

### **3.3. COMPETENCE AND PERFORMANCE,**

Noam Chomsky's concept of competence and performance is somewhat similar to Saussure's concept of language and parole. Competence, according to Chomsky, is the native speaker's knowledge of his language, the system of rules he has mastered, his ability to produce and understand a vast number of new sentences. Competence is the study of the system of rules, performance is the study of actual sentences themselves, of the actual use of the language in real-life situation. So the speaker's knowledge of the structure of a language is his linguistic competence and the way in which he uses it, is his linguistic performance.

Competence is, then, an underlying mental system, it underlies actual behaviour, linguistic ability to analyse language, detecting ambiguities, ignoring mistakes, understanding new sentences, producing entirely new sentences. Whereas competence is a set of Principles which a speaker masters, performance is what a speaker does. The former is a kind of code, the latter is an act of encoding or decoding. Competence concerns the kind of structures the person has succeeded in mastering and internalizing, whether or not he utilizes them, in practice, without interference from many of the factors that play a role in actual behaviour. "For any one concerned with intellectual processes, or with any question that goes beyond mere date arranging, it is the question of competence that is fundamental. Obviously one can find out about competence only by studying performance; but this study must be carried out in devious and clever ways, if any serious result is to be obtained."<sup>2</sup> In this way, the abstract, internal grammar which enables a speaker to utter and understand an infinite number of potential utterances is a speaker's competence.



This competence is free from the interference of memory span, characteristic errors, lapses of attention, etc. "The speaker has represented in his brain a grammar that gives an ideal account of the structure of the sentences of his language, but, when actually faced with the task of speaking or understanding many other factors, acts upon his underlying linguistic competence to produce actual performance. He may be confused or have several things in mind, change his plans in midstream, etc. Since this is obviously the condition of most actual linguistic performance, a direct record—an actual corpus—is almost useless as it stands, for linguistic analysis of any but the most superficial kind."<sup>1</sup>

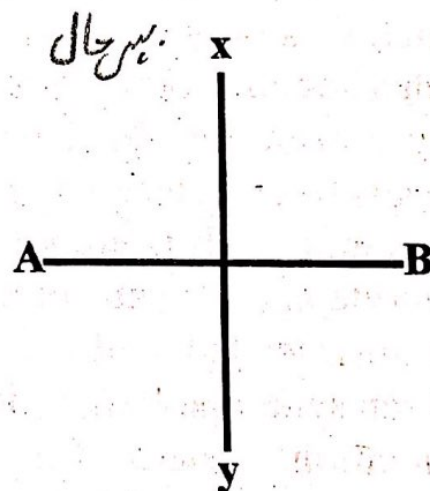
Competence in any sphere can be identified with capacity or ability, as opposed to actual performance. Competence in linguistics is the 'linguistic ability—the ability to produce and understand indefinitely many novel sentences; it refers to the native speaker's innate creativity and productivity implicit in the normal use of language.

This distinction has caused a lot of argument in current-day linguistics. Some socio-linguists regard it as an unreal distinction which ignores the importance of studying language in its social setting. They say that many of today's grammars are based on unjustified assumptions concerning a speaker's competence rather on his performance. But the division is a useful one, if not carried to extremes. In an ideal situation, the two approaches should complement each other. Any statement concerning a speaker's competence must ultimately be based on data collected while studying his performance.

Although Chomsky's competence/performance dichotomy closely resembles Saussure's *langue/parole*, yet the main difference is that Saussure stressed the sociological implications of *langue*, while Chomsky stresses the psychological implications of competence. These distinctions are also parallel to a distinction made between *code* and *message* in communications engineering. A *code* is the pre-arranged signalling system. A *message* is an actual message sent through that system.



community without reference to historical considerations. Saussure's distinction between the diachronic and synchronic investigation of the language is a distinction between these two opposing view-points. Nevertheless, valid diachronic work has to be based on good synchronic work, because no valid statements about linguistic change can be made unless good descriptions of a language do exist. Similarly a synchronic statement may well reflect certain historical developments, for example, two vowels of reel and real are described as being basically different because the historical facts show different sources of the ee and the ea.



*Figure (3.1)*

### 3.1. SYNCHRONY AND DIACHRONY

Synchrony is the study of a language in a given time, diachrony through time. Synchronic or descriptive linguistics studies a language at one period in time; it investigates the way people speak in a given speech community at a given point in time. Diachronic or historical (or temporal) linguistics studies the development of languages through time; for example, the way in which French and Italian have evolved from Latin, or Hindi from Sanskrit; it also investigates language changes. Saussure says : "synchronic linguistics will be concerned with the logical and psychological relations that bind together co-existing terms and form a system in the collective mind of speakers. Diachronic linguistics on the contrary, will study relations that bind together successive terms not perceived by the collective mind but substituted for each other without forming a system." <sup>1</sup> Synchronic linguistics deals with systems, diachronic with units. These two approaches have to be kept clearly apart and pursued separately. Saussure considered synchronic linguistics to be more important : "the first thing that strikes us when we study the facts of language is that their succession in time does not exist in so far as the speaker is concerned. He is confronted with a state. That is why the linguist who wishes to understand a state, must discard all knowledge of everything that produced it and ignore diachrony."<sup>2</sup>

The difference between descriptive (synchronic) and historical (diachronic) linguistics can be illustrated by the following diagram of Ferdinand de Saussure, who was the first person to stress the necessity of distinguishing between the two approaches :

In the diagram, (fig 3.1), axis AB is the synchronic, static axis. It can intersect at any point with XY, the moving, diachronic axis.

Throughout the nineteenth century linguistic research was very strongly historical in character. One of the principal aims of the subject was to group languages into families on the basis of their independent developments from a common source, or to study language change. The description of particular languages was made subsidiary to this general aim, and there was little interest in the study of the language of a given



in fixed numbers nor in a definite order. If we associate **painful, delightful, fruitful**, etc. we are unable to predict the number of words that the memory will suggest or the order in which they will appear. A particular word is like the centre of constellation; it is the point of convergence of an indefinite number of co-ordinated terms." (Saussure 1959 : 126). In a word, the paradigmatic relationship is vertical in absentia; it is a choice relationship, it operates in phonemes, words, morphemes. The syntagmatic relationship, on the other hand, is horizontal, in presentia. The dichotomy between the two can be illustrated in the following manner :-

We	can	come	tomorrow	Syntagmatic relationship
He	may	go	next	P A R A D I G M A T I C ↓
She	will	ask	soon	
You	could	sleep	now	
I	would	eat	.....	
They	should	write	.....	
Boys	.....	.....	.....	
Girls	.....	.....	.....	

### 3.5. SYNTAGMATIC AND PARADIGMATIC

The structure of a language, according to Saussure, can be segmented into two kinds of relationships—the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic. "Combinations supported by linearity are syntagms".<sup>1</sup> Words become a sentence because they are chained together. So syntagmatic relationship is the combinatorial or chain relationship. For example, **We can come tomorrow** is a sentence because in this linear arrangement of words **we** is correlated with **can**, **can** with **come** and so on. The relationship is that of Pronoun+Auxiliary Verb+Main Verb+Temporal Adverb. This relationship is restricted to certain orders. That is why **come can tomorrow we** is not a sentence. "In the syntagm a term acquires its value because it stands in opposition to everything that precedes or follows it, or to both." (Saussure 1959 : 123). In the sentence cited above **we** is not what **can** is, **can** is not what **come** is, and **come** is not what **tomorrow** is. Each of these words differ from all others.

The paradigmatic relationships are contrastive or choice relationships. Words that have something in common, are associated in the memory, resulting in groups marked by diverse relations. For example, the English word **learning** will unconsciously call to mind a host of other words—**study, knowledge, discipline**, etc. All these words are related in some way. This kind of relationship is called associative or paradigmatic relationship. Here the co-ordinations are outside discourse, and are not supported by linearity. They are relations in absentia, and are vertical type relations. Their seat is in the brain; they are a part of the inner storehouse that makes up language of each speaker." (Saussure 1959: 123)

"Whereas a syntagm immediately suggests an order of succession and fixed number of elements, terms in associative family occur neither

---

1. The study of syntagms should not be confused with syntax which is only part of the study of syntagms.



## SECTION I

### 5.1. WHAT IS PHONOLOGY ?

According to Bloomfield phonology is the organization of sounds into patterns. In order to fulfil the communicative functions, languages organize their material, the vocal noises, into recurrent bits and pieces arranged in sound patterns. It is the study of this formal organisation of languages which is known as phonology.

What is sound ? How and where is it produced from ? How is it received by the ears ? How and why is one sound different from the other ?—questions like these are the subject-matter of Phonology.

### 5.2. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PHONETICS

#### AND PHONOLOGY

The difference between phonetics and phonology is that of generality and particularity. Whereas phonetics is the science of speech sounds, their production, transmission and reception and the signs to represent them in general with no particular reference to any one language, phonology is the study of vocal sounds and sound changes, phonemes and their variants in a particular language. If phonetics can be likened to a world, phonology is a country. Phonetics is one and the same for all the languages of the world, but the phonology of one language will differ from the phonology of another. According to John Lyons, "Phonetics differs from phonology.... in that it considers speech sounds independently of their paradigmatic opposition and syntagmatic combinations in particular languages," and that phonology is the level at which the linguist describes the sounds of a particular language (*New Horizons in Linguistics*, 1972 : 21)

The subject-matter of phonology is the selected phonetic material from the total resources available to human beings from phonetics. The human vocal system can produce a very large number of different speech sounds. Members of a particular speech community speaking that particular language, however, use only a limited number of these sounds. Every language makes its own selection of sounds and organizes them into characteristic patterns. This selection of sounds and their arrangement into patterns constitute the phonology of the language.

To quote Robins, "Phonetics and phonology are both concerned with the same subject-matter or aspect of language, speech sounds, as the audible result of articulation, but they are concerned with them from different points of view. Phonetics is general (that is, concerned with speech sounds as such



### 4.1. DEFINITION OF PHONETICS

Phonetics is the scientific study of the production, transmission and reception of speech sounds. It studies the medium of spoken language. Touching upon physiology and physics, phonetics is now a pure science that studies speech processes, including the anatomy, neurology and pathology of speech, as well as the articulation, description, classification, production and perception of speech sounds. It looks at speech from three distinct but interdependent viewpoints : it studies the speech organs, which produce sounds of language; it studies waves, the physical form in which sounds are transmitted through the air from one person to another; and it studies the way in which human beings perceive sounds through the medium of the ear.

Phonetics studies the defining characteristics of all human vocal noise, and concentrates its attention on those sounds which occur in the languages of the world. In other words, phoneticians try to study how the various organs of speech—the lungs, the larynx, the soft palate, the tongue and the lip—function in the production of speech. They also attempt to offer articulatory descriptions of various sounds by describing the air-stream-mechanism and the phonatory and articulatory processes involved. Acoustic phoneticians examine the physical nature of sounds and analyse the speech waves with the help of various instruments.

### 4.2. HISTORY OF PHONETICS