

"Ferdinand de Saussure": Debates on the Investigations of Text and Ideas.

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Abstract :

This research inquiry aims to uncover the most important secrets related to the text of the book: "Lectures in General Linguistics" attributed to Ferdinand de Saussure, which is still considered one of the foundational references in linguistic knowledge.

This research has been able to reveal the most significant critical observations and some slips in the editing of the book's text, and to monitor some forms of distortion that affected those sensitive concepts that founded the linguistic knowledge exclusively related to the principles of general linguistics. This text was intended to epistemically incline towards creating a significant distinction in the history of linguistic studies of linguistics as a project that enhances the distinctive presence of Ferdinand de Saussure's thought, while most of the accusations continue to chase the editors of this text.

Keywords: Ferdinand de Saussure, Albert Sechehaye, Charles Bally, Courses in General Linguistics, Linguistics.

Introduction

This article is research into the latest leaked secrets about the background of the preparation of the book 'Lectures in General Linguistics,' attributed to the renowned linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. The research focuses on the key milestones that are considered pivotal in the content and concepts of the book, after it has gained significant scientific fame.

1.The Enigma of Saussure's Thought

Is there a thought that can be attributed solely to Saussure, or is it merely a mirage? We say this because the question is not surprising, as there is no aspect of his scientific personality that has emerged except for one person. It is the person we came to know in 1916 through the book 'Courses in General Linguistics,' a text that did not appear until after its author's death, and in reality, he did not write a single line of it.

Strangely, this text did not go unnoticed, as it caused a real revolution in the field of humanities. This text enriched the intellectual journeys of 20th-century luminaries such as Merleau-Ponty, Lévi-Strauss, Henri Lefebvre, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and others. At the same time, the ideas in this text addressed in an unusual style some of the issues that concerned philosophers of language from Plato to Humboldt.

The analysis revisits the principles of the linguistic sign, arbitrariness, value, synchrony, and diachrony, suggesting these are not merely theoretical but foundational to linguistic

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studies. Despite these insights, persistent doubts about the authenticity and integrity of these principles surface, especially considering that Albert Riedlinger, a key editor who attended only the early lectures, missed later sessions crucial to the text's formation.

2.The Posthumous Birth of Courses in General Linguistics

Why might this doubt arise? And why specifically today? The reality indicates that Ferdinand de Saussure is the author of a book he did not write, and that the 'Courses in General Linguistics' book, as everyone knows, was authored by his students Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, who compiled the text from notes taken by students.

But the strangest part is that neither of them attended those lectures, specifically the general linguistics lectures. Albert Riedlinger, the third editor and conceptualizer of the book, attended only the initial series of lectures by Ferdinand de Saussure in 1907 and 1908-1909, missing the crucial 1910-1911 sessions which significantly informed the book's content.

This is because Saussure's ideas on general linguistics only crystallized in the summer of 1911, with the final lecture dated July 4, 1911, marking the culmination of nearly forty years of research. It is these same ideas that remain a subject of interest and skepticism for some, given the difficulty in achieving coherence.

3.The Revolutionary Impact on 20th-Century Humanities

We have always thought that what is important in Saussure's thought is summarized in the 'Lectures in General Linguistics,' but this text did not appear until three years after his death. In reality, it is the result of painstaking reconstruction and editing, considering the challenges faced in the arduous journey of researching Saussure's linguistic thoughts before seeking the texts and notes taken by students.

It is suspicious that when we scrutinize these texts, we find ourselves posing many questions and clearly noticing numerous gaps, discontinuities, and instances of illogical leaps. This impression arises due to the inherent uncertainties in the lectures, right up to the final editing by editors who were not original direct listeners.

4.Key Linguistic Concepts: Sign, Arbitrariness, and Value

There is no doubt that the materials used as sources for writing the book 'Courses in General Linguistics' are heterogeneous. This latter source inevitably creates a situation of inevitable deviation from what was presented in the lectures, resulting in interpretations and simplifications required by the process of recording each note separately. This situation is further complicated by differences in editing from one listener to another. As a result, we are faced with a number of discordant texts, incomplete sections, and contradictory sources, all of which are confusing to the concepts and ideas presented in the book, despite their apparent clarity.

Consequently, the editorial team relied heavily on the available manuscripts and student notes, necessitating selective interpretation and additional commentary, thus increasing the risk of distorting the original material. In this context, we should not overlook the fact that the editors' desire to achieve the highest degree of consistency in this book led them to shape it within a remarkable and unique system. Through their editorial work, the 'Courses in General Linguistics' text aimed to stitch together the sections within

a system intended to meet the lecturer's objectives, even if these objectives were not clear; they were shaped based on the editors' speculations as stated in the book's introduction.

The organization of the book reflects these editorial challenges, starting with a general introduction that doesn't align closely with Saussure's lectures, followed by sections on general principles like the sign, and moving into detailed discussions on synchronic, diachronic, and geographical linguistics, culminating with evolutionary linguistics. This structure shows the editors' struggle between maintaining the chronological flow of the lectures and presenting the concepts logically.

The compilation process, therefore, involved critical decisions on content arrangement, contextualization, and synthesis, which carried inherent risks of misrepresentation and speculation, making the reconstruction of Saussure's theories particularly complex.

It is evident in many places the terminological substitutions of what appeared in the students' notes in a successive and disruptive manner, which can be summarized in the following table:

Substance acoustique	Substance phonique
Sonorité linguistique	Chaîne phonique
Suite acoustique	Tranche phonique
Unités irréductibles	Éléments phoniques/phonème

5. Rudolf Engler's Edition and the Differences in Saussure's Manuscripts

Rudolf Engler's edition (1968), which continued to deepen the work presented by Robert Godel (1957), one of the first to examine Saussure's manuscripts, noted many differences between these manuscripts and the book 'Courses in General Linguistics'. These differences can be summarized as follows¹:

1. Changes made by the editors to the conclusion.
2. All examples were added by the editors.
3. All comments are editor additions.
4. Addition of key concepts for clarification, such as the concept of 'social laws' which has no trace in the manuscripts.
5. The concept of 'the natural and actual object of linguistics is the study of the language in itself and for itself' was seen as crucial, added to the final sections of the book.'

Tullio De Mauro regarding the latter points out that we are faced with a situation of speculation and conjecture about Saussure's intentions². It reflects a clear concern by the editors to convey these ideas to the reader of the 'Courses in General Linguistics'.

The text became a series of additions, changes, transformations, substitutions, slippages, and even oppositions, as Jean-Claude Milner sees it³. Ultimately, these processes that formed the lecture text make us move from a series of oral lectures to notes taken by listening students, leading to the interpretation of the oral and heard through the pens of editors who were not originally present.

We have blindly trusted that what is essential in Saussure's thought on general linguistics is summarized in the lectures book, which paralyzes our thinking with a sanctity that has prevented us from returning to its reality. Strangely, even with the emergence of Saussure's manuscripts, we refrained from delving deeper into these questions.

The 20th century in the field of humanities has been marked as the century where researchers were preoccupied with interpreting Saussurean thought from lectures not written by their author. Hence, it was necessary for the editors of these lecture texts to be cautious in forming a picture of this thought based on the available evidence. Therefore, the critical apparatus must clearly distinguish between the teacher and the interpreters of his words. Thus, we are more deserving of bearing the painful blows of criticism, as it is not right to receive such for a valuable thought like this". This clear declaration puts us before the problem clearly; there is a difference between the teacher and the interpreters of his ideas.

But what about those manuscripts and notes taken by the students, which formed the basis of the lectures book? Estanislao Sofia⁴ contributes preliminary remarks on digital publication, emphasizing the importance of understanding Saussure's drafts, which unlike complete manuscripts, are initial versions not fully prepared for publication.

Instead, we are faced with secondary drafts, incomplete and uncorrected handwritten research notes, which often take the form of personal work notes that may mislead the reader into thinking they are prepared for publication, but they are merely research projects. There are many examples in this regard, such as preparatory notes for an article on 'Whitney,' notes on the dual nature of language, or notes for a book on general linguistics⁵.

All these do not represent a text in the documentary sense but are merely preliminary writing processes, requiring all the precautions for their faithful transfer. This can only be achieved by considering the characteristics of the written material, involving complex transfer processes that require attention to correction indicators, additions, substitutions, transformations, and changes, without neglecting the marginal notes between lines and in the margins.

6.Key Notes from Saussure's Drafts

In reality, we may not find it difficult to clearly identify those notes from Saussure's drafts. Still, the process may be lengthy in inventorying those ideas that were subject to transfer and comment in the lectures book. We can point out the most important ones, such as:

- 1)The sign is arbitrary only in relation to what it refers to.
- 2)Language is form; it is pure form as an independent system.
- 3)Thought corresponds to language.
- 4)The signifier matches the concept.
- 5)The social dimension of language has remained neglected.
- 6)Language operates among people; it is social, etc.

These are examples of notes written by Saussure. In all these topics, the true and decisive answer certainly lies in those phrases written by their author. The real discovery of these drafts (1998) has helped clarify these issues with live evidence. Although they have been available for a long time, attempts to utilize them in the logic of textual reconstruction have remained stumbling in their pursuit of an accurate construction of Saussurean thought.

In reality, we cannot, in any case, blame Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, despite many shocking facts, as they are credited with preserving Saussure's thought from oblivion, even if the reconstruction process was done."Saussurean thought, by editors who are attentive to the revolutionary nature of his ideas with a will that is not devoid of awareness of the difficulty of the task. However, questions will find their way to multiply within the texts they have edited.

7.The Fundamental Question: Who Wrote Courses in General Linguistics?

If Saussure was not the writer of the 'Courses in General Linguistics', then what would his true thought have been? This fundamental question puts the lectures book in a cloud of doubt, a necessary doubt to understand the content of a theory attributed to one of the most prominent intellectuals of the 20th century. Referring to Saussure has become imbued with suspicion. So, is the Saussure we refer to, and that theorists have referred to in their theories, the real 'Saussure'? Or do we only know his reconstructed intellectual remnants driven by the motives of proof? To exit this circle of doubt, we will need to review documents, dates, and even the method of follow-up and reading before writing anything on behalf of Saussure.

We must start with the texts published by their author and return to his manuscripts to classify their value, as well as his scientific correspondence, and then review the students' records and their most consistent notes. In light of these data, we cannot speak much, nor attribute to the teacher what he did not say.

Saussure's established works, like his university studies 'Memoir on the Primitive System of Vowels in Indo-European Languages' (1878) and 'Thesis on the Use of Absolute Genitive in Sanskrit' (1881), illustrate his development of key linguistic concepts. These studies laid the groundwork for his later revolutionary ideas of 'system' and 'value,' which were central to his linguistic theories. Alongside these two works, there are many notes and articles published by Saussure that revolve around his continuous research on Indo-European languages.

These publications include all the interventions he presented at the Linguistics Society in Paris between 1880-1892, which took the form of notes that multiplied until the end of 1892 and later witnessed distancing and interruptions. Among the most famous articles by Saussure at that time were those focused on the ancient Lithuanian language, which Saussure had studied and mastered for many years as part of his research journey.

Interestingly, nothing on general linguistics was addressed except for some simple references, such as the statement denying the existence of a 'true theory of language,' indicating some methodological errors and inconsistencies in the presentation. In this regard, Saussure's works published during his lifetime addressed issues of comparative grammar and matters related to the reconstruction of Indo-European language, showing little interest in general linguistics, even if they alluded to views related to general linguistics.

Gradually, Saussure's publications noticeably ceased, except for some brief interventions on etymology issues presented specifically at the History and Archaeology Society in Geneva. He seemed frustrated through those incomplete or abandoned articles. It is the same frustration that dominated him when he foresaw the effort of publishing a work on general linguistics. In an interview with Leopold Gautier, he said: 'It may be futile

to embark on long research to publish a work on general linguistics, considering that I left a lot of unpublished research when I came here' ⁶.

Ultimately, this confirms that beyond these challenges in his writings on issues related to Indo-European languages, Saussure left only scattered fragments and notes requiring considerable effort for explanation, commentary, or even correction.

The scientific texts published by Saussure during his lifetime mostly focused on issues of comparative grammar of ancient languages, and references to general linguistics appeared only incidentally. This is not contradictory to the prevailing climate of that era, as everyone was keen on achieving the dream of reconstructing Indo-European languages.

The manuscripts confirm that Saussure was driven to think about the conditions related to general linguistics due to his dissatisfaction with the methods and concepts established then in comparative grammatical studies of Indo-European languages. This research orientation clearly shows Saussure's actual path and some elements of his theory.

Therefore, we must take on the role of investigation and inquiry regarding those manuscripts that could clarify Saussurean thought on general linguistics. To accurately trace the evolution of Ferdinand de Saussure's ideas, it's crucial to consider the dating of each manuscript, regardless of the topic⁷.

Key manuscripts that predate his three notable lectures at the University of Geneva include those from November 1891, where he explored historical and comparative aspects of Indo-European languages. These lectures are pivotal, illustrating early thoughts on 'general laws' derived from linguistic studies, the dynamics of language change, and the temporal positioning of language.

The manuscript of notes on accentuation in Lithuanian from 1894 shows a fundamental shift in Saussure's thought from comparative grammar to reflections on issues of general linguistics. For instance, he wrote an intriguing statement: 'The central subject of accentuation issues is not the accent itself, but the relations of opposition and difference within language, of which accent is only a simple component.' This context is where he first used the chess analogy, which would become central to his theories.

8. Saussure's Notes on Whitney and the Emergence of Key Concepts

Additional manuscripts include his notes from November 1894, through which he prepared an article on William Dwight Whitney, the renowned American scholar of Sanskrit⁸. Whitney was credited with deriving some general principles about language despite the incomplete results achieved by comparative grammar, thus representing an exceptional case in Saussure's view due to his philosophical outlook⁹.

These notes contain significant cognitive breaks, such as considering language as a 'human institution,' referencing 'sign theory,' distinguishing between 'evolution' and 'language states,' addressing the quantitative property of oppositions, and mentioning 'arbitrariness' explicitly for the first time. There are numerous valuable notes whose dates and correlations with the development of Saussurean thought in linguistics methodology need careful scrutiny.

Although the notes reflect instances of hesitation, doubt, repetition, additions, fragmentation, and cancellation, they are it is clear from Saussure's general interest in issues related to the project of reconstructing Indo-European languages that a genuine

theory of general linguistics was in the process of forming. We cannot overlook the scientific value of the personal correspondences preserved in the manuscripts, as they clarify, beyond any doubt, the true course of his research, which can be seen as a reflection of the psychological climate driving his desires and setbacks in research. These correspondences provide evidence of the plans, consultations, and inquiries about hidden questions, states of frustration, misunderstandings, and even pathological fears of writing or responding to letters. These aspects cannot be neglected in understanding the characteristics of Saussure's thought.

What preoccupied Saussure in these correspondences were issues related to Indo-European languages, yet they also reflected a clear interest in deriving principles of general linguistics. In a letter dated January 4, 1894, to his friend Antoine Meillet, Saussure openly acknowledged the difficulty of this task, stating: 'I have been unable to define a precise meaning for at least one term in the field of linguistics¹⁰. ' These correspondences also reveal Saussure's preoccupation with a significant literary issue known as the problem of anagrams in ancient Latin and Greek poetry. Here, he appeared to be exploring the implications of his linguistic theories towards the horizons of literary text analysis¹¹.

9.The Problem of Anagrams in Saussure's Research

The hypothesis regarding anagrams in ancient poetic texts involved searching for the presence of word structures related to famous names, deities, or values by tracing phonetic connections within the poem, suggesting that these words constituted the structural framework of the verses in a systematic way. To prove the validity of his intuitions, Saussure left behind thousands of pages of notes, estimated by Jean-Louis Calvet to be around 150 notebooks¹². However, these notes only led him to a state of general uncertainty about his hypothesis.

Despite John Strobinski¹³ dedicating efforts to follow-up by publishing a series of articles compiled in the book 'Words Under Words: Saussure's Anagrams,' many researchers held differing views. For instance, R. Amacker considered it a 'misleading fallacy,' J. Rodard saw it as 'bitter shadows,' and P. Wunderli described it as 'a remarkable but incomplete work.'

Saussure's extensive investigation results did not escape doubt. In his second letter to Antoine Meillet, dated November 12, 1906, he candidly stated: 'It is almost impossible with this idea to know whether one is a victim of delusion or if there is some truth at the core of this idea¹⁴.

The project took hold of him with an obsessive grip. From attempts on dozens of ancient Latin poems, his anagram hypotheses led him to contemporary Latin poetry. Here, he had an encounter with the Latin poet Giovanni Pascoli. Curiosity led him to correspond with Pascoli. After the first letter on March 19, 1909, to which Pascoli's response was negative, considering it a mere coincidence, the second letter on April 6 of the same year came with questions supported by evidence to prove his point. However, there was no reply from Pascoli after this second letter. This lack of response seemed to indicate to Saussure that it was time to stop researching a subject filled with doubts, after having spent nearly five years on it.

Conclusion

It may be difficult to determine explicit results from this investigation and follow-up, which has recently been demonstrated through the efforts of a number of researchers

regarding the significant flaws that accompanied the process of editing the text of the book 'Courses in General Linguistics,' especially considering the value of knowledge that was built according to what came in this text. This reflects the necessity of being aware of the importance of the text that builds knowledge. Nevertheless, many investigators' efforts have sought to reduce the gap and the impact of the shock, describing them as merely natural errors in the complex editing process that the book underwent.

Footnotes

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- 2- Ferdinand de Saussure (1972), Cours de linguistique générale, Tullio de Mauro, col. Bibliothèque scientifique, éd. Payot, Paris, p.520.
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- 4- Estanislao Sofia, (2010), Qu'est qu'un brouillon en sciences du langage ? notes préalables à une édition numérique des manuscrites de F. De Saussure, Cahiers Ferdinand De Saussure, Droz, 211, 63, p.3. In <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00668556>
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- 9- Bouquet Simon et Engler Rudolf, (2002), Saussure Ferdinand, Ecrits de linguistique générale, pp.204 -206.
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