SAUSSUREAN DICHOTOMIES

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Module-4

PAPER–XII: GENERAL LINGUISTICS

Time: 3 Hours   **Max. Marks: 80**

The question paper shall consist of Parts-A and B having 24 and 56 marks respectively.

Part–A: Eight (8) short questions (two from each unit) will be set. Students will be required to answer six (6) of them. As far as possible, the questions should be direct and pointed. Questions may relate both to theory and Language in use. The narrower the question, the better it is. The students shall answer these questions within 150 words each. Each question will carry 4 marks.

(4x6=24)

Part–B: Four (4) questions (one from each Unit) will be set. The students will be required to attempt all. Each question will have internal choice. At least a couple of choice questions in this section must require students to do linguistic analysis of language. Theoretical questions may also ask for illustrative answers. If required, the examiner may also have sub-parts of a question. The students shall answer these questions in not more than 800 words. Each question will carry 14 marks.

(14x4=56)

UNIT–I

Structural Theory:
Saussure: The nature of Linguistic sign, Signifier and Signified; Syntagmatic and paradigmatic Relations; Synchrony and Diachrony; Langue and Parole, etc. **Bloomfield:** Scientific Study of Language; Discovery Procedures: minimal pairs, pattern congruity, complementary distribution, IC analysis.

UNIT–II

Transformational Generative Theory:
Chomsky: Competence and Performance, Phrase Structure rules, Basic transformational rules, e.g. negative, question, passive, Deep Structure and Surface Structure.

UNIT–III

Functional Theory:
Halliday: Functions of Language: Ideational, Interpersonal and Textual; Field, Tenor and Mode of Discourse; Clause as message, exchange and representation.

UNIT–IV

Applied Linguistics:
Methods and Approaches to Language Teaching: Grammar-Translation, Direct and Audio-Lingual Methods; Structural and Communicative Approaches.

The Chief Saussurean Dichotomies in the Study and Nature of Language

Saussure made very important contribution to the study and nature of language through a number of dichotomies[1] as follows :

1) Signifier and Signified

The linguistic sign consists of two parts : the *signifier* and the *signified*. And it is generally considered that the word is the signifier which signifies the object that is signified as

Tree   →
(the word)   signifies   (the object in the non-linguistic world)

But the word 'tree' does not signify the actual object, i.e. the "tree". If it did, the word for this in all the languages would have been the same, i.e. the 'tree'. But we know that this object is called by different names in different languages. This means that the word 'tree' in English does not represent the actual object in real world. It represents **the concept or the image of the object that we have in our minds**. We see an object in the real world and form a concept of it in our minds. We invent a word consisting of some sound images which we then use to represent the concept that exists in our minds. There is no logical reason why we choose a certain combination of sounds to represent that concept. So we say that the relationship between sound image and the concept they trigger in our mind is an arbitrary[2] one. Let us now modify the previous diagram regarding sign in the following manner :

Tree   →   signifies   →   the concept of tree
(sound image = signifier)   (mental concept = signified)

That which signifies (the sound image) is the signifier. That which is signified (the concept) is the signified. **Sign is a composite[3] of both**, i.e. it consists of the relationship between the signifier and the signified. This relationship, once established, continues over a long period of time. It is established as a social fact, i.e. by society. It is an arbitrary, and not a logical, relationship. As it is not established by reason (there is no inherent, reasonable connection between the object and the sounds used to represent it), only social agreement can give it validity. It becomes valid and acceptable only through social agreement. There is no intrinsic[4] basis to it. This is how the linguistic sign is established.

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[1] **dichotomy** – /daɪˈkɒtəmɪ, dɪ-/ contrast or opposition between two things or ideas.
[2] **arbitrary** – discretionary; impulsive; capricious.
[3] **composite** – made up.
[4] **intrinsic** – inbuilt; internal.

2) Syntagmatic and Paradigmatic relations

According to Saussure, the structure of a language can be segmented into two kinds of relationship — the *syntagmatic*[5] and the *paradigmatic*[6]. The syntagmatic relationship is **the relationship that linguistic units (e.g. words, clauses) have with one another** in making a well-formed meaningful sentences; that is to say, a word may be said to have syntagmatic relation with the other words which occur in the sentence in which it appears. On the other hand, the paradigmatic relationship is **the relationship in which other words could be substituted for that word in the sentence**.

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I ↔ gave ↔ Tracy ↔ the ↔ book

↕

passed

↕

handed

↕

presented

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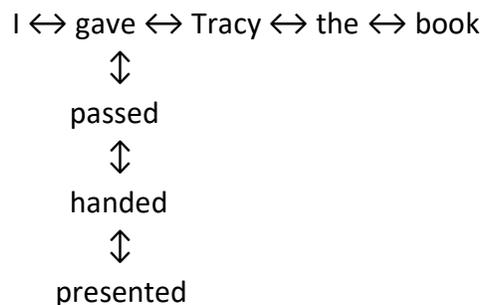
Thus the items in a syntagm[7] are in an 'and-relationship' (or 'chain-relationship'), in contrast to the members of a paradigm[8] which are in an 'or-relationship' (or 'choice-relationship). Syntagmatic relations are the combinatorial or sequential (or the horizontal, shown by ↔ symbol) relations which determine the possibilities of putting words in a sequence to make a well-formed, meaningful syntactic unit. Paradigmatic relations are the substitutional or optional (or the vertical, shown by ↕ symbol) relations between any single word in a sentence and other words that are grammatically similar to that word. Finally, syntagmatic text is present whereas paradigmatic text is absent.

3) Synchrony and Diachrony

An important distinction between two approaches to the study of language is, viz.[9] the *synchronic* and the *diachronic* approach. Synchronic linguistics sees language as a living whole, existing as a state at a particular point in time (Greek 'syn'-with, 'chronos'-time). Diachronic linguistics concerns language in its historical development (Greek 'dia'-through, 'chronos'-time). Thus synchronic linguistics is known as descriptive linguistics which **studies a language at one particular period of time**. Diachronic linguistics is known as historical or temporal linguistics which **deals with the development of language through time**; for example, the way in which

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[5] **syntagmatic** (*adj*) – /ˌsɪntæɡˈmætɪk/
[6] **paradigmatic** (*adj*) – /ˌpærədɪɡˈmætɪk/
[7] **Syntagm** (*n*) – /ˈsɪntæm/
[8] **paradigm** (*n*) – /ˈpærədaɪm/
[9] **viz.** – namely.

Italian has evolved from Latin, or Hindi from Sanskrit; diachronic linguistics also investigates language changes.

Thus the two approaches have to be kept clearly apart and pursued separately. Saussure considers synchronic study of language to be more important :

> [The speaker of a language is always] confronted with a state [of a language]. That is why the linguist who wishes to understand a state, must discard all knowledge of everything that produced it and ignore diachrony. He can enter the mind of speakers only by completely suppressing the past.
>
> (<u>Course in General Linguistics</u> (1959), p-81)

Saussure has given the inter-relationship of synchrony and diachrony in this way :
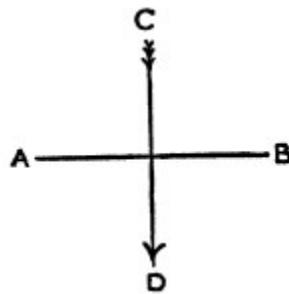
Here, AB is the synchronic axis of simultaneities[10], i.e. the whole system of language as the elements of it co-exist at a particular time; it is the static axis. CD, on the other hand, is the diachronic axis of succession[11], i.e. the historical path the language has travelled and will continually be traveling. AB can intersect CD at any point because at any given time, there will be a number of simultaneous facts about language co-existing. X is the point on CD representing a specific time where a language as it exists at that particular point can be described.

Throughout the 19th century, linguistic research was very strongly historical in character. One of the principal aims of the subject was to group language families on the basis of their independent developments from a common source, or to study language change. The description of particular languages was made subsidiary[12] to this general aim, and there was little interest in the study of the language of a given community without reference to historical consideration. In opposition to the totally historical view of language of the previous hundred years, Saussure emphasized the importance of seeing from two distinct and largely exclusive points of view, which he called synchronic and diachronic. And according to him, a valid

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[10] **simultaneity** – existing, occurring, or operating at the same time.
[11] **succession** – evolution over a period of time; progression.
[12] **subsidiary** – secondary.

diachronic work has to be based on good synchronic work because no valid statement about linguistic change can be made unless good description of a language does exist. Thus a synchronic study independently reflects authentic historical development of language.

4) Langue and Parole

The terms, *langue* and *parole*, were first used by the French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. The French word for 'language', the langue means **the total system of a language of a particular community**, i.e. the arrangement of sounds and words of which speakers of a language have a shared knowledge or, as Saussure said, 'agree to use'. Langue is the ideal form of a language. Parole, according to Saussure, is **the actual use of language by people in speech or writing**. Roughly speaking, langue is the ideal language system of a particular language community; whereas parole is the way members of that language community actually use the system.

Saussure's distinction between langue and parole is similar to Chomsky's distinction between competence and performance. But whereas for Saussure the repository[13] of langue is 'the speech community', for Chomsky the repository of competence is the 'ideal speaker/ hearer'. So Saussure's distinction is basically sociolinguistic whereas Chomsky's is basically individualistic and psycholinguistic.

5) Linguistic Value and Signification

When we think of the value of a word, we generally tend to think of the idea or concept associated with it.
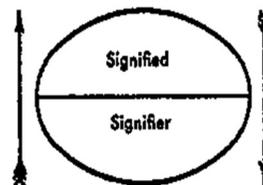
But, one must remember that *value* differs from *signification*. The value of a linguistic sign should not be confused with signification[14], i.e. the counterpart of the sound-image. The value of a linguistic sign is not fixed across the languages. Looking at the example of the union of sound-image with concept would lead one to believe a word to be both independent and self-contained. While the concept may seem to be a counterpart of the sound-image; the sign itself is a counterpart of other signs in a language.

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[13] **repository** – archive; bank; storehouse; depository.
[14] **signification** – signified; the concept.
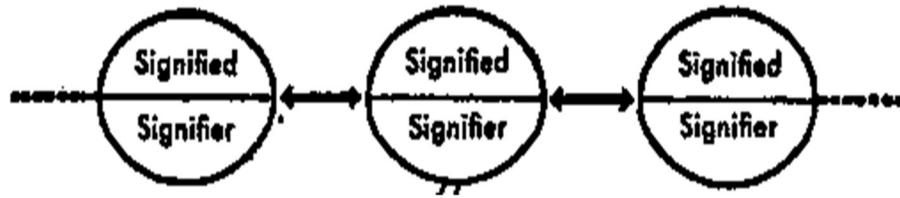
For example, modern French 'mouton' can have the same signification as English 'sheep' (or 'buck[15]') but not the same value. In speaking of a piece of meat ready to be served on the table, English uses 'mutton' and not 'sheep'. The difference in value between 'sheep' and 'mouton' is due to the fact that 'sheep' has beside it a second term while the French word does not. Thus French 'mouton' is linguistically heavier than English 'mutton' in value.

Within the same language, all words used to express related ideas limit each other reciprocally. Synonyms like French 'redouter' (meaning 'dread'), 'craindre' (meaning 'fear'), and 'avoir peur' (meaning 'be afraid') have value only through their opposition. If 'redouter' did not exist, all its contents would go to its competitors. Thus the value of any word is determined or fixed by its environment.

Thus the value of a linguistic sign, according to Saussure, is not determined by its intrinsic signification. It cannot be determined by the sound image alone. In fact, this arbitrarily chosen 'signifier' has no value, and the concept – 'the signified' – does not have true value by itself because it exists within a language system. Instead, the linguistic value of a sign is determined by other factors within its environment, by the other linguistic signs.

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[15] **buck** – a male goat.