3: The Study of Language:
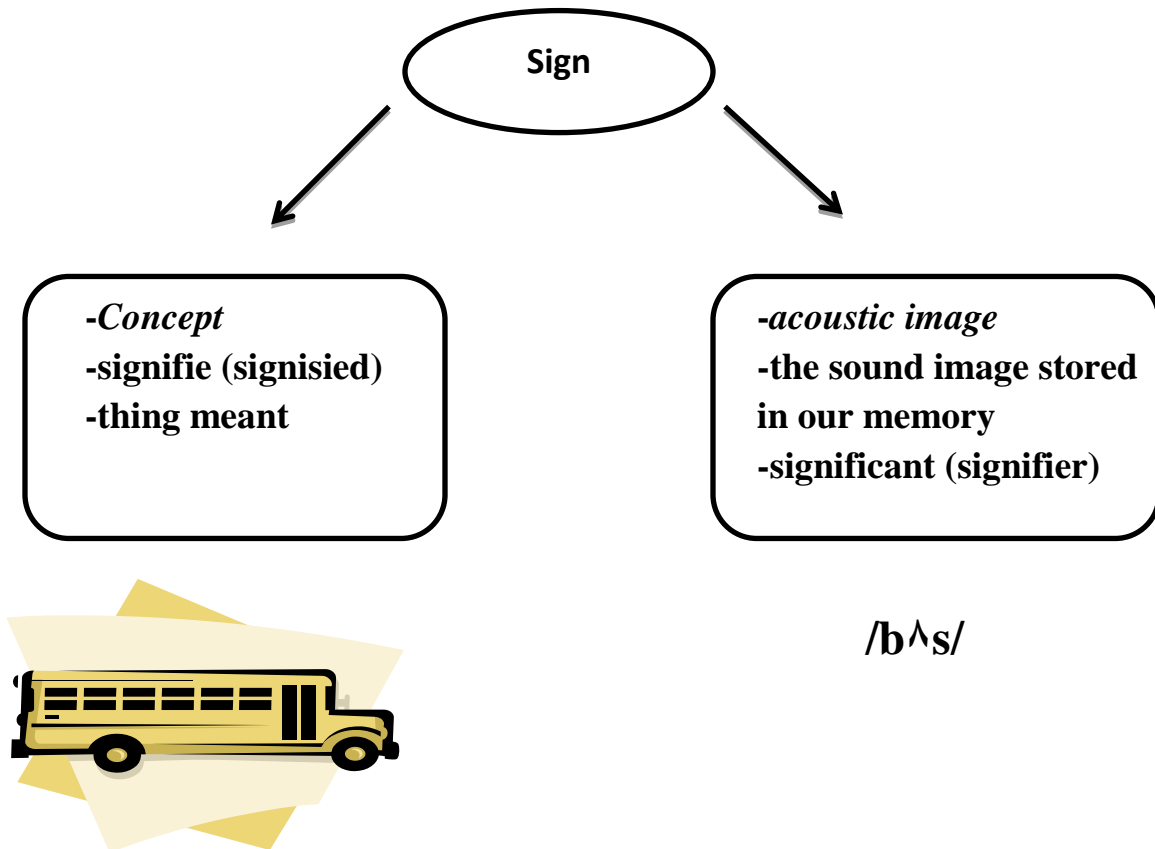
-Early to Mid- 20th Century: Descriptive Linguistics

De Saussure's central ideas concerning the study of language were expressed in the form of pairs of concepts (dichotomies). These can be illustrated as follows:

1. **Diachronic Vs Synchronic**: A diachronic study or analysis concerns itself with the evolution and change over time of that which is studied; it is roughly equivalent to *historical*. Thus diachronic linguistics is also known as **historical linguistics**. A synchronic study or analysis **(non-historical/descriptive study)**, in contrast, limits its concern to a particular moment of time. Thus synchronic linguistics takes a language as a working system at a particular point in time without concern for how it has developed to its present state. De Saussure illustrates this using an analogy with a game of chess; if we walk into a room and while a game of chess is being played, it is possible to assess the state of the game by studying the position of the pieces on the board.

2. **Langage Vs Langue Vs Parole:** Langage is the faculty of speech present in all human beings due to heredity; it refers to our ability to talk to each other. This faculty is composed of two aspects: **langue** (language system) and **parole** (language behaviour).

a) **Langue:** It refers to the abstract knowledge of language (the totality of language). It represents the generalized system of rules and word images stored in the mind of individuals or native speakers.

b) **Parole:** It refers to the actual physical utterance. It is the realization of langue in speech. It refers to the actual and concrete act of speaking on the part of a person (a dynamic social activity) in a particular time and place.

3. **The Linguistic Sign:** In De Saussure's view, the linguistic sign is a psychic entity with two sides: **concept** and **acoustic image**. An acoustic image is not a spoken word, but the sound image which is stored in our memory; it is also referred to as **significant or signifier**.

The concept is the meaning or the thing which is meant and indicated by the acoustic image; it is also referred to as **signifie**.

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                    ┌─────────┐
                    │  Sign   │
                    └─────────┘
            ↙                         ↘
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-Concept **-signifie (signisied)** **-thing meant**	*-acoustic image* **-the sound image stored in our memory** **-significant (signifier)**

/b^s/

4. **Syntagmatic Vs. Paradigmatic Relations:** A sentence is a sequence of signs and each sign contributes something to the meaning of the whole. When the signs are seen as a linear sequence, the relationship between them is called **syntagmatic**. It indicates the horizontal relationship between linguistic elements forming linear sequence in sentences as in:

Syntagmatic

She—can—go

Come—quickly

When a sign is seen as contrasting with other signs in the language, the relationship is called **paradigmatic or associative relations**. It refers to the vertical relations between linguistic signs that might occupy the same particular place in a given structure.

These two dimensions of structure can be applied to phonology, vocabulary and any other aspect of language. Each word in a language is in a paradigmatic relationships with a whole set of alternatives. The result is a conception of language as a vast network of interrelated structure and mutually defining entries- a linguistic system.

Syntagmatic →

Paradigmatic

She+ can+ go
He+ will+ come

I+ may+ sit

You+ might+ see
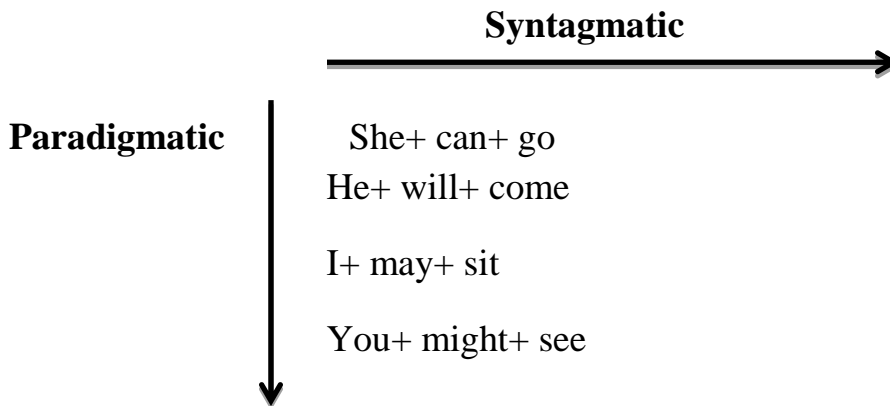
Mid- to Late- 20th Century: Generative Linguistics and the Search for Universals (General Summarized Notes)

1. The transformational theory has undergone several stages of development:

A: From 1957 through 1964, the transformational general theory of language focused primarily on syntax rather than on semantics. Chomsky indicated that a grammar model should be based on syntax rather on semantics. Syntax is an independent component of grammar and one which is primary. This shows that the early form of the theory was concerned with form rather than with meaning. Thus, in 1957, the transformationalists followed the linguistics ladder starting with **syntax, phonology and semantics**. This means that syntax is central and we first need sentences not sounds to express not our ideas.

B: In 1965, Chomsky modified his theory when he published his book *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (the Aspects Model or the Standard Theory). It is the most influential book in the 2nd half of the 20th century. According to this model, the linguistic ladder starts with **semantics, syntax and phonology.** Still Syntax is central and more important than the others that are called *interpretive*. For example, if we want to give a talk, we first arrange the ideas according to the rules of grammar taken from the syntactic component; such as NP $\longrightarrow$ (Det) + N + (Pl). These rules organize the idea, but we need meanings to arrange the idea semantically. Therefore, we go up to the semantic component to (so it is interpretive). Finally, we have to apply the phonological rules to be able to speak. Thus, we go down to the phonological component taking pronunciation; so, it is interpretive too.

Semantics (Interpretive)

$\uparrow$

Syntax (Central/ Heart)

$\downarrow$

Phonology (Interpretive)

2. Chomsky's theory at the beginning was called **transformational grammar**. Then it was called **generative grammar**. Later on, it was called **transformational generative grammar (T.G.G.)**. It is transformational because it depends on transformations and it is a kind of grammar which is specialized to change the language from one structure to the other (from active to passive, positive to negative, declarative to interrogative, etc.). If language was without transformation, it would be static and without life. It is generative because it generates all and only the possible grammatical sentences.

3. Chomsky believes in the universality of human language. He believes that all languages share the same basics since they all have the common linguistic features and levels like phonology, morphology, syntax, and so on. They differ only in some specific points (language specifics). According to Chomsky, a linguistic theory should be universal in that it should be applicable to all human languages. Structural linguistics does not believe in the universality of human language; the structuralists believe that each language is unique and each language has its own basic structure. Traditional Grammarians believed in the universality of human language considering Latin as a model (a language which has universal rules that can be applicable to any language).

4. It is believed, according to T.G.G., that the native speaker has what is called *competence* and *performance*. Competence is all native speaker's knowledge about his language which enable him to understand and generate unlimited number of sentences even those he hasn't heard before. This competence is stored in his mind in the shape of rules and word images and when he speaks, he uses these rules unconsciously. Performance is the actual use of competence in real situations. It is found in the form of speech and writing. This parallels Saussure's concepts of *langue* and *parole*.

5. T.G.G. lays heavy emphasis on the native speaker and his intuition; the native speaker is a major thing in T.G.G. The transformationalists concentrate on the native speaker's knowledge and his competence (the rules

and word images stored in his mind). According to them, the native speaker is the one who can decide whether something is right or wrong by his intuition. The structuralists also consider the native speaker as the source of information, but their method of collecting data was based on observation and they take information from the speech of informants which represents language behavior. Chomsky indicates that speakers use their competence (abstract knowledge of language) to go far beyond any limitations of any corpus by being able to create and recognize novel sentences and to identify performance errors (in speech).

6. The transformationalists believe in level mixing (i.e. linguistic levels) which is very important in linguistic analysis. This means that we can use one level to explain things related to another level. In T.G.G., the linguistic levels start with **semantics, syntax and phonology**. They believe that one level must be applied to another, i.e., we must mix all the levels together. The structuralists, on the other hand, do not believe in level mixing at all. They refuse it completely and believe in level separate. They believe in the order: **phonology, morphology and syntax** giving priority to phonology, as speech is the source of information for them.

7. According to T.G.G, sentences are of two types:

A. Kernal sentence: the original sentence; the basic sentence pattern which hasn't received any change yet, as in *Lily can do her job*.

B. Derived (Transformed) sentence: the sentence that has received one or more changes, as in:

Lily cannot do her job. _____ (1 change/ negative)

Can't Lily do her job? _____ (2 changes/ negative and interrogative)

Can't the job be done by Lily? _____(3 changes/ negative, interrogative and passive)

8. They believe that language has a fixed number of transformational rules. This **finite** number of rules generates **infinite** number of acceptable sentences (transformed from basic ones). Some of these transformations are

universal such as negative and interrogative. Some others are particular or not universal. Sometimes there are universal rules that are applied to languages differently, e.g., passivization.

9. They differentiate between *deep structure (DS)* and *surface structure (SS)*. Deep structure is the abstract syntactic representation of a sentence (also referred to as the underlying or basic structure); it is the original form of the sentence to which no change has happened yet. It goes with competence in the mind.

Competence ⟶ **Deep structure** ⟶ **Kernal sentence**

e.g. *Lily cut Lily.*

The surface structure of a sentence is the final stage of the syntactic representation of a sentence; the form which has received one or more changes. It goes with performance in speech or writing

Performance ⟶ **Surface structure** ⟶ **Transformed sentence**

e.g. *Lily cut herself.* (reflexivization transformation)

10. The structuralists cannot differentiate between the sentences which are similar in surface but have different deep structure. But transformationalists can do this and they can analyze ambiguous sentences too:

e.g. *(1) John is eager to please.*

   (2) John is easy to please.

 According to the structuralists, the above sentences are the same because they focus on the surface structure, but Chomsky, in his book *Syntactic Structures*, shows the difference between them referring to their deep structures saying: in sentence (1), John pleases somebody, whereas in sentence (2) somebody pleases John. Transformationalists also interpret ambiguous sentences (sentences that have more than one interpretation) such as:

Ann whacked a man with an umbrella.

A: Ann had an umbrella and she whacked the man with it.

B: Ann whacked a man and the man happened to be carrying an umbrella.

11. They believe that sentences are **unlimited in number**. The sentences of a language must be **well- formed** i.e. they must be syntactically and semantically acceptable. Any sentence which is not well- formed must be rejected. The native speaker is the one who decides the well- formed sentences.

12. The transformational rules are either *optional* or *obligatory*. An obligatory rule is the one which must be applied otherwise the sentence in incorrect (e.g. the rule of reflexivization: *Lily cut herself*). An optional rule is the one which may or may not be applied like the negative or interrogative transformations.

13. Transformational rules have the property of *recursiveness* (the ability to be applied more than once in generating a given sentence). In the following sentence, for example, the rule of relativization is applied twice:

-This is the dog _that chased the cat that killed the rat_.

14. Transformations do four processes:

A. Rearrangement/ position change

B. Substitution/ replacement

C. Addition

D. Deletion

The above four processes can be clarified in the following example:

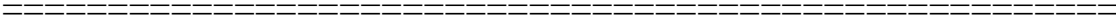**Bob <u>has</u> taken the keys.** (active)

The keys <u>have</u> <u>been</u> taken (<u>by Bob</u>). (Passive)

    a. Rearrangement of the object (the keys) which has become the grammatical subject in the transformed sentence.
    b. *have* replaces *has*

c. *been* is added
d. *Bob* can be deleted since it is optional.

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10

Sociolinguistics and the Sociology of Language

Some investigators have found it appropriate to try to introduce a distinction between *sociolinguistics* or *micro-sociolinguistics* and the *sociology of language* or *macro-sociolinguistics*. In this distinction, sociolinguistics is concerned with investigating the relationships between language and society with the goal being a better understanding of the structure of language and of how languages function in communication; the equivalent goal in the sociology of language is trying to discover how social structure can be better understood through the study of language, e.g., how certain linguistic features serve to characterize particular social arrangements.

Sociolinguistics is, then, the study of language in relation to society, whereas the sociology of language is the study of society in relation to language. In other words, in sociolinguistics we study language and society in order to find out as much as we can about what kind of thing language is, and in the sociology of language we reverse the direction of our interest.

Speech Community

A **speech community** is a group of people who share a set of norms and expectations regarding the use of language (they speak the same dialect). A speech community comes to share a specific set of norms for language use through living and interacting together, and speech communities may therefore emerge among all groups that interact frequently and share certain norms and ideologies. Such groups can be villages, countries, political or professional communities, communities with shared interests, hobbies, or lifestyles, or even just groups of friends. Speech communities may share both particular sets of vocabulary and grammatical conventions, as well as speech styles and genres, and also norms for how and when to speak in particular ways.

The Standard Language

The standard language is the variety which is used in newspapers, mass media, books and which is taught in schools. It is the variety which is taught to those who want to learn, for example, English as a second language.

Dialect, Accent, Style and Register

Dialects are varieties of speech within a specified language. They are the subordinate forms or varieties of a language which differ from the standard language in vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar and idiom. These variations can exist at all linguistic levels, i.e. vocabularies, idioms, grammars and pronunciation. Dialects of the specific language differ from each other, but they are still understandable to the speakers of another dialect of the same language. There are three types of dialect:

1. Regional Dialects: (local or geographical) are spoken by the people of a particular area within a speech community, e.g. Cockney in London.
2. Social Dialects: (class dialects) are spoken by the members of a particular group or status of a speech community, e.g. the dialect of the nobles in old English or the dialect of other social classes, e.g. of the working class.
3. Temporal Dialects: (historical dialects or states of language) represent a variety of language used at a particular stage of its development, e.g. mid 19th C. British English.

In linguistics, an **accent** depends mostly on pronunciation of specific words or phrases. Accents are varieties of speech within a specified language which differ only in pronunciation from the standard form of language. An accent is the manner in which different people pronounce words differently from each other. Accents differ depending on a particular individual, location, or nation. The accent can also help identify the locality, region, the socio-economic statues, the ethnicity, caste and/or social class of the speaker. All these factors affect the accent

of a person. Accents usually differ in the quality of voice, pronunciation of vowels and consonants, stress, and prosody. For example, the word 'route' is pronounced as 'roote' in the US, while as 'raut' in the UK.

Another type of linguistic variation in a certain language is caused due to different styles of speakers within that language. **Styles** generally refer to the mood of the speaker and the situations in which the speaker is placed. This factor differs from dialect and accent variations so that dialect and accent represent the way a certain language is spoken among many people of a society, whereas styles refer to the spoken language of the same person in different situations. For example, in careful styles, more attention is paid to speech, whereas in casual styles, there will be less attention on the monitoring of speech.

The term *register* refers to a speech variety used by a particular group of people, usually sharing the same occupation (e.g. doctors and lawyers) or sharing the same interests (e.g. stamp collectors and baseball fans).

Bilingualism, Multilingualism and Code Switching

Bilingualism is the ability to speak two languages. It may be acquired early by children in regions where most adults speak two languages (e.g., French and dialectal German in Alsace). Children may also become bilingual by learning languages in two different social settings; for example, British children in British India learned an Indian language from their nurses and family servants. A second language can also be acquired in school

Multilingualism is the practice of using more than one language among individuals and societies. It includes individuals who use one language at home, and another (or others) outside the home; it includes people who can function much better in one language but who can still communicate in other languages. It also refers to societies and nation-states that use more than one language in a variety of situations to varying degrees.

A study of the ways in which these multiple languages are used is particularly important for **language planning**, a situation in which a government or education authority attempts to manipulate the linguistic

situation in a particular direction. In multilingual societies, the speakers are not proficient in all the languages spoken; therefore, one language, or simplified language is adopted. A common language of this type is sometimes known as a **lingua franca**. The lingua franca could be an internationally used language of communication (e.g. English). It could be the native language of one of the groups or it could be the language which is not spoken by any one of the groups but has a simplified sentence structure and vocabulary and is often a mixture of two or more languages. English is the most common lingua franca, followed by French; but other languages are also widely used. In East Africa, for example, Swahili is the lingua franca; in many parts of West Africa, Hausa is used. The artificial language Esperanto is sometimes proposed as a candidate for a world lingua franca.

Code-switching is to move from one code (language, dialect, or style) to another during speech for a number of reasons such as, to signal solidarity, to reflect one's ethnic identity, to show off, to hide some information from a third party, to achieve better explanation of a certain concept, to converge or reduce social distance with the hearer, to diverge or increase social distance or to impress and persuade the audience (metaphorical code-switching)

Pidgin and Creole

Pidgin: it is a language which has no native speakers. Pidgins develop as means of communication between people who don't have a common language. It is a language used for communication between different language users, for people whose first languages differ, such as pidgin between European colonizers and African slaves (Swahili).

Creole: when a pidgin becomes the language of newly-born generations as a mother-tongue or first language, and acquires additional vocabulary and grammatical structures to serve their various necessary communicative needs (referential and social functions) it becomes a Creole.

A creole can be devoured by its parent if it is used in an area where the standard language (to which the creole is related) is also used. There may be social pressure on the creole speakers to speak the standard which often has more prestige. Therefore, little by little, the creole becomes **decreolized**, as

words and constructions from the standard replace the creole ones. When people alter their creole speech in the direction of the standard language to which the creole is related, they form a continuum between the standard and the creole. For example, in Jamaica and Guyana, an English-based creole is spoken and Standard English is taught in schools. Those with higher level of education speak something close to Standard English, the **acrolect**. Those with little or no education speak the creole or something close to it, the **basilect**, and the rest speak a range of varieties in between, the **mesolect**.

Spoken and Written Language

There are many differences between spoken and written language. These differences can be summed up as follows:

1. Speech requires one or two participants whereas writing requires a single writer.
2. The speaker cannot pause because his interlocutor will interrupt him or start talking whereas the writer can pause with no fear his interlocutor interrupting him or starting to talk.
3. The speaker has no time in choosing words or expressions because he is under considerable pressure to keep on talking during the period allotted to him whereas the writer has time in choosing words or expressions even looking a word in the dictionary if necessary because he is under no such pressure.
4. The speaker knows that any words which pass his lips will be heard by his interlocutor. The writer can cross or rewrite in the privacy of his study.
5. The speaker can observe his interlocutor and, if he wishes, to modify what he is saying to make it more accessible or acceptable to his hearer. The writer has no access to immediate feedback and simply has to imagine the reader's reaction.
6. The speaker uses fragments, simple structure and concrete common vocabulary. The writer uses full sentences, elaborate structures and abstract less common vocabulary.