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THE DYNAMIC TURN:  
ON SYNTAX BETWEEN *LANGUE* AND *PAROLE*

Abstract: In this article I present the conception of syntax emerging from the “dynamic approach” to syntax and semantics, developed in the last few decades, moving from the critic to the static theories of language, either those developed in the Chomskian framework or those based on Montague’s grammars. I will suggest that this view can be fruitfully compared with Saussure’s position on syntax, provided that one interprets the “Saussurean vagueness” on the collocation of syntax in the rational divisions of linguistics, that is between *langue* and *parole* and between Paradigm and Syntagm, as a precise theoretical consequence of his conception of language.

Keywords: Discourse, Dynamic Turn, Syntax /Semantics Interface.

1. *Back to the structuralism*

How to interpret the “vague” position of F. de Saussure about the collocation of syntax between *langue* and *parole*? Far from being a theoretical uncertainty, I think it is possible to show that this is a relevant consequence of his conception of language, namely of what Saussure calls, in the *Cours*, the “language mechanism”.

The issue affects not only the syntax, but also the morphology, at a lower level, and the discourse structure, at a higher one. My present purpose is not merely philological, but mainly theoretical, trying to show the actuality of this question.

What could nowadays give a renewed interest to the issue of the saussurian view on syntax (a topic not so much discussed among the scholars in the Saussurian studies<sup>1</sup>), I will argue, is the so-called ‘dynamic turn’ in the philosophy of language of the last few decades (Peregrin, 2003). It is widely recognized that some basilar hypotheses of the Dynamic Semantics represent a relevant paradigmatic shift compared to the classical (Fregean) view in the philosophy of language tradition. It is not easy to briefly show the direction of this change, that was also intended to

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<sup>1</sup> See Amacker 1995.

provide an alternative to the generativism mainstream in theoretical linguistics (although Chierchia 1995 has argued for a theoretical framework integrating generativism and Dynamic Semantics).

Shortly, it is well-known that the generative theory of language starts from some fundamental postulates. First of all, according to the generativists, since syntax is the only module belonging to the narrow language faculty, syntax is the very object of the linguistic theory. This is the “autonomy of syntax” postulate, an important one in the generative framework, to the extent that some crucial properties of language, such as those of recursivity and learnability in the “poverty of stimulus” condition, are derived from that postulate. Moreover, thank to it, generativists were able to constantly rule out semantics from the domain of linguistic theory.

Secondly, generative theories have always held on to the competence/performance dichotomy. Thus, focusing on the (idealized) speaker’s competence, generativists were allowed to exclude the pragmatic, contextual aspects of language uses from the theoretical investigation. By virtue of these two postulates, both semantics and pragmatics have always been kept out from the prevailing trend in the generative tradition. Corollary of the above postulates is the centrality of the syntactic category of sentence: the phrase structure of the sentence is the main object of the theory of syntax, given that the sentence is the maximal unit of syntax, as well as the word is the minimal unit.

While in the recent developments of the generative linguistics we have noticed a growing interest in the morphology – due to the introduction of the functional categories in the syntactic architecture of languages – issues concerning larger linguistic units, the discourse units, have never been addressed in the generative tradition. This is a direct implication of the “autonomy of syntax” postulate: The “units of the discourse” do not fall within the domain of the linguistic phenomena covered by syntax. Therefore the discourse were always excluded from the generative theory of language as a constructive theory of syntax. Marginally, you should note the great importance given to the anaphora *within* the sentence in the Binding Theory (one of the module of the generative theory known as Principle and Parameter Theory), compared to the absence of analysis of the cross-sentential anaphora, that is the discourse anaphora.

In what follows, I’m going to point out that, within the framework developed around the core concepts of dynamic semantics, all these three basic postulates of the generative theory (autonomy of the syntax, competence/performance dichotomy, centrality of the phrase-structure of the sentence) have been challenged, and even abandoned.

Overcoming the basic postulates of the generativism, the dynamic approach to language might suggest a new insight into some aspects of the Saussurian conception of syntax, particularly in what concerns the role of syntax in the relation between *langue* and *parole*. The way syntax is conceived emerging from the

“dynamic turn” seems to involve a recovery of some traits of syntax as it was perceived by the Geneva’s school, in the first phase of the structuralism. As we shall see, this is particularly evident with the *Dynamic Syntax* (Kempson, 2001) theory of language, in which grammar is conceived as a “bridge” linking the speaker lexical knowledge and some contextual aspects of the linguistic performances.

Undoubtedly, the “dynamic” tendencies in philosophy of language, as well as other recent trends in cognitive science, have involved a revival of some issues submerged by the wave of generative linguistics. Rethinking the question of the role of syntax relative to the *langue/parole* opposition might lead towards a different approach to the theory of the linguistic competence: The traditional system of the syntax/semantics and semantics/pragmatics interfaces could be replaced by a new way of thinking at the *langue/parole* axis, that is the axis whose extremes are the collective, shared knowledge of language and the individual creativity.

## 2. Grammar and discourse

Before addressing directly the rather complicated issue of the Saussurian ideas on syntax, it will be useful to present in a nutshell the main points of the dynamic paradigm in syntax.

Dynamic principles were born in formal semantics (subsequently being extended to encompassing syntax) in order to account for such phenomena as discourse anaphora or *donkey sentences* that are intractable in the classical, *Montagovian*, semantic framework. These phenomena required some kind of *flexibility* in the binding of pronouns, unachievable with the standard tools of first order quantification.

The essential aspects of the dynamic turn in semantics can be summarized in few remarks. First of all, the meaning of sentences is no longer conceived as given by truth-conditions, but it is identified with the “context change potential” associated with linguistic expressions. This move has several consequences, the most relevant being that a semantic theory is viewed as a transition system: A function that maps informational states into informational states.

Within the *Discourse Representation Theory* (DRT, Kamp e Reyle, 1993), the default state preceding the beginning of a discourse is conventionally represented by an “empty box” (no content has been processed). This box will be incrementally enriched when new sentences are uttered and processed. The *content* of each processed sentence becomes the relevant (structural and semantic) *context* of the current input sentence in the discourse. This is a landmark of the dynamic turn: The representational identification of content and context. The key idea behind the DRT is that, in a coherent multi-sentence discourse, each new sentence *S* of the

discourse is interpreted in the context provided by the sentences preceding it. The interpretation of *S* ends up in the *context update* with the contribution taken by (the content of) *S*.

To briefly illustrate the DRT mechanism, let consider the case of nominal anaphora. The content of an utterance is divided into the discourse referents, indicated by variables at the top of the “box” (this box is named *Discourse Representation Structure*), and conditions on referents, expressed by atomic predicates applied on the discourse referents.

The first statement of the discourse: «A man runs. John praises him» is assigned the following *Discourse Representation Structure* (DRS):

x
man(x) runs(x)

(1)

This DRS provides the context for the interpretation of the second sentence of that discourse. The processing of the second sentence maps the DRS in (1) into the DRS in (2).

x, y
man(x) runs(x) praises(x,j) y=x

(2)

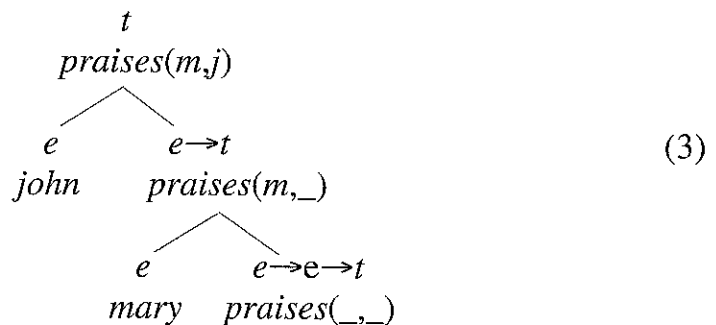
The pronoun “him” of the second statement introduces a new referent that, according to certain conditions of accessibility that can be rigorously formalized, is linked to the referent already introduced by the NP “a man” in the previous utterance (that binding being expressed by the equation  $y = x$ ).

Even from this very brief presentation, it is clear that DRT fully carries out the principles of the dynamic turn. Between the content and the context is established a dialectic: The context is crucial for determining the propositional content of an utterance, but this content, in turn, determines a changing in the context relevant for the interpretation of subsequent utterances in the multi-sentence discourse. Each new sentence or phrase is interpreted as an update of the context in which it is used and this update often involves connection between elements from the sentence or phrase with elements from the context<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Here I have mentioned only the processing of the nominal anaphora, but obviously DRT is able to account for a wide range of phenomena of structural contextual dependence of discourse and dialogue. Among these, temporal anaphora, presuppositions, ellipses, accommodations, fragmentations.

### 3. Dynamic grammar

The *Dynamic Syntax* (DS, Kempson, 2001, and Cann *et al.*, 2005) takes a step forward: It introduces the dynamic principles in the theory of linguistic syntax, thus disclosing the innovative potential of the dynamic turn for the theoretical linguistics. The strong theoretical move consists of viewing language grammar as a set of *parsing* strategies, aimed to the sequential, incremental construction of semantic representations. Language syntax is modelled as a system of parsing/production, whose goal is to recover propositional content by incrementally processing strings of words, in an on-line fashion. The process of “growth of the logical form”, during the left-to-right scanning of an input string of word, is step by step, each step taking previous steps as the structural context that is modified. The process is goal-oriented: The starting goal is to establish some propositional content (some formula of type  $t$ , the semantic type of sentences, truth-value or proposition, in a type-logical semantics) as interpretation of the input sequence of words and this goal is split into some sub-goals, according to the logic of type and modulated by the input words. The parsing system, i.e. the language grammar, maps directly the input strings of words into semantic representations, without making any reference to syntactic categories. The meaning is represented by a tree structure whose root is of type  $t$  (despite of the similarity, these trees are semantic representations, and they should not be confused with phrase structure trees of the generativism). A sentence like “John praises Mary” has the following meaning representation, in a type-logical style<sup>3</sup>:



where  $e$  is the semantic type of noun phrases (entities),  $e \rightarrow t$  is the semantic type of verb phrases (unary predicates, that is functions that map entities into propositions),  $e \rightarrow e \rightarrow t$  is the semantic type of transitive verbs (binary predicates, functions mapping entities into unary predicates). The sister left nodes of this tree are decorated with arguments (*john*, *mary*), the sister right nodes with functions that apply

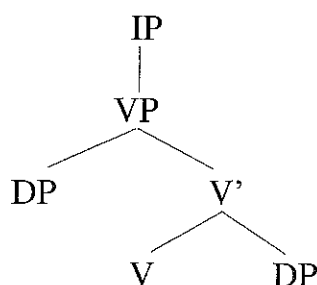
<sup>3</sup> See Carpenter 1997 for a wide introduction to type-logical semantics.

to those arguments (*praises(m,\_)*, *praises(\_,\_)*). The results of these functional applications<sup>4</sup> are collocated at respective mother nodes.

The syntax, in the DS framework, is a system to project semantic trees like the above tree, triggered by an input string of words in context. The speaker's linguistic competence consists of the (internalized) knowledge of this system.

Now, instead of entering in the details of the DS machinery (that would be out of the aim of this paper), I will proceed with some remarks on the difference between DS and the most recent trend in generativism, the *Minimalist Program* (MP, see Chomsky (1995) and Boeckx (2006)), to draw some suggestions for our purpose of reinterpreting the Saussurian conception of syntax, in the perspective of the dynamic turn.

Let consider the exemplar case of the sentence structure in the two theories. According to MP, the (very simplified) sentence structure can be figure out as the following (X-bar) phrase structure, where IP = *Inflectional Phrase*, VP = *Verb Phrase*, DP = *Determiner Phrase*.



The difference between languages SVO<sup>5</sup> (like English or Italian) and languages SOV (like Latin or German) is then expressed in terms of the different order in which subject DP (in the “Specifier” position of the VP), verb V and object DP (in the Complement position of the VP) are raised from the original positions, for gathering the “traits of agreement” in the Head and Spec(ifier) positions of the IP. In other words, the difference in the word order among natural languages is due to the different order in which “movements” are performed, in the process of derivation of the Phonological Form (PF) of phrases and sentences from a selection of words (by means of a “chain” of “merge” and “move” operations).

In the DS framework a different approach to the structure of nuclear sentence is developed. If a grammar is a system of *parsing/generation* for recovering/expanding content of type *t* (propositions), the system, in every language, starts from the

<sup>4</sup> Functional applications are the steps of semantic composition among the elements of the sentence for building up the meaning of the entire sentence, as a function of the meaning of its components.

<sup>5</sup> A language SVO is a language in which the unmarked word order in the sentence is Subject-Verb-Object.

state in which is waiting for a proposition<sup>6</sup>. This state is formal expressed by the “requirement” of a content of type  $t$  (the question mark before the type means that the system, as default disposition, is expecting for a content of that type):

$$?t \quad (4)$$

This requirement is further expanded into two sub-goals, representing the requirements of an expression of type  $e$  (an entity, expressed by a DP) and of type  $e \rightarrow t$  (a predicate, in form of VP):

$$\begin{array}{c} ?t \\ \swarrow \quad \searrow \\ ?e \quad ?e \rightarrow t \end{array} \quad (5)$$

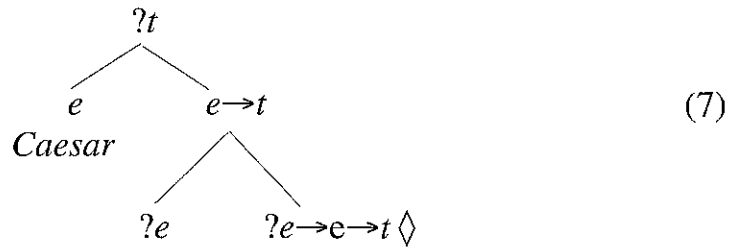
After a NP has been scanned, the system projects the “slots” for a VP (in the case of a transitive verb):

$$\begin{array}{c} ?t \\ \swarrow \quad \searrow \\ e \quad ?e \rightarrow t \\ \quad \swarrow \quad \searrow \\ \quad ?e \quad ?e \rightarrow e \rightarrow t \end{array} \quad (6)$$

Now, DS theory of grammar, no longer moving from a preconceived syntactic format of the sentence, but from the semantic structure of the sentence, can characterize the sentence’s syntactic shape as the result of different strategies of *parsing/generation*. This aspect of DS ensures to the theory a great flexibility in the analysis and formalization of syntactic structures, flexibility that is totally unknown to the MP, and that Saussure, and his first scholars, had firmly in mind.

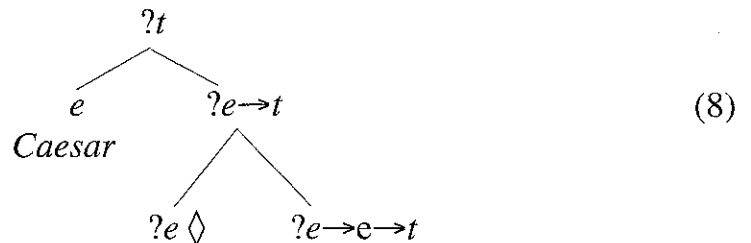
For example, in order to account for the difference between SVO and SOV languages, i.e. between English and Latin, DS introduces a device to point out the node that is expected to be processed in the semantic tree under construction. The English dynamic grammar, after having accepted a DP as first item of an input string, generates a tree like the following:

<sup>6</sup> For a similar perspective in language understanding see Sperber and Wilson (1986).



in which the “pointer” ( $\diamond$ ) to the requirement of the semantic type of a transitive verb points out that the system predicts to process a word to fulfil that requirement, i.e. the system is waiting for a transitive verb as the next word, in continuing to scan the input string. In processing a sentence like “Caesar proposed a prize”, the tree in (7) shows a very simplified representational state of the parser after having accepted the word “Caesar”, waiting for receiving the verb *before* the Object.

However, the Latin parser, after having analyzed the Subject DP, by default runs through the following state:



waiting for the object DP, that generally precedes the verb. The tree in (8) may represent the tree under construction for a sentence like “Caesar praemium proposuit”, after the word “Caesar” has been scanned (in which the position of the pointer formalizes that the Object “is expected” *before* the verb).

The epistemological departure from generativism carried out by the dynamic approach to syntax is remarkable. In the dynamic theory of natural language syntax it is meaningless to distinguish between competence and performance: grammar is performance-oriented, and pragmatic essential aspects of verbal communication, such as the linearity of the verbal signal, play a crucial role in the constructive theory of grammar. Moreover, the autonomy of syntax postulate is abandoned in favour of a conception in which meaning and form, in natural languages, dynamically interact at the level of cognitive operations underlying verbal communication as a social behaviour. Recursivity of human languages is not abandoned but is conceived as an achievement of the human language ability as it unfolds in the social context of communication (a property of the “external language” rather than of the “internal language”, according to a well-known Chomskian distinction). Finally, the sentence category is no longer the cornerstone of syntax. In DS, theory of grammar is broken free from the syntactic categories and this aspect enable the



theory to deal with the wide range of language construction phenomena that goes from single word sentences (elliptical construction) to multi-sentence discourse, in a seamless integrated way.

In the remainder of the paper, I will try to show how these aspects of the dynamic view on grammar could involve a reading of the Saussure's conception of syntax that could display some relevance for contemporary linguistics. Saussure never explicitly stated that syntax belongs to the domain of the *langue*, or to the domain of the *parole*, simply because he thought that syntax belongs neither to the *langue*, nor to the *parole*. According to his way of conceiving the *langue/parole* "opposition" (at least in my opinion), Saussure puts natural language syntax in an intermediate zone between *langue* and *parole*, at the equilibrium between the forces of individual differentiation that are active at the *parole* level, and the forces of standardization acting at the level of the *langue*. The balance of these contrasting tendencies lies in the lexicon. Syntax, in language uses, emerges as a "metastable state", a kind of social constrain on the individual experimentation of the combinatory of the lexical items stored in the speakers memory, the lexical knowledge being the only linguistic knowledge fully belonging to the domain of the *langue* - the unique common linguistic knowledge shared by the members of a linguistic community. This view on syntax is surprisingly close to the dynamic view on syntax outlined above.

#### 4. *The textual dimension*

Saussure about syntax seems oscillate between *langue* and *parole* (especially according to De Mauro, 1985):

Where syntagms are concerned, however, one must recognize the fact there is no clear boundary separating *langue*, as confirmed by communal usage, from *parole*, marked by freedom of the individual. In many cases it is difficult to assign a combination of units to one or the other. Many combinations are the product of both, in proportions which cannot accurately measured. (Saussure, 1922, 173, English translation by Harris, 1986).

The issue of the "syntagmatic domain" (as opposed to the paradigmatic one) is intertwined with that of the Saussurian polemic against the traditional branches of grammatical studies, contrasting with the "rational articulation" of grammar proposed by Saussure himself.

According to Saussure, in the domain of linguistic facts it doesn't exist the syntax, but only the syntagmatic dimension: "Syntax ... falls under syntagmatics, since word sequences invariably involve at least two units linearly ordered. All

syntagmatic facts are not to be classified as syntax, but all syntactic facts belong to syntagmatics" (Saussure, 1922, 188). The syntagmatic dimension encompasses morphology and syntax, corresponding to the more general dimension of *textuality*.

Syntax is the theory of sentence structure, both for the traditional grammatical studies and for the generativism. Sentence is always seemed to be the crucial category of syntax for logical and psychological reasons: it linguistically represents propositions (thoughts with a true-value) and it is the mental representation of the propositional content. Both the "psychological theory" of grammar (such as the Steintal's grammar theory) and traditional grammars (inspired by the Port-Royal tradition), between the nineteenth and twentieth century, will continue to assume the centrality of the sentence, and then the same for generative theory of grammar (as seen above).

But Saussure thought that the sentence has no special role in the grammatical architecture of natural language. He did not posit any sharp discontinuity in the flow of the "syntagmatic chain", he did not absolutely distinguish between merely textual concatenations and concatenations based on morphological or syntactical features (concatenations whose elements enter in a grammatical construction). As we shall see, the lexical units are part of the *langue*, and hereafter everything is discourse, syntagm, text.

The only rational grammatical division is, in the Saussure's conception, the *syntagm/paradigm* opposition:

The interpenetration of morphology, syntax and lexicology is explained by the fact that all synchronic features are ultimately of the same kind. No boundary between them can be laid down in advance. Only the distinction between syntagmatic and associative relations suggests a classification which is indispensable, and which fulfils the requirements for any grammatical systematisation. (Saussure, 1922, 187, English translation by Harris, 1986).

And just before, he suggests that the distinction between morphology and syntax is illusory (1922, 186).

Now, it is natural to wonder what is the *langue* for Saussure, what kind of shared, common knowledge is what he calls to be the *langue*. I suggest that nothing concerning the syntagmatic domain is within the *langue* domain: in the *langue* there are not syntagmatic rules, rules for the syntagmatic constructions. The internalized language, that finally is what the *langue* consists of, is the lexicon or, rather, the complex interweaving, in the speaker's memory, of paradigmatic series whose terminals are the lexical primitives<sup>7</sup>. This network of associative relationships is

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<sup>7</sup> Here one can mention the critical remark that Bloomfield (1993) addressed to Saussure, according to which Saussure had based his analysis of language on the words rather than on the sentences.

developed, in the speaker's memory, during the learning language process, and then forms his linguistic competence as a mature speaker. The syntactic constructions are a kind of by-product, and their stability is due to the stability of lexical knowledge in a linguistic community.

We know that Saussure was concerned with three sorts of systemic relationships: that between a signifier and a signified; those between a sign and all of the other elements of its system; and those between a sign and the elements which surround it within a concrete signifying instance. He emphasized that meaning arises from the differences between signifiers; these differences are of two kinds: *syntagmatic* (concerning positioning) and *paradigmatic* (concerning substitution).

The crucial point in the Saussure's explanation of the "language mechanism" is that speakers are able to assign a syntagmatic structure to the stream of the spoken language by virtue of a segmentation they unconsciously apply to this flow. But this segmentation is possible only insofar as speakers isolate and recognize *replaceable* portions of a spoken flow, the surrounding context remaining unchanged.

In other words, the segmentation of a spoken flow is possible if and only if adjacent portions of it can be isolated as elements of paradigmatic series (a set of replaceable elements, in the OR-relation). The series of associative relations have therefore the priority in the process of language understanding, whilst the elements in a syntagmatic chain (in the AND-relation), that mutually affect themselves in the concrete speech act, are derivable from the paradigmatic network. The syntagmatic relations are a matter of fact, co-occurrence relations among elements in the temporal ordered spoken flow. Co-occurrence is a real relation of concomitance, *in praesentia* (using a Saussurean expression, 1922, 171), whilst paradigmatic relationships are virtual, subconscious and mnemonic (*in absentia*). Moreover, syntagmatic relations, as matter of fact, are unpredictable, resting on the individual choices of speakers, and the contribution they give to the meaning of a text is always determinable *ex post*.

On the contrary, paradigmatic series are invisible, but they have cognitive priority in language understanding, they are the "cognitive background" of the syntagmatic articulation of the verbal signal. They are stored in the memory of speakers, representing the main linguistic social resource of a community. Invisible in a concrete speech act, they constitute the necessary condition that makes it possible.

Thus, the paradigms, that fluctuate around the syntagmatic chains making them articulated, belong to the *langue*, where *langue* means the set of inter-subjective knowledge that renders a group of speakers a linguistic community. But now the question is: is it possible to consider syntax construction patterns as part of paradigm series? I think that Saussure was sceptical about this point. Syntax patterns are "tendencies" too fleeting, too subjected to the individual will for being considered as part of a repertory strongly submitted to the social control, such as the *langue*.

Moreover, Saussurian structuralist categories, such as syntagm and paradigm, have a broad semiotic relevance: they apply to all semiotic systems that involve identifying constituent units (such as portions of a text or of a socio-cultural practice) and structural relationships between them (oppositions, correlations, logical relations, etc.). And natural language, for Saussure, *is* a semiotic system in a broad sense, with the only peculiarity that it is characterized by a strong degree of institutionalization. The idea that natural languages are more akin to formal system than to semiotic system (say, more similar to an algebra than to a garment system) could be due to the normative attitude of grammarians, that tend to formalize natural language as a rule-governed system, in which the nature of the units involved and their relationships are definable by a finite set of rules. I don't intend to discuss here this intricate issue; I only desire to remark that Saussure, conceiving natural languages as semiotic systems in a broad sense, could not consider a rigid syntactic rule-system (for *parsing/generating* phrases and sentences) as part of the *langue*.

Naturally, the relation between paradigms and syntagms is inverted at the genetic, and ontogenetic, level. Syntagms have cognitive priority in language learning (as remarked by Bally, 1932), because they are the concrete and first manifestation of language, while the associative networks are acquired by means of the comparison among syntagmatic chains, by which the speaker progressively improves his mastery of language.

To sum up, according to my interpretation of the Saussure conception of syntax, the father of modern linguistics placed morphology and syntax on the same plane, both belonging to the syntagmatic dimension of language. Coherently, he does not explicitly propose a division between morphology and syntax; if there is a *continuum* between them, every attempt to formally separate their domain of application could sound somehow arbitrary. On the other hand, the same mechanism governs both the assignment of the morphological structure to words and of the phrase structure to sentences.

In this interpretative frame, it is possible to hypothesize that from morphology to syntax, and to syntax to textuality, there is a difference of degree in the strength of cohesion between the contiguous elements of the syntagmatic chain.

*Maximum degree* of cohesion is that of the internal link between the morphemes in the structured words<sup>8</sup>. These morphemes cannot be moved and cannot occur isolated (they are bound morphemes).

*Medium degree* of cohesion between elements of the syntagmatic chain is that of syntactic relations. The strength of this nexus does not prevent the possibility of movements, and the units involved can be displaced. The limits to these move-

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<sup>8</sup> For an update reading on morphology in Saussure see Fadda (2008).

ments are due to a constrain of intelligibility. There is not a preferential position of pronouncing these displaceable units (that generally are words, or free morphemes), and so it is impossible to postulate the existence of traces or empty categories.

*Minimum degree* of cohesion is between the discourse units. Among them there is a relation of mere "textuality". This is a minimum degree of cohesion, and not a null degree, because the concomitance along the syntagmatic axis produces some reciprocal effect among discourse units. Discourse coherence based on semantic or phonological aspects is just a kind of this degree of strength of cohesion in the syntagmatic chain.

##### 5. *Towards a syntax/pragmatic integration*

At this point, we can hypothesize that, according to the Saussure's conception, ties, in the syntagmatic chain, are constantly renewed and tested by speakers, and memorized only as tendencies.

Let me quote here a text of Saussure that clarifies how he believed in the crucial role of discourse, the place of explication of the human language faculty, in which antagonistic forces operating in the social use of language – the social control and the individual creativity – are mediated and temperate.

The langue was created for the purpose of discourse, but what is that separates discourse from *langue*...? The concepts are available in the *langue*... but by virtue of which operation, in what conditions is it possible that discourse emerges, by means of putting those concepts together? The discourse consists of the establishing of a link between concepts upholstered in linguistic form, while the langue only predisposes isolated concepts, that are waiting for entering in some relations in order to express the thought. (Saussure 2002, English translation by D. D'A.)

The compositional potential of the lexical units is realized in the concreteness of discourse, in which they exert a mutual influence, determining different layer of cohesion. The degree of cohesion is a function of the "combinatorial potential" of lexical items, but this potential is not given once and for all; on the contrary, it is experimented and renewed each time. Until the perception of some kind of articulation in a portion of the syntagmatic chain remains active for speakers, this means that the strength of ties continues to be testable for speakers, and subjected, in some sense, to their individual creativity.

Among the scholars of the first structuralism, Meillet (1932) assigned the syntax to the *parole*, for he thought that the manifold variety of patterns showed by the sentence's structure in many languages was better understood as the result of

individual creativity<sup>9</sup>. In the notes for the *Cours*, De Mauro stresses the fluctuations of the Saussure's thought on the problem of syntax, while Hagège (2004) reasserts that the reason why Saussure did not directly focalize the issue of syntax in his works is to be connected to the failure of development of a linguistic theory for the *parole*. If so, syntax, according to Hagège, belongs to the domain of the *parole*.

If ascribing syntax to the domain of the *parole* may seem very difficult, it could be due to the received view on syntax consolidated since the wide spread of the generative linguistics (in the sixties): the syntax as a rule system for the construction of well-formed sentences from a set of lexical units. This view denies any relevant role concerning syntax to the individual activity of speakers, incorporating syntax in the whole of the shared knowledge of speakers in a linguistic community.

But after the emerging of the dynamic paradigm in syntax, today one may conceive grammar as a *parsing* strategy for recovering propositional content from a verbal signal in a given context, that is a system for *text processing*, showing flexibility, an high contextual sensitivity and even some "adaptive ability" in performing its task.

Therefore, it is perhaps possible to find a new theoretical meaning for this reading of the Saussure position on syntax, according to which Saussure posits syntax in the domain of the *parole* since he considers syntagmatics as the domain of the *parole*. In the Dynamic Syntax theory, as we have seen, natural language syntax is thought of as a *pragmatic* strategy for producing/interpreting text rather than a rule-system for parsing/generating a set of a well-formed sentences. The language faculty becomes the cognitive attitudes to acquire such strategy for text processing in context.

In this framework, the modularist hypothesis of the natural language knowledge system (three modules for syntax, semantics, pragmatics and the two interfaces syntax/semantics and semantics/pragmatics) is replaced by a dynamic conception of the interaction between lexical knowledge and (some essential aspects of) the pragmatics of linguistic communication (goal-oriented, on-line, linear and incremental process of production/interpretation of the verbal signal). In other words, this view seems to revitalized the *langue/parole* dichotomy, in parallel with the opposition syntagms/paradigms. And this parallelism is possible since the syntagmatic structures are not stored in the *langue*, but they entirely belong to the *external language*, to the textuality dimension of language. Regarding the unification effects, the word unity, the phrase, sentence and discourse unity, these effects could be considered as determined by the interaction of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic dimension, and not only due to the fulfilling of a structural pattern. If so, they are tried and tested each time by the speakers, and, to some extent, they rest on the individual freedom of speakers.

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<sup>9</sup> For a wide survey of the history of syntactic theories in the twenty century see Graffi (2001).

Corollary of the dynamic approach to syntax, in common with Saussure's thought, is the hostility for "empty categories": "the concept of a *dislocated expression* is replaced by the concept of an *initially unfixed node*" (Kempson et al., 2003); in other words, there aren't "phonological zeros" but only mobile expressions (waiting for fulfilling some appropriated requirement). And the non-existence of empty categories implies, for Saussure as well as for the authors of the Dynamic Syntax, the impossibility of distinguish between different representational levels in the natural language structural characterization, between surface and deep layers in the linguistic structures:

Word order is undeniably an abstract entity. But it is none the less true that it owes its existence to the concrete units involved, which are aligned in a single dimension. It would be a mistake to believe in the existence of an incorporeal syntax apart from these material units distributed in space. In English, *the man I have seen* illustrates a syntactic feature apparently represented by zero, whereas French marks it by *que*, as in *l'homme que j'ai vu*. But it is just this comparison with French that produces the illusion that nothing can express something... The very fact that we do understand a complex of forms such as this English example demonstrates its adequacy to express the thought in question. (Saussure, 1922, p. 191, English translation by Harris, 1986).

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