

**DIACHRONIC AND SYNCHRONIC METHODS IN LANGUAGE
LEARNING (ACCORDING TO F. SAUSSURE)**

Mukhtorova Nozima Ilhomovna

MA student of Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages

Abstract: In this article the information is given about the main features and characteristics of diachronic and synchronic methods in language learning according to F. Saussure. The article also clarifies the benefits of using these methods in foreign language learning and teaching. And there are given some researches about diachronic and synchronic methods.

Key words: diachronic, synchronic, comparative philology, temporal dimensions, semantic terms, synchronous, probation.

The term diachronic is one of the main temporal dimensions of language studies, introduced by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, where languages are studied from the perspective of their historical development, for example, the changes that took place between old and modern English can be described by phonological, grammatical and semantic terms.

Comparative philology is a field of study of the history of language. It compares the characteristics of different languages or the different states of language throughout history. It compares the different forms of related languages and tries to reconstruct the parent language from which they all evolved. It begins with the similarities between ancient Sanskrit and other Indo-European languages such as classical Greek and Latin (focusing on language changes throughout history).

Diachronic linguistics is the study of a language through different periods in history.

Diachronic linguistics is one of the two main temporal dimensions of language study identified by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure in his *Course in General Linguistics* (1916). The other is synchronic linguistics.

The terms diachrony and synchrony refer, respectively, to an evolutionary phase of language and to a language state. "In reality," says Théophile Obenga, "diachronic and synchronic linguistics interlock" ("*Genetic Linguistic Connections of Ancient Egypt and the Rest of Africa*," 1996).

"Diachronic literally means across-time, and it describes any work which maps the shifts and fractures and mutations of languages over the centuries. In gross outline, it is similar to evolutionary biology, which maps the shifts and transformations of rocks. Synchronic literally means with-time, though etymology is misleading here, since Saussure's term describes an atemporal linguistics, linguistics which proceeds

without time, which abstracts away from the effects of the ages and studies language at a given, frozen moment."¹

"Diachronic linguistics is the historical study of language, whereas synchronic linguistics is the geographic study of language. Diachronic linguistics refers to the study of how a language evolves over a period of time. Tracing the development of English from the Old English period to the twentieth century is a diachronic study. A synchronic study of language is a comparison of languages or dialects—various spoken differences of the same language—used within some defined spatial region and during the same period of time.

"Most of Saussure's successors accepted the 'synchronic-diachronic' distinction, which still survives robustly in twenty-first-century linguistics. In practice, what this means is that it is accounted a violation of principle or linguistic method to include in the same synchronic analysis evidence related to diachronically different states. So, for example, citing Shakespearean forms would be regarded as inadmissible support of, say, an analysis of the grammar of Dickens. Saussure is particularly severe in his strictures upon linguists who conflate synchronic and diachronic facts."²

"For many scholars who would describe their field as 'historical linguistics,' one legitimate target of research involves a focus not on change(s) over time but on the synchronic grammatical systems of earlier language stages. This practice can be called (not unrevealingly) 'old-time synchrony,' and it has made its mark in the form of numerous studies providing synchronic analyses of particular syntactic constructions, word-formation processes, (morpho)phonological alternations, and the like for individual earlier (pre-modern or at least early modern) stages of languages.

Gaining as much synchronic information as possible about an earlier stage of a language must surely be viewed as a necessary prerequisite for doing serious work on the diachronic development of a language . . . Nonetheless, pursuing the synchrony of earlier language states solely for the sake of (synchronic) theory-building., as worthy a goal as it may be, does not count as doing historical linguistics in the literally diachronic (through-time) sense that we wish to develop here. At least in a technical sense, then, diachronic linguistics and historical linguistics are not synonymous, because only the latter includes research on 'old-time synchrony' for its own sake, without any focus on language change."³

Synchronous (non-historical descriptive studies).

¹ Randy Allen Harris, *The Linguistic Wars*. Oxford University Press, 1993

² Roy Harris, "Linguists After Saussure." *The Routledge Companion to Semiotics and Linguistics*, ed. by Paul Cobley. Routledge, 2000

³ Richard D. Janda and Brian D. Joseph, "On Language, Change, and Language Change." *The Handbook of Historical Linguistics*, ed. by B. D. Joseph and R. D. Janda. Blackwell, 2003

This study examines languages at a specific moment in time. In other words, possible changes are described without considering the condition of the language. This refers to an approach to linguistic research, in which forms of one or more languages are studied at a particular stage of their development. This approach is followed by modern linguists.

"A synchronic study of language is a comparison of languages or dialects—various spoken differences of the same language—used within some defined spatial region and during the same period of time," wrote Colleen Elaine Donnelly in "Linguistics for Writers." "Determining the regions of the United States in which people currently say 'pop' rather than 'soda' and 'idea' rather than 'idear' are examples of the types of inquiries pertinent to a synchronic study."⁴

Synchronistic views look at a language as if it's static and not changing. Languages continually evolve, though it's slow enough that people don't notice it much while it's happening.

The term was coined by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. That for which he is now most known was just a portion of his contributions to academia; his specialty was the analysis of Indo-European languages, and his work generally studied languages over time, or diachronic (historical) linguistics.

Synchronic linguistics is one of the two main temporal dimensions of language study introduced by Saussure in his "Course in General Linguistics" (1916). The other is diachronic linguistics, which is the study of language through periods of time in history. The first looks at a snapshot of a language, and the other studies its evolution (like a frame of film vs. a movie). For example, analyzing the word order in a sentence in Old English only would be a study in synchronistic linguistics. If you looked at how word order changed in a sentence from Old English to Middle English and now to modern English, that would be a diachronic study.

Say you need to analyze how historical events affected a language. If you look at when the Normans conquered England in 1066 and brought with them a lot of new words to be injected into English, a diachronic look could analyze what new words were adopted, which ones fell out of use, and how long that process took for select words. A synchronic study might look at the language at different points before the Normans or after. Note how you need a longer time period for the diachronic study than the synchronic one.

Consider this example:

When people had more opportunities to change their social class in the 1600s, they started using the words *thee* and *thou* less often. If they didn't know the social class of the person they were addressing, they'd use the formal pronoun *you* to be safely

⁴ State University of New York Press, 1994

polite, leading to the demise of thee and thou in English. This would be a diachronic look. A description of the words and how they were used at the time in comparison to the pronoun you would be a synchronic description.

Synchronic linguistics is descriptive linguistics, such as the study of how parts of a language (morphs or morphemes) combine to form words and phrases and how proper syntax gives a sentence meaning. In the 20th century the search for a universal grammar, that which is instinctive in humans and gives them the ability to pick up their native language as an infant, is a synchronic area of study.

Studies of "dead" languages can be synchronic, as by definition they are no longer spoken (no native or fluent speakers) nor evolving and are frozen in time.

Sir William Jones 1786 and the 19th century

In 1786, the Englishman Sir William Jones pointed out that Sanskrit (an ancient Indian language), Greek, Germanic, Latin and Celtic have structural similarities. He concluded that all these languages came from a common source.

The Twentieth century and De Saussure (1857-1913)

De Saussure is the founder of modern structural linguistics. He worked as a lecturer at the University of Geneva. His early work was in philology. In the 19th century, linguists became more interested in historical linguistics (diachronic linguistics) in the 20th century the focus shifted to synchronic/descriptive studies. The central ideas of de Saussure and linguistic research were expressed in the form of pairs of concepts (dichotomies).

1. Diachronic Vs. Synchronic

In diachronic research, De Saussure sees language as a constantly changing environment. In a synchronic approach, he sees it as a living being that exists at a given moment as space. According to this view, it is always necessary to do some synchronic work before doing diachronic research. There is no need to refer to history in synchronic analysis.

2. Langage Vs. Langue Vs. Parole

Language is the ability to speak that all normal humans have by birth - our ability to talk to each other. This faculty consists of two aspects: language (linguistic system) and conditional (linguistic behavior) speech.

Language refers to abstract language skills (language as a whole). It represents a system of generalized rules and word forms stored in the minds of individuals or native speakers (competence).

Probation means an actual physical statement. It is the realization of language in speech. It refers to the actual and specific speech of a person (dynamic social action) in a specific time and place (performance).

3. Signifiant Vs. Signifie

De Saussure identified two sides to the study of meaning, but emphasized that the relationship between the two is arbitrary. His name tags on both sides are indicative (= the thing signifying the sound image) and signifying (the thing/concept signified).

De Saussure called the relationship between the two "linguistic sign", the basic unit of communication within a community. Language is seen as a sign system..

4. Syntagmatic Vs Paradigmatic

A sentence is a chain, and each character adds something to the meaning of the whole. If signs are seen as a linear sequence, the relationship between them is called syntagmatic. It expresses a horizontal relationship between linguistic elements forming linear sequences in a sentence, as in

He – can – go

He – can – swim

When a sign is seen in a language conflicting with other signs, there is a connection. called paradigmatic. or associative. It refers to the vertical relationship between linguistic signs that can be in the same structure of a particular place.

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