic*** approach, we look at how a language has changed over some period of time.
- By the end of the eighteenth century, **historical linguistics** had begun to be firmly established, and throughout the nineteenth century the historical study of language was for many people synonymous with the scientific study of language.
- Towards the end of the century, though, a number of linguists began turning their attention to the serious study of the structure of language from **a non-historical point of view**.
- But the most influential figure was **the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure.**

structuralism

- An approach to the study of language which sees a language as a structured system.
- language is best viewed as a structured system, with each element in it defined chiefly by how it is related to other elements.
- In this view, which has come to be called ***structuralism***, it is the system which is the primary object of study, and not the individual elements present in that system.

Diachrony

- The time dimension in language. It was the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, in the early twentieth century, who first emphasized the fundamental difference between **synchrony** and ***diachrony*** in the study of language. In a ***diachronic*** approach, we look at how a language has changed over some period of time. Most work in **historical linguistics** is diachronic in nature, but not all of it: a linguist might well be interested in constructing a purely synchronic description of, say, the Old English of King Alfred's day or the Latin of Caesar's day, without considering how the language had developed from an earlier form or what happened to it later.

synchrony

The absence of a time element in linguistic description. In the early twentieth century, the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure introduced his celebrated distinction between ***synchrony*** and **diachrony**. In a synchronic approach to describing a language, we focus on that language at one moment in time and describe it as we find it at that moment. This need not be the present moment: we can equally construct a description of present-day English or of Shakespeare's English. In either case, we take no interest in how the language of that moment differs from the same language at any earlier or later moment; as soon as we start paying attention to that, we are taking a diachronic approach.

Langue and Parole

- We begin our consideration of this volume's Saussurean underpinnings with Saussure's original conception of the opposition between *langue* and *parole* -- or, language and speech.
- *Langue* refers to the common system of expectations that we all share, and that we each induce from the practice of our speech community when we learn to speak.
- *Parole* refers to actual messages that we individually and uniquely construct on the basis of the regularities (or code) provided by langue, joined with various other code-like systems (which Saussure did not name, but which presumably include social class markers, situation markers, and so forth), various communicative intents, [2] and chance factors.

Modern schools of linguistics

Three major schools of modern linguistics have been advanced and dominant since its foundation as an independent academic discipline, concerned with the scientific study of language.

- **The structuralist school: structuralism**
- “Structuralism is a theoretical and methodological approach in linguistics and other human (including social) sciences that attempts to gain insights into its subject matter by assuming that everything to do with human beings is built of more or less autonomous systems as relations of oppositions, may be of different types, but in general, are binary relations”.
- **Structuralism** is an approach to the study of language that sees a language as a structured system.
- **Structuralism** holds that a language is a structured system, with each element in it defined chiefly by how it relates to other elements.
- ***Structuralism*** holds that the system is the primary object of study, and not the individual elements present in that system.
- **Structuralism** gets its name because it emphasizes the importance of recognizing units of structure at every level, though in fact the recognition of **systems** in languages is no less important in the structuralist approach.

- **Structure** is a particular pattern which is available in a language for constructing a linguistic unit, or an instance of this. Structures can be recognized in languages at every level of analysis:
- Phonemes combine to build morphemes,
- morphemes combine to build words,
- words combine to build phrases,
- phrases combine to build clauses and sentences,
- sentences combine to build texts, and so on.

- At every one of these levels, the smaller units must be combined into larger ones in particular orderly ways determined by the rules of the language, and we therefore say in each case that we are looking at an instance of a particular structure. For example,
- The morpheme *bad* is built up from the three phonemes/b/,/æ/ and/d/, and many analysts would argue that, in fact, this is done by first combining/æ/ and/d/ into/æd/, and then adding/b/ to produce/bæd/.
- The adjective *happy* can take the prefix *un-* to produce the adjective *unhappy,* and this in turn can take the suffix *-ness* to produce the noun *unhappiness*. (We cannot analyse *unhappiness* as consisting instead of *un-* plus *happiness,* because *happiness* is a noun, and the rules of English word-structure do not permit *un-* to be added to a noun.)
- The words *little* and *girl* can be combined to construct the N-bar *little girl,* which can then take a determiner like *the* to build the noun phrase *the little girl*.
- Most usually today, we apply the term ***structure*** both to a general pattern and to any individual instance of it, but the general pattern is sometimes called a ***construction,*** while an individual instance has sometimes been called a ***syntagm***. The relation between the elements in a structure is a **syntagmatic relation**.
- The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure is often said to have initiated a structuralist movement, school or intellectual worldview, rather than developing a coherent theory.

Langue and Parole/ The opposition between langue and parole or language and speech.

- Langue refers to the common system of expectations that we all share, and that we each induce from the practice of our speech community when we learn to speak. Langue is analogous to a code as opposed to a message.
- In the Saussurean system, native speakers' knowledge of langue is similar to what Chomsky later called "competence" (with the reservation that Chomsky defines as intrinsic to this system certain syntactic operations that Saussure did not know existed).
- Parole (cf. Chomsky's "performance") refers to actual messages that we individually and uniquely construct on the basis of the regularities (or code) provided by langue, joined with various other code-like systems (which Saussure did not name, but which presumably include social class markers, situation markers, and so forth), various communicative intents, and chance factors.
- Saussure was at one with Durkheim regarding the collective and passive nature of the sign. Language was, for Durkheim, the example par excellence of a collective representation.
- In Saussure's formulations it was a human creation that any single human was nonetheless powerless to change. Saussure's strong assertion of the collective, social nature of language was basic to his conception of the science of linguistics though not to his more general postulated science of serniology, which, in dealing with motivated as well as unmotivated symbols, would necessarily have had to encompass individual as well as collective representations.
- Langue is a collective phenomenon that only exists in the shared understandings that enable communication to take place. It follows that we, either as linguists studying language or as children learning our native language, have no direct access to language (langue), but can only induce representations of it from the samples of speech behaviour (parole) to which we are exposed.

- Each individual also induces or creates additional, idiosyncratic linguistic knowledge that forms part of only that person's personal instantiation of language (his or her own individual *representation* of langue) and that enters into only that person's speech performances (parole); on the other hand, any particular piece of language (langue) may not necessarily be shared by *all members of the speech community in question.*
- Saussure emphasized the passive nature of language (langue) as opposed to the active nature of speech (parole). What he meant is that we create speech acts. In them we produce novel combinations of shared elements and sometimes even include some novel elements. But in order for these freshly and actively created speech acts to communicate to others they must be understood.
- To be understood, they must be constructed out of known, and thus shared, elements -- or provide enough redundancy and context for the meaning of novel elements to be inferred. The linguistic part of what enables this understanding is language: the regularities of pattern and reference that we have experienced in (and induced from) our speech community.
- Language is passive, in one sense, because we form it by taking the regularities we are given, rather than by seeking out the regularities we might want. But, more important, it is passive because it depends not on the regularities that any particular one of us, may experience, whether actively or passively, but on the regularities that happen to have been felt by enough of us to be shared by our speech community
- The passive and collective nature of langue has important consequences for language change. Langue is never experienced directly, but only indirectly through the vehicle of acts of parole. It therefore is not taught directly to new generations of speakers, but rather is induced anew from parole by each new generation. It is thus a distillation of (and abstraction from) regularities experienced across the wide range of speech that the learner encounters.
- Individuals are powerless to change langue (its subconscious nature makes it largely immune to effective political manipulation), but the cumulative (statistical) effect of a large number of parallel individual creations is to change the sample of events that one generation experiences from that experienced by the preceding generation, and thus to change the langue that generation induces from the langue of the previous generation.

Signs: Signifiers and Signifieds

- The key unit of langue is the sign, or the union of a "signifier" and a "signified."
- The signifier is the "sound image" that is, the sequence of phonemes that represents the phonic substance of the sign, and the signified is the concept referred to by the sign. Because sound itself is a continuum that we segment and make into discrete units as we hear it, we understand that the signifier is not the physical sound itself, but instead is our mental image of that sound (e.g., of the phoneme sequence /tri/). Similarly, the signified is not some entity (e.g., some tree) that exists outside of us, but is instead the mental concept by which we represent that entity. The sign is, thus, a totally mental or conceptual entity. 7
- Neither a signifier nor a signified (linguistic concept) has any linguistic significance without the other; they only become part of language when a signifier (sound image) is differentiated from other signifiers in the system of the language by its isolating a signified that is then, and thereby, differentiated from other signifieds.
- A signifier is only a signifier if it signifies something (without signification, a phoneme sequence is only a nonsense syllable or syllables), and a concept (or a potential signified) is only a part of language if it is signified by something. By their linkage to each other, each signifier-and-signified pairing is given an existence in the system, and contrasted with the other linked signifiers and signifieds of the system. Sound images, in turn, point out of language to actual phonic substance, and concepts point, at least most often, to the external, pragmatic world of experience.

- In terms of the system, neither signs nor their signifiers and signifieds exist in isolation from other signs. Signifiers exist only in opposition (contrast) to other signifiers; that is, /p/ does not signify by itself, but only by contrast with /b/, /m/, and so forth. Similarly, signifieds only exist in opposition (or contrast) to other signifieds; *tree* contrasts with *bush* and so, again as speakers and hearers, we decide, not what the ambiguous object in front of us is on its own, but rather only to which of the pre-existing opposed categories it is to be assigned. In this sense one might think of the content of linguistic categories as relative rather than absolute, though Saussure knew (and we shall see) that they have absolute aspects as well.
- Individual signs thus participate in a variety of relationships. Regarding the elements of the individual sign, there are three relationships that can be more or less independently investigated: (1) the relationship of sound to sound-image (signifier);
- (2) the relationship of signifier to signified; and
- (3) the relationship of concept (signified) to external referent. At one step further removed we have the relations of signs to one another:
- (4) the syntagmatic relations by which signs are combined with one another to make larger linguistic units;
- and (5) the paradigmatic relations of contrast that exist among alternative signs (and sets of signs).
- We have (6) the relationship between the representation of signs (or other linguistic phenomena) in one head and in another head; this relationship is by definition constrained for true signs in langue, but is more fully investigable in parole and among other semiological phenomena such as symbols. Finally, if at more remove, a Saussurean view of the function of sign systems would entail a consideration of the syntagmatic relations existing between the concepts entailed in a given sign system and other, pragmatic, concepts and a similar consideration of paradigmatic relations among alternative sign systems and among alternative pragmatic possibilities.

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Langue as a System

- For Saussure, langue is not a happenstantial collection of isolated signs but is instead a system of signs. Because it is a system, changes in one area have ramifications throughout the rest of langue (even if each separate element doesn't directly affect every other element).
- Signs relate to each other in two general kinds of ways: syntagmatically and paradigmatically. Syntagmatic relations are ones of co-occurrence of what goes with what, and how. Rules of syntax provide one example of a kind of syntagmatic relationship. Since spoken language (and its written representation) is linear, syntagmatic relationships in language tend to be sequential; but in other kinds of language, such as the sign languages of the deaf, that are not linear, syntagmatic relations can be spatial.
- Paradigmatic relations . . . are [those] . . . which obtain among alternative possible fillers of some position in a syntagmatic chain (or fabric) and among the alternative forms that some particular filler might take in alternative positions. Such relations in language can be phonological (spot vs. spit), morphological (run vs. ran), syntactic (brought vs. had brought), semantic (hit the ball vs. catch the ball). or other (e.g. sociolinguistic; yes ma'am vs. yeah).
- For semiological systems in general, paradigmatic relations are those which we isolate when we ask "X as opposed to what?" . . . these relations are important because they represent all the non-present associations (or planes of contrast) which the use of some particular form raises or potentially can raise; it is through this aspect of the systematicity of language that a change in one place (e.g. the addition of "pork" to English along side of "pig") affects the whole system of a language (the meaning of "pig" in opposition to "pork" is notably different from the meaning of "pig" in opposition to "cow," "sheep," etc.; the meaning of syntagmatic units that include "pig" is also thereby affected).

- Paradigmatic relations, thus, are ones of contrast or opposition -- the relationship among entities in a set (or paradigm) from which one makes a selection at some particular point in a speech production (or a syntagm).
- Before progressing we should remind ourselves of the different senses in which we are using the term "paradigmatic." First, at the most general linguistic level (the level we have just been using), it is the term Saussure used to label relations among the alternative items within the set from which a given item was selected at a given point in a given act of parole. Paradigmatic relations thus taken include phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic contrast and similarity.
- Second and more specifically, in linguistics, the term has been used to refer to structures of contrasting items formed by the intersection of two or more defining features. This usage developed out of the inflectional paradigms used in teaching the grammar of classical languages, where noun endings, for instance, could differ according to case and number.
- Third, a more general usage than Saussure's made popular some years back uses "paradigm" and "paradigmatic" to refer to the shared rules of the game and shared presumptions that underlie the everyday practice of science -- and that are overturned in a scientific revolution. In this usage, "paradigm" carries the sense of a canonical framework, and one may speak of the Bloomfieldian paradigm in American linguistics having been supplanted by the Chomskyian.

prescriptivism

- The imposition of arbitrary norms upon a language, often in defiance of normal usage. Every language exhibits a good deal of regional and social variation. If very many people want to use a language for a number of different purposes, then it is convenient and even necessary to have a single agreed form of the language—a standard language—known and used by everybody, or at least by all educated speakers. Otherwise, if people insist on using their own particular varieties, the result will be confusion and misunderstanding. But, since languages are always changing, there will always be doubts and disagreements over which forms and usages should be recognized as part of the standard language.
- Prescriptivism consists of the attempts, by teachers and writers, to settle these disagreements by insisting upon the use of those particular forms and usages which they personally prefer and by condemning those others which they personally dislike. Of course, some degree of prescriptivism is necessary, particularly in education: people who naturally use forms which are blatantly not accepted as standard by the community as a whole must learn to use the standard forms, at least in those circumstances which call for the standard language, or else they will be severely disadvantaged.
- But the problem is that many prescriptivists go too far, and try to condemn usages which are in fact perfectly normal for even educated speakers, and to insist instead upon usages which were current generations or centuries ago but which are now effectively dead, or even upon usages which have never been normal for anybody.
- A famous example concerns the so-called split infinitive. For generations, virtually all English-speakers have spontaneously said things like She decided to gradually get rid of the teddy-bears she had spent twenty years collecting. Here the sequence to gradually get rid of is the 'split infinitive'. Many prescriptivists have condemned this usage, on the supposed ground that to get is a single verb-form, the 'infinitive', and therefore 'logically' cannot be split up. Such people typically insist instead on something like She decided gradually to get rid of. …But this is all wrong.

- First, the proposed 'correction' is badly misleading: it suggests that it is the decision which is gradual, rather than the disposal. Second, the sequence *to get* is not an infinitive, nor is it a verb-form, nor is it even a grammatical unit at all. The true infinitive here is *get,* while *to* is nothing but a linking particle. The adverb *gradually* logically belongs next to *get rid of,* and that's where speakers normally put it. That *to get* is not a grammatical unit can be shown in a number of ways, not least of which is the observation that speakers regularly break it up. (Another test is the construction illustrated by *She has asked me to change my hairstyle, but I don't want to,* in which the understood *change* is deleted while *to* is obliged to remain—hardly possible if *to change* were really a unit.) Hence the prescriptivists' position is ignorant and wrong-headed: it represents an attempt to replace normal and elegant usage by something which is silly, unnatural and hard to understand, and which is used by nobody except some prescriptivists and those few who take them seriously.
- Many prescriptivists also object to the familiar English practice of ending a sentence with a preposition, apparently on the bizarre ground that this construction is not possible in Latin. They take exception to ordinary English utterances like *Who were you talking to?, What's this gadget for?* and *That's something I just can't put up with,* demanding instead unnatural things like *To whom were you talking?, For what is this gadget?,* and I have no idea what they would do about the last one.
- Prescriptivists also reject such ordinary utterances as *Who do you trust?,* demanding instead *Whom do you trust?,* a form which was current hundreds of years ago but is now dead, except in frostily formal styles of speech and writing.
- There is clearly a need for informed commentary on usage. Some forms, while widely used, are unquestionably not accepted as part of the standard language, while others are ambiguous, pretentious, clumsy or hard to understand, and drawing attention to these matters is valuable: this is the good face of prescriptivism. But it is deeply unfortunate that so many commentators have seen fit to lose touch with reality

descriptivism

- The policy of describing languages as they are found to exist. A prominent feature of traditional grammar is the frequent presence of prescriptivism: identifying and recommending forms and usages favoured by the analyst and condemning others not favoured by the analyst. Excepting only in certain educational contexts, modern linguists utterly reject prescriptivism, and their investigations are based instead upon descriptivism. In a descriptivist approach, we try to describe the facts of linguistic behaviour exactly as we find them, and we refrain from making value judgements about the speech of native speakers. Of course, our descriptions sometimes include the observation that speakers themselves regard certain usages as good or bad, but that is a very different thing from expressing our own opinions.
- Descriptivism is a central tenet of what we regard as a scientific approach to the study of language: the very first requirement in any scholarly investigation is to get the facts
- right. Prescriptivism, in great contrast, is not a scientific approach. The strong opinions of prescriptivists may be variously regarded as recommendations about good style, as an aspect of social mores, as a consequence of our educational system, or perhaps even as a matter of morality, but they are not statements about actual behaviour, and hence they are not scientific.
- For a prescriptivist, the so-called **split infinitive** is a matter of what people *ought* to say; for a descriptivist, it is a matter of what people *do* say. Since the overwhelming majority of native English-speakers, educated or not, routinely say things like *Susie decided to never touch another cigarette,* in which the sequence to *never touch* is the so-called 'split infinitive', then this construction is by definition a normal and grammatical part of English, and that is the end of the matter: objecting to it is a little like objecting to the law of gravity, since denying the facts is a hopeless way of going about things.

Arbitrariness

- Saussure's name is often associated with the idea of the arbitrariness of linguistic relations. He clearly considered that all of langue was socially constrained or motivated. But he did assert that there was, in general, nothing about the substance of any particular signifier that caused it to be linked its particular signified; the linkage of /tri/ to tree was, in that sense, arbitrary. The kinds of sound symbolism investigated by Jakobson9 vitiate this claim a little, but only for a very few vocabulary items and only in minor ways that have no general relevance to the system of language. Saussure also treated the relationship of signifiers to actual sounds as arbitrary, but in a less radical way: our languages do not group sounds into phonemes arbitrarily or randomly
- Similarly, the boundaries of our signifieds/concepts are arbitrary, as are aspects of their paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships; the line between tree and bush in English is a little different from the comparable line in French, and our English associations with father are a little different from Fanti associations with their translation equivalent, egya.10 The issue here is one we will return to later, in our discussion of "natural conventions."
- In linguistics, a distinction is traditionally made between (Saussurean) European structuralism and American structuralism, the main figure of which is the linguist Leonard Bloomfield.

distribution

- The set of positions in which a given linguistic element or form can appear in a language. The notion of distribution is a central feature of the approach to language study called structuralism, and it was outstandingly important in the version called American structuralism.
- Distribution is a simple notion. Any given linguistic element which is present in a language, whether a speech sound, a phoneme, a morpheme, a word, or whatever, can occur in certain positions but not in other positions. A statement of its possible positions is its distribution, and this distribution is usually an important fact about its place in the language.
- For example, distribution is important in identifying parts of speech. In English, any word which can occur in the slot in This——is nice must be a noun, because English allows only nouns to occur in this position. And larger syntactic categories can be partly identified in the same way: anything that can occur in the slot in ——is nice must be a noun phrase.
- But distribution is perhaps most prominent in phonology. Consider the English labiodental fricatives [f] and [v]. Simplifying slightly, in Old English, the sound [v] could only occur between vowels, while [f] could never appear between t] or [ofU+601r]. We say that, in Old English, [f] and [v] were in complementary distribution, meaning that there was no position in which both could occur. Since the two sounds are phonetically similar, we can therefore assign both to a single phoneme, usually represented as/f/. Indeed, the Old English spellings of the four words were fif, fatt, lifian and ofer, reflecting the fact that only one phoneme existed.
- In modern English, however, the distribution of these two sounds is very different: they can both occur in the same positions to make different words. We thus have minimal pairs like fat and vat, fine and vine, rifle and rival, and strife and strive. We therefore say that [f] and [v] are in contrastivedistribution, and they must now be assigned to separate phonemes,/f/ and/v/, just as the modern spelling suggests.
- Structuralism in a broad sense has mainly been applied in anthropology, especially by the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and other French thinkers, and in literary studies.