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Saussurean Tradition in Linguistics

John E. Joseph

The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) established his reputation at an early age, with his 1878 monograph *Mémoire sur le système primitif des voyelles dans les langues indo-européennes* ('the original vowel system of the Indo-European languages'). The *Mémoire* posited the existence of two Proto-Indo-European 'sonant coefficients' which appeared in no attested forms of the daughter languages, but could account for certain vowel developments which had previously appeared irregular. (Fifty years later an *H* with exactly the distribution of Saussure's sonant coefficients was discovered in Hittite, confirming his hypothesis.) After his 1881 doctoral thesis on the absolute genitive in Sanskrit, Saussure published no more books, only articles on specific topics in historical linguistics.

But in 1907, 1908–09, and 1910–11, he gave at the University of Geneva three courses in general linguistics, a topic on which he never published anything. Soon after his death in 1913, his colleagues Charles Bally (1865–1947) and Albert Sechehaye (1870–1946), appreciating the extraordinary nature of the courses Saussure had given, began gathering what manuscript notes they could find, together with the careful and detailed notebooks of students who had taken one or more of the three courses, especially Albert Riedlinger (1883–1978). From these they fashioned the *Cours de linguistique générale*, published at Lausanne and Paris in 1916. It would become one of the most influential books of the twentieth century, not just for linguistics, but for virtually every realm of intellectual endeavor.

In order to trace the Saussurean tradition in twentieth-century linguistics, this article considers nine key elements of Saussure's view of language. For each a summary is given of the condition prior to Saussure, of Saussure's own view, and of how his view has shaped linguistic inquiry in the years since the publication of the *Cours*.

1. The Establishment of Synchronic Linguistics

At the time of Saussure's lectures, the study of language had been dominated for over 30 years by (a) historical work on the language of written texts (work which had only gradually come to be distinguished from 'philology,' inquiry aimed not at the language but at better understanding of the text itself); (b) dialectological work based on field investigation of local dialects; (c) phonetics, which demanded increasingly minute observation in strong adherence to the positivistic spirit; and (d) psychology, the principal domain of a global perspective on language, dominated by the ideas of Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835) and his followers, notably Heymann Steinthal (1823–99) and Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920) (see *Trends in Twentieth-Century Linguistics: An Overview*).

A fifth approach existed—the study of language as a general phenomenon independent of historical or psychological considerations—but it had made little progress since the death of its principal exponent, the American scholar William Dwight Whitney (1827–94). Furthermore, the publication of a major study of language in 1900 by the Leipzig psychologist Wundt appeared to signal that the new century would give the 'general' study of language over fully to that discipline.

Saussure's problem was to delineate a study of language that would be neither historical nor ahistorical, neither psychological nor apsychological; yet more systematic than Whitneyan general linguistics, so as to be at least the equal in intellectual and methodological rigor to the historical, psychological, and phonetic approaches. His solution was to make a strong distinction between the study of language as a static system, which he called 'synchronic' linguistics, and the study of language change, which he called 'diachronic' linguistics (or, until 1908, 'evolutive'). Saussure's rejection of the traditional term 'historical' seems to have been based in part on a disdain for the reliance it suggested upon extralinguistic factors and written texts, and in part on a desire for terminological symmetry with 'synchronic.' Synchronic linguistics would henceforth designate the study of language systems in and of themselves, divorced from external

considerations of a historical or psychological sort, or any factor having to do with actual speech production.

This is the single most sweeping of Saussurean traditions: for insofar as twentieth-century linguists have focused their efforts neither on simple description of languages, nor on their evolution, nor on their connection to 'national psychology,' they have realized Saussure's program of synchronic linguistics. Furthermore, historical linguistics has largely become the diachronic enterprise envisioned by Saussure (though the term 'historical' continues in general usage), and even the purely 'descriptive' approaches have been profoundly marked by the Saussurean concept of language as a system where *tout se tient* ('everything holds together'), a phrase often associated with Saussure, though there is no record of his using it in his Geneva lectures. However, it was used in a lecture delivered by Antoine Meillet in 1906 in reference to Saussure's *Mémoire* (see Meillet 1921: 16).

In establishing synchronic linguistics, Saussure was not engaging in an exercise of scholarly exactitude, but serving notice upon psychologists and others that the general study of language should fall to persons with historically based training in specific languages and language families, rather than to experts in the functioning of the mind. Many of Saussure's statements about language can best be understood in conjunction with this need for establishing the autonomy of linguistic inquiry vis-à-vis adjoining fields.

2. The Primacy of Spoken Language

The idea that speech is the original and primal form of language, and writing a secondary imitation of speech, runs counter to the general popular accordance of greater prestige to writing. Yet the primacy of spoken over written language became embedded in linguistics in the early nineteenth century, doubtless in connection with the Romantic belief that folk traditions embodied the national spirit more deeply than urban practices like writing, which were more subject to external influences. The trend continued over the course of the nineteenth century as linguistics moved away from philology and became increasingly concerned with the gathering of spoken forms from living dialects. By the turn of the twentieth century few linguists would have disputed that the best source for determining the original form of anything in any language was to reconstruct it from its living descendant dialects, and not from written records surviving from intermediate stages.

Saussure formalized the marginalization of written language as well as anyone, and if its survival is often viewed as a Saussurean tradition, it is because he has borne the brunt of the 1967 attack on this marginalization by Jacques Derrida (b.1930). For Saussure, writing is not language, but a separate entity whose only 'mission' is to represent real (spoken) language. The 'danger' of writing is that it creates the illusion of being more real and more stable than speech, and therefore gains ascendancy over speech in the popular mind. Derrida demonstrated the irrationality and internal inconsistency of this extreme phonocentrism; in his deconstructionist wordplay, all language is a kind of 'writing' (in a sense that is unique to Derrida).

But so deeply ingrained is this tradition in twentieth-century linguistics that few linguists saw the need to respond to Derrida, whose critique was summarily dismissed. Well over 10 years passed before linguists began to admit that the marginalization of writing had been carried to an irrational extreme; and despite some tentative steps toward a linguistics of writing in various quarters, this tradition of privileging spoken language—shared though not founded by Saussure—is in no danger of passing away.

3. The Object of Linguistics: *Langue* versus *Parole*

The role of the human will in language production has constituted a problem for linguistic thought at least since Plato's *Cratylus*: humans are constrained by the conventions of language, yet it is through language that will and individuality are shaped and realized. Since modern science is predicated upon the elimination of the will from any object of inquiry, human desire, action, and creation came to be excluded from the 'scientific' study of language. This has necessitated a considerable abstraction of language away from its role in human affairs, treating it as if it existed independently of speakers and speech acts. But here two problems arose: (a) the metaphor of language as organism (which qua metaphor had been fruitfully employed by early nineteenth-century linguists) became extremely attractive as a way of talking about language independently of speakers, and as Michel Bréal (1832–1915) complained in the introduction to his *Essai de sémantique* (1897), the metaphor was taken literally by many people, giving rise to gross misunderstandings; (b) Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie* ('national psychology') seemed to offer a more sophisticated way of dealing with linguistic phenomena: it eliminated the metaphysical abstraction of 'language,' but replaced it with still less satisfactory explanations that revolved around the 'spirit of peoples,' were untestable, and could not sustain any approach to language that was detailed or systematic.

Saussure's contribution was to dissect the total phenomenon of language (*langage*) into (a) actual speech production (*parole*), including the role of the individual will, and (b) the socially shared system of signs (*langue*) that makes production and comprehension possible. Although he spoke of a linguistics of *parole* that would cover the phonetic side of language and the products of individual will, Saussure made it clear that the linguistics of *langue* is the essential, real linguistics. *Langue* is beyond the direct reach of the individual will. Saussure's formulation is both a

defense and a refinement of the procedures of traditional grammar and historical linguistics, yet at the same time it stakes out an autonomous realm for general linguistic inquiry.

Despite much debate among scholars as to just what Saussure meant by *langage*, *langue*, and *parole*, the distinction has held firm throughout twentieth-century linguistics. It has been suggested that certain work in stylistics (e.g., by Saussure's disciple Bally) and in discourse pragmatics constitutes an attempt at a linguistics of *parole*, but it is not yet clear how any aspect of language, once it is systematized, fails to enter the sphere of *langue* (see *Geneva School, after Saussure*). The human will remains in exile from linguistics, and *langue* (naturally somewhat evolved from Saussure's original conception of it) continues to be the object of study of virtually every approach to which the name 'linguistics' is accorded (see Sect. 4).

4. *Langue* as a Social Fact

Saussure's insistence upon the social nature of *langue* grew during the years in which he lectured on general linguistics, largely at the expense of psychologically based considerations. Again, this may be tied in part to the need to establish synchronic linguistics independently of the dominant post-Humboldtian psychological establishment. The young science of sociology embodied the spirit of positivism, with which it shared the same recognized founder, Auguste Comte (1798–1857). Positivism was coming to be equated with scientificness in general thought, making classical psychology appear old-fashioned and metaphysical. For the sociologists, Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie*, based on non-empirical generalizations (and more akin to what today would pass as philosophy of mind, not psychology) was already unacceptably passé.

Much ink has been spilled regarding the degree to which Saussure's conception of language was directly influenced by work in sociology, particularly by Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) and Gabriel Tarde (1843–1904). Saussure's former student and lifelong intimate Antoine Meillet (1866–1936) was closely allied with Durkheim and his journal *L'Année sociologique*; and there is often a close correspondence between Saussure's and Durkheim's use of terms like 'social fact' and 'collective consciousness.' But since Saussure never cites Durkheim or Tarde (he was after all teaching a course, not writing a book), support for any claim of direct influence is lacking.

In Saussure's view, *langue* is a 'treasury' or 'collection of impressions' that is 'deposited' in identical form in the brain of each member of a given speech community. He uses the metaphor of a dictionary, of which every individual possesses an identical copy. What the individual does with this socially-shared system falls entirely into the realm of *parole*. This distinction (which was not yet clear to Saussure at the time of his first course in general linguistics of 1907) differentiates Saussure's dichotomy from that between 'competence' and 'performance' established in the 1960s by Noam Chomsky (b.1928). Chomsky explicitly related competence with *langue* and performance with *parole*, though in actual fact the analogy was only partial: for Chomsky, competence (derived from innate universal grammar) is mental and individual, and performance the locus of its social actuation. Furthermore the considerable differences between Saussure's orientation toward language as a semiotic system and Chomsky's toward competence as a mental faculty make any such equations difficult.

Saussure's views on the social nature of language have had a great resonance in linguistics and many other fields. By the mid-1930s it was commonplace to equate 'synchronic linguistics' (indeed, 'scientific linguistics') with 'social linguistics,' and to include under this heading the work of Meillet and his many European disciples, including Alf Sommerfelt (1892–1965) and Joseph Vendryes (1875–1960); the American structuralists Leonard Bloomfield (1887–1949) and Edward Sapir (1884–1939); and even the 'social behaviorists' (or 'pragmatists') John Dewey (1859–1952) and George Herbert Mead (1863–1931). Bloomfield in particular exploited the power of the social as an antidote to the psychological (or 'mentalist') approach at the time of his conversion from Wundtian social psychology to empirical behaviorism (see *American Structuralism*). Beginning in the 1940s dialect geographers such as Raven McDavid (1911–1984) began to realize the crucial importance of social factors in linguistic production; around the same time, the sociologist Paul Hanly Furfey (1896–1992) began training students jointly in the techniques of social class measurement and descriptive linguistics. By the early 1950s inquiry combining empirical sociological and linguistic techniques was underway, to be refined significantly by William Labov (b.1927) and others in the 1960s.

In terms of Saussurean traditions, sociolinguistics pursues the Saussurean view of the social nature of *langue*, while Chomskyan generative linguistics (to which sociolinguistics has stood in irreconcilable contrast for a generation) pursues the Saussurean view of the mental and abstract nature of *langue*. An eventual reconciliation of this split—to which a deeper understanding of Saussure's thought may provide a clue—would certainly constitute a major breakthrough in the understanding of language.

5. *Langue* as a System of Signs: Semiology

The semiological conception of language as a collection of signs (a sign being understood as the collation of a signifying word and a signified concept) was anticipated in the philosophy of Aristotle (384–22 BC), elaborated by the Stoics, and reached its summit in the 'speculative grammar' of the twelfth

century. But starting in the fourteenth century, the view of language as a sign system began to cede pride of place to that of language as a social institution, an approach more characteristic of Plato (ca. 429–347 BC), the diffusion of whose works defines the new era of humanism that led to the Renaissance. The semiological perspective was never entirely lost, and would resurface notably among the seventeenth-century British empiricists. But the 'conventional' perspective with which it coexisted periodically overshadowed it, and the early nineteenth century was one such period, when abstract systems disembodied from human activity ceased to be of central interest (see *Aristotle and the Stoics on Language*; *Linguistics in the Later Middle Ages*; *Renaissance Linguistics: An Overview*; *Universal Language Schemes and Seventeenth-century Britain*).

As noted in Sect. 3, abstraction and disembodiment would reemerge as part of the 'scientific' spirit of the later nineteenth century; and it is thus no great coincidence that the 'semiotic' perspective on language was reopened independently by Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) in the USA. Peirce's work in this area, like Saussure's, went unpublished during his lifetime, and was not seriously revived by philosophers until the 1930s. Only in the 1950s and 1960s were attempts made at unifying Saussurean 'semiology' (practiced mostly by European linguists) and Peircean 'semiotics' (practiced mostly by American philosophers) into a single paradigm, under the organizational leadership of Thomas A. Sebeok (b.1920).

For Saussure, the network of linguistic signs which constitute *langue* is made up of the conjunction of a *signifiant* ('signifier'), understood as a sound pattern deposited in the mind, and a *signifié* ('signified'), a concept that is also deposited in the mind. Saussure compares them to the front and back of a single sheet of paper. It is important to note that the signifier is wholly distinct from the actual uttered word, as is the signified from the actual physical thing conceived of (if one exists). Although the distinction between concept and object has existed since antiquity, that between sound pattern and actual sound is Saussure's own contribution, of which some have seen a foreshadowing in the hypothetical 'sonant coefficients' of his early *Mémoire*.

Saussure predicted that *sémiologie*—the study of signs both within and outside of language—would have linguistics as its 'pilot science' (a further challenge to psychology, for the semiological domain is precisely where language is most explicitly mental), and indeed this came to pass in the founding of modern semiotics discussed above. But while linguistics has furnished the paradigmatic model for semiotics, the impact of semiotic inquiry upon linguistics has been slow in coming, with a certain acceleration perceptible in the last decade.

The one place where linguistics has been profoundly affected is in the nearly universal acceptance of Saussure's concept of the signifier as an abstract sound pattern. This view became the cornerstone of the concept of the phoneme as elaborated by Jan Baudouin de Courtenay (1846–1929) and Mikołaj Kruszewski (1851–87) in Russia, and subsequently by N. S. Trubetzkoy (1890–1938) in Vienna and Roman Jakobson (1896–1982) in Brno and Prague; Daniel Jones (1881–1967) in the United Kingdom; and Kenneth L. Pike (b.1912) in the USA, to name only the most prominent figures (see *American Structuralism*; *Firth and the London School of Linguistics*; *Prague School Phonology*). It resulted in the banishment of experimental phonetics from linguistic inquiry in favor of more abstract phonology, based not upon physical differences of sound, but on the ability to distinguish between concepts (see Sect. 8). The distinction between a physical 'etic' level (from phon*etic*) and an abstract 'emic' level (from phon*emic*) would be extended to every level of linguistic structure, and would become a hallmark in particular of postwar American linguistics.

6. The Arbitrariness of Linguistic Signs

As with the semiological nature of language, the arbitrariness of language—the fact that a signifier like the series of sounds /p a j/ has no internal connection with the concept of a 'pie' which it signifies—reflects an ancient doctrine that had never fallen very far from the center of debate about the nature of language up through the end of the eighteenth century. Though not a direct concern for most of the historical linguists of the nineteenth century, the ancient debate between *physis* 'nature' and *nomos* 'convention' in the establishment and operation of language had been revived by Whitney and the Humboldtian psychologists, with Whitney's views of language positioned on the side of *nomos* and the Humboldtians' on the side of *physis*. Saussure, who at age 21 had met Whitney and greatly admired his work, doubtless encountered the debate there.

Saussure's precise formulation of the linguistic sign allows him to situate arbitrariness—which he called the 'first primary concept' of linguistics—precisely at the conjunction of signified and signifier, just as presented in the first sentence of the preceding paragraph. This represented an advance over most earlier formulations of arbitrariness, which (despite Aristotle) focused upon the relationship between the sign as a whole and the real-world objects conceptualized in the signified. Unfortunately, the *Cours* is not consistent in its presentation of arbitrariness, and quickly falls back into the older schema. Another problem with the presentation in the *Cours* is that the arbitrariness doctrine is first encountered in radical form in a very tense, strongly worded, and memorable section; then only later is this tempered with a section on relative arbitrariness that is often ignored, but without which Saussure's conception of language is inaccurately

understood. Saussure's point in the later section is that while signifiers are always arbitrary relative to signifieds, they can be motivated relative to other signifiers. Thus, for example, the French numbers *dix-neuf* '19' and *vingt* '20' both show arbitrariness between signifier and signified, yet *dix-neuf* is motivated relative to the numerals *dix* '10' and *neuf* '9' which compose it, hence *dix-neuf* is relatively arbitrary while *vingt* is radically so. (This is connected to Saussure's distinction between syntagmatic and associative relations, discussed in Sect. 8.) Cases of onomatopoeia, where there seems to be a motivated relationship between signifier and real-world analogue, are dismissed as not really part of linguistic systems.

The fact that the *Cours* presents the radical version of arbitrariness first and most forcefully led to its assuming the status of dogma in twentieth-century linguistics (though undoubtedly it also appealed to something deeper in the Zeitgeist). It is one of the first views of language to which budding linguists are exposed in introductory courses and textbooks, often as one of the design features of language identified in 1958 by Charles Hockett (b.1916). Like most dogmas, the radical form of arbitrariness is counterintuitive and requires a certain faith beyond what reason can sustain. Also, it is not always observable in the practice of those who preach it, particularly because of the influence of Jakobson, who beginning in the early 1930s mounted a sustained attack on radical arbitrariness through his work on markedness, child language acquisition, and aphasia, which suggested that linguistic elements differ in naturalness. Jakobson was to have a significant impact upon Chomsky, Joseph Greenberg (b.1915), and many others, with the result that language is not treated as exhibiting anything like the radical arbitrariness of the dogma. Besides Jakobson, arbitrariness was problematized by Louis Hjelmslev (1899–1965), Emile Benveniste (1902–76), and numerous others in a series of attacks on and defenses of the Saussurean view (often poorly represented) appearing from 1939 to about 1947 (*The Glossematic School of Linguistics*; *Trends in Twentieth-century Linguistics*).

7. The Linearity of Signifiers

After arbitrariness, the second primary principle of linguistics for Saussure is that linguistic signifiers are 'linear,' in the sense that, because they have a temporal existence, they represent a dimension that is measurable only as a line. This is one of the more mysterious of Saussure's ideas, in that he never made clear to what he was opposing it (he notes that it is obvious to everyone, but that its implications have not been appreciated). Linearity is part of what distinguishes spoken language as 'real' language, as opposed to writing, a secondary representation that is not necessarily linear (see Sect. 2); and it is what allows us to analyze connected discourse into meaningful units. One also detects a hedging on the inherent psychologism of the semiological view of language as consisting of perfectly juxtaposed signifiers and signifieds: Saussure here insists that signifiers exist in a completely separate dimension.

This principle has given rise to many interpretations. Jakobson formulated his doctrine of distinctive features in phonology—the idea that phonemes are not monoliths, but consist of bundles of features existing simultaneously—as part of a critique of the linearity of the signifier. Others have argued that Saussure's principle is not in disharmony with the concept of constituent features, but rather was intended (a) to deny the accumulation of signifiers, not their decomposition (a distinction which depends upon what one classifies as a signifier); (b) to insist that, however constituted, signifiers cannot be conceived apart from the dimension of time; and (c) to prepare the ground for the introduction of syntagmatic relations (see Sect. 8).

8. Syntagmatic and Paradigmatic Relations: *Langue* as Form, not Substance

Saussure distinguished between the 'syntagmatic' relations a linguistic element has with the elements preceding and following it in an utterance, and 'associative' (now usually called paradigmatic) relations it has to other elements with which it shares partial identity, but which do not occur in the particular utterance at hand. For example, in the sentence *Crime pays* the element *crime* has a syntagmatic relationship with *pays* that determines, among other things, their order relative to one another and the fact that *pays* has the inflectional *-s*. At the same time, *crime* has paradigmatic relations with countless other elements, including the inflectionally related *crimes*, the derivationally related *criminal*, the conceptually related *misdemeanor* (and the conceptually opposite *legality*), and the phonetically related *grime*. As the last example suggests, each sound of the word *crime* /kraim/ has paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations with at least the sounds around it: /k/ is paradigmatically related to the /g/ that could in principle replace it; and syntagmatically related to the following /r/, since in English the presence of /k/ as the initial element of the word immediately restricts the following sound to /l r w/ or a vowel.

Saussure notes that the two types of relations, which correspond to different types of mental activity, contribute in different ways to the 'value' of the sign. In particular, the paradigmatic relations generate a negative value: the identity of the /r/ in /kraim/ is essentially that it could be, but is not, /l w/ or a vowel. This is important because the actual sound that represents /r/ can differ dramatically from one English dialect to another (being rolled, flapped, retroflex, etc.); but the actual sound content does not matter, so long as /r/ is kept distinct from the other sounds to

which it is associatively related. *Langue*, Saussure insisted, is form, not substance.

Before Saussure, the syntagmatic relations of morphemes within a given utterance were certainly recognized as a matter of linguistic concern, though relatively neglected. But there was little or no precedent for the idea suggested by the *Cours* (implicitly if not explicitly) that there exists a syntax not only of words, but of sounds, meanings, and the relations uniting them; or that every time a sound, word, or meaning is chosen, a vast network of related elements is summoned up in absentia. The latter concept in particular set the study of language on a new course of abstraction that did not rely on psychological theorizing, but remained internal to language.

In many ways, the Saussurean notion of paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations would become the hallmark of twentieth-century linguistics: first, because it proposed that a single principle of structure unites all the levels at which language functions—sound, forms, and meaning; second, because it suggested a way of analyzing language that would not depend on a simple listing of elements with their 'translation' into either another language or some sort of philosophical interpretation. Elements could henceforth be analyzed according to the relations they maintained with other elements, and the language could be understood as the vast system—not of these elements—but of these relations. This was the point of departure for structuralism (see Sect. 9).

To a large extent, the distributional method developed by Bloomfield is a working out of this Saussurean notion, with special emphasis on the paradigmatic relations. With the work of Bloomfield's follower Zellig S. Harris (1909–92) the syntagmatic relations assumed a status of equal importance, and with Harris's student Chomsky, overriding importance. (Regarding word order, Saussure's view is that the syntagmatic relations constitute that part of syntax which is predetermined—like the use of a 3rd person singular verb form after the singular subject *crime*—and so a part of *langue*; while the rest of syntax, being subject to free combination, is relegated to *parole*.)

9. The Systematicity of *Langue*: Structuralism

Certainly the most wide-reaching Saussurean intellectual tradition, both within and outside of linguistics, derived from Saussure's characterization of *langue* as a wholly self-contained network of relationships among elements which, as discussed above, have no positive content or value, but only the negative value generated by their differing from one another. Like most of his contemporaries, when Saussure thought of language he thought first of sounds and their combinations, and extrapolated outward from that level. The study of sounds had for several decades been a battleground between those who, later in the twentieth century, would be called the 'phoneticians,' proponents of an extreme form of positivism who believed that the key to understanding language lay in ever more precise measurement of sound waves and vocal apertures; and those who would now be called 'phonologists,' who preferred to operate on a more abstract (and traditional) plane, dealing with classes of sounds rather than the minute differences within classes. But the phoneticians were steadily gaining prestige, since their positivistic approach had the characteristic look of modern science.

As noted in Sect. 4, Saussure was attracted to positivism, but within limits. If psychology represented the Scylla of hyperrationalism, experimental phonetics was the Charybdis of hyperempiricism, equally to be avoided. Perhaps more so: whereas Saussure never attempted a complete divorce of language from the domain of the mind, his characterization of *langue* as a network of pure relations, of form and not substance, succeeded in marginalizing phonetics to the point that within a few decades it would retreat to the position of an auxiliary discipline to linguistics. The term *phonème*, used by Saussure as early as 1878 (five years after its coinage by A. Dufriche-Desgenettes, 1804–79) to denote an abstract unit representing sound, but never actually defined by him, was taken up by Baudouin de Courtenay and Kruszewski and joined to an essentially Saussurean conception: 'phoneme' became the name for Saussure's abstract mental sound pattern, identifiable as the minimal unit of sound capable of changing the meaning of a signifier in a language. It eventually became the basis for further, related new concepts: the morpheme (coined by Baudouin de Courtenay) or moneme (minimal unit of meaning), tagmeme (minimal meaningful unit of syntax), toneme, and so on.

The full implications of Saussure's view of *langue* were realized in Prague, principally by Trubetzkoy, who elaborated complete phonological schemata for a panoply of languages from all over the world; and Jakobson, who extended the implications of 'functional' phonology to other domains of linguistic (and literary) inquiry. But strikingly similar projects were underway in other quarters: in the USA with Bloomfield, who saw himself as at least partly under the influence of Saussure (in a 1945 letter he described his major work *Language* as showing Saussure's influence 'on every page'); in Denmark, with the overtly Saussurean glossematics of Hjelmslev; in France, where Meillet had transmitted the Saussurean perspective to a whole generation of students, including André Martinet (b.1908); Gustave Guillaume (1883–1960); and Benveniste (see *American Structuralism*; *Guillaumean Linguistics*; *The Glossematic School of Linguistics*; *Functional Grammar*). All the lines of affiliation among these 'schools' are not yet clear. But their work came to define the mainstream of linguistics in the twentieth century, and all of it assumes the conception of *langue* set out in the *Cours*.

The idea that language forms a self-contained system justified the autonomy of linguistic study not only vis-à-vis phonetics, but every other discipline as well, including psychology, anthropology, and sociology (the latter, again, was never deemed a threat). The only discipline under whose aegis it hypothetically fell was semiology, but even had semiology existed, the status of linguistics as its pilot science meant that it yielded its autonomy to no other field. The origins of 'structuralism' are generally traced to turn-of-the-century work by the Anglo-American psychologist E. B. Titchener (1867–1927). But by the period between the 1940s and the 1960s when most fields of human knowledge came under the domination of structuralism, it had come to be seen as the extrapolation out of linguistics of Saussure's concept of *langue* as a self-contained system of syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations among elements of negative content (see *Trends in Twentieth-Century Linguistics*). Its most widely heralded application was in the field of anthropology, by Claude Lévi-Strauss (b.1908), who discovered Saussure in 1942 in a course taught by Jakobson. Other areas and their most prominent structuralist practitioners include, in biology, Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1901–72) and C. H. Waddington (1905–75); in literary theory, Roland Barthes (1915–1980); in Marxist theory, Louis Althusser (1918–90); in mathematics, 'Nicholas Bourbaki' (the pseudonym of a group of French mathematicians); in psychoanalysis, Jacques Lacan (1901–79); and in psychology (where Titchener's concept of structure had long since been replaced, for example by the concept of *Gestalt*), Jean Piaget (1896–1980). The rejection of structuralism by such figures as Jacques Derrida and, to a lesser degree, Michel Foucault (1926–84), became tied up with the French student revolts of 1968, launching the 'poststructuralist' era, whose very name indicates that the Saussurean tradition remains an active force even when shaping the direction of reactions against it.

Within linguistics, the effects of poststructuralist thought are only beginning to be felt; the field in which structuralism began is the last to let it go. Precisely at midcentury the great British linguist J. R. Firth (1890–1960) was able to state that 'Nowadays, professional linguists can almost be classified by using the name of de Saussure. There are various possible groupings: Saussureans, anti-Saussureans, post-Saussureans, or non-Saussureans.' As we approach the twentieth century's end, the only change one is tempted to make to Firth's statement is to remove 'non-Saussureans,' as it is doubtful that any survive. All work on or against language as an autonomous, self-contained system—and this includes work in generative grammar, universal–typological linguistics, discourse pragmatics, and sociolinguistics—falls squarely within the most important of Saussurean traditions.

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Geneva School, after Saussure

René Amacker

The 'Geneva School of Linguistics,' a term first used in print by Charles Bally in 1908, may be said to comprise a fairly large number of linguists including—besides Ferdinand de Saussure—all his direct and indirect disciples in Geneva. They form three generations, the chief representatives being first Charles Bally (1865–1947) and Albert Sechehaye (1870–1946), then Henri Frei (1899–1980), Robert Godel (1902–1984), and Serge Karcevski (1884–1955), and finally Luis J. Prieto (b.1926) and René Amacker (b.1942); the third generation also includes Rudolf Engler (b.1930), although he has worked in Bern during his entire career.

The Geneva School, thus defined by an essentially