

Important distinctions in linguistics

Saussurean Dichotomy

- Descriptive vs. prescriptive
- Synchronic vs. diachronic
- *Langue & parole*
- Competence and performance

Descriptive vs. prescriptive

- **Don't say X.**
- **People don't say X.**
- The first sentence can mean something that is known as a **prescriptive** command, while the second is a **descriptive** statement.
 - The distinction lies in prescribing how things ought to be and describing how things are.
- The reason why present-day linguists are so insistent about the distinction between the two types of rules is simply that traditional grammar was very strongly normative in character, e.g.
 - You should never use a double-negative;
 - You should not split the infinitive; etc.

- **Prescriptive (traditional) approach:**

It is an approach toward language based on what is held to be “correct” by socially prestigious institutions and by teachers.

- This approach shows a complete disregard for the way a community actually speaks.
- Certain forms of language are seen as more “correct” than others as a result of the social prestige associated with their users
- The prescriptive attitude seeks to enforce the above mentioned ideas.

Which is “correct”?

- Buy bought/boughten
- Spell spelled/spelt
- Forecast forecast/forecasted
- Shave shaved/shaven
- Dive dove/dived
- Drag dragged/drug
- Spell spelled/spelt

Humorous grammar rules

- ☺ Never end a sentence with a preposition.
- ☺ And don't start a sentence with a conjunction.
- ☺ It is wrong to ever split an infinitive.
- ☺ Also, always avoid annoying alliteration.
- ☺ No sentence fragments.
- In the 18th century, all the main European languages were studied prescriptively.
 - The grammarians tried to lay down rules for the correct use of language.
 - Some usages were prescribed to be learned by heart, followed accurately or avoided altogether.
 - It was a matter of black or white, right or wrong.

- A very simple example of ‘prescriptive rules’ is the Doctors writing prescriptions for patients.
- The Patients do not ever ask the doctor as what the medicines are and why are these given to them (even with some exceptions in modern time).
- Moreover, even if the doctors tell us about the medicine, we will still follow the instructions of the doctor for consuming the medicines.
- There is fair amount of ‘prescriptivism’ in the practicing of the Doctor.
- No wonder his ‘memo’ is called ‘Prescription’
- So, the prescriptive attitude is still with us, though people have realized the facts that the usage count more than the authority-made “standards”.

Descriptive approach:

- Observe principles that describe the way the language is actually spoken
- The goal of the descriptive approach is a description and knowledge of rules (principles) of how the language is actually spoken
- For example, if we go to a shop and want to buy a 'cell-phone', the salesman 'describes' all the functions and features of the different phones to us.
- The person might compare one cell-phone to others and suggest which one is better and how.
- Thus, a grammar that has 'descriptive' power will not only explain what is correct, but it will also describe how.
- For example:

In English, qualifying words often appear between the **to** and the verb in infinitive phrases:

“to *boldly* go where man has never gone before”

- **Teaching Grammar:**
- Descriptions of a language used for learning purposes
- The Descriptive grammar is better used for language learners based on how the language is spoken
- If we say that a linguistics grammar emphasizes on *descriptive* norms ..then
- We are interested
 - in the language that is used in the society
 - how speakers use it
 - What the speakers use it for..

Synchronic vs. diachronic

The words Synchronic and diachronic are Latin words, and they mean the following:

Synchronic is from the Latin word 'Synchronous' and this means = same time.

Diachronic is from 'Diachronous' in Latin and this means = through time.

According to Saussure 'Synchronic study of language' means study of the language or component of language at a given point in time(present time).

The 'Diachronic study' on the other hand means the study of language or component of language through different points in time.

In simple, they mean 'study of language' at a given point or present time,

And diachronic means study of the language through different stages as it must have evolved.



This panoramic view of the painting where the painter has drawn the pictures of several peaks of mountain is similar to viewing 'the language' a full system,

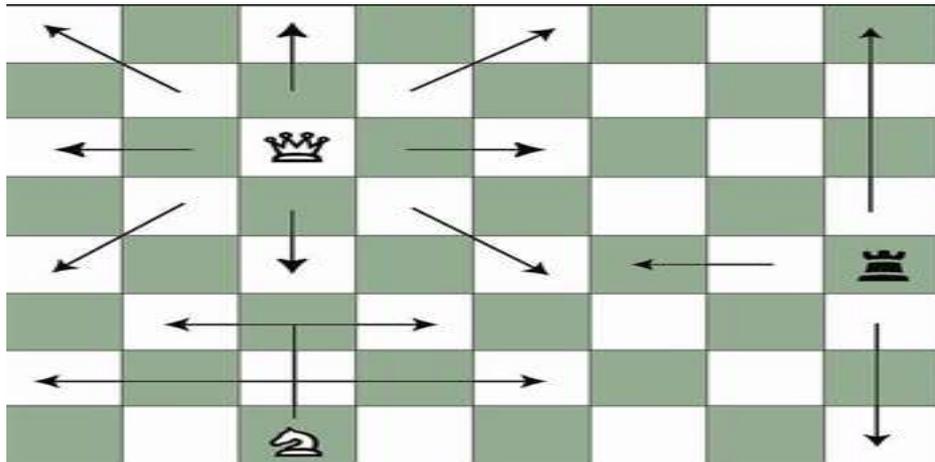
And thus it is an example of synchronic aspect of the view/picture.

However,



If we examine or analyze how this panoramic view of the mountain peaks were created at different stages by the artist, we exemplify the 'diachronic' approach to it.

In order to make it more convincing and simple, Saussure gives an example of game of Chess-board:



He says that the 'Chess game' shows a system of value and the values differ from pawns, knights, kings, queens etc.

However, if we put all these pieces together, they form a system; a system of game of chess.

They interact like elements of language in a synchronic state, and it is the interaction that creates their value.

Now, when we start the game, we move the pieces here and there. This brings a change in the value of the chess-board, and this is similar to a linguistic change in the language and thus is an example of 'diachronic' analysis of it.

The move of the piece of chess-board is just one, but this move brings an effect to the whole system of the chess-game.

The chess-board is in **one state** before the move and **another state** after the move, but the move itself does not belong to either state.

Langue & parole

Langue

La langue is the whole system of language that precedes and makes speech possible.

Learning a language, we master the system of grammar, spelling, syntax and punctuation. These are all elements of langue.

Langue is a system, and it has a large number of elements whereby meaning is created in the arrangements of its elements to each other.

Parole

Parole is the concrete use of the language, the actual utterances.

It is an external manifestation of langue. It is the usage of the system, but not the system. The so called functional aspect of a system.

- While *parole* constitutes the immediately accessible data, the linguist's proper object is the *langue* of each community.
- This must include the lexicon, grammar, and phonology implanted in each individual by his upbringing in society and on the basis of which he speaks and understands his language.
- By defining *Langue* and *Parole*, Saussure differentiates between the language and how it is used, and therefore enabling these two very different things to be studied as separate entities.
- As a structuralist, Saussure was interested more in *la langue* than *parole*. It was the system by which meaning could be created that was of interest rather than individual instances of its use.

Competence and performance

- Saussure gives these terms to understand 'langue' and 'parole' in a better way.
- He says that whatever we learn and can learn about the language as a system is what constitutes 'Competence' and
- Whatever, we make use of the language as a system in actual situation is what is 'Performance'
- This fundamental distinction has been later discussed by many linguists including Chomsky in his *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (1965).
 - A language user's underlying knowledge about the system of rules is called his linguistic **competence**.
 - **Performance** refers to the actual use of language in concrete situations.

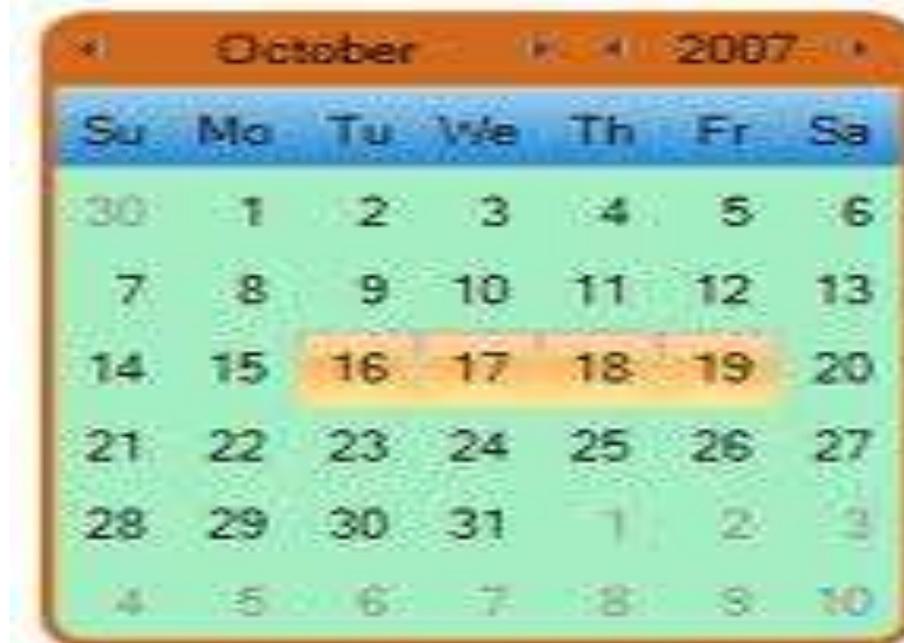
Syntagmatic and Paradigmatic

According to layman's point of view, any arrangement of things in 'horizontal manner' is called 'Syntagmatic'

And things that have been arranged in a 'vertical manner' must be called 'Paradigmatic'.

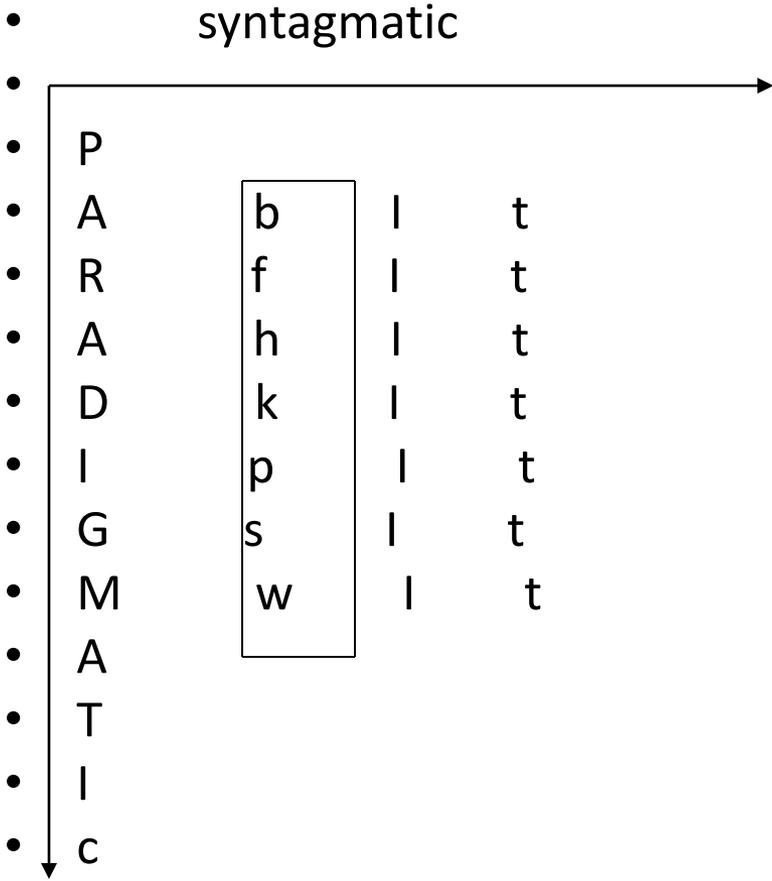
Word of causation: the system of arrangement of things in these two manner is called 'syntagmatic and paradigmatic.

For example:



A screenshot of a calendar for October 2007. The calendar is displayed in a grid format with days of the week (Su, Mo, Tu, We, Th, Fr, Sa) as columns and dates as rows. The dates 16, 17, 18, and 19 are highlighted in a light orange color, illustrating a horizontal arrangement of elements.

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
30	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31	1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10



A vivid picture of the two concepts

