Saussure:

Begins with the distinction between events in the physical world and social events: for the latter, their meaning is crucially part of what they are. If one sees an action as impolite, then this is a social fact which concerns one and cannot be ignored. So, to analyse human behaviour one must be concerned less with events themselves than with events that have meaning.

However, rather than tracing the historical causes of individual events, we must focus on the functions events have with a general social framework, treating social facts as part of a system of **conventions** and **values**. Will return to these key terms.

Saussure thus focuses on an underlying system rather than individual causes. In so doing he questions the very foundation of linguistics. If you make a noise and at some other time I make a noise, under what conditions would we be justified in saying that we had uttered the same words? How do we know the utterances are the same? [they sound different, don't they?]

Language as a system of signs: for noises to communicate ideas they must be part of a system of conventions which relate sounds to ideas. Otherwise they are just noise. It is this union of sound and idea (or as Saussure says, sound image and concept) that is called a sign, re-naming them

signifier-signified = sign

While we speak of these as separate, they exist only as components of the sign, which is therefore the central fact of language. So, what is a sign? What are the characteristics of the sign? What is its nature?

Arbitrary nature of sign

Relationship between signifier and signified is an arbitrary one: there is no intrinsic connection. So far, not very interesting. But, as Saussure puts it, "it is often easier to discover a truth than to assign it its rightful place". (965) So what is the rightful place? [Possible exceptions: onomatopoeia and compound words]

(a) Language is not a nomenclature (contrast: biblical naming) for universal concepts. If this were so, translation would be easy. Each language articulates its conceptual universe differently.

(light and dark blue in Russian, connaitre and savoir in French) They do not simply name existing categories but articulate their own.

(b) Concepts evolve just as much as signifiers do: if language were a set of names applied to independently existing concepts, then in the historical evolution of a language, the concepts should remain stable, even if signifiers evolved. But this isn't so: Cattle property in general-→four footed property -→ domesticated bovines. Silly→happy→blessed→pious→"silly" in our sense.

Implies there is no core of meaning a signified must retain in order to count as the proper signified for a particular signifier. Both signifier and signified are arbitrary, both can change, and there is no intrinsic reason why one particular signifier attaches to one particular signified. But, then what defines a signifier or a signified?

So what defines a signifier or signified? Answer: Because they are arbitrary therefore they are both purely relational or differential entities.

Because they are arbitrary they are relational. This is a crucial and tricky idea.

(a) Language sets up an arbitrary relationship between signifiers of its own choosing and signifieds of its own choosing: each language cuts up the conceptual plane differently. For example, we all need ways of talking about flowing bodies of water, but how we divide up that universe can be radically different. (River/stream in English depend upon size, but the French words fleuve and riviere depend not only on size but on direction of flow, the former flows into the sea, the latter does not).

(b) Since these are arbitrary divisions of a continuum, they are not autonomous identities that have some kind of essence: Rather, **they are part of a system and defined in relation to other members of the system** (stream, river, rivulet, tributary etc.) (Colour terms: Brown: can't just show someone brown objects, but need to show him reds, yellows etc)

"in all cases then we discover not ideas given in advance but values emanating from the system. When we say that these values correspond to concepts, it is understood that these concepts are purely differential and not positively defined by their content, but negatively defined by their relations with other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is that they are what others are not." (p. 970)

Two related elements here: 1/ differential relations 2/value

Relationality: Sounds vary (how I say bed isn't how you say bed) How far can it vary? Quite a bit, so long as it doesn't get confused with bud, bid, bod, bode, bread, blead, dead, fed, head, bet, bell etc. The distinctions are what are important: linguistic units have a purely relational identity (8:25 Geneva to Paris express).

Normally, when we think of differences, we think of two terms that differ, but Saussure is arguing that signifiers and signifieds are not things in this sense, the actual material sounds that make up signifiers don't define them, rather their relation to other signifiers is what matters (if I were systematically to exchange bed for pet throughout the language, the language would clearly be expressed differently, but it wouldn't change: thus a difference between language system and the actual realisation, to which I shall return)

Another example, The 10:25 Paris to Geneva express (its identity is its place in the timetable)

Now, this means that we are distinguishing between the units of the linguistic system and their actual physical manifestations or realisations. This leads to the notion of value and the crucial distinction between Langue and Parole.

Values: The distinction between system and realisation is crystallised in the notion of value, which is something like "Systemic meaning", a property not of actual utterance, but of elements of an underlying linguistic system. The distinction Saussure employs is between value and signification: Linguistic units have a value within the system, a meaning which is a result of the oppositions that define them; but when these units are used in an utterance, they have a signification, a contextual realisation of or manifestation of meaning.
> •J'ai vu un mouton/I saw a sheep: same signification, but different values,since sheep is animal as opposed to mutton (meat), while French has no such distinction. In other words, two kinds of meaning: meaning as the property of an utterance (signification), and meaning as property of relations within linguistic system (value).
> •Pronouns: I am tired (refers to me), but reference is not part of meaning of sentence qua system, since someone else can use it to refer to him/herself

In other words, there is a kind of relational meaning based on system and another based on actual use----> leads to **Langue vs Parole**

System of Language versus actual speech

langue as set of forms which speaker internalises, parole as actualisation
langue as institution, parole as event (selection and combination---a problem here of where to locate syntax: forms/combination ~= linguistic faculty/exercise of faculty). But importantly, isolates the object of linguistic study: La Langue.

Distinction between Phonetics and Phonology, one studies the sounds, the other the underlying system of oppositions that "bear" meaning, that is, functional differences.

Synchrony vs Diachrony

Study of language at a particular time/ Historical evolution. Saussure has been accused of forgetting that language is contingent and temporal, but this doesn't quite get at his radical historicity: he argues that facts about linguistic system and facts about linguistic evolution are categorically different, belong to two different orders of evidence, which must be separated analytically from one another.

If some essential connection between signifier and signified, then we could identify some unchanging essence and oppose it to the accidental features that change. But there is no such core: arbitrariness means that the sign is totally exposed to history,

the combination of signifier and signifed at any point is a contingent historical result. But because there is no core that persists, it has to be defined through its relations to other elements. <u>And the relevant relations are those that obtain at a particular time</u> "System of pure values which are determined by nothing except the momentary arrangement of its terms". Historical tracing of elements, therefore, are irrelevant to langue ((object) you, ye (subject), thee (object) thou (subject but pl)--this is irrelevant to understanding place of you in current system.) Not a matter of elements changing over time, rather a matter of systems changing. Historic filiations are thus derived from synchronic, not the other way around. Diachrony: facts and therefore change occur outside system of langue (in parole) and then trigger systemic changes within. (see plurals example):

+/- i = Functional opposition that bears a systemic meaning of "plural/singular" +/-i and o/e: shift from o to e wherever i followed a stressed syllable (even in verbs, for example), which just happened to affect certain plural forms creating a "redundancy" (two oppositions instead of the earlier one) Dropping of the i: again, not limited to plurals creates the situation in which the functional opposition bearing the plural/singular meaning shifts.

There are no positive self-defined elements with which to start. To identify two instances of the same unit, we have to first contruct a formal and relational entity by distinguishing differences that are functional and those that are not functional. Once we have defined the relations delimiting signifiers, on the one hand, and signifieds, on the other, we have things we can speak of as positive identities (signs), but they are entities that emerge from and depend upon a network of differences which constitute the linguistic system at any given time.

Syntagmatic/Paradigmatic.

Linguist is thus concerned with relations: identities and differences. Leads to two sorts of relationships: (a) those oppositions that produce distinct and alternative terms (such as bet/pet, foot/feet) and (b) those relations that combine sequentially (cannot substitute for one another, as it were). On the one hand, then, oppositions which produce distinct and alternative terms (associative or paradigmatic) (foot vs feet) and relations between units, on the other which combine to form sequences (syntagmatic). Elements are defined both in relation to what can take its place and what can follow or precede it: And this takes place at each level of the structure. Phonetic level: p + et (met, bet, net, set) or pl, pr, or sp. Morphology: noun partly defined by suffix and prefix relations (syntagmatic)
     friendless, friendly, unfriendly, befriend, friendship, but not disfriend, defriend
     etc.(syntagmatic), while paradigmatic contrast between the morphemes that
     can replace one another (some at end, some at beginning). ---ship
     (friend/lecturer etc)
Syntax, he frightened can only be followed by certain types of structures, which are paradigmatically related.

Structuralist view of language:

Language is a system of elements defined through their relation to one another within the system

Linguistic system consists of different levels of structure, at each of which we can find contrastive relations and combinatory relations between elements, allowing higher level units, but the principles of structure at each level are the same.

Language as social: social relations precede individuals. One must first grant that there is a social reality and that man lives among objects and actions that have meaning, and these meanings are not just subjective perceptions. What makes individual experience possible? What enables them to cooperate with meangful objects? To communicate and act meaningfully? Inversion: individual behaviour made possible by internalised social systems. So what you study are the **underlying systems of norms (structural rather than causal explanations: why a particular action has significance by relating it to the underlying functions, categories, and norms which make that action possible).**

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