

# Modern Literary Criticism: Important Terminologies

## Langue and parole

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**Langue** (French, meaning "language") and **parole** (meaning "speaking") are linguistic terms distinguished by Ferdinand de Saussure in his *Course in General Linguistics*. *Langue* encompasses the abstract, systematic rules and conventions of a signifying system; it is independent of, and pre-exists, individual users. *Langue* involves the principles of language, without which no meaningful utterance, "parole", would be possible. *Parole* refers to the concrete instances of the use of *langue*. This is the individual, personal phenomenon of language as a series of speech acts made by a linguistic subject. Saussure did not concern himself overly with *parole*; however, the structure of *langue* is revealed through the study of *parole*. The distinction is similar to that made about language by Wilhelm von Humboldt, between *energeia* (active doing) and *ergon* (the product of that doing). Saussure drew an analogy to chess to explain the concept of *langue* and *parole*. He compared *langue* to the rules of chess—the norms for playing the game—and compared the moves that an individual chooses to make—the individual's preferences in playing the game—to the *parole*.

## Diachronic / Synchronic

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(Gk, *chronos*, time; *dia*-, through, across; *syn*-, with, together).

A diachronic study or analysis concerns itself with the evolution and change over time of that which is studied; it is roughly equivalent to *historical*. Thus diachronic linguistics is also known as historical linguistics.

A synchronic study or analysis, in contrast, limits its concern to a particular moment of time. Thus synchronic linguistics takes a language as a working system at a particular point in time without concern for how it has developed to its present state.

Synchronic and diachronic approaches can reach quite different conclusions. For example, a Germanic strong verb like English *sing* - *sang* - *sung* is irregular when viewed synchronically: the native speaker's brain processes these as learned forms, whereas the derived forms of regular verbs are processed quite differently, by the application of productive rules (for example, adding *-ed* to the basic form of a verb as in *walk* - *walked*). This is an insight of psycholinguistics, relevant also for language didactics, both of which are synchronic disciplines. However a

diachronic analysis will show that the strong verb is the remnant of a fully regular system of internal vowel changes; historical linguistics seldom uses the category "irregular verb".

## Syntagm and Paradigm

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Semiology distinguishes between two fundamental dimensions of analysis: the syntagmatic and paradigmatic. From the Saussurian proposition that the individual symbol is arbitrary and dependent for its comprehensibility on the language system (*langue*) of which it is a part, it follows that the inter-relationships of symbols within this system is of crucial concern. Saussure argued that these relationships could be classified into a horizontal - linear - sequential arrangement - the **syntagmatic**; and a vertical - non-linear - associative one that relies on links forged by memory, custom, and culture - the **paradigmatic**. A refinement of this is to say, after Roman Jakobson, that the paradigmatic dimension involves selection amongst possible alternatives, e.g. tree, shrub, bush, while the syntagmatic involves a process of combination, e.g. *the cat sat on the mat*, but not *the sat cat on mat the*.

Syntagmatic relations define combinatory possibilities - the way symbols might combine to form an intelligible sequence (sometimes described as a 'chain' of signifiers). Paradigmatic relations, on the other hand, are built upon the sets (categories) of associated terms which may or may not replace one another. To select one term from an associative set identifies a) what category of things it is appropriate to use at this point in the communication, i.e., an animal rather than a thing, as in 'the cat sat on the mat' and b) excludes other terms from the same set, i.e., the conventional expression uses the term cat, although it could be replaced by dog, mouse, or even goat. More generally, paradigmatic sets are formed by an association amongst terms such that they are seen to share common characteristics but in relationship to which they also offer difference.

## Sex and Gender

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Sex refers to the biological distinction between males and females; by contrast, *gender* concerns the social differences between males and females. Research in sociology focuses on gender rather than sex; sociologists distinguish between sex and gender to study differences between human males and females with greater precision. Whereas sex is based on physical differences, gender is based on social factors such as values, perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes. For example, men and women have different genitalia;

this is a difference of sex. Men and woman also face different social expectations, as when women are expected to be more nurturing than men; this is a difference of gender. Gender varies across time and culture, as different groups have different beliefs about appropriate behaviour for males and females.

## Three Waves of Feminism

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Feminism, in the most generic of definitions, is the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes, and organized activity on behalf of women's rights and common interests. There are many "feminists" and many different theories. However, feminism can be broken up into three waves; first-wave which spans from the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, second-wave which spans from the early 1960's through the late 1980's, and the third-wave which started in the early 1990's, and is continuing through present time.

The first-wave of feminism began in the United Kingdom and the United States around the nineteenth century and lasted until the early twentieth century. The main focus of this movement at this time was on de jure inequalities, or officially mandated inequalities. There were many people during this time who were considered to be feminists, Mary Wollstonecraft, Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone, Olympia Brown, and Helen Pitts; there are countless more. Most people consider the first-wave to have ended when the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was passed, granting women the right to vote. This major victory of the movement also included reforms in education, in the workplace and professions, and in healthcare.

The second-wave of feminism refers to the period of feminism beginning in the early 1960's and extending through the late 1980's. Unlike the first-wave, the second-wave's focus was on the de facto inequalities, or unofficial inequalities, and also felt that de jure and de facto inequalities were inextricably linked issues that needed to be addressed together if there was ever going to be any hope of change. This wave encouraged women to understand aspects of their personal lives and deeply politicized, and reflective of a sexist structure of power. The key word of this wave was education, of women and of men. There were also some key players in this wave such as Simone de Beauvoir, Bella Abzug, Lorraine Bethel, Charlotte Bunch, Angela Davis, Andrea Dworkin, Jo Freeman, Betty Friedan, Michele Wallace, and Ann Simonton.

The third-wave of feminism began in the early 1990's and is continuing today. Since there was this feeling of failure left throughout, the third-wave rose as a response to this feeling, and in full force. It is also believed that this wave was in response to the backlash against

initiatives and movements that were unexpectedly created by the second-wave. Again, with either of the two waves, there are important people we must consider, such as, Judith Butler, Martha Davis, Betty Dodson, Miranda July, Sandra Oh, and Molly Yard.

## Androcentrism and Gynocentrism

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**Androcentrism** (Greek, *andro-*, "man, male") is the practice, conscious or otherwise, of placing male human beings or the masculine point of view at the center of one's view of the world and its culture and history. Thus androcentrism can be understood as a societal fixation on masculinity whereby all things originate. Under androcentrism, masculinity is normative and all things outside of masculinity are defined as *other*. According to Perkins Gilman, masculine patterns of life and masculine mindsets claimed **universality** while female ones were considered as **deviance**.

**Gynocentrism** (Greek, *gyno-*, "woman", or "female") is the ideological practice, conscious or otherwise, of asserting the female point of view on a wide range of social issues. The perceptions, needs, and desires of women have primacy in this approach, where the female view is the point of departure or lens through which issues are addressed or analysed. Ideologically, gynocentrism prioritizes females hierarchically as the overriding focus, at the exclusion of all else; and as a result emulates or may be interpreted as **misandry**, the hatred and prejudice towards men.

## Patriarchy

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**Patriarchy** is a social system in which males are the primary authority figures central to social organization, occupying roles of political leadership, moral authority, and control of property, and where fathers hold authority over women and children. It implies the institutions of male rule and privilege, and entails female subordination. Many patriarchal societies are also patrilineal, meaning that property and title are inherited by the male lineage. The female equivalent is matriarchy.

Historically, patriarchy has manifested itself in the social, legal, political, and economic organization of a range of different cultures.

Patriarchy literally means "the rule of the father" and comes from the Greek πατριάρχης (*patriarkhēs*), "father of a race" or "chief of a race, patriarch", which is a compound of πατρία (*patria*), "lineage, descent" (from *patēr*, "father") and (*arkhō*), "I rule".

Historically, the term patriarchy was used to refer to autocratic rule by the male head of a family. However, in modern times, it more generally refers to social systems in which power is primarily held by adult men.

## Gynocriticism

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**Gynocriticism** is the historical study of women writers as a distinct literary tradition. (Friedman 18) Elaine Showalter coined this term in her essay "Toward a Feminist Poetics." It refers to a criticism that constructs "a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories" (quoted by Groden and Kreiswirth from "Toward a Feminist Poetics," *New Feminist Criticism*, 131). The work of gynocriticism has been criticized by recent feminists for being essentialist, following too closely along the lines of Sigmund Freud and New Criticism, and leaving out lesbians and women of color.

Gynocriticism is the study of feminist literature written by female writers inclusive of the interrogation of female authorship, images, the feminine experience and ideology, and the history and development of the female literary tradition. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries respectively, Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir began to review and evaluate the female image and sexism in the works of male writers. During the 1960s the feminist movement saw a reaction and opposition to the male-oriented discourse of previous years. Most thoroughly developed during the late 1970s and early 1980s, gynocriticism was a result of the interrogative critiques utilized in post-structuralism and psychoanalysis.

## Hybridity

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*Hybrid talk*, the rhetoric of hybridity, is fundamentally associated with the emergence of post-colonial discourse and its critiques of cultural imperialism. It is the second stage in the history of hybridity, characterized by literature and theory that study the effects of mixture (hybridity) upon identity and culture. The principal theorists of hybridity are Homi Bhabha, Néstor García Canclini, Stuart Hall, Gayatri Spivak, and Paul Gilroy, whose works respond to the multi-cultural awareness that emerged in the early 1990s. Moreover, in their discussions of hybridity, there recurs the literature of post-colonial and of magical realist writers, such as Salman Rushdie, Gabriel García Márquez, Milan Kundera, and J. M. Coetzee.

In the theoretic development of hybridity, the key text is *The Location of Culture* (1994), by Homi Bhabha, wherein the liminality of hybridity is presented as a paradigm of colonial

anxiety. The principal proposition is the hybridity of colonial identity, which, as a cultural form, made the colonial masters ambivalent, and, as such, altered the authority of power; as such, Bhabha's arguments are important to the conceptual discussion of *hybridity*. Although the original, theoretic development of hybridity addressed the narratives of cultural imperialism, Bhabha's work also comprehends the cultural politics of the condition of being "a migrant" in the contemporary metropolis. Yet, hybridity no longer is solely associated with migrant populations and with border towns, it also applies contextually to the flow of cultures and their interactions.

That critique of cultural imperialist hybridity meant that the rhetoric of hybridity progressed to challenging essentialism, and is applied to sociological theories of identity, multiculturalism, and racism. Moreover, *polyphony* is another important element of hybridity theory, by Mikhail Bakhtin, which is applied to hybrid discourses presented in folklore and anthropology.

## Grand narratives and little narratives

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The terms 'Grand narratives' and 'Little narratives' have their origin in the French terms, *grand récit* and *petit récit*. *Grand récit* is also known as 'master narrative'. The terms have been given widespread currency by Jean-Francois Lyotard's book *The Postmodern Condition*. Lyotard distinguishes the modern by its association with what he calls grand narratives:

"I will use the term modern to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse of this kind making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative ..."(Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, xxiii).

A grand narrative is thus a means for emplotting a life or culture; to give one's actions or one's life meaning by picturing oneself as a character within an already written narrative, one whose final conclusion is assured in advance.

In popular usage the term is typically applied to ideological systems such as Marxism, or religious outlooks like Christianity or Islam. In Lyotard's view the day of such all-embracing, totalizing systems of belief has passed. From now on we derive the meaning from little narratives, from local justifications. Lyotard thus argues that the society of the future falls less within the province of Structuralism or Systems theory, and more with a pragmatics of language particles, a world of many language games (Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, xxiv).

# Hyperreality

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Hyperreality is a term used in semiotics and postmodern philosophy to describe an inability of consciousness to distinguish reality from a simulation of reality, especially in technologically advanced post-modern societies. Hyperreality is seen as a condition in which what is real and what is fiction are seamlessly blended together so that there is no clear distinction between where one ends and the other begins. It allows the commingling of physical reality with virtual reality (VR) and human intelligence with artificial intelligence (AI). Individuals may find themselves for different reasons, more in tune or involved with the hyperreal world and less with the physical real world. Some famous proponents of hyperreality/hyperrealism include Jean Baudrillard, Albert Borgmann, Daniel J. Boorstin, Neil Postman, and Umberto Eco.