Course Notes

Historical Linguistics seeks to:

1. Study language in relation to other disciplines
2. Identify and follow language change
3. Classify languages
4. Compare languages to identify common features
5. Investigate the origin and history of words

De Saussure questioned and rejected the practices of Historical Linguistics. He argued that:

1. Linguistics should be an independent discipline.
2. Linguistics is synchronic, meaning that it should deal with language as it is, describing the structure, sound and meaning.
3. Language is a sign where a word, or a signifier refers to a concept, or a signifier.

Saussure also used the word ‘langage’ to refer to the faculty of language, while the word ‘langue’ was introduced to denote the system of rules, or the theoretical knowledge of language. The word ‘parole’ is used to stand for the act of speaking. This latter differs among members of a community sharing the same system, or ‘langue’.

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