

# Unit 3

## The syllable and its environments

some relevant contexts in which the syllable functions.

Slides for the session of

*Phonetics with Listening Practice (British)*

held on

le duodi 12 floréal an CCXXXII

Tuesday 30 April 2024

Robert Spence  
English Department  
Saarland University

[fə.'net.ɪks wɪð 'lɪs.(ə)n.ɪŋ 'pɪækt.ɪs 'b.ɪt.ɪf 'ju:n.ɪf 'θri:]

φων

The syllable and its environments

Outline

From matter to meaning:  
language in the  
evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic  
systems

Dimensions in the  
Systemic Functional  
theory of language

MANIFESTATION

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METAFUNCTION

INSTANTIATION

RANK

AXIS

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Envoi

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[tju:z.deɪ ðə 'θɜ:t.i(.)əθ əv 'eɪp.rəl 'twɛnt.i.'twɛnt.i.'fɔ:]

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['tju:z.deɪ ðə 'θɜ:t.i(.)əθ əv 'eɪp.rəl 'twɛnt.i.'twɛnt.i.'fɔ:]

Tuesday 30 April 2024



Image: "F. Jullien Genève", maybe Frank-Henri Jullien (1882-1938) - Indogermanisches Jahrbuch / Wikipedia CC BY-SA 4.0

Ferdinand Mongin de SAUSSURE  
26.11.1857--22.2.1913

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## 3 Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

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# The place of language in the evolutionary order of nature:



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### The place of language in the evolutionary order of nature:

- **matter** + **life** → *function*

### The place of language in the evolutionary order of nature:

- **matter** + **life** → *function*

- **life** + **society** → *value*

*Gebrauchswert*



*Tauschwert*



### The place of language in the evolutionary order of nature:

- **matter** + **life** → *function*
  - **life** + **society** → *value*  
*Gebrauchswert*  
↓  
*Tauschwert*
  - **society** + **language** → *meaning*
- [before there is grammar:]
  - **sounds** 'standing for' **meanings** → *words*

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  - ... and **words in structures** ‘stand for’ **meanings**
  - thus, adult human language has three ‘*levels*’ or ‘*strata*’:

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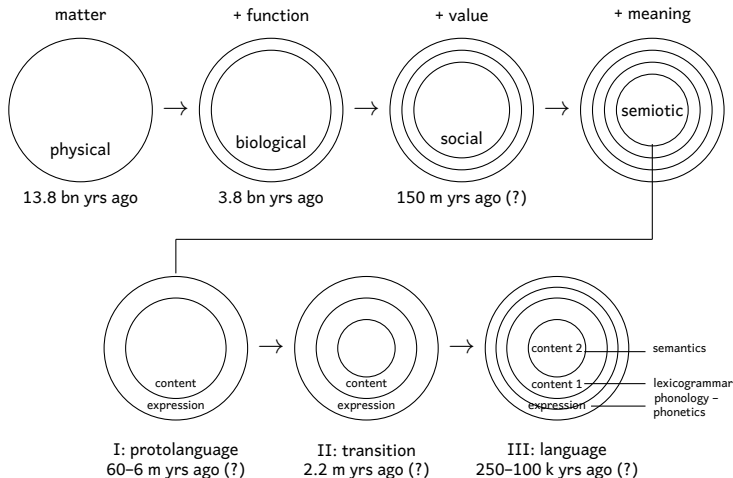
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  - **meanings**
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  - ... and **words in structures** ‘stand for’ **meanings**
  - thus, adult human language has three ‘*levels*’ or ‘*strata*’:
  - **meanings**
  - ... stood for by **wordings**
  - ... stood for by **sound(ing)s**



**Figure:** From matter to meaning (after C. M. I. M. Matthiessen)

# The importance of using a logarithmic time scale:

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From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

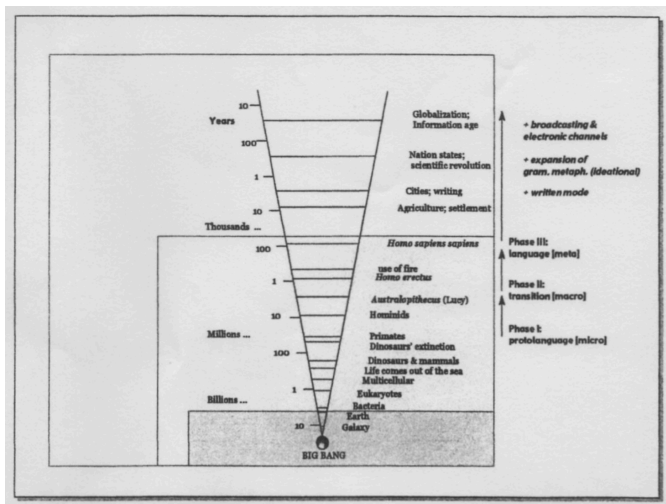
Signs and semiotic systems

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- METAFUNCTION
- INSTANTIATION
- RANK
- AXIS
- DELICACY

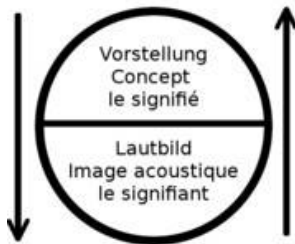
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**Figure:** Cosmogensis (logarithmic scale): acceleration

Source: Delsemme 1998, adapted by C.M.I.M. Matthiessen



**Figure:** The sign function (Saussure)

Source: Wikipedia

## Signs and semiotic systems (2)

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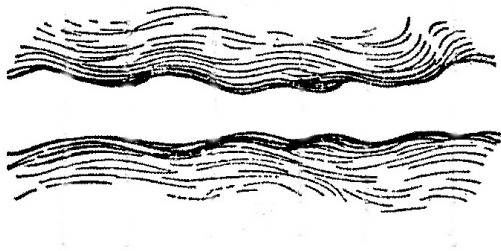
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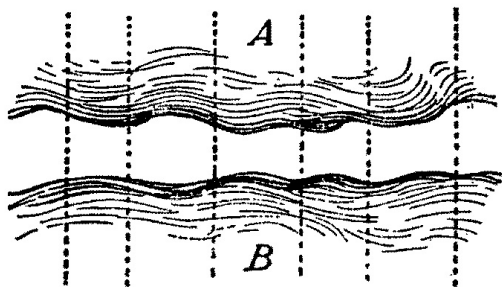
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**Figure:** Without language, thought and sound are indefinite and indistinct

Source: adapted from Saussure (1916); Wikipedia



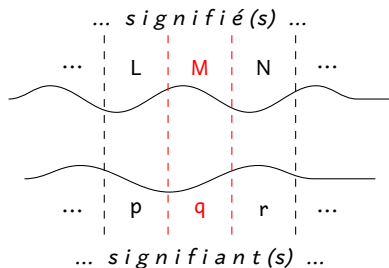


**Figure:** With language: the arbitrariness of the sign and the notion of *valeur*

Source: Saussure (1916); Wikipedia

## Signs and semiotic systems (4): *l'arbitraire du signe & valeur*

- language (... L/p, M/q, N/r, ...) is a form, not a substance



- that q stands for M is **ARBITRARY**
- M is only defined by its **VALUE** relative to { ... L ... N ... }
- q is only defined by its **VALUE** relative to { ... p ... r ... }

## Signs and semiotic systems (5): an extraterrestrial example



**Figure:** Klingon has 8 different concepts where English has only ‘fight’; and don’t confuse the final sound of “qaH” [q<sup>h</sup>αx] (‘Sir!’) vs “qagh” [q<sup>h</sup>αχ] (‘worms’)

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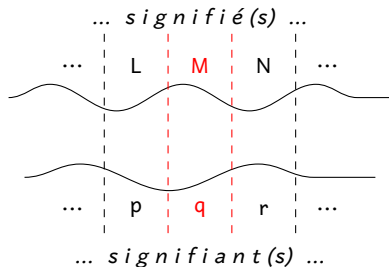
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## Signs and semiotic systems (6): *l'arbitraire du signe* $\longleftrightarrow$ *valeur*

- language (... L/p, M/q, N/r, ...) is a form, not a substance



- that q stands for M is **ARBITRARY**
  - M is only defined by its **VALUE** relative to { ... L ... N ... }
  - q is only defined by its **VALUE** relative to { ... p ... r ... }
- society (a speech community) is necessary to define these **SYSTEMS** of values
  - were the *signifiant* / *signifié* relation natural, not arbitrary, it would not be necessary for the speech community to so strictly police the boundaries between the signs within the system

## A semiotic system = a system of signs

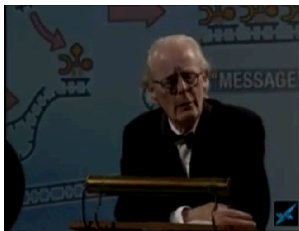
- Each sign can only be defined by its place in the *system* of signs.



Source: Wikipedia

- Language is a system of signs.
- Read:  
Ferdinand de Saussure: *Cours de linguistique générale*. 1916.  
Available [online](#).
- These five paragraphs from Saussure (1916) are ...  
... the most important thing I will ever be able to teach you  
about language:

## From a bistratal to a tristratal semiotic system



**Figure:** John Maynard Smith ← click for link to video extract

The full video on the origin of life is available in six parts here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=viP5kBMtZ18>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EzP3m\\_XlwV8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EzP3m_XlwV8)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fRzRbohQ5Zs>

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## Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

The theory of language adopted in this course is **Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)**. The theory provides a number of dimensions for describing language, the most important of which are described here:



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- 1 **MANIFESTATION** (how language appears ['manifests itself'] in the world)

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- 7 **DELICACY** (‘broad’ vs. ‘narrow’ descriptions)

## Three possible MANIFESTATIONS of language

At the point where language interfaces with physical reality, there are three possible ways in which it can ‘manifest itself’:

- **sound** (pronunciation) ... from the very beginning

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At the point where language interfaces with physical reality, there are three possible ways in which it can ‘manifest itself’:

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- **writing** (orthography) ... since about 3000 B.C.



## Three possible MANIFESTATIONS of language

At the point where language interfaces with physical reality, there are three possible ways in which it can ‘manifest itself’:

- **sound** (pronunciation) ... from the very beginning
- **writing** (orthography) ... since about 3000 B.C.
- **“signing”** (*Gebärdensprache*) ... for the hearing-impaired

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- **Phonetics** (are those human sounds? AND: are those the kinds of sounds you'd hear in English?)

- **Phonology** (are those the kinds of sound patterns you find in English words and sentences?)
- **Phonetics** (are those human sounds? AND: are those the kinds of sounds you'd hear in English?)

- **Lexicogrammar** (what do the words and sentences mean... regardless of context?)
- **Phonology** (are those the kinds of sound patterns you find in English words and sentences?)
- **Phonetics** (are those human sounds? AND: are those the kinds of sounds you'd hear in English?)

- **Discourse Semantics** (what do the words and structures mean... in context?)
- **Lexicogrammar** (what do the words and sentences mean... regardless of context?)
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- **Register** (what's going on? who's taking part? what role is language playing?)
- **Discourse Semantics** (what do the words and structures mean... in context?)
- **Lexicogrammar** (what do the words and sentences mean... regardless of context?)
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- **Genre** (what kind of text for what social purpose?)
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- **(Code)** (who's an insider? e.g. two insiders: „Unn?“ – „Jo.“)
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- **Ideology** (what is thinkable? what is doable?)
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- (Material reality: Bipedal apes **living**)
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- (Material reality: Bipedal apes making **noises** with their **faces**)

## Higher STRATA *constraining* lower STRATA

- **Language:** the **noises** we make with our **faces** in order to **live**
- (Material reality: Bipedal apes **living**)
- **Ideology** (what is thinkable? what is doable?)
- **(Code)** (who's an insider? e.g. two insiders: „Unn?“ – „Jo.“)
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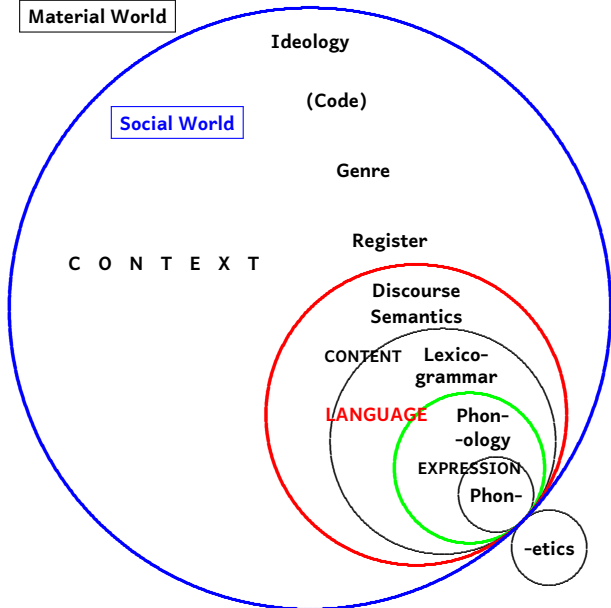
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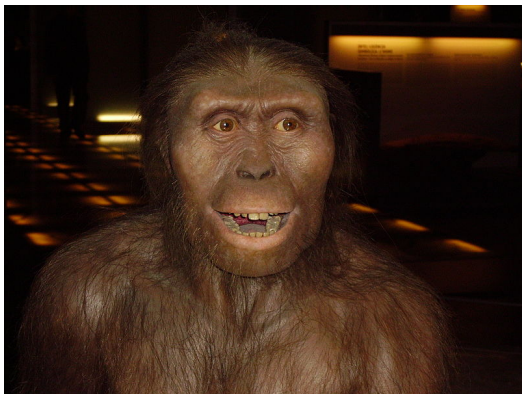
AXIS

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## Ideology is historically conditioned



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It's 3.2 million years ago. You're an *Australopithecus afarensis*.  
What is thinkable? What is doable?

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## FUNCTIONAL COMPONENTS of language and structural types (1)

**METAFUNCTIONS:** Functional components of language – internal reflections, within the architecture of language as a system, of the general functions language serves in society

Function of language		Examples	Structural type
ideational	logical	–Chris said ... that Jane thought ... that Tom had claimed ... that Peter likes Mozart	linear  ("string"-like)
	experiential	–the dinosaurs died –an asteroid killed the dinosaurs –Peter likes Mozart –Sally's the cleverest girl in the class	nuclear  ("particle"-like)
interpersonal		–he likes Mozart –he's, like, sooo totally into Mozart –I suspect he's possibly rather fond of Mozart, wouldn't you say?	prosodic  ("field"-like)
textual		–an asteroid killed the dinosaurs –they were killed by an asteroid –they were killed by one –it was an asteroid that killed them	culminative  ("wave"-like)



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## FUNCTIONAL COMPONENTS of language and structural types (2)

Function of language		Examples	Structural type
<p>→ (natural logic)</p> <p>reflecting upon the world</p>	<p>modification, quotes/reports, subordination, coordination, apposition, ...</p>	<p>Chris said ... that Jane thought ... that Tom had claimed ... that Peter likes Mozart</p>	<p>linear</p> <p>("string"-like)</p>
<p>(experience)</p> <p>→</p>	<p>processes, participants, circumstances ...</p>		<p>nuclear</p> <p>("particle"-like)</p>
<p>acting upon the world by interacting with the other people in it: mood, modality, negation, attitude, ...</p>		<p>???????????????????????????????? ???????????????????????????????? suspect...possibly...rather...wouldn't ???????????????????????????????? ????????????????????????????????</p>	<p>prosodic</p> <p>("field"-like)</p>
<p>creating relevance: theme-rheme structure, information structure, ...</p>			<p>culminative</p> <p>("wave"-like)</p>

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## FUNCTIONS OF LANGUAGE associated with *pitch* (dt. *Tonhöhe*) changes



in English: **intonation** (see Units 13–15)

logical	yes	e.g. ways of joining clauses together
experiential	no	
interpersonal	yes	e.g. what you feel and want
textual	yes	e.g. what is 'given' and what is 'new'?

in Chinese: **lexical tone**

experiential	yes	e.g. distinguishing between different concepts 媽 mā 'Mutter' 麻 má 'Hanf' 馬 mǎ 'Pferd' 罵 mà 'fluchen'
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## INSTANTIATION: from potential (=system) to actual (=instance) (1)

(‘Pünktlichkeit’)

**culture**

**language**

(Partikel)

POTENTIAL

climate

(‘Verabredung’)

**situation**

**text**

(*noch! schon!*)

ACTUAL

weather

φωv

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(‘Pünktlichkeit’)

**culture**

**language**

(Partikel)

POTENTIAL

climate

(‘Verabredung’)

**situation**

**text**

(*noch! schon!*)

ACTUAL

weather

- Today’s weather is an actual instance of the climate.

## INSTANTIATION: from potential (=system) to actual (=instance) (1)



### The syllable and its environments

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**culture**

**language**

(Partikel)

POTENTIAL

climate

(‘Verabredung’)

**situation**

**text**

(*noch! schon!*)

ACTUAL

weather

- The climate is the potential for weather.
- Today’s weather is an actual instance of the climate.

## INSTANTIATION: from potential (=system) to actual (=instance) (1)

- This text is an actual instance of the German language.

(‘Pünktlichkeit’)

**culture**

**language**

(Partikel)

POTENTIAL

climate

(‘Verabredung’)

**situation**

**text**

(*noch! schon!*)

ACTUAL

weather

- The climate is the potential for weather.
- Today’s weather is an actual instance of the climate.

## INSTANTIATION: from potential (=system) to actual (=instance) (1)

- The German language is the potential for German text(s).
- This text is an actual instance of the German language.

(‘Pünktlichkeit’)

(‘Verabredung’)

**culture**

**situation**

**language**

**text**

(Partikel)

(*noch! schon!*)

POTENTIAL

ACTUAL

climate

weather

- The climate is the potential for weather.
- Today’s weather is an actual instance of the climate.

## INSTANTIATION: from potential (=system) to actual (=instance) (1)

- This situation is an actual instance of German culture.
- The German language is the potential for German text(s).
- This text is an actual instance of the German language.

(‘Pünktlichkeit’)

**culture**

**language**

(Partikel)

POTENTIAL

climate

(‘Verabredung’)

**situation**

**text**

(*noch! schon!*)

ACTUAL

weather

- The climate is the potential for weather.
- Today’s weather is an actual instance of the climate.

## INSTANTIATION: from potential (=system) to actual (=instance) (1)

- German culture is the potential for German situations.
- This situation is an actual instance of German culture.
- The German language is the potential for German text(s).
- This text is an actual instance of the German language.

(‘Pünktlichkeit’)

**culture**

**language**

(Partikel)

POTENTIAL

climate

(‘Verabredung’)

**situation**

**text**

(*noch! schon!*)

ACTUAL

weather

- The climate is the potential for weather.
- Today’s weather is an actual instance of the climate.

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## RANK: bigger units made up of smaller ones (1)



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The rank scale in grammar:

clause	an asteroid killed the dinosaurs						
group	an asteroid		killed		the dinosaurs		
word	an	asteroid	killed		the	dinosaurs	
morpheme	an	asteroid	kill	ed	the	dinosaur	s

## RANK: bigger units made up of smaller ones



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The rank scale in phonology:

tone group	^ ən <b>æst</b> ə rɔɪd <b>kɪld</b> ðə <b>dɑɪn</b> ə sɔ:z								
foot	^ ən	<b>æst</b> ə rɔɪd			<b>kɪld</b> ðə		<b>dɑɪn</b> ə sɔ:z		
syllable	ən	æst	ə	rɔɪd	kɪld	ðə	dɑɪn	ə	sɔ:z
phoneme	ə n	æ s t	ə	r ɔ ɪ d	k ɪ l d	ð ə	d a ɪ n	ə	s ɔ : z

## RANK: the central unit at each stratum

### SEMANTIC STRATUM

***text***

|

stage

|

phase

|

figure/message/move

|

participant

### GRAMMATICAL STRATUM

***clause***

|

group/phrase

|

word

|

morpheme

### PHONOLOGICAL STRATUM

tone group

|

foot

|

***syllable***

|

phoneme

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## RANK: a structure is a configuration of functional roles

A unit is “made up of” smaller units... but how?

syllable	sɔ:z			(bigger unit)
(STRUCTURE)	Initial	Nucleus	Final	← functional roles
phonemes	s	ɔ:	z	(smaller units)

or:

syllable	sɔ:z			(bigger unit)
(STRUCTURE)	Onset	Rhyme		← functional roles
		Nucleus	Coda	
phonemes	s	ɔ:	z	(smaller units)

## AXIS: CHOICE (paradigmatic) vs. CHAIN (syntagmatic)

must

and you should learn it

may

I

and you should learn it

she

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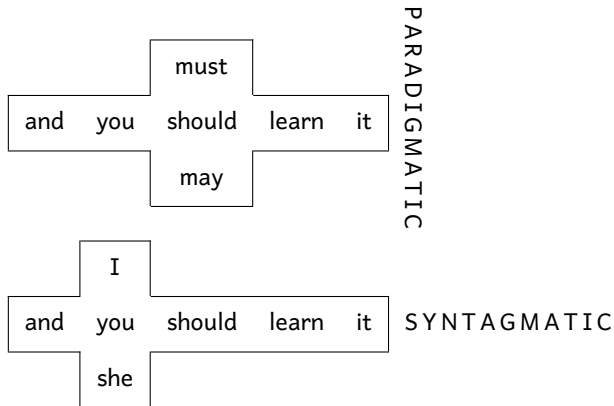
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## AXIS: CHOICE (paradigmatic) vs. CHAIN (syntagmatic)



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## AXIS: there is CHOICE and CHAIN in phonology, too

.	.	
.	f	
.	θ	
.	s	
.	ʃ	
f	v	
θ	ð	
s	ɜ:	z
ʃ	ʒ	
v		
ð	m	
z	n	
	ŋ	
h		
m	l	
n		
w		
l		

The syllable /sɜ:z/ exists in English, as do  
/fɜ:θ fɜ:s fɜ:m fɜ:n fɜ:l θɜ:z θɜ:n sɜ:s sɜ:n sɜ:l ʃɜ:z  
ʃɜ:n ʃɜ:l vɜ:n hɜ:s hɜ:z hɜ:n hɜ:l mɜ:f mɜ:s mɜ:z  
mɜ:n mɜ:l nɜ:θ nɜ:s nɜ:z nɜ:m wɜ:f wɜ:z wɜ:m  
wɜ:n wɜ:l lɜ:z lɜ:n .../

φων

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## DELICACY: 'broad' vs. 'narrow' transcriptions

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A 'broad' (less delicate) transcription, making only the minimum necessary number of distinctions:

[ ɹed ]

A 'narrow' (more delicate) transcription, making as many distinctions as possible:

[ ɹ<sup>w</sup>ed̚ ]

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

- The homework to be completed before week 4 is:  
Learn the adjectives corresponding to the Places of Articulation for consonants:  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Places\\_of\\_articulation.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Places_of_articulation.svg)

How can you tell that this is French just by listening to it?

Un petit d'un petit /  
S'étonne aux Halles /  
Un petit d'un petit /  
À degrés te fallent /  
Indolent qui ne sort cesse /  
Indolent qui ne se mène /  
Qu'importe un petit /  
Tout gai de Reguennes?

from the mediaeval manuscript “Mots d’heures: gousses, rames”.

## Envoi (2)

Now compare this strangely similar English poem. How can you tell it is English, just by listening to it? (What about the rhythm?)

Humpty Dumpty /  
sat on a wall /  
Humpty Dumpty /  
had a great fall /  
And all the King's horses /  
and all the King's men /  
Couldn't put Humpty /  
together again.

source: the traditional collection “Mother Goose Rhymes”



### The syllable and its environments

#### Outline

From matter to meaning:  
language in the  
evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic  
systems

Dimensions in the  
Systemic Functional  
theory of language

MANIFESTATION

STRATIFICATION

METAFUNCTION

INSTANTIATION

RANK

AXIS

DELICACY

Homework for Week 4

Envoi