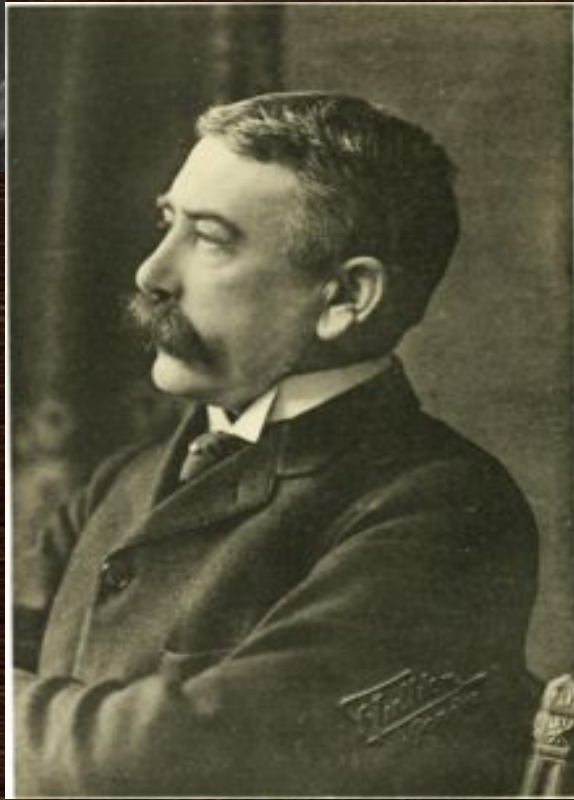# F. de Saussure concept of linguistics

LOIKOVA ANNA , 110

Ferdinand de Saussure

1) Swiss linguist and semiotician.

2) His ideas laid a foundation for many significant developments in both linguistics and semiology in the 20th century.

3) He is widely considered one of the founders of 20th-century linguistics
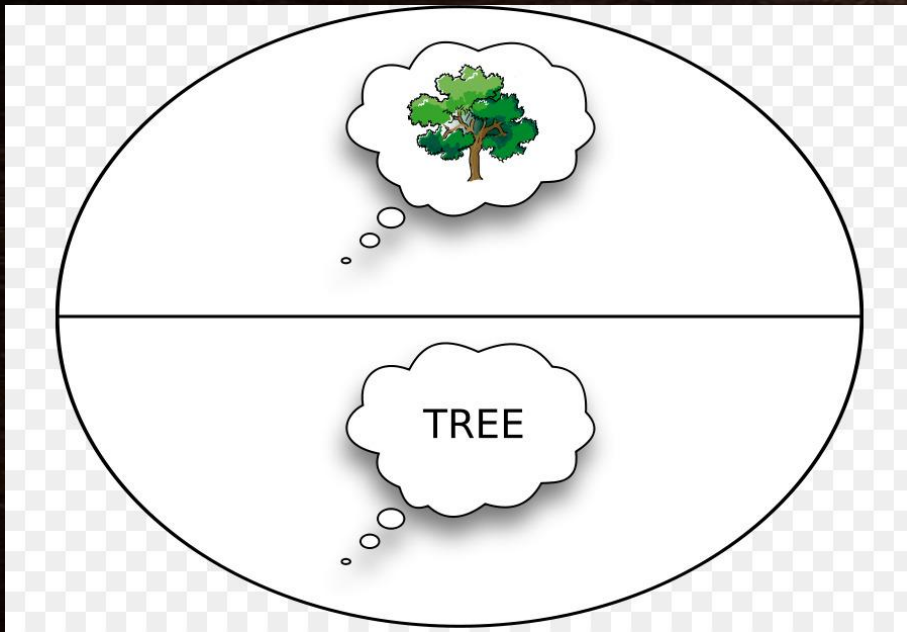
Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913)

- Father of modern linguistics
- His worked was put together and published by his students after his death
- Introduced several key concepts into linguistics
  - Distinguished between the study of language at a particular point in time (synchronically) and over a period of time (diachronically)
  - Distinguished also between individual acts of speech (parole) and the language (langue) shared by members of a speech community
- de Saussure's approach was called **structuralism** and has been influential since 1920's
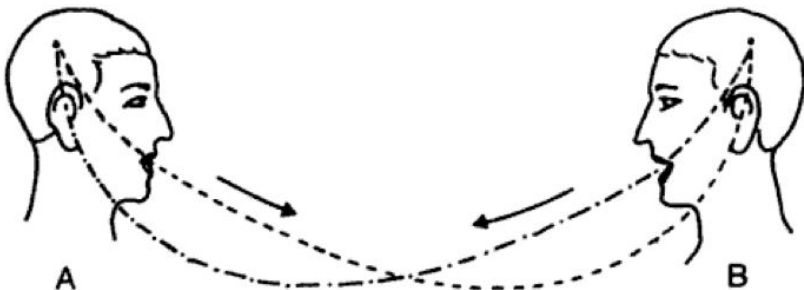
Course in General Linguistics
1) book summarizing his lectures at the University of Geneva from 1906 to 1911
2) he explained the relationship between speech and the evolution of language, investigating language as a structured system of signs.
3) Saussure perceived a linguistic unit to be a 'double entity,' meaning that it is composed of two parts. He viewed the linguistic unit as a combination of:
1. a concept or meaning
2. a sound-image

§2. *Linguistic structure: its place among the facts of language*

In order to identify what role linguistic structure plays within the totality of language, we must consider the individual act of speech and trace what takes place in the speech circuit. This act requires at least two individuals: without this minimum the circuit would not be complete. Suppose, then, we have two people, *A* and *B*, talking to each other:
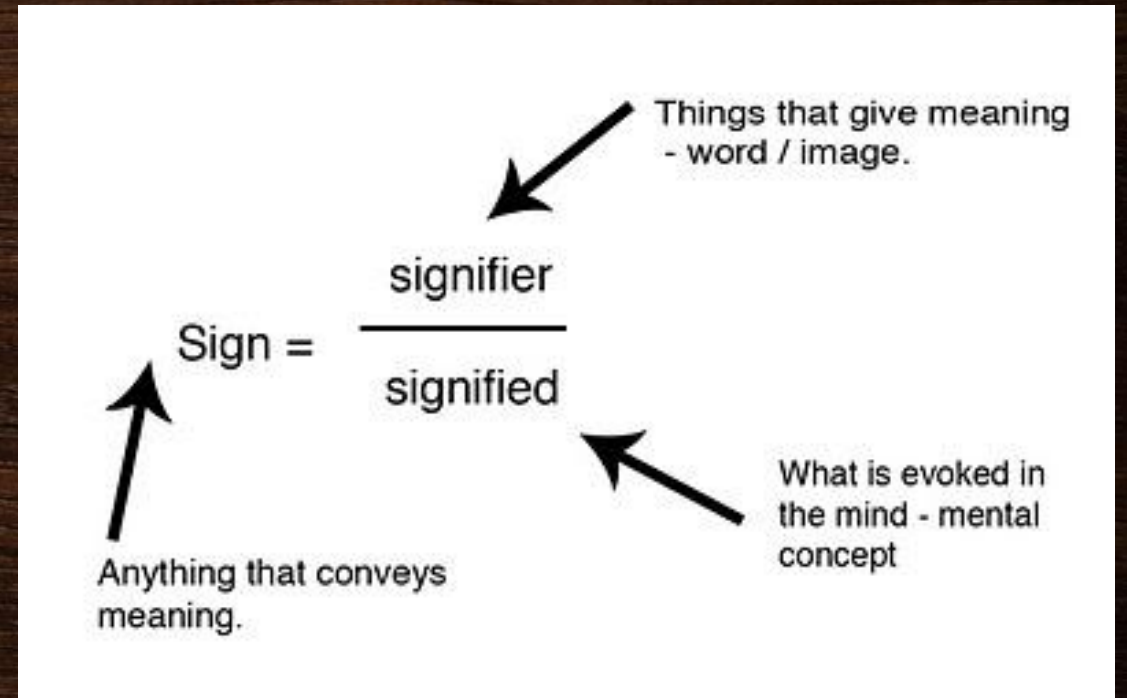

The starting point of the circuit is in the brain of one individual, for instance *A*, where facts of consciousness which we shall call concepts   [28]

1) The first point to understand is when Saussure mentioned 'linguistic units,' sound-images' and 'concepts,' he was referring to the mental processes that create these entities.

2) He was not referring to spoken or written words, but to the mental impressions made on our senses by a certain 'thing.'

3) It is our perception, or how we view this 'thing,' together with the sound system of our language that creates the two-part mental linguistic unit he referred to as a 'sign.'

1)The part of the sign Saussure calls the 'concept' or 'meaning' (mental impression/association of the 'thing') he named, 'signified.'

2)The part he calls the 'sound-image' (the mental 'linguistic sign' given to the 'thing') he named the 'signifier'. 3) the connection between all 'signifiers' which are 'sound images' or 'linguistic signs' and what they are signifying – their signified object or concept – is arbitrary. In other words, there is not necessarily any logical connection between the two.

Things that give meaning - word / image.

$$Sign = \frac{signifier}{signified}$$

Anything that conveys meaning.

What is evoked in the mind - mental concept

Langue
(system)

Parole
(put into practice)

Language in social, cultural context

The Distinction Between *Langue* and *Parole*

1) A language, *une langue*, is the virtual system possessed by all those who form part of the same speech community that makes it possible for them to understand and be understood by other members of that community.

2) *La parole* is the utterances, the texts, that individuals produce and understand making use of the system that is *la langue*.

1)For Saussure, the reality of a language cannot be fully comprehended without taking account of both its social and its historical dimension, in conjunction with the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign. Hence, the study of a language must be both synchronic and diachronic.
2)Synchronic analysis is aimed at identifying the elements of a system and their values at a given point in time, a given *état de langue*.
3)Diachronic analysis is the comparison of two or more *états de langue* as they exist at different times.

complete system
at a given time

Synchrony & Diachrony

historical
development

Ferdinand de **Saussure**
Diachronic and synchronic linguistics.

• Diachronic (historical) Linguistics
  – Study of language change (development).
  – Etymology.
• Synchronic Linguistics
  – Linguistic phenomena occur only at **one** point in time.

Structuralism

- Focus on Language Structure/ Form
- Structural linguistics is based on the idea that language is a self-regulating and self-contained system.

- Pioneer: **Ferdinand de Saussure**
- *A Course in General Linguistics*

Saussure introduced Structuralism in Linguistics, marking a revolutionary break in the study of language, which had till then been historical and , philological. In his Course in General Linguistics (1916), Saussure saw language as a system of signs constructed by convention. Understanding meaning to be relational, being produced by the interaction between various signifiers and signifieds, he held that meaning cannot be understood in isolation.

And now test questions that will help you to learn the material.
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