

## Saussure revisited: the delineation of *langue* and *parole* using a prototype-category model

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It is little over a century since Saussure (1916) suggested that language is both a mental construct (*langue*) and a sociological event (*parole*).

To this day, we have failed to stipulate which language elements belong to *langue* and which to *parole*, or even suggest how these two domains differ, except in very general ways.

The Chomskyan perspective has skirted around the idea of *langue*, and Chomsky (1986) has seen *parole* as unworthy of investigation.

Halliday's Functional Grammar, by contrast, looks at language sociologically, and is rooted firmly in the area of *parole*, with little attention given to language in the mind.

In this presentation we will use a simple system, the prototype-category approach, to characterize *langue* and *parole* and delineate clearly how they differ.

Lexical categories like FURNITURE have prototypes or best examples, such as *table*, *chair* and *sofa*, as do grammatical categories. The Existential category (there is/are in English, and *imasu/arimasu* (います/あります) in Japanese) has a range of at least six grammatical variations, including Exist+NP+PP (there is a book on the table) and Exist+NP+VP (there is a man waiting at the door).

By eliciting existential data from over 100 native speakers of English and Japanese respectively, speakers of both languages overwhelmingly produced the pattern Exist+NP+PP, suggesting this as the prototype for both languages.

When this data is compared with spoken usage-based corpus data (Langacker, 1987), the corpus data is non-prototypical and involves a whole range of structural variation.

We suggest therefore that *langue* seems to be prototypical, that the mind appears to organize categories rooted in their own prototypes, while *parole* makes use of the full range of linguistic possibilities, improvising and expanding on the basic prototypical-categorical language to weave structurally wide-ranging, lexically abstract patterns that reflect the full possibilities of human communication in the real world.

### References:

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