7 Saussure and American linguistics

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When William Dwight Whitney died in 1894, the American Philological Association, of which he had been co-founder and first president, asked scholars in America and Europe to contribute appraisals of his work for a memorial meeting. Professor of Sanskrit and comparative philology at Yale College, Whitney had a long and distinguished career, and his work on Sanskrit and on general linguistics reached students, scholars and even a lay readership. Absent from the many prominent linguists sending public tributes to Whitney's work was Ferdinand de Saussure. It was not that Saussure disapproved of Whitney's work. To the contrary, he was a strong proponent who 'never ceased to feel indebted to the American scholar [Whitney] and . . . when he offered courses in general linguistics at the University of Geneva, he did not fail to mention Whitney's name with praise and to discuss his ideas' (Godel, 1966: 480).

The American Philological Association had invited Saussure to contribute to the Whitney memorial, and he began a notebook for drafts and comments of what he planned to write, but he never completed the letter. The notebook, however, survived and fragments were eventually published (Godel, 1957; Engler, 1968–74; Jakobson, 1971b). From these it is clear that what Saussure most admired in Whitney was his attempt to move forward from the details of nineteenth-century comparative grammar, especially German comparative grammar, and toward generalisations about the nature of language. The new linguistic science that Whitney envisioned 'makes the laws and general principles of speech its main subject, and uses particular facts rather as illustrations' (Whitney, 1867: 315).

In the 1894 notebook Saussure wrote: 'Whitney a dit: le langage est une *Institution* humaine. Cela a changé l'axe de la linguistique' ('Whitney said: language is a human institution. That changed the axis of linguistics', quoted by Jakobson, 1971b: xxxiv). Concepts that attracted Saussure and for which he may well have been indebted to Whitney are readily apparent in an examination of Whitney's two major books on the nature of language, *Language and the Study of Language: Twelve Lectures on the Principles of Linguistic Science* (1867) and *The Life and Growth of Language: An Outline of Linguistic Science* (1875).

Whitney wrote:

> Speech is not a personal possession, but a social; it belongs, not to the individual, but to the member of society. No item of existing language is the work of an individual; for what we may severally choose to say is not language until it be accepted and employed by our fellows. The whole development of speech, though initiated by the acts of individuals, is wrought out by the community. (Whitney, 1867: 404)

He also wrote: 'We regard every language . . . as an institution' (1875: 280). Closely connected to this central concept of language as a social institution was Whitney's view on the 'arbitrary and conventional' nature of human language 'in all its parts' (Whitney, 1875: 282). His position was so like that later attributed to Saussure that it is worth quoting in greater length:

> every word handed down in every human language is an arbitrary and conventional sign: arbitrary, because any one of the thousand other words current among men, or of the tens of thousands which might be fabricated, could have been equally well learned and applied to this particular purpose; conventional, because the reason for the use of this rather than another lies solely in the fact that it is already used in the community to which the speaker belongs. (Whitney, 1875: 19)

Saussure noted that 'Whitney, whom I revere, never said a single word on the same subjects [concerning 'a theoretical view of language'] which was not right; but like all the others, he does not dream that language needs systematics' (Jakobson's translation, 1971b: xxxvii), and later scholars seem generally agreed that a major element missing from Whitney's theorising about language was indeed the notion of systematic and interconnected linguistic structure (e.g. Silverstein, 1971: xv). Whitney was certainly not a structuralist in any sense, modern or not, but it must be kept in mind at this point that the term 'structuralism', now so closely associated with Saussure's legacy, would not arise in any significant way within American linguistics until nearly half the twentieth century had passed.

When the young American Leonard Bloomfield published his first textbook in 1914, the title, *An Introduction to the Study of Language*, recalled Whitney's books, which Bloomfield acknowledged in his Preface and to which he directed readers for further information (Bloomfield, 1914: v, 315). He saw his book as an updated report on the 'great progress of our science in the last half-century' since Whitney 1867. Like Whitney, Bloomfield wrote of the 'social character of language' and noted that a speech utterance 'depends for its form entirely on the habits of the speaker, which he shares with his speech-community. These habits are in a sense arbitrary, differing for the different communities . . .' (Bloomfield, 1914: 17, 81–2). It should come as no surprise, then, that when Bloomfield reviewed the second edition of Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* in 1924, he was to say: 'Most of what the author says has long been "in the air" and has been here and there fragmentarily expressed' (Bloomfield, 1924: 318).

This review is an important document in the history of American linguistics, first because Bloomfield was a principal figure, and second because it seems to be the only review of the *Cours* published in any American journal until new editions were prepared in the second half of the twentieth century. For these reasons, Bloomfield's review has been the subject of several analyses (Joseph, 1989a; Koerner, 1989; Falk, 1995) and has acquired a prominence that it did not have when it was published.

The review of the *Cours* was not Bloomfield's first public discussion of Saussure's contributions to linguistics. Two years earlier, in a review of Edward Sapir's now-classic book *Language* (1921), Bloomfield pointed to Saussure's *Cours* as a book 'which gives a theoretic foundation to the newer trend of linguistic study' in which one 'critical point' was that linguists were 'coming to believe that restriction to historical work is unreasonable and, in the long run, methodically impossible' (Bloomfield, 1970 [1922]: 92). Here Bloomfield referred to Saussure's distinction of 'synchronic' and 'diachronic', using the Saussurean terms when pointing out that Sapir, too, dealt with 'synchronic matters . . . before he deals with diachronic . . . [giving] to the former as much space as to the latter' (*ibid.*).

The synchronic/diachronic distinction was one of the Saussurean concepts highlighted in Bloomfield's review of the *Cours* and it appeared again in the article 'On Recent Work in General Linguistics' (1927). But Bloomfield dated what he called the 'theoretical justification' for the precedence of descriptive linguistics over historical studies not primarily to Saussure, but rather 'especially' to the earlier work of Franz Nikolaus Finck (Bloomfield, 1970 [1927]: 179). A similar passage, but with an expanded list of predecessors, appeared in Bloomfield's only reference to Saussure within the text of his book *Language* (1933), the most influential work in American linguistics in the first half of the twentieth century.

> some students saw more and more clearly the natural relation between descriptive and historical studies. Otto Böhtlingk (1815–1904) . . . applied the descriptive technique to . . . Yakut of Asiatic Russia (1851). Friedrich Müller (1834–1898) published an outline of linguistic science (1876–1888) which contained brief sketches of the languages of the world, regardless of whether a historical treatment was possible. Franz Nikolaus Finck (1867–1910), both in a theoretical essay (1905) and in a little volume (1910) in which he analyzed descriptively eight unrelated languages, insisted upon descriptive study as a basis for both historical research and philosophical generalization. Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) had for years expounded this matter in his university lectures; after his death, they were published in book form (1915) [sic]. (Bloomfield, 1933: 18–19)

Bloomfield did not use the Saussurean terms. Instead, he discussed 'two streams of study, the historical-comparative and the philosophical-descriptive' (Bloomfield, 1933: 19; see also Hockett, 1989: 1–3).

'Descriptive' and 'historical' became the standard terminology of American linguistics, with the distinction recognised as existing in the linguistic literature

long before Saussure's *Cours*, not only in the European works Bloomfield cited, but in American work as well:

> The fact of the matter is that Sapir, who had completed his Takelma grammar . . . some time before February 20, 1911 . . . had no need of a 1916 publication to stimulate him to the synchronic, analytic study of languages . . . By 1916, Sapir, indeed, had laid the basis for our knowledge of the structure of six languages (Takelma, Wishram, Yana, Southern Paiute, Nootka, and Chasta Costa). (Hymes and Fought, 1981: 15–16)

Despite occasional claims to the contrary by commentators on the history of linguistics who provide no documentation, there is no evidence that Sapir was directly influenced by the *Cours*; he certainly never cited it in his work (Levin, 1965: 84; Hymes and Fought, 1981: 15; Anderson, 1985: 228).

Sapir's Takelma grammar was part of a project designed by Franz Boas, often credited as the founder of modern American anthropology. Boas's *Handbook of American Indian Languages* (1911) predated the appearance of the *Cours*, and Boas's framework for the grammars to be included in the *Handbook* owed nothing to Saussure:

> the method of treatment has been throughout an analytical one. No attempt has been made to compare the forms of the Indian grammars with the grammars of English, Latin, or even among themselves . . . Although . . . an analytical grammar can not lay any claim to present a history of the development of grammatical categories, it is valuable as a presentation of the present state of grammatical development in each linguistic group. (Boas, 1911: 77–8)

Bloomfield, too, had prepared what he termed 'the first scientific analysis of the structure of the [Philippine] language' Tagalog, refraining from 'any and all historical surmises beyond the indication of unassimilated loan-words', based on work with a native speaker he conducted in 1915 and 1916, before he had had any opportunity to read Saussure's teachings on synchronic linguistics (Bloomfield, 1917: 10).

There is, then, ample evidence that the notion of linguistic description of the current state of a language, as contrasted to traditional studies of historical change, was well entrenched in American linguistics before the *Cours* appeared. Bloomfield and his contemporaries viewed Saussure's synchronic/diachronic distinction as little more than a terminological innovation, which most Americans did not adopt until the 1940s or later.

In his review of the *Cours*, Bloomfield introduced the famous *langue/parole* distinction as follows:

> This rigid system, the subject-matter of 'descriptive linguistics', as we should say, is *la langue*, the language. But *le langage*, human speech, includes something more, for the individuals who make up the community do not succeed in following the system with perfect uniformity. Actual speech-utterance, *la parole*, varies not only as to matters not fixed by the system . . . but also as to the system itself . . . (Bloomfield, 1924: 318–19)

Bloomfield took up the distinction again in 1927 where he reduced Saussure's system of signs to the physically observable elements of actual object and speech utterance, casting aside what he considered 'the purely mental terms' of 'concept' and 'acoustic image' (Bloomfield, 1970 [1927]: 177). The resulting reconceptualisation of *langue* and *parole* was tantamount to a rejection of the Saussurean distinction, and indeed after 1927 Bloomfield made no use of these terms. It can be argued, however, that in both his theoretical work and his descriptive analyses, Bloomfield actually took the speech-utterances of *parole* as 'the subject-matter of linguistics' with the abstraction by analysis from the speech utterances yielding 'a description of *langue*' (Levin, 1965: 87). Of course, the same might be argued for any linguist who works from samples of the language to a generalised description that goes beyond the corpus.

Bloomfield did credit Saussure with the concept of what would later be called the phonemic system, but he did not view Saussure's contribution here as unique: 'developed by the school of [Henry] Sweet, [Paul] Passy, and Daniel Jones . . . [t]he same concept was developed (independently, I think) by Franz Boas (Handbook of American Indian Languages, 16) and by de Saussure (Cours de Linguistique Générale [Paris, 1916])' (Bloomfield, 1970 [1922]: 92). Charles Hockett wrote that 'the synchronic phonemic principle . . . Bloomfield got mainly, it would seem, from Henry Sweet' (1989: 4).

There were few specific contributions in the *Cours* that were compelling to Bloomfield, but he praised the book for more general qualities: 'its clear and rigorous demonstration of fundamental principles' mapping out 'the world in which historical Indo-European grammar (the great achievement of the past century) is merely a single province; [Saussure] has given us the theoretical basis for a science of human speech' (Bloomfield, 1924: 318–19).

After 1933, in his published works Bloomfield never mentioned Saussure again. The review had been reserved (hardly the 'eulogy' that Roy Harris (1987: xiii) claimed), and it was a minor piece, appearing in a relatively new journal devoted mostly to high school and college language-teaching materials and methods, not one of the prestigious linguistics journals of its time. Further, the review of the *Cours* was but one of fifteen reviews Bloomfield wrote during the 1920s, and his references to Saussure in other articles during the 1920s and early 1930s were often little more than inclusion in listings of earlier works. For example, in 'On Recent Work in General Linguistics', the *Cours* is twenty-first in a list of twenty-eight linguistics texts published between 1876 and 1926 (Bloomfield, 1970 [1927]: 173–4). Bloomfield admired Saussure and on several occasions referred his readers to the *Cours*, but he did not adopt Saussurean terms. He viewed most basic Saussurean concepts as ideas that had been set forth by other, earlier scholars.

Arguably excepting only his contemporary Edward Sapir, Bloomfield stands tallest as the major figure in American linguistics in the first half of the twentieth

century. Nearly the entire generation of linguists who followed him was trained on his *Language*, his major articles, and his teaching, so much so that this generation of American linguists is often called the 'Bloomfieldian', 'post-Bloomfieldian', or 'neo-Bloomfieldian' school. They themselves referred to the work they did as descriptive linguistics, and they dominated American linguistics until the mid 1950s when the work of Noam Chomsky began its ascendancy. The most prominent members were Bernard Bloch, Robert A. Hall, Jr, Zellig S. Harris, Archibald A. Hill, Charles F. Hockett, Martin Joos, Floyd G. Lounsbury, George Trager and Rulon S. Wells. In addition, in the mid 1930s, Yuen-Ren Chao and W. Freeman Twaddell contributed to American phonological theory and practice as it was being developed by Bloomfield and his followers.

As in Bloomfield's own work after 1933, they rarely, if ever, referred to Saussure or the *Cours*. Take, for example, the six articles chosen by Martin Joos to represent the American development, after Bloomfield's *Language*, of the phonemic principle and descriptive phonology. In his collection *Readings in Linguistics: The Development of Descriptive Linguistics in America since 1925* (Joos 1958), we have: Morris Swadesh, 'The phonemic principle' (1934), Yuen-Ren Chao, 'The non-uniqueness of phonemic solutions of phonetic systems' (1934), W. Freeman Twaddell, 'On defining the phoneme' (1935), Morris Swadesh and Charles F. Voegelin, 'A problem in phonological alternation' (1939), Bernard Bloch, 'Phonemic overlapping' (1941), and Charles F. Hockett, 'A system of descriptive phonology' (1942).

Only Twaddell made any mention of Saussure. Following extended discussion of phonological principles in the work of N. S. Trubetzkoy, Daniel Jones, Harold E. Palmer, Sapir and Bloomfield, Twaddell stated:

> It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the phoneme, so defined [as a unit Twaddell termed the macrophoneme], is meaningless as applied to any particular linguistic element: it is a negative, relational, differential abstraction; it is a unit of that sort of relation which de Saussure describes: 'Dans la langue il n'y a que des différences sans termes positifs' (Cours de Linguistique Générale [1922] 166) [in language there are only differences without positive terms]. (Twaddell, 1958 [1935]: 74)

Not one of the other five articles made any mention of Saussure or the *Cours*, and even Twaddell's brief excursion into Saussurean territory did not attract his contemporaries; the 'macrophoneme' was not adopted.

The Americans' failure to even acknowledge Saussure and the *Cours* in the decade following Bloomfield's *Language* cannot be attributed to ignorance of European linguistic work in general, or to American political and academic isolationism during the interwar period, or to some 'sense of discontinuity from the past', or to the valorising of 'a distinctive American version of linguistics',

points raised about the period by Andresen (1990: 210, 208) and Hockett (1982), among others, although these may have been contributing factors. But these articles contained ample citations of Daniel Jones, Harold E. Palmer, Otto Jespersen, and Nikolaj Trubetzkoy, Roman Jakobson and other members of the Linguistic Circle of Prague. The fact is that, as Stephen Anderson said of Saussure, 'there is very little in his work which is specific enough to serve directly as the foundation for concrete descriptions of phonological structure' (Anderson, 1985: 55). And it was precisely the establishment of principles and procedures for concrete descriptions of phonological structure in which the Americans of this period were most fully engaged.

While phonology was the focus of the 1930s, the 1940s in American linguistics have been referred to as 'the Decade of the Morpheme' (Hockett, 1987: 153). Examination of five articles on morphology from Joos, 1958 (Harris, 1942, 1946; Hockett 1947; Nida 1948; Lounsbury 1953) reveals no references at all to Saussure. Indeed, the descriptivists now were citing virtually no one other than their fellow American descriptivists (see Murray, 1994: 157–60 for a chart and discussion of their citation patterns). As these same linguists moved into the 1950s, several began to write on the history of descriptive linguistics in America (Hall, 1951–2; Hill, 1955). Again there was no discussion of influence from Saussure and the *Cours*, although in a final footnote Hall mentioned an article by Rulon Wells (1947) titled 'De Saussure's system of linguistics', to which we return below.

It should be noted here that Joos's selections for his volume were not uncontroversial. Hymes and Fought mentioned its 'partisan character' and noted that omission of work by Roman Jakobson and Kenneth Pike 'makes the volume seriously unreliable as a representation of the period it treats' (1981: 40). However, it had not been Joos's intention to represent the period but rather, as his subtitle showed, to reflect 'the development of descriptive linguistics in America' (Joos, 1958: iii). Jakobson was never an American descriptivist, but Pike's work certainly should have been included, especially Pike, 1943 and 1947, papers of insight and lasting importance that challenged some of the precepts of orthodox descriptivism while upholding others. The challenges were surely the reason for Joos's exclusion. Despite the sometimes idiosyncratic nature of Joos's choices, however, an examination of the major articles by a good number of the most important descriptivists represented in his anthology does provide a valid view of how they viewed Saussure and the *Cours* in the two decades following Bloomfield's *Language*.

American linguistics has never been a homogeneous discipline. Descriptivism clearly was the dominating approach of the 1930s, 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s, but it was not the only form of linguistics in America. With the start of the Second World War in Europe, European linguists began moving to

the United States. Foremost among these was the Russian-born Roman Jakobson, co-founding member of the Linguistic Circle of Prague, who arrived in New York in 1941.

Unlike Bloomfield, whose overt attention to Saussurean concepts was brief, lasting just a decade, Jakobson's engagement was virtually lifelong, beginning in his years in Europe and extending throughout the four decades of his life in the United States. The major Saussurean themes that occurred repeatedly in Jakobson's writings during the Prague years were presented in seminal form in a single paper read to the Prague Linguistic Circle on 13 January 1927, a paper that Jakobson himself later selected as the lead item for the first published volume of his *Selected Writings* in 1962 (Jakobson, 1962 [1928]: 1–2). Here Jakobson maintained that 'Saussure and his school broke a new trail in static linguistics, but as to the field of language history they remained in the neogrammarian rut' and he went on to challenge 'Saussure's teaching that sound changes are destructive forces, fortuitous and blind' (*ibid.*). In the same paper, Jakobson rejected Saussure's 'antinomy between synchronic and diachronic linguistic studies' and called for 'a transformation of historical phonetics into the history of the phonemic system' and 'a comparison of phonemic systems', both synchronic and diachronic, that 'enables us to lay down certain universally valid sound laws' (*ibid.*). He also argued for 'the relevance of acoustical analysis' (*ibid.*). These lifelong Jakobsonian themes of dynamic synchronism, phonological universals and the relevance of acoustic analysis were – for Jakobson – the antitheses of Saussurean concepts.

Saussure repeatedly served as a foil to Jakobson, who would set forth the positions of the Genevan linguist only to argue against them. A reflection of Jakobson's beliefs about the nature of scientific inquiry, this was not just a rhetorical strategy. Jakobson saw the practice of linguistics as a continual rectification of inaccurate theories and the positing of new theories, useful and important even if incomplete. Further, Jakobson was committed to recognising the contributions of his central and eastern European intellectual ancestors, and he often did so in relation to concepts widely credited to Saussure. For example, in 'Phoneme and phonology' (1932) he introduced the concept of the phoneme 'first outlined in the works of Baudouin de Courtenay and F. de Saussure' (Jakobson, 1962 [1932]: 231) and he attributed 'the first foundations of phonology to 'Baudouin de Courtenay, F. de Saussure, and their disciples' (1962 [1932]: 232). In other papers he credited Tomás G. Masaryk with the synchronic/diachronic distinction (Jakobson, 1971a [1933]: 542) and Filipp F. Fortunatov with the notion of negative form (1971a [1939]: 211n.1).

Within a year of his arrival in New York, Jakobson had become vice-president of the Ecole Libre des Hautes Etudes, a French-language institution founded by exile scholars in New York, which provided a place to teach and study for those who had not found regular university positions in the United States. Here,

in 1942, Jakobson gave two lecture series which together provided a focus on Saussurean concepts that was unprecedented in American linguistics. One series was devoted entirely to Saussure's linguistic theory ('La théorie saussurienne en rétrospection') while the other treated Saussurean concepts in phonology ('Six leçons sur le son et le sens') (Falk, 1995; Joseph, 1989b; Waugh, 1984).

Based closely on a lecture series he had presented in Copenhagen in 1939, Jakobson used his six lectures on sound and meaning to challenge Saussurean linearity, which he considered incompatible with his own theory of phonological distinctive features, and to oppose Saussure's claims on the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, at variance with his 'means-ends model of language' (Jakobson, 1963) and with his interest in sound symbolism (Reichard, Jakobson and Werth, 1949). He did, however, acknowledge that in Saussure's work was to be found an 'idea crucial for the functional study of sounds, the idea of the relations between the phonemes, i.e., the idea of the *phonological system*' (Jakobson, 1978: 42 [emphasis in original]). Jakobson's thinking on phonology was to have a major impact on American linguistics, especially his theory of distinctive features (see Anderson, 1985: 116–29 for an account and critique). His view of phonological structure 'was taken over in largely intact form by (at least early work in) generative phonology' (1985: 117).

Also in 1942, Jakobson gave a second course at the Ecole Libre on Saussurean theory, this time focusing on the *langue/parole* distinction (portions reproduced from lecture notes and translated into English in Jakobson, 1990: 80–109; see also Waugh, 1984), with additional discussion of other topics including what he termed dynamic synchrony, a precursor to later sociolinguistic approaches to the study of language. Soon he was also to write about Saussure in his first American publication dealing with general linguistic theory, an obituary article on Franz Boas (Jakobson, 1944).

This article and the lectures on Saussure, even when critical, brought greater awareness of the latter's views than had occurred previously in American linguistics, and as Jakobson's prominence increased among American linguists, so did further attention to Saussure. When he and the other linguists of the Ecole Libre joined forces with New York area linguists to found the Linguistic Circle of New York/Cercle Linguistique de New York in 1943, an organisation was formed that presented and promoted European ideas in America. The New York Circle soon created the journal *Word* which provided a publishing outlet for papers dealing with European-based linguistic concepts, as well as for American studies that did not fit well with the dominant descriptivist approach favoured by *Language*, journal of the Linguistic Society of America (LSA). In *Word*, for example, two articles on Saussurean linguistics appeared in the third volume: 'De Saussure's system of linguistics', Rulon S. Wells (1947); 'La linguistique saussurienne à Genève depuis 1939', Henri Frei (1947). It was no accident that the descriptivist Wells placed his analysis of Saussure in *Word*.

Here there was a readership knowledgeable about Saussure and interested in connections between American and European linguistics. (See Costello, 1994, for personal opinions and recollections, but not documented historiography, about the early years of the Linguistic Circle of New York and of *Word*.)

With all of this activity going on in New York, Bloomfield in January 1945 wrote from Yale to his friend J Milton Cowan, then secretary-treasurer of the Linguistic Society of America: 'There is a statement going round that De Saussure is not mentioned in my *Language* text book (which reflects his *Cours* on every page)' (Cowan, 1987: 29). The parenthetical remark was an exaggeration, as was the previous sentence in which Bloomfield, the most well-established living figure in American linguistics of the time, said: 'Denunciations are coming thick & fast; I expect to be completely discredited by the end' (*ibid.*). The reintroduction of Saussure that led to these remarks was centred in the Linguistic Circle of New York. Although the actual source of the 'statement' has not been firmly ascertained, those who have been suggested were within the Circle's membership (Koerner, 1989: 440; Hall, 1990: 78–9). In any case, what matters here is the evidence the letter provided for the attention Saussure was then receiving in America.

Bloomfield and Sapir had written about structure, e.g. 'grammatical *structure*' (Bloomfield, 1933: 264 [emphasis in original], 'linguistic structure' (Sapir, 1921: 127–56), but the terms 'structural linguistics' and 'structuralism' in the 1940s were largely confined to European approaches to linguistics. In two articles in *Word*, the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss attributed 'structuralisme' to Trubetzkoy (Lévi-Strauss, 1945: 35) and the historian Ernst Cassirer wrote of 'the program of structuralism developed by [Viggo] Bröndal' in the 1930s (Cassirer, 1945: 117). Only in the later 1940s did the terms 'structuralism' and 'structural linguistics' begin to appear in the writings of American linguists working in the descriptivist tradition.

An important impetus came in two reviews by Zellig Harris in the early 1940s. A review of *Foundations of Language* by Indo-Europeanist Louis Gray (Gray, 1939) was for Harris an opportunity to distinguish traditional historical linguistics from the newer American 'method of structural analysis, i.e. of organized synchronic description' (Harris, 1940: 216). Harris was not yet using the terms 'structuralism' or 'structural linguistics', but the review was saturated with the words 'structure' and 'structural', e.g. 'Failure to organize data by their place in the structure often leads to unsatisfactory classifications' (1940: 218). 'Neglect of structural analysis of each language leads to disregard of the differences between language structures' (1940: 219). 'Since one cannot do entirely without structural interpretations, the linguist who does not explicitly work out the structure of other languages is in danger of interpreting them in his own terms' (1940: 220–1). And so forth on nearly every page to the conclusion.

Nowhere in this review did Harris associate 'structure' with Saussure. Where he did mention Saussure by name it was to reject 'the langue-parole dichotomy of Saussure' and the 'science sémiologique' (1940: 228). The latter involved 'a relation of "signifying" . . . which requires something like teleology for its understanding' (*ibid.*); 'it cannot be studied objectively' (*ibid.*). '"Parole"', Harris argued, 'is merely the physical events which we count as language, while "langue" is the scientist's analysis and arrangements of them' (*ibid.*). The following year Harris returned to this point in a review (Harris, 1941) of Trubetzkoy's *Grundzüge der Phonologie* (1939). He wrote that Prague Circle terminology 'gives the impression that there are two objects of possible investigation, the Sprechakt (speech) and the Sprachgebilde (language structure), whereas the latter is merely the scientific arrangement of the former' (Harris, 1941: 345).

Archibald A. Hill, writing on the history of the LSA summer Linguistic Institutes, recalled that it was during the 1947 Institute that people began using the phrase 'structural analysis' where previously most would have said 'descriptive analysis' (Hill, 1964: 8, quoted in Hymes and Fought, 1981: 9). By the following year, European structuralism and American descriptivism were referred to jointly as 'structural linguistics' in a number of American articles (Preston, 1948: 132; Hockett, 1958 [1948]: 279; Voegelin, 1948: 115), and the new label began to take hold.

Interestingly, this development occurred, in part, in the context of a debate over the issue Harris had raised in his review of Trubetzkoy's work, that is, whether linguistic structure resides in the language or is the result of linguistic analysis (Preston, 1948; Hockett, 1948; Householder, 1952). Concerning 'descriptive or structural linguistics', Hockett wrote: 'The task of the structural linguist, as a scientist, is, as Preston [1948] implies, essentially one of classification', but Hockett went on to conclude that '[f]or the scientist . . . "linguistic structure" refers to something existing quite independently of the activities of the analyst: a language is what it is, it has the structure it has, whether studied and analyzed by a linguist or not' (Hockett, 1958 [1948]: 279–80). The label 'structural linguistics' was then used by Harris as the title to his influential book *Methods in Structural Linguistics* (Harris, 1951). The manuscript had previously circulated with the title 'Methods in Descriptive Linguistics' (LSA *Bulletin*, July–September 1948: 15, October–December 1949: 13), but in the preface, dated January 1947, Harris already had written: 'the logic of distributional relations . . . constitutes the basic method of *structural linguistics*' (Harris, 1951: v, emphasis added).

Not all American descriptivists immediately adopted 'structuralism' as the label for their work. Even in 1957, Joos continued to use 'descriptive linguistics' in his book title (Joos, 1958), as did H. A. Gleason for his widely used textbook *An Introduction to Descriptive Linguistics* (1st edition 1955, revised edition

1961), and Hockett, who was one of the earliest to use the term for American linguistics, later wrote: 'I have never been sure just what structuralism is supposed to be (Hymes and Fought [*American Structuralism*, 1981] . . . assiduously avoid telling us) – unless it is just a fancy way of referring to the twentieth-century emphasis (promoted especially, though not exclusively, by Saussure) on system and pattern in contrast to the somewhat atomistic nineteenth-century approach' (1987: 133). But gradually, American descriptive linguistics, particularly for the period of Bloomfield and the post-Bloomfieldians, came to be referred to as American structural linguistics, especially so in histories of the discipline (e.g. Hymes and Fought, 1981; Murray, 1994; Newmeyer, 1980).

As the discussion here attempts to show, so-called American structuralism was not built directly on a Saussurean foundation. Indeed, Gadet has argued that there is 'no direct line of descent leading from Saussure to linguistic structuralism; it was constituted through the creation of a number of linguistic schools', including 'the Prague Circle, glossematics (the Copenhagen Circle), the Geneva School' (Gadet, 1989: 119). Structuralism in its broader sense, 'generalized structuralism' (Gadet, 1989: 112), became an important part of literary and cultural theory in the late 1950s and the 1960s with the work of Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan, among others. The rather loose connections between any type of structural linguistics and such expanded structuralism is touched on by Gadet. But as structuralism in this broader sense permeated the general intellectual climate, some American linguists, too, began to view the origin of their own structuralism as resting with Saussure, and it became increasingly common to nod in his direction and to cite from the *Cours* what often amounted to little more than slogans when early twentieth-century American linguistics was discussed.

This new practice was supported during the 1950s and early 1960s by increased American openness to European linguistics, including the publication of the first English translation of the *Cours* (1959), and a growing interest in semiotics and semantics.

First, as some of the wartime refugee linguists became established in the United States and communication restrictions prevalent during the war disappeared, Americans' interest in reestablishing connections with European linguistics extended beyond the efforts of the Linguistic Circle of New York. In 1950 Einar Haugen, in his LSA presidential address, began by pointing out that 'Linguistic science is today in every sense of the word an international science', lamenting that '[r]arely does one see a reference in American writings on linguistic theory to the works of de Saussure, Trubetzkoy, or other European writers', and arguing for greater attention to European work (Haugen, 1951: 211). And that began to happen with increasing frequency as the decade went on, enhancing the earlier discussions of structuralism.

In the *Modern Language Journal* John Waterman introduced Saussure to the modern language teachers of America with the statement that 'much of the theoretical foundation of modern structuralism stems from Ferdinand de Saussure's formulations of linguistic principles' (Waterman, 1956: 307). Martin Joos, organising the papers for his 1958 anthology, pulled Wells's 'De Saussure's system of linguistics' (1947) out of the chronological ordering of the rest of the volume and placed it in lead position, implying a foundational role in American linguistics that Saussure's work did not have. He also claimed, without evidence, that 'half of these authors [in Joos, 1958] had read the Cours. The others got it second-hand' (Joos, 1958: 18). As Hymes and Fought noted, Joos 'marvelously confuses' Saussure's effective role and his symbolic role (1981: 16). It is generally best to treat Joos's remarks on Saussure's place in American linguistics as after-the-fact myth-making, but it is worth noting the importance that he was now attributing to Saussure and the *Cours*.

The publication of an English version of the *Cours* in 1959 was another sign of the new American receptiveness to Saussure's work. More than forty years after the original and well after translations had appeared in other languages, e.g. Japanese 1928, German 1931, Russian 1933, Spanish 1945 (see Koerner, 1972: 62–3), the English *Course in General Linguistics* may have been prompted and aided by the French linguist André Martinet, a member of the Linguistic Circle of New York and the Columbia University faculty during the late 1940s and early 1950s (Martinet, 1993: 360).

The International Congress of Linguists was held in the United States for the first time, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1962. Papers in the congress proceedings (Lunt, 1964) show several American contributors making determined efforts to comment on past and current European work, including early remarks on Saussure by Noam Chomsky (Chomsky, 1964b; see Joseph, 1990, for information on the several publishings and revisions of this important paper).

Chomsky discussed Saussure in a number of articles published around the time of his paper at the International Congress of Linguists and occasionally in later work. His concerns and interpretations shifted over the years (see Joseph, 1990, for discussion and analysis), but it was Saussure's *langue* and its relationship to Chomsky's concept of linguistic competence that received the most attention. One point of agreement was that *langue*, or competence, was theoretically prior to *parole*, or actual performance (Chomsky, 1964a: 52). However, Chomsky did not fully accept *langue*, seeing it 'as essentially a storehouse of signs (e.g. words, fixed phrases), their grammatical properties, and, perhaps, certain "phrase types"' (1963: 328), not the 'generative process based on recursive rules' of Chomsky's generative grammar (*ibid.*). Further, Chomsky did not accept what he believed was Saussure's relegation of sentence formation to 'a matter of *parole* rather than *langue* . . . (or perhaps, in some obscure way, as on

the border between *langue* and *parole*)' (1964a: 59–60). It is important to note that Chomsky's discussions of Saussure were never as consistently positive as his references to two other European linguists, Wilhelm von Humboldt and Otto Jespersen (see, e.g., Chomsky, 1963 and 1966, on Humboldt, Chomsky, 1975 and 1986, on Jespersen).

Linguists who proposed non-generative approaches in the 1950s and 1960s also made reference to European work. Kenneth Pike, founder of the approach known as tagmemics, for the most part did not accept Saussurean notions: 'we reject the theory of signs of de Saussure' (1954: 24); 'we abandon the distinction between *la langue* and *la parole* proposed by de Saussure' (1960: 52); he found the work of J. R. Firth much more compatible (e.g. Pike, 1954: 6, 42, 74). Sydney Lamb, whose stratificational grammar (Lamb, 1966) attracted some attention in the 1960s, acknowledged Saussure as one of the 'renowned scholars who have provided precedent' for 'the assertion that linguistic structure is stratified' (Lamb, 1965: 38), but much of Lamb's work at the time was more connected to the glossematics of Louis Hjelmslev (1953) than to Saussure.

By the mid 1970s the subject of the European background of non-historical American linguistics was so well established that it served as the topic of a symposium celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the LSA (Hoenigswald, 1979). Here, quotations from the *Cours* and references to Saussure appeared frequently (e.g. pp. 89–90, 123–6, 147–8, 165–7). Saussure's place in American linguistics was now retroactively but well established.

During these years, a shift had been occurring in the place of semantics within American linguistics. Many of the descriptivists had avoided the study of meaning, and even as late as 1949 Wells had written of semantics and linguistics as two distinct fields:

> there will be a branch of science that describes the vehicles, the forms, the signifiants used by various languages, and another branch that describes the meanings of these forms . . . both of these [and] other sciences . . . will be included in the still more comprehensive science of semiotic . . . On the whole the decision that seems most advisable is to restrict the term 'linguistics' to the study of linguistic forms, i.e. to the conjunction of phonemics, morphology, syntax, and some other fields. Linguistics will make use of certain statements about meaning which are, to it, postulates, but which are inductively established by its coordinate science, semantics. (Wells, 1949: 322)

Although many American linguists still view semiotics as a separate field of inquiry, there is some overlap, as in the work of Thomas A. Sebeok, 1975 LSA president, who early on became an internationally known specialist in semiotics (see Sebeok et al., 1964, and then Sebeok, 1976, 1979, 1991, 1994), 'unifying Saussurean "semiology" (practiced mostly by European linguists) and [Charles Sanders] Peircean "semiotics" (practiced mostly by American philosophers) into a single paradigm' (Joseph, 1995: 236).

There was in the 1950s a developing line of work in semantics associated with descriptive linguistics, but its still tenuous status at the time was reflected by Joos's decision to include no articles on meaning in the 1958 anthology. For the most part American semantics was constructed not on a Saussurean model, but from a British and American background, especially C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards's *The Meaning of Meaning* (1927) and Charles W. Morris's theory of signs (Morris, 1938, 1946). Ogden and Richards dismissed Saussure: 'this theory of signs, by neglecting entirely the things for which signs stand, was from the beginning cut off from any contact with scientific methods of verification' (1927: 6). And Morris, who drew on Bloomfield's linguistic behaviourism, followed Peirce's semiotics: to determine the meaning of any sign 'we have . . . simply to determine what habits it produces' (1946: v).

When the American linguist Floyd Lounsbury turned to semantic analysis of kinship systems, he brought together ideas from Ogden and Richards (1927) with Morris's theory of signs and the distributional analysis of descriptive linguistics (Lounsbury, 1956, 1964). He made no reference to Saussure, but other descriptivists nodded at least in passing. Thus, William Wonderly began an article on 'Semantic components in Kechua person morphemes' by relating Bloomfield's term 'sememe' ('the meaning of a morpheme') to Saussure's *signifié*: 'we have the morpheme as the minimal unit of meaning speech form (Saussure's signifiant) and the sememe as the minimal unit of discretely classified reality (Saussure's signifié) corresponding to it' (Wonderly, 1952: 366). Wonderly's and Lounsbury's semantics and that of other descriptivists was largely morpheme and word based.

In the 1960s, generative linguists sought a place within their framework for the semantic interpretation of sentences. In a foundational book on this subject, *An Integrated Theory of Linguistic Descriptions*, Jerrold Katz and Paul Postal began their Preface with a reference to Saussure, most likely because of the discussion of *langue* and *parole* appearing at this time in Chomsky's work.

> In any linguistic study, it is necessary to distinguish sharply between *language* and *speech*. Although this distinction has been classic in linguistics at least since the time of F. de Saussure, modern linguistics . . . has often confused the two. Because of this confusion, the importance of this classic distinction must be re-emphasized. (Katz and Postal, 1964: ix)

The aim of their book was 'to provide an adequate means of incorporating the grammatical and the semantic descriptions of a language into one integrated description' (1964: x). This goal has proved difficult to achieve, but ever since, semantics has remained an integral part of American linguistics.

The 1970s brought yet another development that enhanced American knowledge, appreciation and further investigation of Saussure – the rapid growth and expansion of studies in the history of linguistics. Especially consequential was

the work of E. F. K. Koerner, whose doctoral dissertation on Saussure was published in 1973, preceded the year before by his *Bibliographia Saussureana 1870–1970* (Koerner, 1972). Koerner and other historians of American linguistics have examined the interpretations of Saussure by Bloomfield, Chomsky, Jakobson and Wells (e.g. Andresen, 1990; Falk, 1995; Joseph, 1990; Koerner, 1995; Levin, 1965), and this focus has sometimes led to the impression that Saussure was the most important European predecessor to American work. Only additional studies of other European linguists and their relation to American linguistics (e.g. Falk, 1992) can demonstrate whether this is indeed the case.

Meanwhile, American linguists in the 1980s and 1990s widely ignored Saussure and the *Cours*. The four-volume *Linguistics: The Cambridge Survey* (Newmeyer, 1988), 'a comprehensive introduction to research results and current work in all branches of the field' (vol. I, p. vii), was largely American in orientation. The editor and seven of the nine members of the Editorial Board held appointments at United States universities, and 49 of the 63 contributors were affiliated with institutions in the United States and Canada. Of these North American authors, only five mentioned Saussure in their texts, all either as brief historical comments, e.g. 'de Saussure himself apparently held that the domain of the sign relation . . . was the word or complex form' (Anderson, 1988: 152), or as source for a standpoint to be corrected by more recent linguistics:

> Following Saussure, the synchronic and diachronic perspectives have been considered diametrically opposed . . . In order to heal the Saussurean division of our discipline and construct a dynamic or organic theory of language accommodating both structure and change, we must address issues of social class and sociolinguistic variation. (Guy, 1988: 56)

The latter position is reminiscent of Jakobson's 1928 rejection of the 'antinomy between synchronic and diachronic linguistic studies' in Saussure's work and his own theme of dynamic synchronism (Jakobson, 1962 [1928]: 1–2).

In the final decade of the twentieth century, many overviews of contemporary American linguistics made no mention of Saussure at all (e.g. Napoli 1996, Yule 1996). Works that did so usually had nothing more than a brief acknowledgement of general influence: 'Ferdinand de Saussure . . . turned his attention . . . to the structural principles of language rather than to the ways in which languages change and develop, and in so doing, became a major influence on twentieth-century linguistics' (Fromkin, 2000: 5); 'de Saussure (1959) investigates the relationship between linguistic "signs" and what they represent, developing what has come to be known as semiotic theory' (Weisler and Milekic, 2000: 230).

Concerning Saussure and American linguistics, the conclusions of Dell H. Hymes, 1982 LSA president, remain relevant in the twenty-first century:

> Just as the comparative-historical approach has its mythical founder in Sir William Jones, so the structural approach has had its mythical founder in Ferdinand de Saussure. The great respect one must have for both men does not bar inquiry into the actual part they played; in both cases, it was, most dramatically, in the symbolic use made posthumously of each. (Hymes, 1983: 375)