

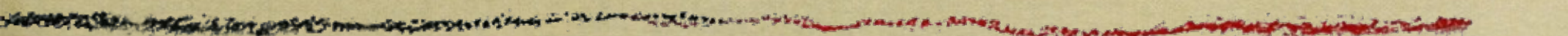
Ferdinand de Saussure's Structural Linguistics



The idea of language as system of signs is usually associated with **Ferdinand de Saussure**, a Swiss linguist who lived in the latter part of the 19th century and whose views on language were published posthumously from the lecture notes of his students. For this reason, Ferdinand de Saussure is usually referred to as “**The Father of Modern Linguistics**”.

Saussure was a historical linguist who studied the evolution of sound patterns in the Indo- European languages. Historical linguistics in the 19th century and earlier was devoted mainly to find out the proto- type (or mother) languages from which modern languages were thought to have evolved. This devotion to the past was based on empirically- derived premise that some languages evolved from the same ancient language.





For example, the Indo- European languages like English, German, Sanskrit and Latin share structural similarities, causing theorists to assume that they actually were, at some point in the past, just one language. The same can be said of other families of languages, including the Malayo- Polynesian family to which Philippine Languages belong.

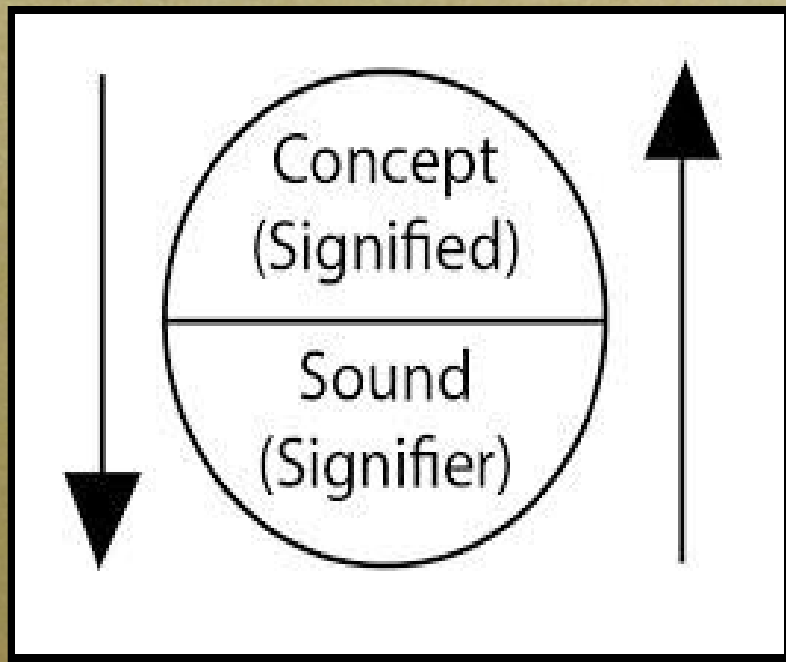
Diachronic V.S. Synchronic

Saussure came to a point where he became disillusioned with historical linguistics. Saussure abandoned his historical orientation and, instead, set his sights on the **system of language** itself. In other words, while his earlier works focused on the study of language through time, his new concern dealt with **the study of language at a particular point in time**. While earlier he worked on the diachronic aspect of language, he now started working on its synchronic dimension.

~~Diachronic~~
(evolutionary)

Synchronic
(particular
point in time)

Signifier and Signified



According to Saussure, language is a system of signs. A sign functions like a coin with two sides. The first side consists of the form of the sign. The concept of the sign, on the other hand, refers to a mental image which registers in the mind.

Sign

“Tree”
Signifier



Signified

M A G N U M {Signifier}



Creates a mental image



MAGNUM

{Signified}

The relation between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, which means that there is no intrinsic or natural reason why a particular form signifies a particular concept.

For example:

Signifier

Teacher

Maestro

Guro

Signified

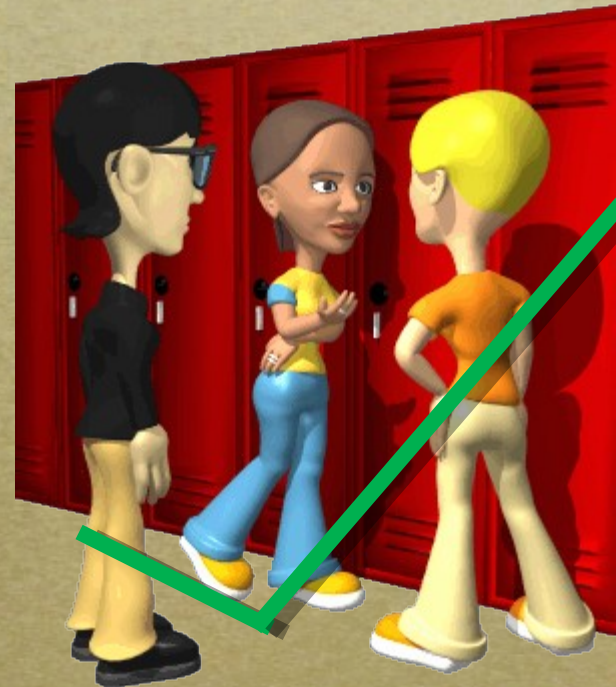


Langue and Parole

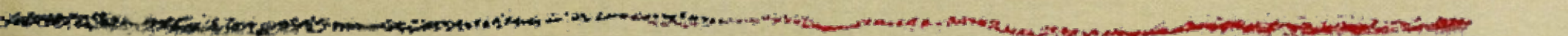
Saussure's proposition is for us to stick to the study of the abstract system, which is called **langue**, and disregard the many ways we use the system in real contexts, which are called **parole**.



Parole
(individual use of language)

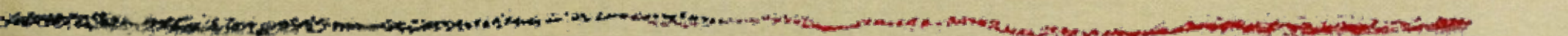


Langue
(system of knowledge in a **society**)



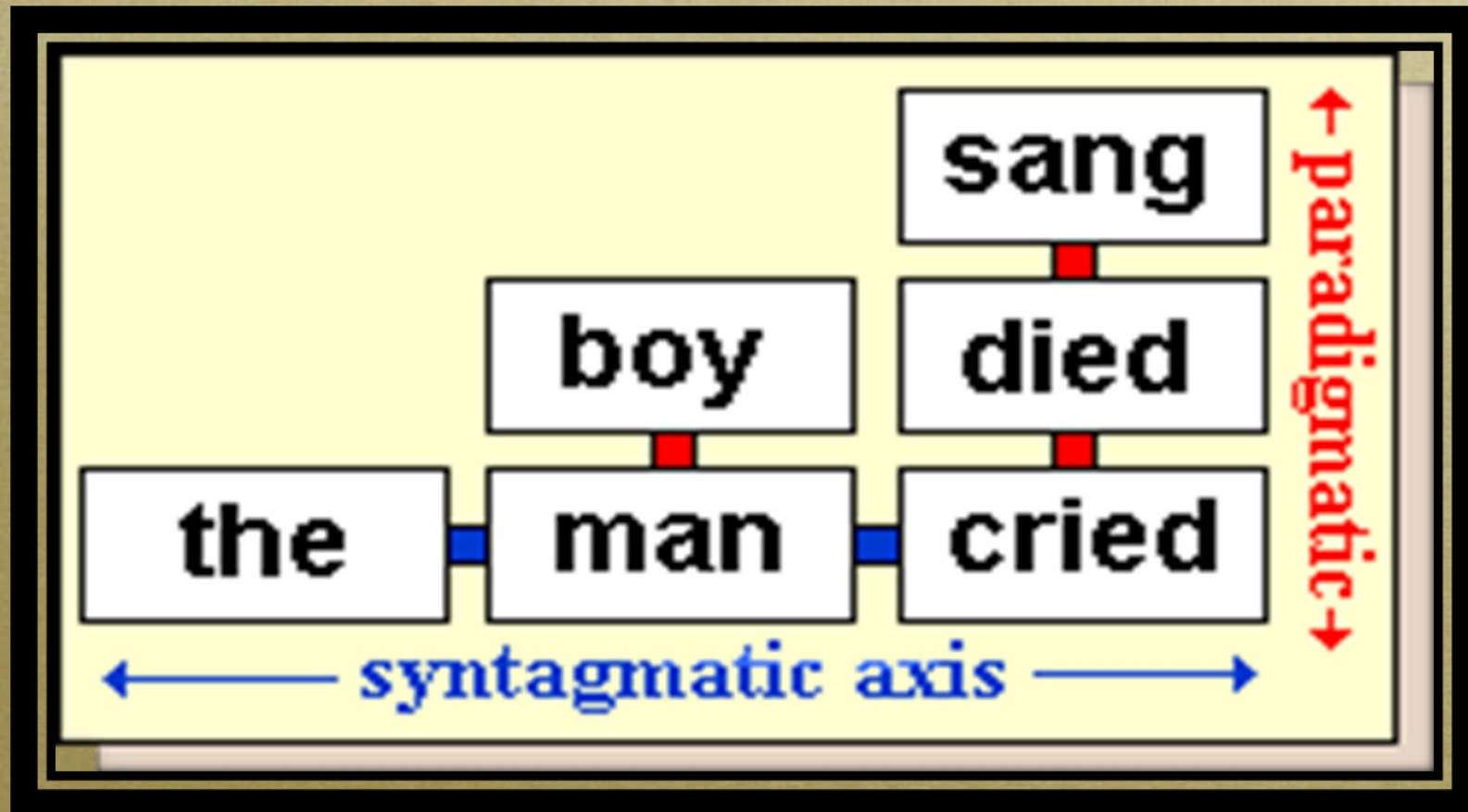
Because Saussure wants us to study language in a systematic, scientific way, it is therefore understandable that his linguistics would focus on the langue, rather than the parole. The langue is abstract and is therefore easily systemized parole is messy, forever changing and therefore extremely difficult to capture in any scientific investigation.

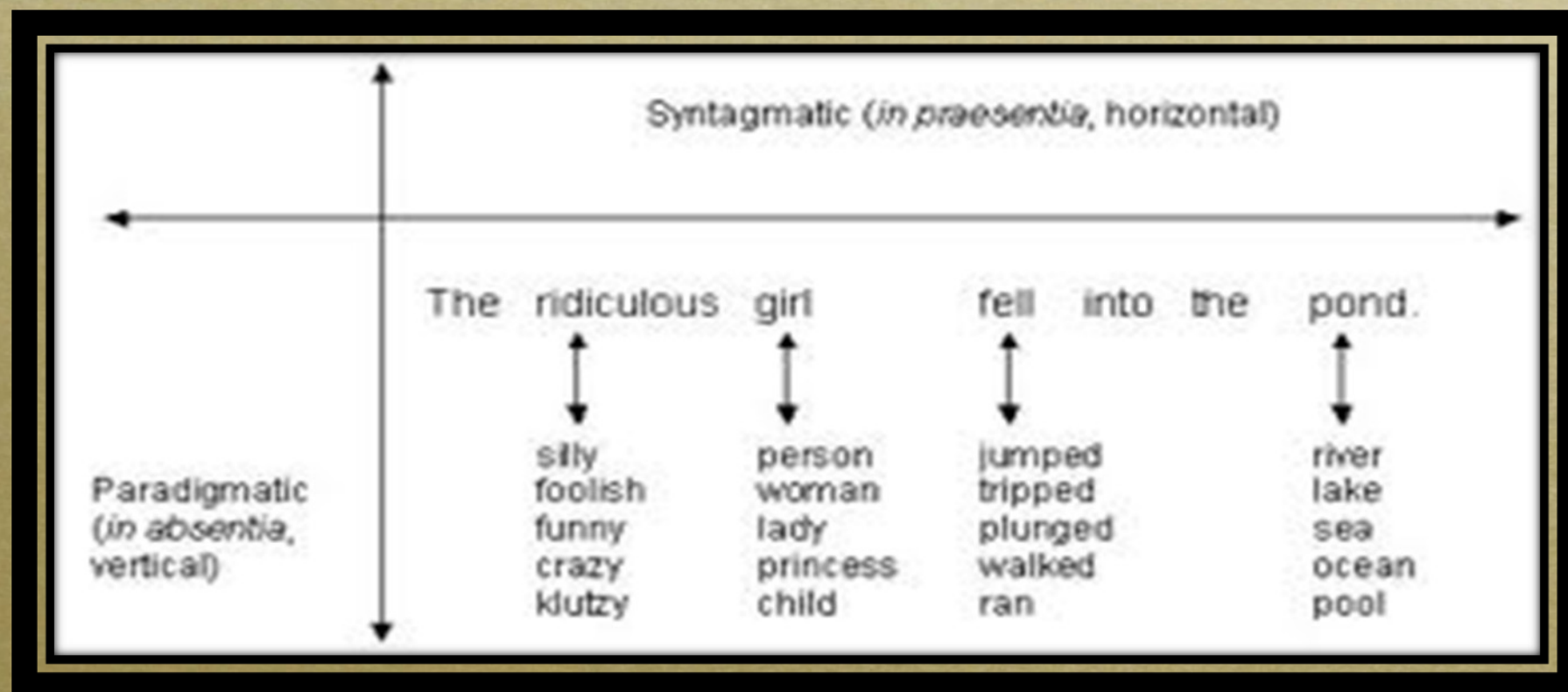
Syntagmatic and Paradigmatic



Aside from the synchronic and diachronic dimensions of the sign, we can approach language through its syntagmatic and paradigmatic aspects. These aspects actually refer to different types of relations that sign can have with one another. On the other hand, sign relate each other in a **syntagmatic** way- that is according to their **positions** in a given sentence or utterance. On the other hand, signs relate to each other in a **paradigmatic** way- that is, according to the membership in particular types or classes of signs.

Example





Summary

-
- Language, according to Saussure, is a system of arbitrary signs. A signifier and a signified constitute a sign which, in turn, has both synchronic/ diachronic and syntagmatic/ paradigmatic dimensions.
 - The system is both abstract (langue) and concrete (parole).
 - Since the goal of linguistics is to look for a system in language in a scientific and empirical way, then the focus of this approach is the language of language as well as sign's synchronic and syntagmatic dimensions.

Language as a System	Language as a History
Language at a point of time	Language through time
Langue	Parole
Signifier	Signified
Form	Meaning
Synchrony	Diachrony
Syntagmatic relations	Paradigmatic relations
Syntactic categories	Parameters of choice
Present entities	Absent entities
Idealized language	Actualized language
Stable	Unstable
Scientific	Unscientific