

Synchrony and Diachrony

Synchrony and diachrony are two different and complementary viewpoints in linguistic analysis.

A synchronic approach considers a language without taking its history into account. The word is built on the Ancient Greek words 'syn' meaning 'with' and 'chrony' meaning 'time'. Synchronic linguistics aims at describing language rules at a specific point of time, even though they may have been different at an earlier stage of the language.

A diachronic approach considers the development and evolution of a language through history. The word is built on the Ancient Greek words 'dia' meaning 'through' and 'chrony' meaning 'time'. Historical linguistics is typically a diachronic study.

The concepts were theorized by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, Professor of General Linguistics in Geneva from 1896 to 1911, and appeared in writing in his posthumous work 'Course in General Linguistics' published in 1916. In contrast with most of his predecessors, who focused on historical evolution of languages, Saussure emphasized the primacy of synchronic analysis to understand their inner functioning.