

LINGVISTICĂ GENERALĂ

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Engleză Principal

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THE NINETEENTH CENTURY. HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS.

The scientific study of language did not begin in the 19th century; but the years around 1900 happen to have marked an important turning point in the history of modern linguistics. The re-orientation that occurred about then was a shift from the *historical linguistics*, also known as *diachronic linguistics* or *philology*, which had dominated 19th century linguistic research – the investigation of the history of languages, the uncovering of their relationships and the reconstruction of the lost *proto-languages* from which families of the extant languages descend – towards what became known as *synchronic linguistics*: the analysis of languages as communicative systems as they exist at a given point in time (often the present), ignoring (as their speakers ignore) the route by which they arrived at their present form.

The term *philology* and its cognates in the European languages embody an awkward ambiguity. On the Continent, *Philologie* refers to the study of a culture through its literature: 'classical philology' concerned itself with the Latin and Greek languages only as means to a better understanding of the Roman and Greek civilization, and when, during the Romantic period, scholars in Central Europe began to study the early forms of their own languages, as ends in themselves rather than as literary vehicles, they tended to distinguish this new approach to language-study as *Sprachwissenschaft* or *Linguistik*. In modern English usage *linguistics* normally means linguistics in the twentieth-century style – therefore primarily *synchronic linguistics* while *philology*, if used at all, refers (often slightly patronizingly) to *historical linguistics*, as practiced in the nineteenth century.

Historical linguistics looks, as the name suggests, at language and its history, that is at earlier stages of language development and at processes leading to change and finally to language as we have it today. Its aims are twofold at least: analyzing and describing the historical status of language(s) and analyzing and describing patterns of change and development that help explain language history and also ongoing processes in language today.

In the beginning, that is from the late 18th century on, historical linguistics was a mainly **comparative** field of study, looking at related languages, establishing **language families** by using e.g. the **family tree model** and (re-)constructing earlier stages of language based on results of comparative work. By gathering lists of **cognate words**, that is words with a common root and similar form and meaning in various languages, **proto-languages** were reconstructed. Early and

famous comparative work was conducted by the Englishman Sir William Jones (1786), who compared Sanskrit and European languages, establishing the **Indo-European language family**, to which also English and German belong, both being part of the (West-)Germanic sub-branch.

Cognates¹ in Indo-European

Sanskrit English German

PITAR FATHER VATER

BHRATHAR BROTHER BRUDER

and in the West-Germanic sub-branch:

English German Dutch

THREE DREI DRIE

MONTH MONAT MAAND

It is commonly the case in the history of science that at any given time there are a few outstandingly successful branches of science which are regarded as models of what a science should-be, so that scholars attempting to investigate scientifically some new field of phenomena will almost inevitably imitate the methods and theories of the 'model' sciences. The nineteenth century contained two such outstandingly successful scientific models.

The first of these was mechanistic physics, 2 - so that all future states of the world could in principle be inferred from a complete knowledge of its present state (the view classically expressed by Laplace in the preface to his *Théorie analytique des probabilités* (1820), and abandoned in our own century with the adoption of the quantum theory); **the second** was the biological theory of evolution by natural selection, which emerged from a great upsurge of interest in natural history during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and culminated in Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) and the storm of controversy aroused by that book.

From physics, philologists took the notion of .describing the history of sound-changes occurring in a language in terms of 'laws' which apply uniformly to whole ranges of examples, rather than discussing individual words in the case-by-case way in which a historian (in the ordinary sense) treats individual persons or events. One of the first such discoveries, for instance, was the Proto-Germanic consonant-shift commonly called Grimm's Law (though in fact stated first by the Dane Rasmus Rask in 1814), whereby Proto-Indo-European (PIE) consonants

¹ *Cognate*(of a word or morpheme) : related by derivation, borrowing, or descent/origin; e.g.: the English verb "eat" and the German verb "essen" are *cognate*.

changed in the Germanic branch in accordance with the following rules:

PIE	Germanic
voiceless stops [p t k]	> voiceless fricatives [f θ x] (pater-father, tertius-third, cornus-horn)
voiced stops [b d g]	> voiceless stops [p t k] (labium-lip, duo-two, ager-acre)
voiced aspirates [bh dh gh]	> voiced stops [b d g]

Since in other branches of Indo-European the consonants remained unchanged (or developed differently - thus PIE voiced aspirates become voiceless aspirates [ph th kh] in Classical Greek, which in turn become voiceless fricatives in Modern Greek), the Germanic consonant-shift produces many cases of words alike in meaning but containing distinct consonants in different languages: compare, for example, the initial consonants of Greek *thyra* and English *door*, Greek *genos* and English *kin*, Greek *pous* and English *foot*. 'Grimm's Law' reduces many hundreds of cases like these to three simple formulae.

While mechanistic physics, provided one paradigm for linguistics, however, the influence of biology was certainly very much greater. As German scholarship came to distinguish between the *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften* between the natural and moral sciences, or in modern terms between the 'sciences' and the 'arts' or 'humanities' - linguists were anxious to align themselves with the former: but, if linguistics is to be a natural science, then a 'language' must be some kind of entity which can be described objectively along with the rest of the furniture of the natural world. It will not be adequate to interpret the term 'language' as merely a convenient way of referring to various characteristics of the purely subjective intellectual life of a nation, as one adopting the 'humanities' rather than 'science' approach might be inclined to do.

The solution of many nineteenth-century linguists was to regard languages as an order of natural organisms, on a par with plants and animals. Thus, Bopp² (1827) writes:

Languages must be regarded as organic bodies [organische Naturkörper], formed in accordance with definite laws; bearing within themselves an internal principle of life, they develop and they gradually die out, after, no longer comprehending themselves, they discard, mutilate or misuse ... components or forms which were originally significant but which have gradually become relatively superficial appendages.

Similar views are expressed by August Pott³ a few years later (1833):

² Franz Bopp (1791-1867) – German linguist, known for his extensive work on Indo-European languages.

³ August Friedrich Pott (1802-1887) – German linguist, Bopp's student.

A language is in a constant state of change throughout its life: like every organic object [organische Naturgegenstand], it has its periods of gestation and maturation, times of accelerated and of slackened growth, its prime, decay and gradual extinction

These remarks are by no means unreasonable, even though few would agree with them today. Although languages are in some sense a product of people's minds, they seem to have a life of their own, rather than being consciously created artefacts like a symphony or an aircraft design. Thus, it was clearly not by any process of conscious decision on the part of its speakers that the Old English of pre-Conquest days developed successively into Chaucer's English, Shakespeare's English and now the different varieties of modern English. Furthermore, groups of languages have 'family trees' just as groups of biological species do. As we saw above, French, Italian and Romanian descend from Latin while English, German and Norwegian descend from 'Proto-Germanic', and Latin, Proto-Germanic and various other known or postulated ancient languages descend from a still more ancient Proto-Indo-European language; this cannot fail to remind us of the situation in biology where, say, Man, chimpanzee and gorilla all descend from an extinct species of ape while cat, lion and tiger descend from an extinct proto-feline, and proto-ape, proto-feline, and others themselves share a common ancestor further back in geological time.

Already at the beginning of the 19th century, scholars such as Friedrich von Schlegel⁴ and Jacob Grimm⁵ had suggested that the discipline most closely cognate with the new science of 'comparative grammar' was comparative anatomy. The *Stammbaum*, or 'family tree', theory of linguistic evolution was first formally expressed by August Schleicher⁶ (in his *Compendium*, 1861) almost simultaneously with the appearance of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (published in England in 1859, in German translation in 1860); Schleicher's friend Ernst Haeckel (an important early evolutionist) drew his attention to Darwin's book, and Schleicher (who lived from 1821 to 1868) responded in 1863 by publishing a short treatise on Darwin's Theory and Linguistics, in the form of an open letter to Haeckel, arguing strongly that linguistics should be regarded as one of the natural sciences to which Darwin's theory applies.

⁴ Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829) – German poet, philosopher and linguist.

⁵ Jacob Grimm (1785-1863) – one of the Brothers Grimm, German jurist mythologist and linguist, enunciator of *Grimm's Law*, aka *Rask-Grimm Rule*, the Germanic Sound Shift.

⁶ August Schleicher (1821-1868)- German linguist, author of *A Compendium of the Comparative Grammar of the Indo-European Languages*; author of the *Stammbaumtheorie* (family-tree theory).

The linguist's language-families, languages, dialects, and idiolects⁷ correspond to the biologist's genera, species, varieties, and individuals. Languages and language-families, like species, compete with one another in a 'struggle for survival' (consider, in the British Isles for instance, how English has spread at the expense of the Celtic languages: Cornish and Manx are extinct, Welsh and Scottish Gaelic live on but lose ground steadily to English, Irish is kept alive artificially in a small Gaeltacht⁸ like a protected species in a game reserve); and, on a world scale, Schleicher saw the Indo-European language-family as having reached a dominant position linguistically, as Man has become dominant zoologically.

Later on, when it had come to seem clear that, after all, the laws of biology fail to apply to language - so that the only entities to fall within their domain are material plants and animals - some scholars 'charitably' reinterpreted Schleicher's equation of linguistics with biology as having been intended only metaphorically rather than literally, while others poured scorn on views like Schleicher's as if they embodied an obvious contradiction; thus Giuliano Bonfante⁹ said: 'Languages are historical creations, not vegetables.'

Until 100 years ago, then, the historical approach was the natural one for the study of language, and historical linguistics looked like one of the frontiers on which exciting new scientific advances could confidently be expected. As the nineteenth century neared its end, for a number of reasons, this expectation came to seem less likely to be fulfilled.

The first problem had to do with the directionality of change. It is central to the evolutionary view of biology that the replacement of old species by new is not merely a process of random changes (even if the individual mutations on which evolution depends are random), but rather is a movement from lower to higher - mutations which succeed in spreading are those which give their possessor an advantage in the struggle for survival, while disadvantageous traits are eliminated. This notion that different forms of life occupy different points on a scale of degrees of development is by no means an original feature of Darwin's theory of descent with modification, of course; it had been familiar since Aristotle as the philosophical and theological

⁷ The term *idiolect* refers to the habits of speech of a single person.

⁸ In Ireland, any (or, collectively, all) of the districts where the government admits that Irish is the dominant language of the home.

⁹ Giuliano Bonfante (1904-2005) – Italian linguist, expert in the language of the Etruscan

doctrine of the Great Chain of Being, a concept which became particularly influential in the eighteenth century .

Nineteenth-century historical linguists in many cases took it for granted that linguistic change was similarly 'directional'. Thus, according to Rask, languages became steadily simpler over time:

The language which has the most sophisticated grammar is the purest, most original, oldest, nearest to the source, because grammatical inflexions and endings are eroded in the development of new languages, and they require a very long time, and a certain mingling with other peoples, to evolve and organize themselves again. Thus Danish is simpler than Icelandic, English than Anglo-Saxon; and Modern Greek bears the same relation to Classical Greek, Italian to Latin, German to Gothic, and similarly in all cases known to us.

Rask's claim seems to be a statement of a purely empirical generalization about observed facts: it is certainly correct for the cases he cites (except that German is not now held to be a direct descendant of the extinct language called Gothic), and it is not clear whether Rask intended it as a strong hypothesis about all possible cases of language change - the clause about 'evolving and organizing themselves again' seems to allow for some cases of languages moving in the direction of greater complexity. As the biological analogy became increasingly persuasive, however, so the directional view of language-change came to play a more central role in linguists' theorizing. One strand in the directional view was the notion that languages could be classified into a small number of types, usually three: **isolating languages**, in which each word consisted of a single unchanging root (Chinese and Vietnamese being frequently cited examples); **agglutinating languages**, in which words include affixes as well as root, but the division of the word into root and affixes is clear (e.g. Turkish, where *sevisdirilmek* means 'to be made to love one another', and the word divides into *sev-* 'love', *-is-* 'reciprocal', *-dir-* 'causative', *-il-* 'passive', and *-mek* 'infinitive'); and **inflecting languages** (e.g. Sanskrit, Classical Greek, Latin, and the other languages cited by Rask as relatively complex), where a single word includes a number of 'units of meaning' but one cannot assign these meaning-units to distinct portions of the entire word.

Otto Jespersen suggests that the three-way classification originated with Friedrich von Schlegel's brother August, who treated the inflecting type as the highest. August Schlegel divided inflecting languages into two subclasses, **synthetic and analytic languages** - the former

being inflecting languages in the fullest sense, the latter including some characteristics of the isolating type (prepositions in place of case-endings, subject pronouns in verb conjugations); and he treated the history of the Romance family of languages as a process of decay from synthetic Latin to analytic modern languages such as French.

REMEMBER!!!

The classification of languages is the process and result of grouping several languages together based on certain criteria:

(a) Areal (geographical) classification is based on linguistic similarities which have arisen from cultural contact between linguistic communities as well as geographical proximity through borrowing of words and grammatical constructions. Languages which share essential characteristics due to borrowings are termed linguistic areas; examples include the Balkan languages or the influence of **Chinese** on **Vietnamese**.

The term *linguistic area* refers to a geographical area in which, due to borrowing and language contact, languages of a region come to share certain structural features - not only borrowed words, but also shared elements of phonological, morphological or syntactic structure. Linguistic areas are also referred to at times by the terms *Sprachbund*, *diffusion area*, *adstratum relationship* and *convergence area*. The central feature of a linguistic area is the existence of structural similarities shared among languages of a geographical area (where usually some of the languages are genetically unrelated or at least are not all close relatives). It is assumed that the reason why the languages of the area share these traits is because at least some of them are borrowed.

(b) Genealogical (genetic) classification, based on linguistic similarities that result from being descendants of a common **proto-language**. Languages that derive from a common proto-language are called language families, e.g. the **Indo-European** languages. Genealogical classification is based primarily on words and grammatical forms preserved in common.

English is a West Germanic language because if one traces the history of the generational tradition of the language we now call English, we will find that it merges with the linguistic traditions we call Dutch, German, etc. approximately 1400 years ago. Similarly, Irish and Hindi, despite their radically different typologies, can be shown through various sorts of evidence to be traceable back through generational transmission to a common language called Proto-Indo-European.

(c)Typological classification is based on structural similarities that are independent of geographical influence and/or genealogical affiliation,. Typological similarities can be explained either functionally, i.e. as performing functions which are common to all human languages, or as resulting from a common biological capacity for language present in all human beings.

Language typology [Grk *typós* ‘model, pattern’] is the classification of languages based on grammatical characteristics, i.e. ignoring genetic or geographical connections. The classical typology based on *morphological criteria* comes from A.W.von Schlegel’s distinction between **analytic** and **synthetic languages**: in analytic languages (*also isolating language*), such as Classical **Chinese**, the grammatical relations between words in a sentence are expressed by independent syntactic form elements (e.g. prepositions), while in synthetic languages they are expressed by dependent morphological units. In the synthetic languages, Schlegel distinguishes between **agglutinating languages**, in which grammatical and lexical morphemes with simple semantic components are simply affixed to each other (e.g. **Turkish**), and **inflectional languages**, whose words cannot be analysed into single morphemes with simple semantic meaning.

In the early stage of language typology, value judgments were also attached to each type: the richness of forms in the inflectional languages was considered a sign of greater development, while the isolating and agglutinating languages were seen as less developed stages on their way to becoming inflectional languages.

The syntactic approaches to typology owe the most to Joseph Greenberg¹⁰ (1963), who developed a typology of word order types. As we well remember, English is a SVO type (Subject-Verb-Object: *He brought water*). For instance, Classical Arabic or Insular Celtic languages are VSO types (**Brought he water*).

In specific cases, it is often very difficult to discern between areal, genealogical, and typological factors: for example, there are cases where genealogically related languages are still in geographical contact after their development into separate languages.

¹⁰ American Linguist (1915-2001).

[*A very short history of English*

Traditionally and in fact most appropriately, the history of English is divided into four distinct periods: Old, Middle, Early Modern and Modern English. Old English covers a period from the second half of the first millennium to roughly around 1100, ending shortly after the Norman Conquest. It is a period in which English still was a dominantly **synthetic language** and it is certainly different from any English spoken since. The language of this period was influenced by and in contact (language contact) with Latin and what is called Old Norse, i.e. the language of Scandinavian seafarers and settlers. As in later stages, the English lexicon at this stage of its development was (amongst other features) characterized by frequent borrowings from contact languages, i.e. by taking over words from them. With the beginning of the Middle English period a change in typology becomes evident, which was never a question of “a few years” around the Norman Conquest but certainly a process taking a much longer time. Middle English is generally labeled as being an **analytic language**. More careful scholars might say it is “increasingly analytic”. In Middle English we trace, next to continued and renewed Latin influences, strong influences of various predecessors of modern French: Norman dialects at an early stage and Central French influence as time went by. As a consequence we trace an ongoing expansion of the lexicon, i.e. borrowing, especially in areas influenced by the new ruling classes. Another drastic and important change starting in Middle English (around 1400), though not ending until well into, possibly even at the end of, Early Modern English (c. 1800), was the so-called Great Vowel Shift (GVS). The GVS is best defined as a process in which *all long vowels become raised to higher and closer positions*, with “position” referring to articulation. A final and equally important process starting in the Middle English period was that of the standardization of the English language. As this is a long and complex story in itself, it shall suffice to say that it started even before 1400 and that it is widely finished around 1800, as well. Important stages in this process are the printing press, though with de-standardizing effects in the beginning, the first dictionaries and grammars and finally the Elementary Educational Act, though slightly after the period given above, i.e. in 1870. This is already deep inside what we call the Early Modern English period, the start of which is usually placed around 1500, that is in a time of drastic change in Europe (Reformation, Renaissance etc.) and after the discovery of America. EModE is also characterized by a continued and refreshed influence of Romance and Classic languages on

its lexicon, due to the Renaissance, and also by the continuation of both the GVS and the process of standardization. Also, the development towards an increasingly analytic language type continues. After 1750 the Modern English period begins. Again, some scholars claim earlier or later dates, a fact that is again due to all periodization being a mere means of structuring a long history and basically any date being more or less arbitrary and disputable. Still, most drastic change phenomena are widely finished by this time and English has taken a shape that makes it look much like the English we know today. However, the journey of English continues as you read, as change is an ever present facet of language.]

FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE (1857-1913)

Saussure was born on November 26, 1857 in Geneva, to a family that had emigrated from France as Huguenot refugees. There was a strong scholarly tradition in the family, and when he finished his lower studies at 17, he entered the University, where he studied Philosophy, Chemistry, Physics, and especially Classical Philology. He spent the years 1876-78 in Leipzig, where Curtius, then a Grecist Comparativist of note, was his mentor. At the age of 19, de Saussure became a member of Linguistic Society of Paris, while studying Sanskrit, Iranian, Old Irish, Old Slavic, and Lithuanian. At 20, he presented a paper to the Paris society on IndoEuropean which was published one year later as *Mémoire sur la système primitive des voyelles dans les langues indoeuropéennes* (Leipzig: Tuebner. 1879). Linguists were impressed by the cogency of his internal reconstruction of PIE vowels.

Saussure lectured in Paris and from 1891-1913 he was a professor of Linguistics in Geneva. Despite the acclaim won by his brilliant *Mémoire*, he published little. Perhaps he had trouble articulating his misgivings about the scientific basis of linguistics, which his posthumous *Cours de Linguistique Générale* was to provide. Three sets of lectures were summarized from scraps of his own notes, but mostly from those of a few students, and edited by colleagues as the posthumous *Cours* (1916).

In his lectures, Saussure revolutionized linguistics by introducing certain key dichotomies into the field, each one allowing for a new perspective on language.

Saussure's distinctions are based on **four famous dichotomies**¹¹.

1. The first and foremost of these is that of *synchronic vs diachronic*. Synchronic Linguistics deals with the investigation of language at one particular point in time (which may, but does not necessarily have to be, the present). Diachronic/Historical linguistics is the investigation of language over time. The dichotomy of *synchrony* and *diachrony* is often explained by the metaphor of time slices. If you were to cut time into slices, with each slice being a certain moment in time, then a synchronic approach would look only at a single slice, whereas a diachronic one would look at several slices and compare them to each other.

Diachronic study (historical view point)



Synchronic slices (points in time)

A slice is a *language state*, the state of a language at a given point in time. Modern synchronic linguistics investigates language as a system and places emphasis on language structure, on how parts are related and their function

Langue vs. Parole

Langue encompasses the abstract, systematic rules and conventions of a signifying system; it is independent of, and pre-exists, individual users. *Langue* involves the principles of language, without which no meaningful utterance, "parole", would be possible.

But what is language [langue]? It is not to be confused with human speech [langage], of which it is only a definite part, though certainly an essential one. It is both a social product of the faculty of speech and a collection of necessary conventions that have been adopted by a social body to permit individuals to exercise that faculty(...) Language, on the contrary, is a self-contained whole and a principle of classification. As soon as we give language first place among the facts

¹¹ Dichotomy: A bipartite, complementary opposition; division into two mutually exclusive, opposed, or contradictory groups

of speech, we introduce a natural order into a mass that lends itself to no other classification. (Course of General Linguistics¹², p. 9)

Parole refers to the concrete instances of the use of *langue*. This is the individual, personal phenomenon of language as a series of speech acts made by a linguistic subject. Saussure did not concern himself overly with *parole*; however, the structure of *langue* is revealed through the study of *parole*.

Speaking, on the contrary, is an individual act. It is wilful and intellectual. Within the act, we should distinguish between: (1) the combinations by which the speaker uses the language code for expressing his own thought; and (2) the psychophysical mechanism that allows him to exteriorize those combinations. (CGL, p.14)

To summarize, these are the characteristics of language:

- 1) Language is a well-defined object in the heterogeneous mass of speech facts. It can be localized in the limited segment of the speaking-circuit where an auditory image becomes associated with a concept. It is the social side of speech, outside the individual who can never create nor modify it by himself; it exists only by virtue of a sort of contract signed by the members of a community. Moreover, the individual must always serve an apprenticeship in order to learn the functioning of language; a child assimilates it only gradually. It is such a distinct thing that a man deprived of the use of speaking retains it provided that he understands the vocal signs that he hears.
- 2) Language, unlike speaking, is something that we can study separately. Although dead languages are no longer spoken, we can easily assimilate their linguistic organisms. We can dispense with the other elements of speech; indeed, the science of language is possible only if the other elements are excluded.
- 3) Whereas speech is heterogeneous, language, as defined, is homogeneous. It is a system of signs in which the only essential thing is the union of meanings and sound-images, and in which both parts of the sign are psychological.

¹² From now on, CGL.

4) Language is concrete, no less so than speaking; and this is a help in our study of it. Linguistic signs, though basically psychological, are not abstractions; associations which bear the stamp of collective approval—and which added together constitute language—are realities that have their seat in the brain. Besides, linguistic signs are tangible; it is possible to reduce them to conventional written symbols, whereas it would be impossible to provide detailed photographs of acts of speaking [*actes de parole*] ; the pronunciation of even the smallest word represents an infinite number of muscular movements that could be identified and put into graphic form only with great difficulty. In language, on the contrary, there is only the sound-image, and the latter can be translated into a fixed visual image. For if we disregard the vast number of movements necessary for the realization of sound-images in speaking, we see that each sound-image is nothing more than the sum of a limited number of elements or phonemes that can in turn be called up by a corresponding number of written symbols. The very possibility of putting the things that relate to language into graphic form allows dictionaries and grammars to represent it accurately, for language is a storehouse of sound images, and writing is the tangible form of those images. (CGL, p.14-15)

Signifiant vs Signifié (Signifier vs Signified)

For Saussure language is a sign¹³ system. A sign in a language is the relationship between **a concept** and **an acoustic image**, i.e. between a *signifié* (that which is signified, i.e. the concept) and a *signifiant* (that which signifies, i.e. the acoustic form, the signifier).

The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image. The latter is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses. The sound-image is sensory, and if I happen to call it "material," it is only in that sense, and by way of opposing it to the other term of the association, the concept, which is generally more abstract. (CGL,p.66)

¹³ In semiotics, a **sign** is something that can be interpreted as having a meaning, which is something other than itself, and which is therefore able to communicate information to the one interpreting or decoding the sign. Signs can work through any of the senses, visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory or taste, and their meaning can be intentional such as a word uttered with a specific meaning, or unintentional such as a symptom being a sign of a particular medical condition.

The First Principle, the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign: Saussure not only differentiated between signifier and signified, but he also characterized the relationship between these two as **arbitrary**. *Arbitrariness* in this context means that there is no natural connection between the signifier and the signified. For example, a “table” is called a table simply because some people thought it would be a fitting name, and the rest of us agreed. The word does not look or sounds like a “table”. If you've never seen a table/don't know what it's called, then hearing/seeing the word will give you no clue to its meaning.

Since the general relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary, the specific signifier to be used is implicitly agreed upon by cultural convention. This agreement ensures that the same signifier is used for a specific signified by all speakers of a given dialect. Note that there are limits to the arbitrariness of sign relationships. First, if you use a composite, then this word can often be logically separated into its parts; the arbitrariness stops at composition. Keep in mind, however, that this is not necessarily so, and even if it is, it may be difficult to deduce the concept behind it: Is a «dog biscuit» *for* dogs, or is it *made from* dogs? And a «subway» may be a way under sub the streets, but that won't help you much if you've never seen one. Also, and more importantly, there is **onomatopoeia**. Onomatopoeic signs have an acoustic relationship to the signified. The «cuckoo» is called thus because of its trademark wake-up call, and if you «squelch» a bug, you have a pretty good idea of how that will sound like.

Language is a system of signs that express ideas, and is therefore comparable to a system of writing, the alphabet of deaf-mutes, symbolic rites, polite formulas, military signals, etc. But it is the most important of all these systems. A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable; it would be a part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology; I shall call it semiology (from Greek semeion 'sign'). Semiology would show what constitutes signs, what laws govern them. Since the science does not yet exist, no one can say what it would be ; but it has a right to existence, a place staked out in advance. Linguistics is only a part of the general science of semiology; the laws discovered by semiology will be applicable to linguistics and the latter will circumscribe a well-defined area within the mass of anthropological facts. (CGL, 16)

Syntagmatic vs. paradigmatic

Semiology distinguishes between two fundamental dimensions of analysis: the syntagmatic and paradigmatic. From the Saussurian proposition that the individual symbol is arbitrary and dependent for its comprehensibility on the language system (*langue*) of which it is a

part, it follows that the inter-relationships of symbols within this system is of crucial concern. Saussure argued that these relationships could be classified into a horizontal - linear - sequential arrangement - the **syntagmatic**; and a vertical - non-linear - associative one that relies on links forged by memory, custom, and culture - the **paradigmatic**. A refinement of this is to say (according to Roman Jakobson¹⁴), that the paradigmatic dimension involves selection amongst possible alternatives, e.g. tree, shrub, bush, while the syntagmatic involves a process of combination, e.g. *the cat sat on the mat*, but not *the sat cat on mat the*.

Saussure insists that there is no fundamental difference between a linguistic unit and a grammatical fact. Their common nature is the result of the fact that signs are entirely differential objects and that what constitutes a linguistic sign is nothing but differences between signs. "A rather paradoxical consequence is that, in the final analysis, what is commonly referred to as grammatical fact fits our definition of a linguistic unit."

Thus, in the case of the German opposition between *Nacht* (night) and *Nächte* (nights), it is the difference which carries grammatical meaning.

„Each of the terms present in the grammatical fact (the singular without umlaut and final *e*, as opposed to the plural with umlaut and final *e*), is itself the result of the interplay of oppositions within the system. Taken by itself, neither *Nacht* nor *Nächte* is anything; thus, everything lies in the opposition.

Putting it another way, the *Nacht: Nächte* relation can be expressed by an algebraic formula a/b in which *a* and *b* are not simple terms but result from a set of relations. Language, in a manner of speaking, is a type of algebra consisting solely of complex terms. Some of its oppositions are more significant than others; but units and grammatical facts are only different names for designating diverse aspects of the same general fact: the functioning of linguistic oppositions. This statement is so true that we might very well approach the problem of units by starting from grammatical facts. Taking an opposition like *Nacht: Nächte*, we might ask what are the units involved in it. Are they only the two words, the whole series of similar words, *a* and *ä*, or all singulars and plurals, etc.?

Units and grammatical facts would not be confused if linguistic signs were made up of something besides differences. But language being what it is, we shall find nothing simple in it regardless of our approach; everywhere and always there is the same complex equilibrium of

¹⁴ Roman Jakobson -

terms that mutually condition each other. Putting it another way, **language is a form and not a substance**. This truth could not be overstressed, for all the mistakes in our terminology, all our incorrect ways of naming things that pertain to language, stem from the involuntary supposition that the linguistic phenomenon must have substance.” (CGL, p. 122)

Consider, for example, the case of the English word *took*. What is the sign of the past tense here? It is obviously nothing positive in the word itself but a relational element. The opposition between *take* and *took* carries the distinction between present and past, just as the opposition between *foot* and *feet* carries the distinction of number. Without *feet*, *foot* would probably be indeterminate, just as *sheep* is.

In studying a language, then, the linguist is concerned with relationships: identities and differences. According to Saussure, *there are two major types of relationships*. On the one hand there are oppositions which produce different and alternative terms (*b* as opposed to *p*, *foot* as opposed to *feet*). On the other hand there are the relations between units which combine to form sequences. In a linguistic sequence a term’s value depends not only on the contrast between it and the others which might have been chosen in its stead but also on its relations with the terms that precede or follow it in the sequence. The former, which Saussure calls *associative*, are now generally called **paradigmatic** relations. The latter are called **syntagmatic** relations. Syntagmatic relations define combinatory possibilities: the relations between elements that might combine in a sequence. Paradigmatic relations are the oppositions between elements which can replace one another.

These relations hold at various levels of linguistic analysis.

The phoneme /p/ in English is defined both by its opposition to other phonemes which could replace it in contexts such as /-et/ (*bet*, *let*, *met*, *let*, *set*) and by its combinatory relations with other phonemes (for instance, it can precede or follow any vowel, but can only be preceded by /s/).

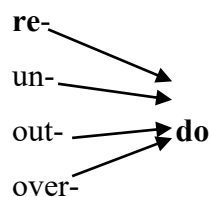
At the level of morphology or word structure we also find both syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships. A noun is partly defined by the combinations into which it can enter with prefixes and suffixes. Thus we have *friendless*, *friendly*, *friendliness*, *unfriendly*, *befriend*, *unbefriended*, *friendship*, *unfriendliness* but not **disfriend*, **friendation*, **subfriend*, **overfriend*, **difriendize*. The combinatory possibilities represent syntagmatic relationships and the

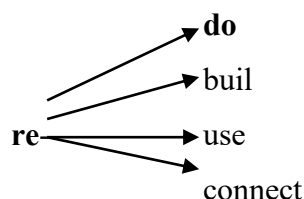
paradigmatic relationships are to be found in the contrast between a given morpheme, and those which could replace it in a given environment. Thus, there is a paradigmatic contrast between the suffixes *-ly*, *-less* and *-ship*, in that they can all occur after *friend* and replacement of one by another brings a change in meaning. Similarly, *friend* has paradigmatic relations with *member*, *dictator*, *partner*, *professor*, etc., in that they all contrast with one another in the environment *_ship*.

If we move up to the level of syntax we can continue to identify the same types of relationship. The syntagmatic relations that define the constituent *he frightened* allow it to be followed only by certain types of constituent: *George*, *the man standing on the corner*, *thirty-one field mice*, etc. but not *the stone*, *sincerity*, *purple*, *in*, etc. Our knowledge of syntagmatic relations enables us to define for *he frightened* a paradigmatic class of items which can follow it. These items are in paradigmatic contrast with one another, and to choose one is to produce meaning by excluding others.

Saussure claims that the entire linguistic system can be reduced to and explained in terms of a theory of syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations and that in this sense all synchronic facts are fundamentally identical. This is what may be called the structuralist view of language: not only is a language a system of elements which are wholly defined by their relations to one another within the system, but also the linguistic system consists of different levels of structure; at each level one can identify elements which contrast with one another and combine with other elements to form higher level units, and the principles of structure at each level are fundamentally the same.

At each level of structure one identifies the units or elements of a language by their capacity to differentiate units of the level immediately above them. The only way we can identify the prefix *re-* as a morphemic unit of English is by asking not just whether it contrasts with other elements but whether, when it combines with other elements to form a higher level unit, it enters into contrasts which distinguish and define the higher level combination:





We know that *re-* contrasts paradigmatically with *un-*, *out-* and *over-* because *redo* contrasts with *undo*, *outdo* and *overdo*; and we know that *do* is a separable morphemic element because *redo* contrasts with *rebuild*, *reuse*, *reconnect*, etc. It is only contrasts between words that enable us to define the lower level constituents of words, morphemes.

The basic structural principle that items are defined by their contrasts with other items and their ability to combine to form higher level items operates at every level of language.

”In discourse, on the one hand, words acquire relations based on the linear nature of language because they are chained together. This rules out the possibility of pronouncing two elements simultaneously. The elements are arranged in sequence on the chain of speaking. Combinations supported by linearity are syntagms. The syntagm is always composed of two or more consecutive units (e.g. French *re-lire* 're-read,' *contre tous* 'against everyone,' *la vie humaine* 'human life,' *Dieu est bon* 'God is good,' *s'il fait beau temps, nous sortirons* 'if the weather is nice, we'll go out,' etc.). In the syntagm a term acquires its value only because it stands in opposition to everything that precedes or follows it, or to both.

Outside discourse, on the other hand, words acquire relations of a different kind. Those that have something in common are associated in the memory, resulting in groups marked by diverse relations. For instance, the French word *enseignement* 'teaching' will unconsciously call to mind a host of other words (*enseigner* 'teach,' *renseigner* 'acquaint,' etc.; or *armement* 'armament,' *changement* 'amendment,' etc.; or *education* 'education,' *apprentissage* 'apprenticeship,' etc.). All those words are related in some way.

We see that the co-ordinations formed outside discourse differ strikingly from those formed inside discourse. Those formed outside discourse are not supported by linearity. Their

seat is in the brain; they are a part of the inner storehouse that makes up the language of each speaker. They are associative relations. The syntagmatic relation is *in praesentia*. It is based on two or more terms that occur in an effective series. Against this, the associative relation unites terms *in absentia* in a potential mnemonic series.” (CGL, 123)

The second principle, the linearity of the sign

„The signifier, being auditory, is unfolded solely in time from which it gets the following characteristics : (a) it represents a span, and (b) the span is measurable in a single dimension; it is a line. While Principle II is obvious, apparently linguists have always neglected to state it, doubtless because they found it too simple; nevertheless, it is fundamental, and its consequences are incalculable.

Its importance equals that of Principle I; the whole mechanism of language depends upon it. In contrast to visual signifiers (nautical signals, etc.) which can offer simultaneous groupings in several dimensions, auditory signifiers have at their command only the dimension of time. Their elements are presented in succession; they form a chain. This feature becomes readily apparent when they are represented in writing and the spatial line of graphic marks is substituted for succession in time.

Sometimes the linear nature of the signifier is not obvious. When I accent a syllable, for instance, it seems that I am concentrating more than one significant element on the same point. But this is an illusion ; the syllable and its accent constitute only one phonational act. There is no duality within the act but only different oppositions to what precedes and what follows.”(CGL, p.70)

ROMAN JAKOBSON

Roman Jakobson was born in Moscow in 1896 to a well-to-do family. A leading figure, as a young scholar, in both the Moscow and **Prague linguistic circles**, he is generally regarded as one of the twentieth century’s foremost linguists, and a proponent of the structuralist approach to language.

Jakobson’s approach to poetry is essentially that of the linguist, and ‘poetics’ for him forms part of the general field of linguistics. As a formalist, one of his major interests lies of course in the attempt to give an account of the poetic function of language, but this is pursued

under the larger umbrella of a comprehensive linguistic theory. To this end, he postulates two general linguistic notions which help to focus on the particular character of language when it is used poetically: the notion of polarities, and the notion of equivalence.

Jakobson's concept of 'polarities' in language derives from Saussure's insight concerning the syntagmatic and associative planes of linguistic performance, and it confirms the notion of the 'sparkling' force of binary opposition even at that basic level. Writing in 1956 about the linguistic problems of the disorder called *aphasia* (loss or impairment of the power to understand and to use speech), Jakobson records his observation that the two major (and binarily opposed) component disorders ('similarity disorder' and 'contiguity disorder') seem to be strikingly related to the two basic rhetorical figures metaphor and metonymy.

Both are figures of 'equivalence' in that they characteristically propose a different entity as having 'equivalent' status to the one that forms the main subject of the figure. Thus, in the metaphor 'the car beetled along', the movement of a beetle is proposed as 'equivalent' to that of the car, and in the metonymic phrase 'The White House considers a new policy', a specific building is proposed as 'equivalent' to the president of the United States. Broadly speaking, metaphor is based on a proposed similarity or analogy between the literal subject (the car's movement) and its metaphorical substitute (the beetle's movement), whereas metonymy is based on a proposed contiguous (or 'sequential') association between the literal subject (the president) and its 'adjacent' replacement (where the president lives). Metaphor, to apply Saussure's concepts, is generally 'associative' in character and exploits language's 'vertical' relations, where metonymy is generally 'syntagmatic' in character, and exploits language's 'horizontal' relations.

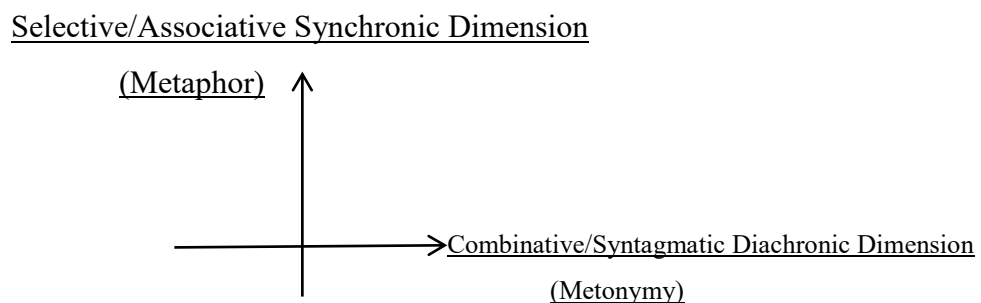
Jakobson sees *Metaphor and Metonymy* as the characteristic modes of binarily opposed¹⁵ polarities which between them underpin the twofold process of *selection* and *combination* by which linguistic signs are formed: 'the given utterance (message) is a *combination* of constituent

¹⁵ A binary opposition (also binary system) is a pair of related terms or concepts that are opposite in meaning. Binary opposition is the system by which, in language and thought, two theoretical opposites are strictly defined and set off against one another. It is the contrast between two mutually exclusive terms, such as *on* and *off*, *up* and *down*, *left* and *right*. Binary opposition is an important concept of structuralism, which sees such distinctions as fundamental to all language and thought. In structuralism, a binary opposition is seen as a fundamental organizer of human philosophy, culture, and language.

parts (sentences, words, phonemes, etc.) *selected* from the repository of all possible constituent parts (the code)' (*Fundamentals of Language*, p. 75). Thus messages are constructed, as Saussure said, by a combination of a 'horizontal' movement, which combines words together, and a 'vertical' movement, which selects the particular words from the available inventory or 'inner storehouse' of the language. The combinative (or syntagmatic) process manifests itself in contiguity (one word being placed next to another) and its mode is *metonymic*. The selective (or associative) process manifests itself in similarity (one word or concept being 'like' another) and its mode is *metaphoric*. The 'opposition' of metaphor and metonymy therefore may be said to represent in effect the essence of the total opposition between the *synchronic* mode of language (its immediate, coexistent, 'vertical' relationships) and its *diachronic* mode (its sequential, successive, linearly progressive relationships).

Jakobson's study of *aphasia* makes the significant claim that in the patient suffering from 'similarity' disorder, only the *syntagmatic* or combinative aspects of language seemed to be preserved, and there was a consequent inability to deal in 'associative' relationships, such as 'naming', the use of synonyms, definitions – i.e. the raw material of metaphors.

However, such patients employed *metonymy* widely: they would substitute *fork* for knife, *table* for lamp, *smoke* for fire etc. Meanwhile, in the patient suffering from 'contiguity' disorder, the reverse situation pertained. The 'syntactical rules organizing words into higher units are lost' and the patient's speech was largely confined to the *substitution* of words by 'similarities . . . of a metaphoric nature'. Thus, it appears that 'Metaphor is alien to the similarity disorder, and metonymy to the contiguity disorder'. As a result it becomes possible to propose that human language in fact does exist in terms of the two fundamental dimensions suggested by Saussure and, moreover, that these dimensions crystallize into the rhetorical devices on which poetry characteristically and preeminently draws. The two axes may be represented as follows:



Both metaphor and metonymy can be subdivided into other figures (simile is a type of metaphor; synecdoche is a type of metonymy) but the distinction between the two modes remains fundamental, because it is a product of the fundamental modes of language itself: it is how language works. Jakobson's most famous formulation on this basis is his definition of the *poetic* function of language as one which draws on both the selective and the combinative modes as a means for the promotion of *equivalence*:

'The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination.'¹ This becomes the distinguishing 'trademark' of the 'poetic' use of language, as opposed to any other use. When I say 'my car beetles along' I *select* 'beetles' from a 'storehouse' of possibilities which includes, say, 'goes', 'hurries', 'scurries' etc. and *combine* it with 'car' on the principle that this will make the car's movement and the insect's movement *equivalent*. As Jakobson puts it, 'similarity superimposed on contiguity imparts to poetry its thoroughgoing symbolic, multiplex, polysemantic essence. . . Said more technically, anything sequent is a simile. In poetry where similarity is superinduced upon contiguity, any metonymy is slightly metaphorical and any metaphor has a metonymical tint'.

REMEMBER!

METONYMY is a figure of speech that uses a phrase that is indicative of and associated to an actual concept.

METAPHOR is used to liken an object, person or situation to another that may be completely unlike the former but has one similar quality.

Metaphor *creates* the relation between its objects, while metonymy *presupposes* that relation. Metonymy allows us to refer to one aspect of a particular domain/thing, in relation to another aspect of the same domain, while metaphor requires two domains to be able to establish a relationship.

Example of metaphor:

All the world's a stage/ And all men and women merely players. (Shakespeare, *As You Like It*) – (two separate, independent domains, real life and theatre, are brought together).

Example of metonymy:

They remained loyal to the crown. (the crown is indicative of an actual king or queen)

Jakobson is also prepared to consider a preference for one mode or the other as a kind of rough and ready index of literary style:

”The primacy of the metaphoric process in the literary schools of romanticism and Symbolism has been repeatedly acknowledged, but it is still insufficiently realized that it is the predominance of metonymy which underlies and actually predetermines the so-called ‘realistic’ trend.”

In fact, he argues that a universal ‘competition’ between both modes will be manifested in any symbolic process or system of signs, be it intrapersonal or social, and instances that of painting where it is possible to distinguish between Cubism as metonymic and Surrealism as metaphoric in mode. Structuralist psycho-analysts such as Jacques Lacan have even suggested that these two modes of symbolic representation provide a model for the understanding of psychic functions: the concept of metaphor illuminates the notion of ‘symptom’ (the replacing of one signifier by an associated one), that of metonymy sheds light on the origin of desire (through the combinative connection of signifier to signifier and the sense this implies of the infinite extension of such a process into uncharted areas). Jakobson’s ‘polarities’ thus seem to take us to the heart of the act of signification itself and in so doing to suggest very important ways in which modes of signification may be distinguished from each other. True to his formalist background, his concern centres on the ways in which poetry differs from prose, and in which ‘literariness’ in language marks itself as distinctive.

MARKEDNESS

The concept of *markedness* originates in the work of the Russian linguist Nikolay Trubetzkoy (1890-1938) in relation to pairs of phonemes and is variously interpreted in linguistics. MARKED AND UNMARKED are terms which designate a contrasting pair, one possessing a special 'mark', the other neutral: in *play/played*, *play* is unmarked and neutral, and *played* has the mark *-ed*. Similarly, *host* is unmarked, but *hostess* is morphologically marked for the feminine gender. The mark is not necessarily visible or audible: in the pair *horse/mare*, *horse* is the more general, unmarked term, while *mare* is marked for the feminine gender. In the pair *cow/bull*, *cow* is unmarked, while *bull* is marked for the masculine. The terms are sometimes extended to wider, typological characteristics of languages, and also to social situations, to distinguish between

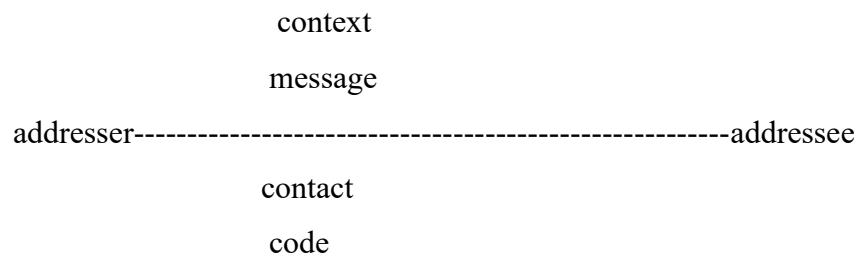
normal (unmarked) behaviour and a less common variant.

The concept of markedness, therefore, can be used in a variety of contexts to distinguish what we can consider as the base, normative, or most common forms of items or features from those which are derived, non-normative, or less frequent.

Every single constituent of a language system is built on an opposition of two logical contraries: the presence of an attribute (**markedness**) in contraposition to its absence (**unmarkedness**)

Jakobson's Communication Model

Very briefly, Jakobson draws attention to the six constituent factors that make up any speech event. These can be best understood by means of his diagram :



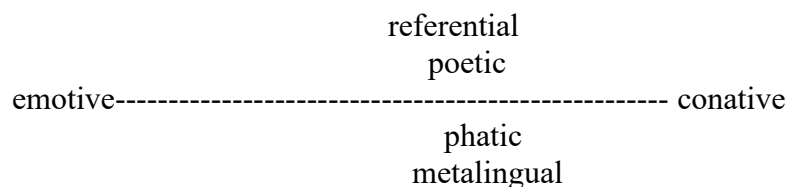
All communication consists of a *message* initiated by an *addresser*, whose destination is an *addressee*. But the process is not as simple as that. The message requires a *contact* between addresser and addressee, which may be oral, visual, electronic or whatever. It must be formulated in terms of a *code*: speech, numbers, writing, sound-formations etc. And the message must refer to a *context* understood by both addresser and addressee, which enables the message to ‘make sense’ – as (we hope) the context of the present discussion enables individual phrases and sentences to be meaningful where otherwise (uttered at, say, a football match) they would not.

The central point to emerge from Jakobson’s account of communication is that the ‘message’ does not and cannot supply all of the ‘meaning’ of the transaction, and that a good deal of what is communicated derives from the context, the code, and the means of contact.

‘Meaning’ in short resides in the *total* act of communication, a situation intensified by the fact that all languages contain grammatical elements which have no precise meaning *per se*, and which are wholly sensitive in this respect to the *context* in which they occur. That is, their meaning is capable of considerable degrees of change, depending on how they are used, and where they occur.

The Functions of Language

True to the functional commitment of his Prague school background, Jakobson goes on to argue that **each of the six elements involved in the communication event has a distinct functional role**. The nature of the message is finally determined by the fact that it takes on the functional character of whichever of the six elements involved happens to be dominant. To understand this, we need to supply to the above diagram of the speech event, the following additional functional dimensions:



This means that if the communication is orientated towards *context*, then the *referential* function dominates, and this determines the general character of a message such as ‘The distance from Cardiff to London is one hundred and fifty miles’ which aims to refer to a context beyond itself, and to convey concrete, objective information about that. This seems to be the leading task of most messages, of course, but the matter cannot simply be left there. For instance, if the communication is orientated towards the *addresser* of the message, then the *emotive* function dominates, and this arrangement would yield a message such as ‘London is a long way from home’ which aims to express the addresser’s emotional response to a particular situation, rather than a purely referential description of it. Similarly, if the communication is angled towards the receiver of the message, the addressee, then the *conative* (or vocative, or imperative) function dominates, indicated by the use of devices such as ‘Look!’ or ‘Listen!’ or ‘Now see here . . .’ or ‘I say . . .’.

If the communication inclines towards the *contact*, then the *phatic* function dominates (the purpose of this is to check that the contact is working properly: in utterance it yields ‘phatic’ events such as ‘good morning’, ‘how are you’ etc., whose purpose is not to elicit or offer

information, but to establish linguistic contact: most British conversation about the weather has this ‘phatic’ function, rather than a meteorological one). If towards the *code*, then the *metalingual* function dominates (this is to check that the same code is being used by both parties: in utterance this yields phrases such as ‘understand?’, ‘see?’, ‘Get it?’, ‘O.K.?’). Finally, if the communication is orientated towards the *message* for its own sake, then the *poetic* or *aesthetic* function can be said to be dominant.

It is worth stressing, however, that in Jakobson’s theory ‘poeticalness’ appears as an aspect of *all* uses of language and cannot simply be confined to poetry. In short, the ‘poetic function’ is part of the way all language works, and is not just a special set of ‘tricks’ that poets perform. Poetry only occurs, it follows, when ‘poeticalness’ is raised to a higher degree than any of the other competing functions, although they will obviously all continue to operate. Thus:

Poetic function is not the sole function of verbal art, but only its dominant, determining function, whereas in all other verbal activities it acts as a subsidiary, accessory constituent. This function, by promoting the palpability of signs, deepens the fundamental dichotomy of signs and objects. Hence, when dealing with poetic function, linguistics cannot limit itself to the field of poetry.

Of course, we have methods of analyzing poetry which are more or less satisfactory in that they can more or less deal with the metaphorical nature of the material. But the analysis of prose is less well advanced:

. . . so-called realistic literature, intimately tied with the metonymic principle, still defies interpretation, although the same linguistic methodology, which poetics uses when analyzing the metaphorical style of romantic poetry, is entirely applicable to the metonymical texture of realistic prose.

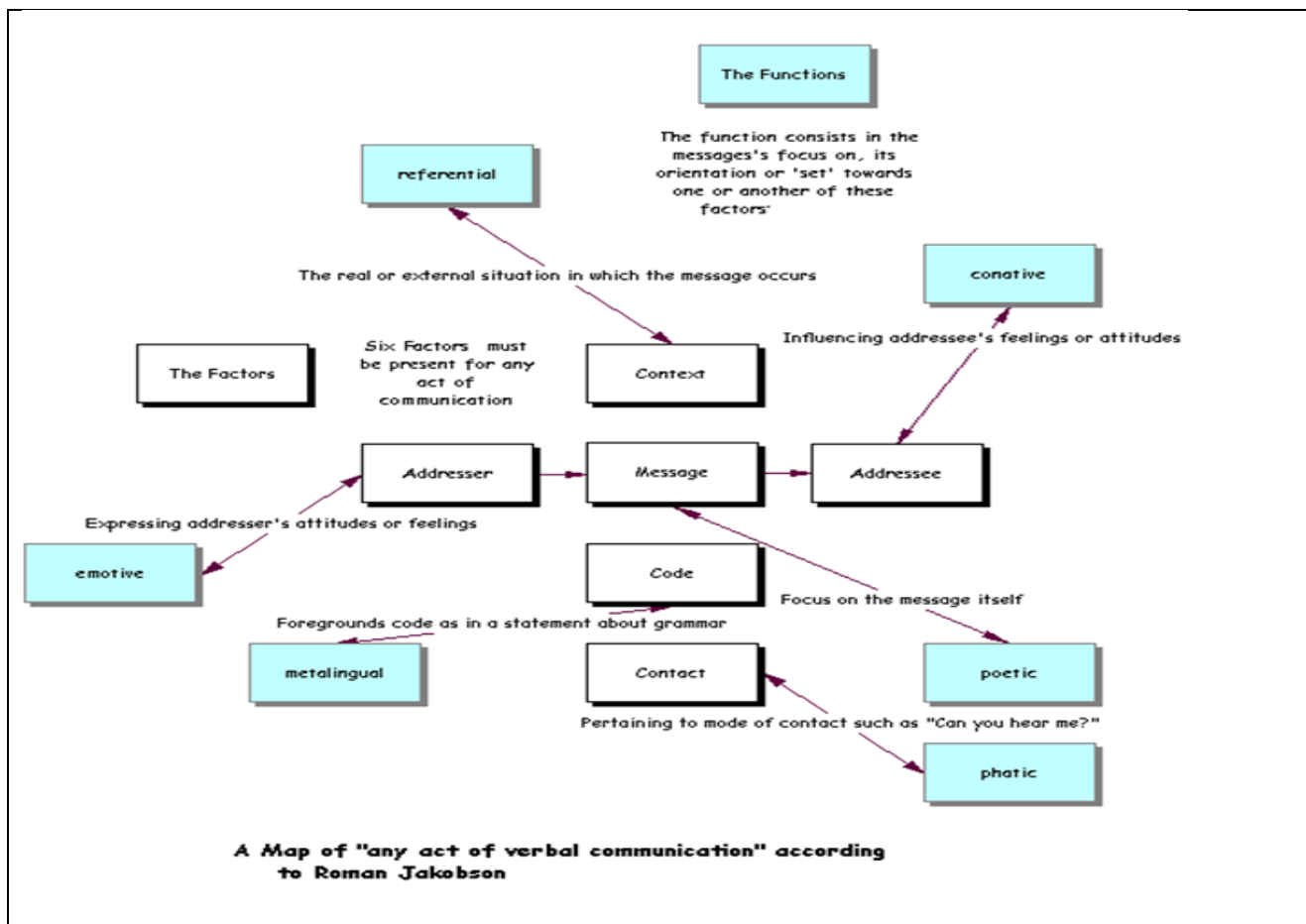
Jakobson offers the more refined proposal that the metaphoric mode tends to be foregrounded in poetry, whereas the metonymic mode tends to be foregrounded in prose. What we need, Jakobson concludes, is therefore a *poetics* of both poetry *and* prose which will attend to the differential, contrastive functioning of metaphor and metonymy at all levels.

Jakobson’s comprehensive (and fundamentally structural) view of the way language operates confirms and reinforces that crucial insight into the nature of verbal art to which attention has already been drawn in the assessment of his work as a formalist. For it is of the distinctive essence of the aesthetic use of language, seen thus ‘functionally’ and in relation to the totality of human communication, that it is *self-conscious*; concerned *above all* to draw attention to its *own nature*, its own sound-patterns, diction, syntax etc. and *not* to refer primarily to some

‘reality’ beyond itself. Language’s ‘poetic’ function promotes ‘the palpability of signs’. As a result, it systematically undermines the sense of any ‘natural’ or ‘transparent’ connection between signifier and signified, sign and object. As Jakobson says, it ‘deepens the fundamental dichotomy of signs and objects’. Verbal art, seen thus, is not referential in mode, and does not function as a transparent ‘window’ through which the reader encounters the poem’s or the novel’s ‘subject’. Its mode is auto-referential; it is its own subject.

This view of literary art serves to reintegrate form and content, and to present the work, not as the ‘container’ of a message, but as an intrinsic, self-generating, self-regulating and ultimately self-regarding whole, needing no reference beyond its own boundaries to validate its nature. It is, in short, in Piaget’s terms, a structure. In its formulation of a comprehensive theory of language and communication in which this notion of literature has an integral part, Jakobson’s work emerges as the bridge linking Formalism and Structuralism, and as the theoretical foundation of both.

Important!!!!!!



- **I'm terribly sorry to interrupt, but if you would be so kind as to lower your voices a little.**

Focused on the addresser (or sender), that is, on the first person, *the emotive function* reflects the speaker's attitude to the topic of his or her discourse.

- **Will you belt up!**

The conative function is centered on the second person, the addressee (or receiver). The most explicit instance is illustrated by two grammatical categories--the vocative and the imperative--neither of which is subject to the true/false criterion of declarative utterances.

- **It was a burning hot day; the air was stifling; one could hardly breathe even near the sea.**

The referential function can be equated with the cognitive use of language, which privileges the informational content of an utterance, virtually eliminating the focus on the speaker or on the addressee.

- **It was a beautiful warm day; the air was like velvet; the sea air was invigorating.**

The poetic function (which should not be confused with poetic discourse) valorizes the signifier, foregrounding what might be called the decorative or aesthetic function of language, in Jakobson's words, *the message for its own sake*, thereby deemphasizing (though not necessarily eliminating) the referential function.

- **Nice weather today!**

The phatic function is centered on the channel used and thus on the contact between speaker and addressee.

- ***Stifling* means "very hot and causing difficulties in breathing; suffocating"**

The metalingual function is focused on the verbal code itself, that is, on language speaking of itself, its purpose being to clarify the manner in which the verbal code is used.

GLOSSEMATICS (THE COPENHAGEN SCHOOL)

Glossematics is a structural linguistic theory developed in the 1930s by the two Danish linguists, **Louis Hjelmslev** (1899–1965) and **Hans Jørgen Uldall** (1907–57). Hjelmslev had a broad background in comparative and general linguistics. In 1928 he published *Principes de grammaire générale*, which contains many of the ideas which were later developed further in his glossematic theory, above all the attempt to establish a general grammar in which the categories were defined formally on the basis of their syntagmatic relations. In 1935 he published *La Catégorie des cas*, presenting a semantic analysis of the category of case. Uldall had studied phonetics under Daniel Jones¹⁶ and anthropology under Franz Boas¹⁷, and had felt a strong need for a new linguistic approach when trying to describe Native American languages. He spent the years 1933–9 in Denmark, during which period he and Hjelmslev, in very close co-operation, developed the glossematic theory. In 1939 they were approaching a final version, but during the years of the war, which Uldall spent abroad working for the British Council, their co-operation was interrupted, and it was not until 1951–2 that they had an opportunity to work together again. In the meantime, Hjelmslev had published an introduction to the theory, *Omkring sprogteoriens grundlæggelse* (1943), which was published in English in 1953 under the title ***Prolegomena to a Theory of Language***. In 1951–2, Uldall wrote the first part ('General theory') of what was planned to be their common work *Outline of Glossematics*, but this first part was not published until 1957. It contains a general introduction, largely in agreement with the *Prologemena*, but more comprehensible, and a description of a glossematic algebra, meant to be applicable not only to linguistics, but to the humanities in general. The plan had been that Hjelmslev should write the second part, containing the glossematic procedures with all rules and definitions.

However, during the long years of separation, Uldall had come to new conclusions on various points, whereas Hjelmslev on the whole had stuck to the old version of their theory. Some of the differences were due to the fact that Uldall was concerned with fieldwork, whereas Hjelmslev was more interested in the description of well-known languages. Moreover, he found the algebra constructed by Uldall unnecessarily complicated for the purposes of linguistics.

¹⁶ Daniel Jones (1881-1967)- English phonetician; In his book, *Outline of English Phonetics*(1918) , he was the first to give a detailed description of the English standard pronunciation (Received Pronunciation)

¹⁷ Franz Boas (1858-1942) – American linguist and anthropologist, mainly concerned with the study of languages and cultures of Native Americans

Hjelmslev therefore found it difficult to proceed from Uldall's algebraic system and hesitated to write the second part.

After a while, he decided to return to a simpler algebra used in earlier versions of the theory and to base the second part on the summary he had written in 1941 and revised in 1943. However, illness prevented him from fulfilling this plan. The summary was translated and edited by Francis Whitfield in 1975 under the title *Resumé of a Theory of Language*. This book consists of several hundred definitions and rules with no supporting examples.

An easier access to glossematics are Hjelmslev's many papers on various aspects of the theory, most of which are published in the two volumes of collected articles, *Essais linguistiques* (1959) and *Essais linguistiques II* (1973). The papers, 'Structural analysis of language' (1947) and 'A causerie on linguistic theory' (written in 1941) may be recommended as relatively easy introductions to the theory. But the most essential papers are 'Essai d'une theorie des morphèmes' (1938), describing the grammatical inflexional categories on the basis of glossematic functions, and 'La stratification du langage' (1954), which contains some revisions of the theory. However, the most important and widely read glossematic publication is his *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*.

THE GLOSSEMATIC CONCEPT OF LANGUAGE

Prolegomena to a Theory of Language is mainly concerned with the preconditions of the theory, i.e., with the features which, according to the preliminary investigations, characterize a **language**. In his view of the nature of language, Hjelmslev is strongly influenced by Saussure (1916)). Like Saussure, Hjelmslev considers language to be a sign structure, a **semiotic system**. Corresponding to Saussure's signifier and signified, Hjelmslev speaks of **sign expression** and **sign content**; and **expression** and **content** are described as the two **planes** of language. It is a characteristic feature of glossematics that content and expression are regarded as completely parallel entities to be analysed by means of the same procedures, leading to analogous categories. At the same time, however, it is emphasized that the two planes are not conformal. A given sign content is not structured in the same way as the corresponding sign expression, and they cannot be divided into corresponding constituents or **figurae**, as Hjelmslev calls them. Whereas, e.g., the Latin sign expression *-us* in *dominus* can be analysed into the expression figurae *u* and *s*, the corresponding sign content is analysed into 'nominative', 'masculine', and 'singular', of which none corresponds specifically to *u* or *s*. In the same way the expression *ram* can be analysed into

r, *a*, and *m*, and the corresponding content into ‘he’ and ‘sheep’, but *r*, *a*, and *m* do not correspond to any of these content elements.

From the point of view of its purpose, then, language is first and foremost a sign system; but from the point of view of its internal structure it is a system of *figurae* that can be used to construct signs. If there is conformity between content and expression, i.e. structural identity, there is no need to distinguish between the two planes. Hjelmslev calls such one-plane systems **symbolic systems** (for example, the game of chess); two-plane structures are called **semiotics**. A natural language is a semiotic into which all other semiotics can be translated, but the glossematic theory is meant to be applicable not only to (natural) languages but to all semiotic systems¹⁸.

Content and Expression must be analysed separately, but with constant regard to the interplay between them, viz. the function between sign-expression and sign-content. Replacement of one sign-expression, e.g. *ram*, by another, e.g. *ewe*, normally results in another sign-content; conversely, the replacement of one sign-content, e.g. ‘male sheep’, by another, e.g. ‘female sheep’ brings about another sign-expression. Parts of signs (*figurae*) may be replaced in the same way, e.g. /a/ by /i/ in the frame /r-m/, leading to the new sign-content ‘edge’, or ‘male’ by ‘female’ in the sign content ‘male sheep’ resulting in the new sign expression *ewe*. The smallest parts reached by the given procedure and whose replacement may bring about a change in the opposite plane are called **taxemes**. (In the expression plane, the level of taxemes corresponds roughly to that of phonemes.)

For this replacement test, glossematics coined the term **commutation test**, which is now widely used. This test has, of course, also been applied by other linguists, e.g., the Prague School linguists, but it is characteristic of glossematics that it stresses the fact that the test may take its point of departure in any of the two planes, as illustrated in the examples above. By means of the commutation test, a limited number of commutable elements, **invariants**, is reached in both planes.

Like Saussure, Hjelmslev also distinguishes between *Form and Substance*, and this distinction is basic in glossematics. But in contradistinction to Saussure, who sets up one form between two substances, sound and meaning, Hjelmslev operates with two forms, an expression

¹⁸ Language is a semiotic system, as we have probably understood by now but fashion, body language, traffic signals, etc., are also semiotic systems.

form and a content form. Since the two planes are not conformal, each must be described on the basis of its own form. Form comprises all paradigmatic and syntagmatic functions and the terminal points of these functions, i.e. **elements** and **categories**. In addition to form and substance, Hjelmslev introduces a third concept, **purport** (French *matière*—the Danish, rather misleading, term is *mening*, ‘meaning’), which refers to sounds and meanings apart from the way in which they are formed linguistically, whereas substance designates linguistically formed purport. It may be formed differently by various sciences like physics or psychology. An example of purport in the content is the colour spectrum. It may be formed differently as content substance of the signs designating colours in different languages, i.e., the numbers of colours distinguished and the delimitations between them may be different. As an example of expression purport one may mention glottal closure or stricture, which may be substance for a consonant in one language and for a prosody or a boundary signal in other languages. The function between form and substance is called **manifestation**. A given form is said to be manifested by a given substance. Form is the primary object of the linguistic description, and differences between languages are mainly differences of form. Form is also called **schema**, and in *OSG* **usage** is almost synonymous with substance.

But sometimes, e.g. in the paper ‘Langue et parole’ (1943), Hjelmslev draws a distinction between **schema**, **norm** and **usage**. In this case norm refers to the admissible manifestations, based on the mutual delimitation between the units, e.g. *r* as a vibrant distinguished from *l*, whereas usage refers to the manifestations actually used in the language, e.g. [r] as a tongue-tip vibrant. ‘Norm’ and ‘usage’ correspond to Coşeriu’s (1952) ‘system’ and ‘norm’ respectively.

System and Norm

In 1952, Coşeriu published the essay *Sistema, Norma y Abia* (System, Norm and Speech), and soon this distinction entered the canonical knowledge of linguistics. Coşeriu extends the concept of language system and introduces a new distinction between *system* and *norm*. Accordingly, the system is not only the sum of all actually occurring structures of a language, but also the class of all potential structures which could occur according to its general rules. In actual language use, however, not all those potential structures occur. **The class of those structures of the language system which are actually used by its speakers constitutes the language norm. The norm is the common, traditional realization of the system in a speech community.** One mustn't confuse it with the prescriptive norm, the exemplary norm in a community. It exists in all fields

of language. The system of a language will only contain, for instance, the rules for generating words, but not the specific realizations. For example, the phonological (sub)system of English allows a word such as [su:m] (possible spelling: "soom"), but no such word occurs in the norm of the English language.

Let us take, from among Coseriu's illustrations, the words in Spanish for 'actress' (*actriz*) and for 'manageress' (*directora*). One is formed from *actor* 'actor' with *-iz* and the other from *director* with *-a*; and, in general, the system of the language, as a system of 'possibilities', allows feminines to be formed with either of these endings. Hence the word for 'manageress' could, in principle, be *directriz* and the word for 'actress' could, in principle, be *actora*. Now any speaker, naturally, will learn from other members of the community to say *actriz* and *directora*. But in using these forms, they are constrained not by the system, which would equally allow these meanings to be carried by *actora* and *directriz*, but by what Coseriu calls the 'normal realisation' of the system.

THE LONDON SCHOOL

J.R.Firth (1890–1960), who became the first professor of linguistics in England, took what was best in structuralism and functionalism and blended it with insights provided by the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942). Because both Firth and Malinowski were based in London, they and their followers, including Halliday and R.A.Hudson (b. 1939), are sometimes referred to as the **London School** (Sampson, 1980,ch.9).

Malinowski carried out extensive fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands and argues that language is not a self-contained system—the extreme structuralist view—but is *entirely* dependent on the society in which it is used—in itself also an extreme view. He maintains that language is thus dependent on its society in two senses:

- 1 A language evolves in response to the specific demands of the society in which it is used.
- 2 Its use is entirely context-dependent: 'utterance and situation are bound up inextricably with each other and the context of situation is indispensable for the understanding of the words'

He maintains that a European, suddenly plunged into a Trobriand community and given a word-by-word translation of the Trobrianders' utterances, would be no nearer understanding them than if the utterances remained untranslated— the utterances become comprehensible only in the context of the whole way of life of which they form part.

CONTEXT

According to H.G. Widdowson, the context is represented by “those aspects of the circumstance of actual language use which are taken as relevant to meaning.” , while George Yule considers “context is the physical environment in which a word is used.”

- Types of Context

Opinions on how to classify context vary from one to another. Some linguists divide context into two groups, while some insist on discussing context from three, four, or even six dimensions.

According to different circumstances, some of which are mentioned in the above definitions, we can divide context into linguistic context, situational context and cultural context.

A. Linguistic Context

Linguistic context refers to the context within the discourse, that is, the relationship between the words, phrases, sentences and even paragraphs. Take the word “bachelor” as an example. We can’t understand the exact meaning of the sentence “He is a bachelor.” without the linguistic context to make clear the exact meaning of this word.

Linguistic context can be explored from three aspects: deictic, co-text, and collocation.

- In a language event, the participants must know where they are in space and time, and these features relate directly to the deictic context, by which we refer to the deictic expressions like the time expressions *now*, *then*, etc., the spatial expressions *here*, *there*, etc., and the person expressions *I*, *you*. Deictic expressions help to establish deictic roles which derive from the fact that in normal language behavior the speaker addresses his utterance to another person and may refer to himself, to a certain place, or to a time.
- Co-text
Any sentence other than the first in a fragment of discourse, will have the whole of its interpretation forcibly constrained by the preceding text, not just those phrases which obviously and specifically refer to the preceding text. The interpretations of the words which occur in discourse are constrained by their **co-text**.
- The syntagmatic relations, between, e.g., bite and teeth, bark and dog, blond and hair, are

called collocation=a series of words or terms that co-occur more often than would be expected by chance

B. Situational Context

Situational context, or context of situation, refers to the environment, time and place, etc. in which the discourse occurs, and also the relationship between the participants.

C. Cultural Context

Cultural context refers to the culture, customs and background of epoch in language communities in which the speakers participate. Language is a social phenomenon, and it is closely tied up with the social structure and value system of society. Therefore, language cannot avoid being influenced by all these factors like social role, social status, sex and age, etc.

Social roles are culture-specific functions, institutionalized in a society and recognized by its members. By social status, we mean the relative social standing of the participants. Each participant in the language event must know, or make assumptions about his or her status in relation to the other, and in many situations, status will also be an important factor in the determination of who should initiate the conversation. Sex and age are often determinants of, or interact with, social status. The terms of address employed by a person of one sex speaking to an older person, may differ from those which would be employed in otherwise similar situations by people of the same sex or of the same age.

- The Role of Context

A. Eliminating Ambiguity

Ambiguity refers to a word, phrase, sentence or group of sentences with more than one possible interpretation or meaning. There are two kinds of ambiguities: lexical ambiguity and structural ambiguity. Lexical ambiguity is mostly caused by homonymy and polysemy. For example, these four words, *right*, *rite*, *write* and *wright*, are all pronounced as [rait], but they are quite different from each other. Let's also have a look at the following sentence:

They passed the port at midnight.

This sentence is lexically ambiguous. However, it would normally be clear in a given context which can indicate the meaning of the word "port", meaning either harbor or a kind of fortified wine.

Structural ambiguity arises from the grammatical analysis of a sentence or a phrase. For example, the phrase *young men and women* can be analyzed as either "young /men and women/"

(i.e. both are young) or “/young men/ and women” (i.e. only the men are young). Let us also examine the following sentence:

I like Bill more than Mary.

This sentence can mean “I like Bill more than Mary does.” or “I like Bill more than I like Mary.”

In such examples, a given context can indicate what the sentence exactly means.

B. Indicating Referents

To avoid repetition, we usually use such words like *I, you, he, this, that*, etc. to replace some noun phrases, or words like *do, can, should*, etc. to replace verb phrases, or *then, there*, etc. to replace adverbial phrase of time and place. Therefore, context is of great importance in understanding the referents of such words. The following dialogue is written by the well-known linguist, Firth:

-- *Do you think he will?*

-- *I don't know. He might.*

-- *I suppose he ought to, but perhaps he feels he can't.*

-- *Well, his brothers have. They perhaps think he needn't.*

-- *Perhaps eventually he will. I think he should, and I very much hope he will*

Without context, we can hardly guess what the speakers are talking about since there are too many auxiliary verbs and modal verbs such as *will, might, have, can't*, etc. used in the dialogue. In fact, these auxiliary and modal verbs replace the verb phrase, “join the army”. From this typical example, we can see the important role of context.

Malinowski distinguishes the immediate **context of utterance** from a general and generalizable **context of situation**, and argues that we must study meaning with reference to an analysis of the **functions** of language in any given culture. For example, in one Polynesian society Malinowski studied, he distinguished three major functions:

Malinowski's functions of language

- 1 The **pragmatic function**—language as a form of action;
- 2 The **magical function**—language as a means of control over the environment;
- 3 The **narrative function**—language as a storehouse filled with useful and necessary information preserving historical accounts.

Malinowski is perhaps best known, however, for his notion of **Phatic Communion**. Discussing language used in what he calls "free, aimless social intercourse", mentioning "inquiries about health, comments on weather", and greeting formulae, Malinowski points out the following:

“[...] to a natural man another man's silence is not a reassuring factor, but on the contrary, something alarming and dangerous [...]. The breaking of silence, the communion of words is the first act to establish links of fellowship, which is consummated only by the breaking of bread and the communion of food. The modern English expression, 'Nice day to-day' or the Melanesian phrase 'Whence comest thou?' are needed to get over the strange unpleasant tension which men feel when facing each other in silence. After the first formula, there comes a flow of language, purposeless expressions of preference or aversion, accounts of irrelevant happenings, comments on what is perfectly obvious [...]. There can be no doubt that we have a new type of linguistic use — phatic communion I am tempted to call it, actuated by the demon of terminological invention — a type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words [...].

Are words in Phatic Communion used primarily to convey meaning, the meaning which is symbolically theirs? Certainly not! They fulfil a social function and that is their principal aim, they are neither the result of intellectual reflection, nor do they necessarily arouse reflection in the listener [...]. Each utterance is an act serving the direct aim of binding hearer to speaker by a tie of some social sentiment or other. Once more, language appears to us not as an instrument of reflection but as a mode of action [...].

[...] 'phatic communion serves to establish bonds of personal union between people brought together by the mere need of companionship and does not serve any purpose of communicating ideas.' (Malinowski 1936, *The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages*)

By this he means speech which serves the function of creating or maintaining 'bonds of sentiment' between speakers; English examples would include idle chat about the weather, and phrases like *How are you?*

In connection with the idea of **context of situation** and the idea of function as explanatory terms in linguistics, Firth points out that:

1. If the meaning of linguistic items is dependent on cultural context, we need to establish a set of categories which link linguistic material with cultural context. Thus, the following categories are necessary in any description of linguistic events:

A The relevant features of participants: persons, personalities.

- (i) The verbal action of the participants.
- (ii) The non-verbal action of the participants.

B The relevant objects.

C The effect of the verbal action.

2. The notion that ‘meaning is function in context’ needs formal definition so that it can be used as a principle throughout the theory; both the smallest and the largest items must be describable in these terms.

To achieve this formal definition, Firth uses the Saussurean notion of system, though Firth’s use of the term is more rigorous than Saussure’s. The language system in the Saussurean view is “a function of *la masse parlante*, stored and residing in the *conscience collective*” of a community. In contrast, Firth takes linguistics to be primarily concerned with the speech events themselves. Firth’s **system** is an enumerated set of choices in a specific context.

Any item will have two types of context:

- (1) the context of other possible choices in the system; and
- (2) the context in which the system itself occurs. The choices made in the systems will be functionally determined. **Meaning is, therefore, a function of a linguistic form in a context.**

Systemic Functional Grammar (M. A. K. Halliday)

SFG is an approach to linguistic description which aims to provide a comprehensive account of how language is used in context for communication. The approach views language as a resource that is fundamentally shaped by the uses that people make of it; it therefore aims to explain the forms of language in terms of the meanings that they express, and to develop a grammar which is designed to ‘make it possible to say sensible and useful things about any text, spoken or written’.

Systemic-functional grammar (SFG) originated with M. A. K. Halliday, building especially on the ideas of his tutor J. R. Firth, in publications from the 1960s on, with major contributions by other scholars such as Ruqaiya Hasan and, in more recent years, Jim Martin and Christian Matthiessen among many others. From early in its development, SFG has had two main distinguishing features, which are reflected in the name. **First**, whereas many approaches focus on the syntagmatic, ‘horizontal’ dimension of how constituents may be combined with

other constituents in a well-formed structure, SFG prioritises the choices that are open to the speaker at any particular point in an utterance – the paradigmatic, ‘vertical’ dimension. The grammatical structures are then seen as the outcome of choices from those available (the technical term in SFG is that structures ‘realise’ choices). Sets of choices between options can most economically be shown in the form of systems: for example, ‘if A is the case, there is a choice between B and C; if B is chosen, there is then a choice between D, E and F; but if C is chosen, there is then a choice between G and H’. Systems embody the Saussurean concept of ***valeur***: **a linguistic form has meaning by virtue of the other possible forms that could have been chosen instead**. Hence this is a ‘systemic’ grammar. **Second**, the model is oriented primarily towards meaning rather than form: that is, its aim is to describe how wordings are used in expressing meanings. What a linguistic form consists of is seen as less important than the function that it performs in the clause: hence, this is a ‘functional’ grammar.

The **systemic nature** of the grammar can be illustrated with a relatively simple example. The choices at nominal group level between different kinds of determiner (such as ‘the’ and ‘a’) can be represented as a system, labelled **DETERMINATION** (names of systems are traditionally written in small capitals in SFG). The entry condition (the linguistic context in which the choices apply) is ‘nominal group’; the first choice (at least in English) is between ‘specific’ (‘the [cat]’) and ‘non-specific’ (‘a [cat]’). Each option taken opens up a further set of choices until a formal realisation is reached: for example, selecting ‘specific: personal: interactant: addressee’ leads to the deictic (determiner) form ‘your [cat]’, whereas selecting ‘specific: demonstrative: selective: near _ plural’ leads to ‘these [cats]’. As this last instance shows, some sets of choices in the system may be simultaneous: that is, rather than only choosing one of two or more mutually exclusive options, the speaker chooses from two sub-systems at the same level. Thus, taking the ‘selective’ option means choosing both between ‘near’ and ‘far’ and between ‘plural’ and ‘non-plural’.

Systems do not operate in isolation: they interact with each other. For example, the system of **POLARITY** (positive/negative) interacts with a number of other systems, including **DETERMINATION**: here, a combination of ‘negative’ with ‘non-specific: total’ gives the deictic¹⁹ ‘no’ as in ‘no [cats]’. As relatively simple systems build up into system networks in this way, the

¹⁹ **Deictic**- relating to or denoting a word or expression whose meaning is dependent on the context in which it is used (such as *here, you, me, that one there, or next Tuesday*)

complexity increases, but that reflects faithfully the complexity of the meaning choices that are realised in any utterance.

The other key feature of the grammar is its **functional nature**. In contrast to form-oriented approaches which concentrate more or less exclusively on how clauses are constructed, with meaning excluded and dealt with separately in a semantics component, SFG is designed to map the relationships between forms and meanings in a consistent way. This has a number of important implications. First, the most important labels are functional, or semantic (telling us what the elements mean), rather than formal (telling us what they consist of). Even traditional labels, such as subject, are reinterpreted in SFG as not being purely syntactic ('controlling' agreement with the verb) but as having meaning: the subject expresses the entity which is represented as responsible for the validity of the proposition expressed in the clause (that is, the proposition is represented as true for, or applicable to, this entity). This connects with a second implication: whereas many approaches are parsimonious in that they place great value on achieving maximally economical descriptions of grammar, SFG is 'extravagant' in Halliday's term. In order to capture the multivariate relations between meaning and structure, the grammatical model has to allow for different perspectives on the clause, providing a much richer and more informative set of descriptions.

This then leads on to a third important implication: since the communicative function of utterances can only be fully understood in relation to their meaning in context, the grammar has to be designed in such a way that the analyst can 'shunt' between specific choices at clause level or below and the context within which the utterance is used. For example, an interrogative such as 'Why aren't you leaving?' may function as a question, but in certain contexts it may instead function as a command. The 'context' here would include who the interactants are, what their relationship is, how power is distributed in the culture (who has the right to give commands to whom in particular circumstances), and so on. In many approaches, the use of the interrogative as a command would be treated as in some way an extension of its 'literal' decontextualised use as a question and dealt with separately as a matter of pragmatics; but, in SFG, the analyst would take all these factors into account in arriving at a full grammatical characterisation of the utterance, exploring the reasons why a particular meaning expressed in a particular way at a particular point in an interaction is likely to have appeared appropriate to the speaker in a particular situation.

The two key bases of the model, system and function, come together in the concept of metafunctions. Halliday argues that the system networks that can be identified fall into three main groupings, with interaction between systems in any one group, but little or no interaction between the systems across groupings. Thus, mood (declarative, interrogative, imperative) interacts with polarity in that, for example, the position of the negative particle ‘n’t’ varies in relation to the subject with different mood choices; but transitivity roles are unaffected by whether the clause is declarative or interrogative. **The three groupings of systems make up what Halliday calls three metafunctions, each of which realise different broad types of meaning.**

1. *The interpersonal metafunction* comprises those systems which function to enact social relations between addressers and addressees, to express the speaker’s viewpoint on events and things in the world, and to influence the addressee’s behaviour or views. Apart from mood and polarity, another system is, at the semantic level, speech function (whether the clause functions as statement, question, command or offer). This is the area of the grammar in which differences in meaning such as the following are captured:

1. The flight is confirmed. (declarative, statement)
2. Is the flight confirmed? (interrogative, question)
3. Confirm the flight. (imperative, command)
4. Would you confirm the flight? (modalised interrogative, command)
5. The flight mustn’t be confirmed. (negative modalised declarative, command)

As the examples show, SFG highlights the crucial distinction between mood and speech function: for example, not all interrogatives function as questions. The choice of forms may seem to be imposed naturally by the context. For example, if you want information you use an interrogative question; but in fact speakers in different contexts consistently exploit choices. There is, for instance, an important difference between expressing a command through the imperative or the modalised interrogative wordings shown above; and there is also a choice between the interrogative question ‘Is the flight confirmed?’ and the declarative question ‘The flight is confirmed?’. These choices depend on, and simultaneously reflect the speaker’s view of, the context of utterance. A basic tenet of SFG is that any difference in wordings is the result of meaningful choice.

2. *The experiential metafunction*

The second metafunction is the experiential (or ideational). This is language seen from the perspective of how it is used to talk about events, states and entities in the world, to construe the speaker's view of the world. This kind of meaning is traditionally taken – even in many linguistic approaches – as ‘real’ meaning. In SFG, however, it is only one kind of meaning: **in simple terms, why something is said (the interpersonal angle) and how it is said (the textual – see below) is as important as what is said (the experiential).** An experiential analysis of a clause focuses on the *process* (realised by the verb), the *participants* in that process (typically, but not always, realised by nominal groups), and the *circumstance(s)* in which the process happens (typically realised by adverbial groups or prepositional phrases).

We might therefore list, as **participant roles**:

- (a) Actor (“logical subject”): preposition *by*
- (b) Goal (“logical direct object”)
- (c) Beneficiary (“logical indirect object”): preposition *to / for*
- (d) Instrument: preposition *with / by*
with the possibility for further distinctions such as:
 - (b) Goal: goal/ resultant [The Borough Council restored **this gazebo**/Sir Christofer built **this gazebo**]
 - (c) Beneficiary: beneficiary, recipient [I have given **Oliver** a tie; I have made **Oliver** a jacket]
 - (d) Instrument: instrument, force [It was sung **by the fire**, John opened the door **with a key**]

Processes can be divided into six main types, which reflect the cognitive categories that we use to make sense of the events around us (Halliday and Matthiessen 2006 expand on this relation between grammar and cognition):

1. material (processes of action);
2. mental (processes of sensing, which construe our interior worlds);
3. relational (processes of being and having);
4. verbal (processes of conveying messages, by saying, and so on.);
5. behavioural (characteristically human physiological processes);
6. existential (processes of existing).

Each of these types can be further subdivided into more delicate options: for example, one subdivision of material processes, the largest group with the greatest number of cross-cutting options, is between ‘creative’ (a process which results in a new entity, such as ‘build’) and transformative (a process which involves a pre-existing entity, such as ‘cut’). The participants in

each process type are given different labels which reflect their relation to the process. There is no space to give a full account, but Table 1 gives a flavour of transitivity analysis.

It is worth highlighting that transitivity may be ‘blind’ to certain parts of the clause. The clause in Table 2 has the same transitivity configuration as the first example in Table 1.

Transitivity labels are semantic, but it is important to note that each corresponds to different grammatical possibilities. Halliday stresses that ‘all the categories employed must be clearly “there” in the grammar of the language’. There is only space to mention two of these grammatical reflexes as examples: material processes cannot project (that is have a ‘that’ clause as their complement), whereas mental and verbal processes can; mental and behavioural processes must normally have human sensors/behavers, whereas material processes have no such restriction.

Table 1.

The man	drove	the car	fast.
Actor	Process:vmaterial, transformative	Goal	Circumstance
I	recognised	the driver.	-
Senser	Process: mental,cognition	Phenomenon	-
The man	was	a fast driver.	-
Carrier	Process: relational, attributive	Attribute	-

Table 2.

Might	the man	have	driven	the car	too fast	perhaps?
	Actor	-	Process:material	Goal	Circumstance	

3. *The textual metafunction*

The third metafunction is the textual. This is the part of the grammar which is concerned with how the meanings in the clause are organised to fit in with the co-text of the surrounding messages and with the wider context of the utterance. The textual system that has been most fully explored is that of theme: the theme of a clause is the initial experiential constituent, which has a special role in signalling how the current clause relates to clauses around it. **Very broadly, there is a choice between unmarked themes (where theme and subject are the same), which typically signal continuity of some kind in the topic, and marked themes (where something other than subject, such as an adverbial adjunct, is theme), which signal that there is some kind of specific contextual pressure at work, often associated with a change of textual frame.** For example, in the following extract from a guide to a historical monument, the choice of themes (underlined) is designed to help the reader to follow the text organisation. The marked themes (in italics) signal that the text is moving on to deal with a different part of the church, whereas the unmarked themes signal that the text is, for the moment, continuing to focus on the same part of the church introduced in the preceding marked theme.

On the northern side of the church was a porch . . . *Further east*, on the west side of the north transept was a room . . . The east wall of the room was divided into three parts . . . Its use is not known for certain, but it may have been a vestry and sacristy . . .

The other part of the message is called *Rheme*.

Within the textual metafunction the two choices, Theme and Rheme, form the major system.

Theme, for Halliday, is the “point of departure; it is that with which the clause is concerned”. Theme is seen as a universal element; in every language there is a means for identifying what the clause is about.

Rheme is everything that is not Theme: it is the part of the clause where the Theme is developed. A message structure in English is comprised of a *Theme* plus a *Rheme*. There is an order to the structure: Theme comes first, followed by Rheme, and whatever is placed in initial position is Theme.

China

started its massive programme of tax reform as part of an overall

	economic restructuring in January 1994.
Unmarked Theme	Rheme
In January 1994,	China started its massive programme of tax reform as part of an overall economic restructuring .
Marked Theme	Rheme

Table 3

Rise in radiation exposure	leads	to warning.
Actor	Process:material	Circumstance

NOAM CHOMSKY AND GENERATIVE TRANSFORMATIONAL GRAMMAR

Transformational grammar (TG) first emerged in the early 1950s in the work of the leading ‘post-Bloomfieldian’, Zellig S. Harris, Chomsky’s supervisor at Pennsylvania, and was the central focus of his Ph.D. (1955), entitled ‘Transformational Analysis’. The basic notion was that sentence types, e.g., actives and passives, were systematically related to each other.

Chomskyan grammar in the early days was regularly termed ‘generative transformational’, and while the label is less used today, the principles remain unchanged.

A generative grammar is one which contains a series of rules which simultaneously

- confirm (or otherwise) that a particular string of elements belongs to the set of strings compatible with the grammar and
- provide at least one grammatical description of the string (if there is more than one description, the string is ambiguous)

According to Chomsky, a generative grammar is a model for the native speaker's intuitive knowledge of the language (i.e. his internal grammar), a decisive part of which is Universal Grammar and is genetically inherited.

Competence and Performance

Chomsky distinguishes between the speakers' actual knowledge of the language, which is termed *competence*, and the use of that knowledge, which is termed *performance*. Any piece of text (spoken or written) represents a performance of language, which will match the speaker's competence more or less accurately. Thus performance is often taken as a poor guide to competence, but competence is the object of study for the linguist.

The competence/ performance distinction (first put forward in *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* in 1965) is reminiscent of Saussure's *langue/parole* contrast, but the choice of terms is psychological, not linguistic. 'Competence' seems an odd synonym for 'knowledge' (Chomsky himself has agreed), but 'performance' is an effective label, though typically described in rather negative terms, as the source of memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and errors of various kinds that prevent the true reflection of underlying competence.

Chomsky uses the term *performance* in very much the same sense as Saussure used the term *parole*, but there is considerable difference between *competence* and *langue*. Saussure's *langue* was static: it was the system of linguistic signs. Chomsky's competence is dynamic: it puts the generation of sentences in the centre of attention.

Like *langue* for Saussure, *competence* is the ultimate focus of linguistic theory, which is defined by Chomsky in his most famous quotation as being 'concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogenous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by [performance limitations]'

Another difference is that Saussure thought of *langue* as being in the collective consciousness of a community. Chomsky thinks of competence as knowledge whose basis is given to every normal human being by birth, in the sense that its structure is related to the structure of the human mind and so the basis of competence is a universal characteristic of the human species.

On the basis of their competence, native speakers can do several things:

- They can produce and understand an infinite number of new grammatical sentences in their language.
- They can distinguish between grammatical and ungrammatical formations (*He went to London* vs. **Went London he to*)²⁰.
- They can interpret elliptical sentences, i.e. sentences with missing elements (*Peter is happy but John isn't*).
- They can perceive ambiguity (*The lamb is ready to eat*).
- They can perceive synonymy (*The duck crossed the road* vs. *The road was crossed by the duck*).
- They can idealise utterances, i.e. they can disregard the imperfections and idiosyncratic features of performance and reconstruct the grammatical sentences which the utterances realise (* *The thought of those poor children were really ... WAS really ... bothering me.*)



²⁰ We mark with * non-existent forms or incorrect sentences