Variability of languages in time and space

Lecture 2: Linguistic sign, language system

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Lecture 2 – October 19, 2018
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1. Linguistic sign in the system of language
   - Two sides of linguistic sign, typology of signs
   - Language system, syntagmatic and associative relations

2. Linguistic signs and non-signs
   - Signs and non-signs
   - Morphemes
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   - Morphemes
Ferdinand de Saussure (1957–1913)
- Swiss linguist
- reconsidering methods and goals of linguistics
- courses in general linguistics at University of Geneve 1906–1911
- fundamental ideas published in *Cours de linguistique générale*
  - 1st edition 1916
    - edited by Saussure’s former students Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, based on notes taken by other students
  - critical edition by Tullio de Mauro (Paris 1972)
  - En. translation *Course in General Linguistics* by Roy Harris (London 1983)
  - Cz. translation *Kurs obecné lingvistiky* by František Čermák (Praha 1989)
Saussure’s term of “linguistic sign”

When communicating by language, we use sounds to convey meanings.

- The term **linguistic sign** is used for a pairing of a particular sound sequence (form) and a particular meaning.

- A linguistic sign composed of two elements:
  - **signifier** (Fr. *signifiant*)
    - *sound image* of the word = *form*
    - *not* the real sound
    - one can talk to oneself without articulating the words
  - **signified** (Fr. *signifié*)
    - the **concept** associated with the sound image = *meaning*
    - *not* the thing itself
Two sides of linguistic sign

En. *signified* (Fr. *signifié*)

concept

En. *signifier* (Fr. *signifiant*)

sound image

TREE
Linguistic sign in phonation and audition

- **phonation**: when producing language, the speaker thinks about the concept and produces the corresponding sound image.
- **audition**: when hearing the sound image, the sound image unlocks the corresponding concept in the hearer’s brain.

![Diagram showing the process of phonation and audition](image)
Basic features of linguistic sign

- arbitrariness
  - the relation between the signifier and signified is **not motivated**
  - given by **convention**, thus **inseparable** when used in the language community

- linearity of the signifier
  - in time (spoken texts)
  - in space (written texts)

- portability in time and space (writings)
Linguistic sign refers to reality

The relation between the signifier and the signified is a relationship internal to language itself, not a relationship between language and extra-linguistic reality.

- Linguistic signs refer to objects of extra-linguistic reality = referents.
- The relations between the signifier, the signified, and the referent are modelled by the semiotic triangle.
  (C. K. Ogden – I. A. Richards: The meaning of meaning, New York 1923)
the signifier *symbolises* the signified
the signified *refers to* the referent
the signifier *stands for* the referent
Linguistic and non-linguistic signs

- Linguistic signs are only one type of signs.
- In general, **signs** are things, gestures, behaviors, events etc. that communicate a meaning
  - examples of non-linguistic signs: photographs, traffic lights, traffic signs, laugh, a minute of silence, flags
- Signs in general are studied by **semiotics**
  - the study of linguistic signs is a subfield of semiotics
  - in some approaches, the term *semiology* is used for this subfield
Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914)

- American philosopher, logician, mathematician etc.
- founder of semiotics and pragmatics
- typology of signs since the 1860s, final account 1906–1910

3 types of signs according to the degree of arbitrariness between the signifier and the signified:

1. **icon** imitates an object
2. **index** (pl. indices) is in causal connection with the referent
3. **symbol** represents something else
Iconical sign

- imitates an object
- shares a quality with the object it stands for
- examples of *non-linguistic icons*
  - a portrait, no-smoking sign

- ex. of *linguistic icons*
  - En. *bang, to mew, to drop*
  - Fr. *boum, beugler, dégoutter*
  - Cz. *bác, bučet, kapat*
Indexical sign

- the sign and the referent are in causal connection
- an indexical sign points to something else than to the referent
- examples of non-linguistic indices
  - smoke (refers to fire)
- examples of linguistic indices
  - words whose referent is relative to the context:
    En. I, today; Fr. je, aujourd’hui; Cz. já, dnes
Symbolic sign

- the sign and the referent in general or conventional connection
- a symbolic sign represent something else than the referent
- examples of *non-linguistic symbols*
  - flag

Examples of *linguistic symbols*

- En. *dog*, *to think*, Fr. *chien*, *penser*, Cz. *pes*, *myslet*
Linguistic signs are organized into a complicated structure = language system (langue).

- **langue** (language / language system)
  - an abstract, structured system of linguistic signs
  - common code shared by speakers of a given language community

- **parole** (speech)
  - usage of the common code by different individuals
  - utterances spoken or written by the speakers of a language

- **langage** (human speech)
  - faculty which allows humans to acquire a language
Two types of relations among linguistic signs

A linguistic sign has a *value* within the language system given by its relations it has with the other units.

Linguistic signs are organized by relationships of two types:

- **syntagmatic relations**
  - F. de Saussure: relations *“in praesentia”*
  - between units present in the same sequence

- **associative (paradigmatic) relations**
  - F. de Saussure: relations *“in absentia”*
  - between units that can be substituted one for another

In de Saussure’s approach, the definition of the linguistic sign is based on the *word* as a prototypical unit.
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Linguistic signs and non-signs
- Signs and non-signs
- Morphemes
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Although languages differ largely in what is understood as a word, there are some general features that are valid across languages:

- The smallest unit that can form an utterance on its own.
- Formally represented as a string of phonemes / graphemes, separated by pauses / white spaces.
- Conveys meaning.
- Can be relocated.
- Cannot be interrupted by function words.
- The order of its elements cannot be changed.
- Is conventionalized and reproducible in a language community.
Linguistic signs and non-signs

- The concept of the **linguistic sign** is applicable to **units both smaller and larger than words**
  - morphemes
  - syntactic phrases
  - sentences
  - texts

- But there are units that do not fit the concept (**non-signs**)
  - syllables
  - phonemes
• the smallest distinct sound unit in a language
does not convey meaning but
distinguishes meaning of larger units
cf. different vowels used in the same context:
En. bad, bed, bid, bod
Czech šípky ‘rosehip’, šípky ‘arrows’

– phonemes are not linguistic signs
but distinguish meaning of linguistic signs
Syllable

- unit of pronunciation
- a substring in a word that can be produced in isolation
- syllable structure differs across languages
- division into syllables is a matter of pronunciation – syllable division only mirrored in writing
  - En. *o-mit, jump*
  - Cz. *pře-sko-čít* ‘to jump over’, *pře-skoč* ‘to jump over.imp’

- syllables are **not associated with meanings**
  - syllables are not linguistic signs
Morpheme

- a substring in a word which **conveys a meaning**
  - smaller than words, or identical with them
- the smallest meaningful units in language
  - morphemes are **linguistic signs**
- usually repeated in a set of words

- words are **fully decomposable** into morphemes, cf.
  - *chair* consists of 1 morpheme: *chair*
  - *chairs* consists of 2 morphemes: *chair-s*
  - *played* consists of 2 morphemes: *play-ed*
  - *player* consists of 2 morphemes: *play-er*
  - *players* consists of 3 morphemes: *play-er-s*
  - *distastefully* consists of 4 morphemes: *dis-taste-ful-ly*
Lexical vs. grammatical morphemes

- **lexical morphemes**
  - have a lexical meaning by themselves
  - can function as words, or be used with other morphemes
  - *free morphemes (roots)*
    - chair-s, play-ed, play-er-s, dis-taste-ful-ly

- **grammatical morphemes**
  - change inflectional features or the lexical meaning of a lexical morpheme
  - appear as parts of words
  - *bound morphemes (affixes)*
    - chair-s, play-ed, play-er-s, dis-taste-ful-ly
Grammatical morphemes: prefixes, suffixes etc.

- With respect to their **position**, grammatical morphemes are subclassified into
  - prefixes
    - before the root
    - *pří-tok*
  - suffixes
    - after the root
    - *stol-ek*
  - circumfixes
    - before and after the root
    - *na-hořk-lý*
  - interfixes
    - between two roots
    - *dřev-o-rub-ec*
  - infixes
    - within the root
    - Lat. *rupp-o* ‘I break’ (root *rup*, cf. *rup-t-us* ‘broken’)

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Variability of languages
Morphemes around one root

cf. the morphemic structure of the following words:
- chair, chairs, dismissed
- Czech nahořklý ‘slightly bitter’, neuvěřitelný ‘unbelievable’

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>root</th>
<th>suffix</th>
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<tr>
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<td>chair</td>
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<td>dis-</td>
<td>-miss-</td>
<td>-ed</td>
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<td>na-</td>
<td>-hořk-</td>
<td>-lý</td>
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<tr>
<td>ne- u-</td>
<td>-věř-</td>
<td>-i- -teln- -ý</td>
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</tbody>
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Morphemes around more roots

cf. the morphemic structure of the following compounds:

- German *Abschlussprüfung* ‘final exam’
- German *Jahresabschluss* ‘end of the year’
- Czech *modrooký* ‘blue-eyed’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>prefix</th>
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<th>interfix</th>
<th>prefix</th>
<th>root</th>
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References