Later 19ᵗʰ century: other issues

Syntax and the psychology of language

- Syntax not generally seen as belonging to the core of language (as opposed to phonology and morphology)
- *Geisteswissenschaft* (science of the spirit, humanities) vs. natural science
- Why? Beacuse one has certain freedom
  (*I don't like him ~ Him I don't like*)
- Many feature discussed under stylistics

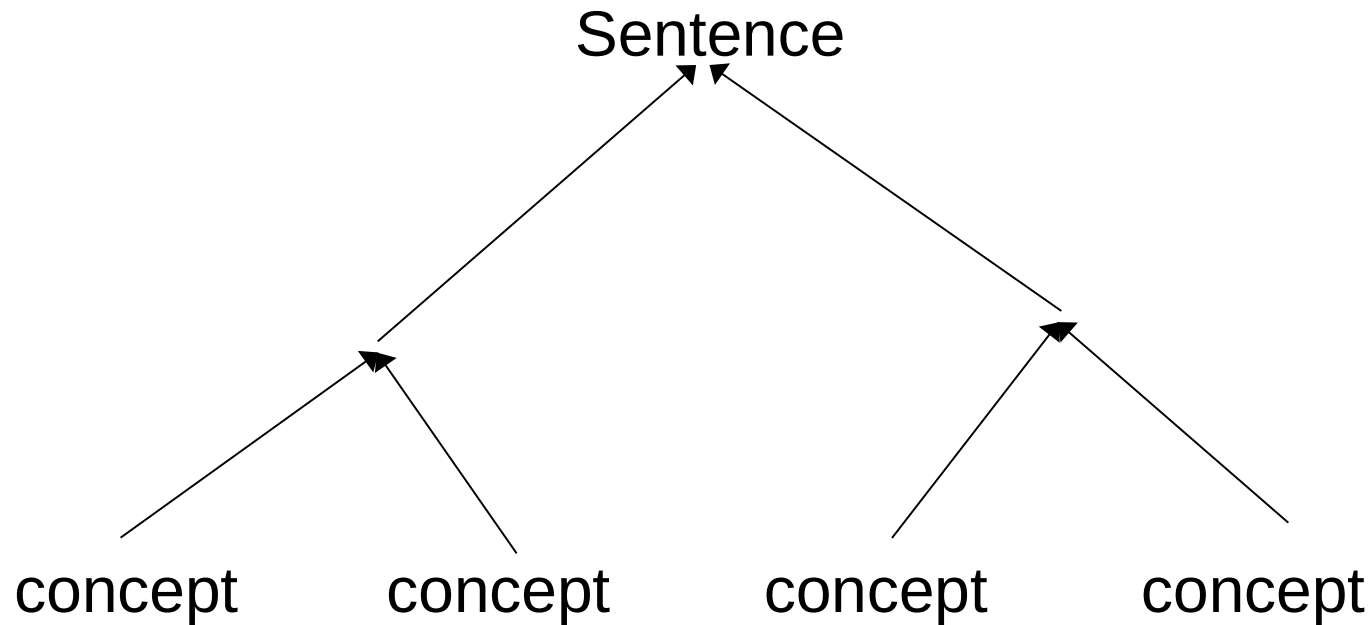**Later 19th century: other issues**

Syntax and the psychology of language

- Are concepts assembled in a sentence (syntax = synthesis)?

- Or are unitary ideas decomposed into words (syntax = analysis)?

Later 19th century: other issues

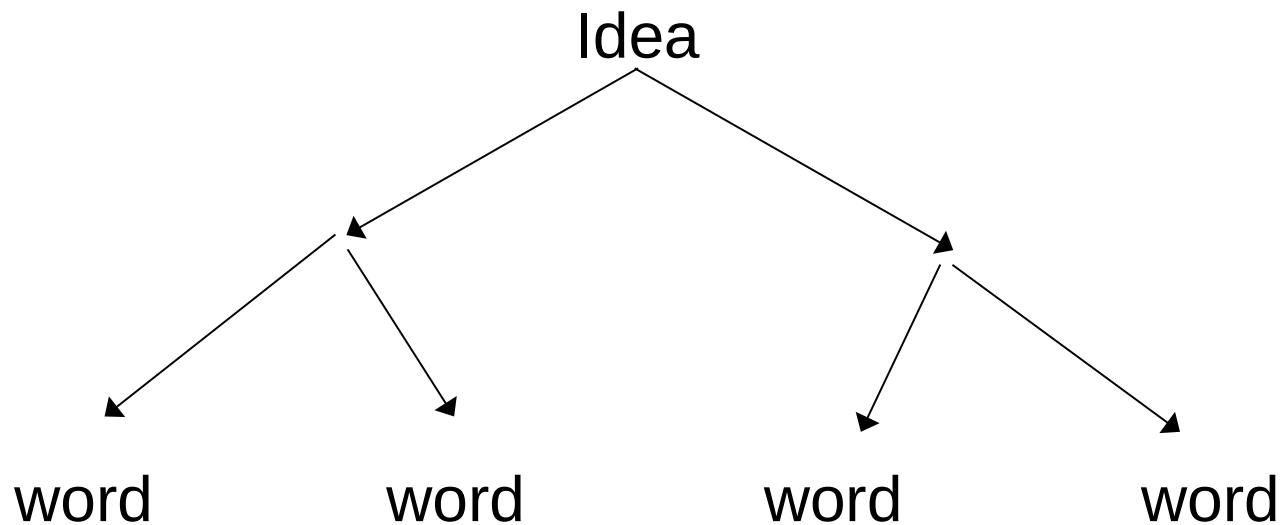Syntax and the psychology of language

- Are concepts assembled in a sentence (syntax = synthesis)?

Sentence

concept   concept   concept   concept

Later 19th century: other issues

Syntax and the psychology of language
- Or are unitary ideas decomposed into words (syntax = analysis)?

Idea

word   word   word   word

Later 19th century: other issues

Syntax and the psychology of language

- Syntax continually mixed up with some rudimentary psychology and philosophy, not really an autonomous and central field within linguistics until mid-20th century

Summary of 19th century

- content-wise: the great age of historical & comparative linguistics, focus on morphology, then phonology
  - Indo-European, Turkic, Finno-Ugric, Semitic...
  - dialect geography
  - theoretical phonology
  - phonetics
  - syntax & psychology
  - semantics

Summary of 19th century

- sociologically
  - professionalisation: being a linguist is a job
  - institutionalisation
    - university chairs, courses
    - scholarly societies
    - scholarly journals
    - libraries
  - specialisation
    - narrowing focus as knowledge accumulates

The early 20ᵗʰ century: Saussure

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913)

- born in Geneva, family of scientists
- contemporary of Neogrammarians, also studied at Leipzig
- important work on Ablaut (*Mémoire...,* 1879)
- Teaches various subjects at Geneva University
- *Cours de linguistique générale* (Course in general linguistics, 1916) →

The early 20ᵗʰ century: Saussure

Cours de linguistique générale (Course in
    general linguistics, 1916)
- perhaps the most famous book on linguistics
- Saussure did not write it!
- Compiled by two colleagues, based on
    students' notes
- We do not exactly know what Saussure
    meant and what he did not

    → but what is the book about?

Saussure: *Cours*...

Language can be looked at in many ways:

- physically (speech)
- psychologically
- social aspects, variation, norm
- change through time
- texts, philology

But is there a way of singling out LANGUAGE?

Saussure: *Cours*...

The tangible units are communication events; but Language is not the sum of these

- comm. events are unique physically and mentally (sound & meaning)

- yet we recognise & understand them

- consequently, there has to be something common to speakers that is not the same as the individual utterances or their sums

→ Language is something social/communal

Saussure: *Cours*...

Language mediates between meanings
(=mental content) and sounds – but these in
themselves are formless, unstructured!

E.g. colours:

no pre-given divisions; those are given by the
individual languages!

Saussure: *Cours*...

Languages divide the same domain differently!

colour terms in Bellonese (Polynesian, Solomon isl's):

Saussure: *Cours*...

Language mediates between meanings (=mental content) and sounds – but these in themselves are formless, unstructured!

E:	*bite*		*sting*
	lion dog	spider mosquito flea	wasp bee
Fr:	*mordre*	*piquer*	

Saussure: *Cours*...

Language mediates between meanings
(=mental content) and sounds – but these in
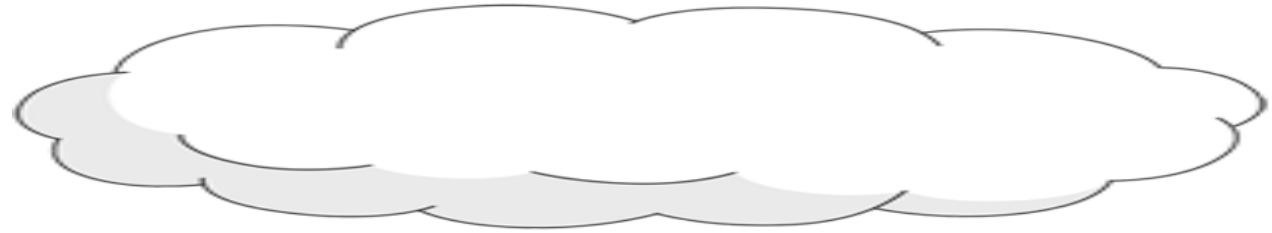themselves are formless, unstructured!

sounds too:

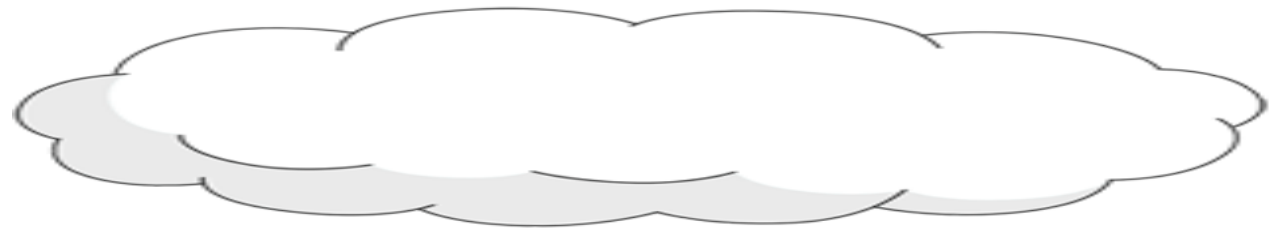Cz *te*[n] vs. *te*[ŋ]*ký* – not contrastive

E *si*[n] vs. *si*[ŋ] – contrastive

Saussure: *Cours*...
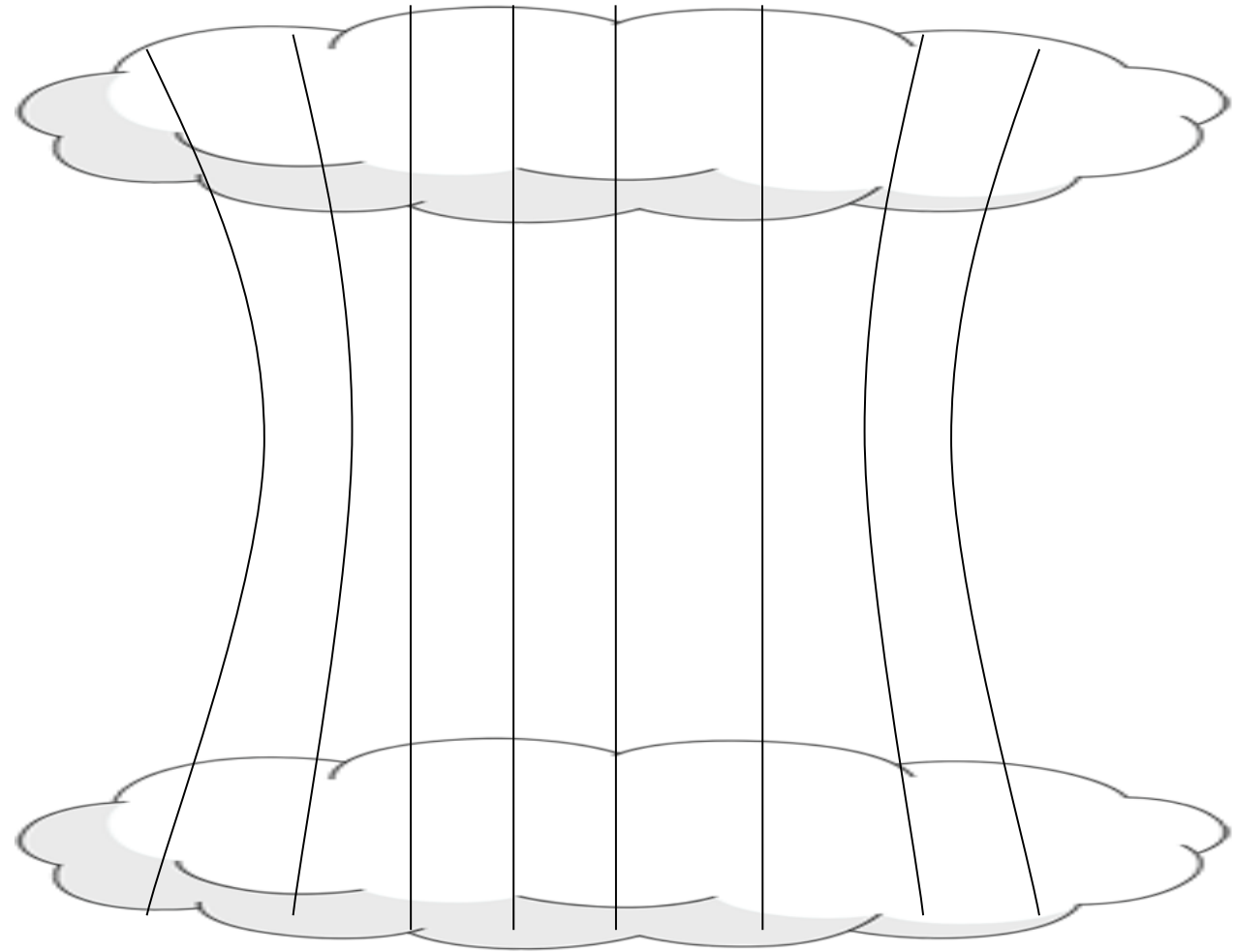
contents
of mind:

sounds:

Saussure: *Cours*...

contents
of mind:

Language:

sounds:

Saussure: *Cours*...

→ Language is arbitrary in several ways:

- In imposing divisions on mental content
  orange ≠ red? where is the line?
- In imposing divisions on sounds
  [n] and [ŋ] contrastive? *hăt≠hāte* vs. *pătron=pātron*
- In connecting meaning and sound
  hand vs. *ruka* vs. *yad* vs. *kéz* vs. *manus...*

Saussure: *Cours*...

→ A word is not a label attached to something pre-given; the nature of signs is radically different than previously thought

- signifier and signified can only exist together, like two sides of a sheet
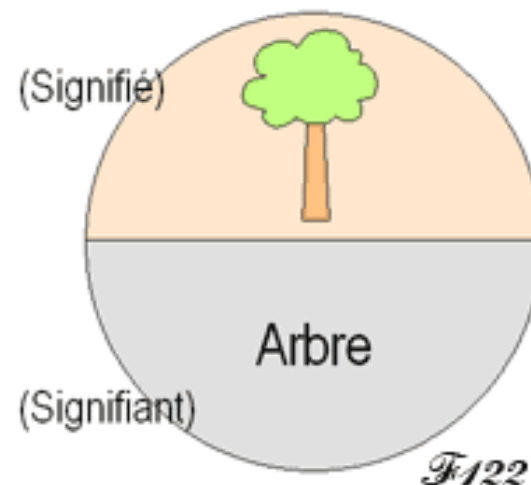
Saussure: *Cours*...

→ units of language have a *value* within the system, but are not anchored outside

e.g. what is [aj]?

It can be described physically (articulation and acoustic structure), but that says nothing about what it is in the language (e.g. English)

Saussure: *Cours*...

[aj] →

    One sound or two?

    Is it a contrastive unit wrt. [aː], [ej], [oj]...?

    Is it a lexical item?

    If yes, what? (*I, eye*)...

    How does it differ from other items?

These are all questions about the *value* (function) of [aj] *within* the system.

Saussure: *Cours*...

What makes this a queen?

   shape?

   material?

   size?

   colour?

Only distinguishability and
function by agreement; queen only *within* game!

Saussure: *Cours*...

→ Language is a *system* in which everything is connected to everything else, change in one part changes lots of other things

(chess, the train timetable...)

Saussure: *Cours*...

sign, arbitrariness, linguistic function, language system

These were not new to late 19th century linguists, but Saussure's succinct and incisive analysis made this a very important & seminal work

Foundational work of 20th century linguistics

Early 20th century: Structuralism

- European schools (functionalism)
  - Prague school: Jakobson, Trubetzkoy, Mathésius, Trnka
  - French school: Martinet
- American schools
  - Anthropological linguistics (Boas, Sapir)
  - Formal linguistics (Bloomfield, Army Program, Hockett, Harris)