Inhalt / Contents / Sommaire

Aufsätze / Articles

Projektberichte / Reports on Projects / Rapports de projets

Nachruf / Obituary / Nécrologie

Rezensionen / Reviews / Comptes rendus

Neuerscheinungen / New Publications / Publications récentes

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Rezensionen / Reviews / Comptes rendus

Elitzur A. Bar-Asher Siegal

How to apply the Principle of Charity when reading Saussure's *Cours*[*]

Introduction: A summary of *Saussure and Sechehaye: Myth and Genius*

Since the posthumous publication of Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* in 1916, it has received contrasting reactions. While many have considered it revolutionary and mark it as the beginning of modern linguistics, others have been less enthusiastic. Among members of the second group, it is customary to argue against the claim of the first that Saussure innovated an unprecedented type of linguistics. Such a reservation, for example, was stated explicitly in Leonard Bloomfield's (1923) concise review of the second edition of the *Cours* when he wrote the following:

> The value of the *Cours* lies in its clear and rigorous demonstration of fundamental principles. Most of what the author says has long been "in the air" and has been here and there fragmentarily expressed; the systematization is his own.
>
> (Bloomfield: 317)

Seuren's recent evaluation of the *Cours* goes somewhat further, when he concludes the following:

> The conclusion we must draw after our careful and detailed look at Saussure's *Cours* is not cheerful. If one looks at it as just an academic publication, one has to conclude that it fails to meet the standards that are normally applied. If one takes

[*] Pieter A. M. Seuren, *Saussure and Sechehaye: Myth and Genius. A Study in the History of Linguistics and the Foundations of Language*. Leiden, Boston: Brill 2018, xii, 268 pp. [ISBN 978–90–04–37814–8 (hb); 116,00 EUR // ISBN 978–90–04–37815–5 (eBook); 105,00EUR].

I wish to thank Pieter Seuren for reading drafts of this paper and for the collegial and productive dialogue we had about this paper.

> the special circumstances of its author and its coming about into account, one still wonders how it could possibly have had the career it has had. (p. 101)

I must admit that my reaction upon reading such claims was that Seuren took the role of the child in Hans Christian Andersen's "The Emperor's New Clothes", shouting loudly the feeling of many when they first read the *Cours*. Seuren's assessment of Saussure, quoted above, is the conclusion of the third chapter of his book, and it follows a careful reading of the main themes of the *Cours*, including the social dimension of language, *langue* vs. *parole*, the notion of *sign* (and its arbitrariness), and *synchrony* vs. *diachrony*. In his discussions on each topic, Seuren demonstrates how these topics in the *Cours* were not fully developed, consist of contradictions, that most of the ideas were better developed earlier by other European linguists, and that Saussure mostly ignored the rich literature of his time. Furthermore, Seuren points to Saussure's failure to treat syntax (a theme that already appears in the aforementioned review by Bloomfield). This shortcoming becomes a major theme in the rest of Seuren's book.

Thus, the significance of his book, with regard to Saussure, is that it reveals many of the flaws in the *Cours*, flaws that readers of this book, over the last century, have often preferred to ignore (although, as noted by Seuren, many have criticized specific issues.) In this respect, Seuren should be praised for saying explicitly what many have thought discreetly.

The tone of Seuren is different in his review of Charles-Albert Sechehaye when he provides in Chapter 4 a detailed summary of Sechehaye's two major publications (*Programme et methodes de la linguistique theorique,* published in 1908 and *Essai sur la structure logique de la phrase,* published in 1926). This part of the book is a major service to the community of scholars who are interested in the history of linguistics, since, unfortunately, Sechehaye has never received the respect he deserves. (For most scholars he is only known as one of the co-editors of the *Cours*.) Seuren fills this gap by providing a good account of Sechehaye's approach to what the linguistic phenomenon is and to the methodology for how this object of knowledge should be studied (especially the relationship between linguistics and other disciplines such as philosophy and psychology).[1] In this part of the book, Seuren changes his tone, being more forgiving. He tolerates contradictions and gives credit for even unripe ideas. In various issues, he demonstrates how Sechehaye was the first to introduce several concepts to linguistics, such as *syntactic transformations* and *the generative principle* that stood later at the core of Generative Grammar (pp. 130–131).

1) We will return to this topic, and to the differences between Saussure and Sechehaye on this topic below.

Following the meticulous reviews of the three books with some biographical details on the two main protagonists and their possible personal relationship, Chapter 5 in Seuren's book discusses the Subject-Predicate debate that prevailed at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century,[2] and Chapter 6 provides an overview on the nature of *Structuralism* (defined as a manner of analysis, which focuses on the *structure* of the object of investigation; and in linguistics in a way that the elements are in the service of a meaningful whole; see p. 202). These chapters provide brief discussions on an array of central topics that stand at the foundations of linguistics, such as what the scientific inspirations of linguists are and what determines the scientific methodologies in this discipline. Chapters 5–6, to a large extent, also revolve around the three major themes mentioned earlier:

1. The significant role of propositions in the human sciences in general (the mental act of attributing properties to entities)[3] and in linguistic in particular (as revealed by the syntactic realizations of the predications on the one hand, and by various other exhibitions of the relevant discursive relations on the other hand.)
2. The extent of the contribution, or even the relevancy, of Saussure to the major topics in linguistics in the 20th century is minimal, often expressing skepticism whether it exists at all.
3. An emphasis on the participation of Sechehaye in these discussions, as he provided preliminary ideas that were found to be in the right direction (according to Seuren) in the course of the history of linguistics.

Seuren's book concentrates on the myth about Saussure, which considers him to be the father of modern linguistics in general and of structuralism in particular. Therefore, the goal of Chapters 5 and 6 is to discuss the main topics that stood at the heart of linguistics at the time of Saussure and after him, and they provide strong and convincing arguments that the *Cours* did not contribute to these topics, and therefore this myth is not based on substantial facts.

After providing this synopsis of Seuren's book, I would like to comment in the rest of this article in some more depth on his assessment of Saussure. I must emphasize that this is not an attempt to review all aspects of Seuren's

2) For a detailed review of this debate, Elffers-van Ketel (1991) is still the standard. The main contribution of Seuren to this chapter in the history of linguistics is that he covers also some later developments in the 20th century, and also how the literature in this debate corresponds with more recent theoretical discussions.

3) This is also described often as the mental operations of predicating and judging and in the history of philosophy and in the history of linguistis it was often transferred from the object of an act of thinking to the act itself and to the words or sentences in which that act is expressed. Thus, one has to be careful in the use of the term propositions, and see Seuren p. 178 for his definition of the term and for references to the literature on propositions.

book in depth, and other important aspects of his book deserve further discussions. For our purposes, this book invites us to have a methodological discussion regarding what can be our reactions when encountering significant problems in the literature from the early periods of linguistics in general, and in Saussure's book in particular. To what extent our responsibility is merely to point to these problems, or whether we should aim at solving them. In the case of the study of Saussure, I would suggest specific steps that can be recommended if we are interested in understanding Saussure — the person. This is not Seuren's approach, since his discussions revolve around the *Cours* — the book.

I would like to take a different approach than Seuren and suggest that although one can agree with Seuren's claim that the *Cours*, as is, does not deserve the praise it has received, it is more beneficial, or at least interesting, to my taste, to try to understand what led to the contradictions in this text. Obviously, this is not a criticism of Seuren's endeavor, but a call for an alternative attitude, as I take his observations concerning the problems in this text as a starting point for a different route. Ironically, in many ways, I follow Sechehaye's own approach when he reflected about the *Cours* 24 years after its publication (Sechehaye 1940) and attempted to solve some of the contradictions which were exposed by its early readers. This approach, I would argue, may lead us to uncovering interesting ideas in Saussure's writings, and to the revelations of intellectual roads that have not been developed further, and to reflect about their validity.

Due to the nature of this paper, I limit myself to condensed comments, and each of the following brief discussions should be developed further in other venues. I start with some thoughts and observations concerning the topic that is one of Seuren's criticisms of Saussure as known from the *Cours*: the non-inclusion of syntax in his treatment of languages.[4] This issue, however, seems to be of special significance, as it puts Saussure in contrast to Sechehaye who concentrates on this topic and also it is related to issues that stand at the heart of Chapters 5–6 of Seuren's book. This discussion provides a good opportunity to reflect on how to read the *Cours*. After focusing on this topic, I elaborate a little further on two dichotomies often associated with Saussure, *langue-parole* and *synchrony-diachrony*, and point to what I believe stands behind some of the misunderstanding of Saussure's thoughts.

I must emphasize that the following discussion deals with syntax in our cotemporary use of the term. This is not the way Saussure himself used the

4) As mentioned, this issue is among other points of criticism raised by Seuren, such as its intellectual isolation, its silence regarding the great subject-predicate debate, its deficient definition of 'sign' and its failure to take into account the things referred to in the analysis of the speech circuit.

term (see Seuren p. 60 for a more elaborated clarification on the use of the term syntax in the history of linguistics.)

Why did Saussure not include propositions as independent linguistic/cognitive entities?

Seuren repeatedly returns throughout the book to the fact that Saussure had no clear vision on how syntactic inquiries should or can be carried out (see for example, pp. 60–69), and I believe that he is right in pressing this issue. Seuren is spot-on in identifying this omission as one of the most significant failures of Saussure and in that the ramifications of this failure were acute to his life-long project, as it reveals the lack of clear methodology for synchronic linguistics in Saussure's linguistic approach. While, generally speaking, Saussure followed the *neogrammarian*'s tradition in historical linguistics, he never made clear what should be expected from someone who does synchronic linguistics in a scientific manner beyond providing descriptive grammars.[5] In this context, it is worth mentioning that Saussure himself never ceased from being active only in historical linguistics, and one cannot point to a single paper written by him that follows a methodology of synchronic linguistics.[6]

Again, as noted by Seuren, with regard to syntax, Saussure is similar to most of his contemporaries who did not study this sub-discipline of linguistics (in the sense that the term "syntax" is used today). The question is, therefore: why?

One possible answer would be that he simply did not want to explore this area, but as will become clear below, this is simply not true.[7] I would like, therefore, to suggest two reasons that may explain the absence of this domain in Saussure's linguistic framework and how his *decision* to not include syntactic entities as part of his linguistic ontology[8] reflects fundamental aspects in his scientific approach:

5) In this context, one must mention Saussure's praise of the classical grammarians, who, according to Saussure, followed a methodology which is almost scientific in studying languages synchronically. In Bar-Asher Siegal (2017), I discuss this topic at some length (cf. pp. 27–29 in Seuren's discussion).

6) This puzzle about the gap between Saussure's practice and theory led various interpreters to speak about "two Saussure" ("deux Saussure"). See, for example, Redard (1978) and more recently Morpurgo's (2004) discussion about his scholarship.

7) Bouquet (2004: 214–216) surveys the various places in the courses where Saussure was hesitant about the status of syntax and how his thoughts were misrepresented in the *Cours*.

8) I deliberately speak in terms of ontology, since as demonstrated in Bar-Asher Siegal (2017: 263–265), Saussure has a realistic approach, which requires a natural object to stand at the heart of a discipline. This is an issue that sets Saussure and Sechehaye apart, and it is interesting to compare how each of them determines what is the basic linguistic unit. Sechehaye (1908: 138–140) speaks about identifying the cells (see also p. 72 concerning this biological term), but

1. Lack of conceptual tools to perceive the notion of a proposition: for Saussure semantics is semiology. In other words, meaning has to do only with signification. Accordingly, linguistic events of speakers' expressions are merely linearizations of linguistic signs with their double aspects: the *signified* (*signifié*) and the *signifier* (*signifiant*).[9] Consequently, semantically speaking, nothing changes at the level of what logicians will treat as a representation of proposition in declarative sentences; this is merely an accumulation of a list of signs (cf. the quote from Paul on p. 64, which express similar ideas). As long as linguistic entities are defined by the correspondence between the forms and their meaning (which is obviously not a trivial assumption), if one wants to speak about sentences or propositions as a different type of linguistic entity, it is necessary to define their semantics as having a different nature.

   Since Plato (in the dialogue *The Sophist*) and Aristotle (in *On Interpretation*) and in the modern time in the work of Frege, the semantics of sentences has to do with truth-values (truth conditions), which is related to the act of judgement or to proposition as a mental act. In Frege's terms a proposition, which reflects a predication, has the predicate as a function that takes the references (*Bedeutung*) as arguments and provides truth values as outputs; the latter is the reference of the sentence. As will become clear, for Saussure and many other linguists of his period, speaking in such terms meant transgressing the boundaries of linguistics.[10] As a consequence of this self-constraint, linguists were restricted to the province of morphology,[11] which remains within the boundaries of significations. In other words, it is hard to see in Saussure's semantic framework in what sense there is semantics beyond lexical meaning and this has prevented him from applying even classical philosophical treatments of propositions within the realm of linguistics.

2. An epistemological problem with the ability to analyze the linguistic realization of propositions. As mentioned by Seuren (p. 25), Saussure in his own writings briefly noted on why, for him, Subject and Predicate are not linguistic terms. Seuren, however, refers only to the first part of Saussure's discussion, and as will become evident, it is crucial to consider the broader contexts where Saussure speaks about this issue, as in the following passages:

   > In the sentence the most notable thing is that while it is made up of at least two logical (ideal) terms, it can be reduced to a single linguistic term, without the word being reducible in such a way as to elude the conclusion. Thus *fiat!* or *sunt*. Or probably 'Who says this?' — 'God'. The limits of ellipsis (the famous ellipsis) only occur when articulated sound stops, and when language gives way to pure thought …
   >
   > The very word *ellipsis* has a meaning which should give pause for thought. **Such a term suggests that we know at the outset how many terms a sentence *should* be made up of, and that by comparing the actual terms· it contains we work out the shortfall. But if a term is infinitely extendable in its meaning, the calculation we are trying to establish using *n* ideas and *n* terms is clearly quite ridiculous, and moreover perfectly arbitrary**. And if we put aside the specific sentence and reflect more generally, we are likely to reach the rapid conclusion that *there is no ellipsis*, simply because signs of language are always sufficient for what they express, if we recognize that a given word or phrase expresses more than we thought. Similarly not a single meaning-bearing word is without ellipsis, but then *why speak of ellipsis* (as does Breal) as if there was some sort of norm below which words are elliptical. Every one is elliptical, and there can be no interruption or precise evaluation of the. . . . Ellipsis is simply surplus value …
   > (WGL, p. 67; emphasis is mine).

Similar ideas are expressed in another place:

he does not seem to be bothered by ontology, as his discussion stays at the rational level (although some ontological claims are found in this book, see for example the note on p. 24). This difference between the two is missing from the discussions in Seuren's book and deserves a future study. It may explain the choice of the editors to prefer Saussure's 3rd course, over the first two, as this was the course in which Saussure used less ontological terminology (see Joseph (2000) for some preliminary discussion about the differences between the first two courses and the last).

9) This is the context in which Saussure introduced "the linear character of the language" in the first course (CLG–I, p. 78).

10) A topic that requires a longer discussion is to what extent Saussure was concerned about the autonomy of linguistics and about drawing clear boundaries between linguistics and other fields (psychology, philosophy, sociology, etc.). It is a well-known fact that the last sentences of the *Cours*, "Linguistics has for its unique and true object language, taken by itself and for itself", was phrased by the editors and was never documented as expressed by Saussure himself (cf. Seshehaye 1908: 15), and it is still uncertain to what extent he would have accepted it. Overall, it is very clear that Saussure cared less about the boundaries between disciplines, as he explicitly wrote: "Little by little psychology will take practical charge of our science, because it will realize, not that *langue* is one of its branches, but that it is the very basis of its own activity" (WGL, p. 73) — for some literature on Saussure's approach to psychology, see Godel (1957: 182–183), Amacker (1994), Bergounioux (1995), Fehr (1995), Joseph (2000: 322–327) and Stawarska (2015: 135–136). What seems to be the case is that Saussure wanted to define the "object of study" in a very limited way — that it would include only entities that are related to the language faculty, and for him, this faculty is reflected in the linguistic sign located in the brain. One place where Saussure discussed this issue in some detail was, towards the end of his life, in the 3rd course on April 25th, 1911 (CLG–III, pp. 66–69). Accordingly, unlike Seuren's description (pp. 44–46; 125–126), Sechehaye was not that distant from Saussure with respect to the question of the autonomy of language, although it seems that, as Seuren emphasizes correctly, Sechehaye went further in the inclusion of the logical categories within the realm of the linguistic inquiry (Sechehaye 1908: 112–113), while for Saussure (as seen in the quote hereafter) these categories are part of the "thought" and not of the "language".

11) In various places, Saussure mentions that assuming that linguistics is associated with semiology entails focusing on morphology as the scope of linguistics. See *inter alia* WGL, p. 6.

> Considerable difference between terms such as *subject* etc. used for the sentence and 'parts of speech'. Sentence terms may not correspond to anything linguistically whereas an 'adjective' or an 'adverb', etc. must at least be represented by a vocal form. We can evoke the subject of the sentence without this subject being actually present· in front of us, translated· into a material form, but we cannot evoke a noun without implying that the noun has a vocal shell, something absolutely crucial …
>
> There are three types, viz:
>
> Not requiring vocal expression: subject, predicate.
>
> Requiring vocal expression, but not a vocal setting corresponding to the categories: adjective, noun, etc.
>
> Other vague expressions of differences (WGL, p. 82)

Besides drawing the lines between what belongs to the "thought" and what is part of the "signs of languages", which seems to be of importance to Saussure (a topic that was briefly mentioned earlier and in footnote 10), we encounter here a deeper criticism: assuming that each sentence has a subject and a predicate entails ascribing these features to elements which are not phonetically expressed (as he demonstrates with case in vocatives or replies).

A reasonable interpretation of these passages suggests that Saussure claims something stronger than merely noting why this syntactic division is missing from his approach. He seems to criticize the scientific methodology which relies on hypothetical categories without empirical evidence. This line of argumentation seems to be consistent with Saussure's somewhat positivist approach to the sciences, according to which theories must rely, at least initially, on positive data (see Bar-Asher 2008 and 2017). Consequently, Saussure did not participate in the "Great Subject-Predicate Debate" due to some fundamental creeds concerning what the criteria are for a scientific analysis.

It is beyond the scope of the current discussion to elaborate on the ramifications of these observations at length. I would like, however, to use these remarks as an opportunity to portray an alternative approach for how to study Saussure when encountering problems in his discussions, different than the one exhibited in Seuren's book.

While I believe that most linguists nowadays do not follow Saussure's purist positivist approach, I think that when acting as historians of the discipline it is less compelling to criticize someone from a century ago, whatever his reputation is, and it is advisable to attempt to understand his motivations and his underlying epistemological assumptions and to examine whether they could lead to the problems we encounter in these texts.

I must admit at the outset that the difference between Seuren's approach and mine derives from the fact that he refrains to refer to "real Saussure", as reflected in Sausure's own writings and in the students' notes who attended the three courses, from which the *Cours* was composed, while I believe that these

sources are often the key to solving problems in the *Cours*. Seuren's justification for this approach is the following:

> even if it were to be found that the *Cours*, as published in 1916, differs substantially from what Saussure actually taught, it is still that book, the 'vulgate', not the supposed actual teaching, that forms the textual basis of the aura of genius that has arisen around Saussure's person: the search for the 'real' Saussure came too late to have had any influence on the course of linguistic theory over the past century. (p. 14)

Although in principle this is true, it is still insightful to see how these sources often guide us in how to read the *Cours* and lead us to charitable interpretations. I turn now to demonstrate briefly in other topics as well how the sources for the "real Saussure" can shed some light on topics that were discussed in Seuren's book. This leads us to the question of how we can apply the Principle of Charity when we read the *Cours*. The Principle of Charity is a methodological presumption, which should govern the interpretation of the beliefs and utterances of others. It urges charitable interpretation, by instructing to seek to maximize the truth or rationality of what others think and say. For example, when a contradiction is exposed one has to seek for ways in which apparently contradicting opinions expressed by the same person can be reconciled.

The *Cours* provides an interesting challenge for this principle. While Seuren is right that in various topics it is difficult to offer charitable interpretations to the contradictions and to the undeveloped ideas of the *Cours* as a book, but I will argue that we can still read it with some charity if we read it against the history of this book and the way it was composed, in other words, if we are interested in Saussure — the person. This is by no means a non-critical reading of Saussure, it is merely an attempt to provide a consistent and developed approach — which can, and should be later examined in a critical way. Admittedly, arguing that the *Cours* does not represents the actual thoughts of Saussure leads to an uncherished assessment of the editing work by Sechehaye and Bally, but in fact this is justifiable by demonstrating the rational that stands behind their choices.

Langue–Parole

Seuren concludes his discussion on the topic of the relationship between *langue–parole* with the following statement:

> Given the lack of further information, the most realistic reading of the events suggests that both Saussure and Sechehaye plucked it from the academic air, where this distinction had been circulating for some time, but that Sechehaye was the first

not only to publish it but also to make it the cornerstone of any linguistic edifice (p. 58)[12]

The question of who should receive the credit on making this distinction, "the cornerstone of any linguistic edifice", raises various interesting issues about the relationship between the two Genevan colleagues, which to some extent stands at the heart of Seuren's book.

First, it is reasonable to assume that the medium of their communication regarding issues in general linguistics was mostly oral dialogue. Therefore, it is hard to know who said what first to whom. However, in discussions on who should receive the credit, evidence of the time when Saussure thought about a certain topic can be crucial, and in such a discussion, it is expected to seek evidence from the "real Saussure". It is, therefore, important to note that already in his 1891 manuscript *On the Double Essence*, Saussure invokes the notion of *parole*, where he distinguished between "real speech" (parole) and the linguistic system (also called potential *parole*) (WGL, p. 39).[13]

Second, for those who are familiar with the published *Cours*, the dichotomy made between *langue* and *parole* is very sharp (CLG, Introduction, Chapter IV), and indeed, it seems to be "the cornerstone of any linguistic edifice". There are, however, reasons to doubt to what extent this is indeed a reflection of Saussure's own thoughts. It is sufficient to note that in Engler's edition (CLG–EC, p. 52 ff.) some of the most famous statements in the *Cours* about this division are additions of the editors and were not taken from the students' notes.[14]

Furthermore, examining the role of this dichotomy in the notes from the actual courses reveals that Saussure used it in a variety of ways (in fact, Godel (1957: 142–159) already noted that one can identify a development in Saussure's ideas about the distinction between *langue* and *parole*), and more importantly, there are aspects that are not reflected in the published *Cours*. For example, as already observed by Harris (2001: 30), the distinction between *langue* and *parole* in Saussure's theory in the first course (CLG–I, p. 65) is related to his analysis of the role of association. Association is a psychological process, which is part of the individual's *faculty of language*, and it is linked to the *parole*, to the individual analysis of actual speech; those of its products that get **socially** sanctioned enter into the *langue*. The editors, who missed the important role of the mental process of association as reflected in the formation of analogies in Saussure's analysis, could not provide a good representation of Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole* (see Bar-Asher Siegal 2017: 268, n. 53). It is reasonable to read some of Saussure's discussions in a way that the distinction between *langue* and *parole* is merely descriptive, where various phenomena are located — especially with respect to the latter — and accordingly, for him, this dichotomy was not really the cornerstone of any linguistic edifice. The significant part for Saussure was the fact that the *langue* exists.

Accordingly, one must be careful when arguing that Saussure followed Sechehaye, as it is always possible that Sechehaye, as the editor of the posthumous publication, was *ipso facto* responsible for making Saussure's ideas seem similar to his own. This is an aspect of the study about the relationship between these two scholars which is missing from Seuren's book. There are, naturally, strong reasons to believe that a better understanding of Sechehaye's ideas may shed some light on the way his thoughts could have shaped the publication. Sechehaye (1940), for example, is a good place to see Sechehaye's own ideas on this dichotomy and how it could affect his reading of the notes from the students when he composed the *Cours* with Bally. It seems to be the case that a study that will compare the "real Saussure", the published *Cours*, and the writings of Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye would provide us with significant tools in understanding the intellectual process of the formation of the *Cours*.

Paying attention to the misrepresentation of the editors is relevant to other problems in the *Cours*, which were also criticized by Seuren (p. 94–101), for example regarding the relationship between synchrony and diachrony, which will stand at the heart of the next setion.

Synchronic vs. *Diachronic Linguistics*

Concerning the synchronic-diachronic dichotomy, Seuren notes about the history of the distinction, and justifiably indicates that this distinction cannot be attributed to Saussure, and he criticizes him for not being part of the discussions on this topic in the literature of his time. In addition, he says the following:

> Saussure, apart from being uninformed, appears to have been unclear in his own mind regarding the priority or primacy of either the diachronic or the synchronic point of view. (p. 96)

This is a very painful accusation when we are dealing with one of the issues that seems to stand at the heart of Sauusure's thoughts throughout his life. Some of the contradictions mentioned in Seuren's discussion have been known since the publications of the *Cours*.[15]

12) This is partially a quote from Sechehaye (1917: 11), mentioned on p. 56.

13) See Joseph (2012: 387).

14) Others have already commented on the role of the editors in this topic; see, for example, Bouquet (2004: 207–210).

15) It is worth mentioning what Sechehaye wrote about this issue:
En ce faisant nous avons use evidemment de beaucoup de liberte à l'egard du texte du

While one must admit that it is possible to identify various changes in Saussure's thoughts on this topic throughout his life, this is not the main reason for the lack of consistency in the *Cours*. As I have discussed at length elsewhere (Bar-Asher Siegal 2017), a big part of the confusion in understanding the *Cours* on this issue is related to the fact that the editors ignored a crucial aspect of the distinction that Saussure made in his writings and classes.

According to Saussure, the distinction between the study of historical changes (diachronic linguistics) and the study of the conscious state (synchronic linguistics) also relates to the scope of what is being studied in each of them: **the former deals with sounds and the latter with morphemes.** While this claim might be surprising for readers of the *Cours*, this is Saussure's description of the various types of linguistics in his manuscript *On the Dual Essence of Language*:

> I. Point of view of the *etat de langue itself*,
>
> — not different from the *instantaneous* point of view,
> — not different from the *semiological* point of view (or that of the sign-idea),
> — not different from the point of view of *the individual will outside history*,
> — not different from the *morphological* or *grammatical* point of view,
> — not different from the point of view of *combined elements*.
> (The *units* in this domain are fixed by the relationship between meaning and sign, or by the relationship between the signs, which is no different.)
>
> II. Point of view of transversal units,
>
> — not different from the *diachronic* point of view,
> — not different from the *phonetic* point of view (or from that of the *vocal figure* detached from the idea *and detached from the function of a sign,* which comes back to the same thing as in 1),
> — also not different from the point of view of *isolated elements*. (WGL, 6)

I will briefly summarize Saussure's division between these two frameworks: Synchronic linguistics covers signs (i.e. morphemes). It is the study of the relationship between signs, which is another way to describe associations (which are reflected via analogies). In diachronic linguistics, only forms are studied (i.e. the sounds). Forms are "isolated" because the sounds from different stages of a language are compared in diachronic linguistics, and the meaning of the words in which they appear is irrelevant.

These are ideas that Saussure kept for the rest of his life, or at least until the second course he gave on general linguistics where he discussed this issue at length (CLG–II, p. 67–68).

maitre, mais nous croyons, en procedant à une revision de ses principes, avoir continue et precise sa pensee retenue et deformee par certaines preoccupatipns qui dominaient la linguistique de l'epoque. (Sechehaye 1940: 6)

Grasping these differences changes our perspectives on the division between the two frameworks in which linguistics can be studied, and the hierarchy between them. This whole aspect of the way Saussure perceived the differences between the two "points of view" is missing from the *Cours,* and it is reasonable to assume that this lack of representation of Saussure's ideas probably has to do with the editors' inclination to make him sound similar to his contemporaries.

In Bar-Asher Siegal (2017), I explained what motivated his distinction and also demonstrated how the editors' inattention to this distinction corrupted his thoughts in the published *Cours*, since synchronic elements (e.g. morphemes) were inserted into the historical parts of the *Cours* and vice versa. In a nutshell: a diachronic analysis can stand independently of any synchronic fact, according to Saussure, when sound shifts are studied, but questions like "what is part of an analysis" and "which facts become part of linguistic knowledge" depend on synchronic facts. Accordingly, the relationship between synchrony and diachrony is both hierarchical and independent.

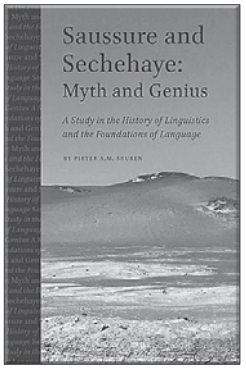
I am by no means trying to justify Saussure's division, but I wish to argue that it seems problematic to praise Seshehaye and to criticize Saussure, when Seshehaye who as one of the co-editors, composed the *Cours* out of quotes from the actual courses, is probably part of the reason behind the contradictions in Saussure's published *Cours*.

Final remarks

In this short discussion, I have attempted to demonstrate how reading the *Cours* attributed to Saussure alongside the publications of his younger colleague Albert Sechehaye can lead to a more charitable interpretation of the posthumous publication, especially when it is compared with what is known to us about "real Saussure". It does not, however, justify the myth about Saussure, which is justifiably criticized by Seuren.

Throughout this paper I have given only three short illustrations, and I believe that similar observations could be made for other parts of Seuren's book. For example, in his discussions on the notion of arbitrariness (p. 80–87) or on the claim that "there are only differences in the Language System" (p. 92–94), one could have benefited from understanding why Saussure's take on these issues are crucial for his ontology about the existence of languages and how they are important for his epistemological assumptions concerning linguistic knowledge. Such inquiries, as I have attempted to exhibit elsewhere (Bar-Asher Siegal 2017), can demonstrate which philosophy of sciences is reflected in Saussure's thoughts — and it can provide some significant, not anecdotal, contribution to the discussion in Chapter 6 of Seuren's book about the scientific aspirations of the discipline of linguistics.

As I made it clear earlier, this is not a criticism of Seuren's book, as we have different goals in our studies. I must be grateful for the observations in his book, which, from my point of view, are invitations to seek for more insights from the "real Saussure". These discussions did not aim at arguing against Seuren's criticism of the Saussurean myth. In fact, they share with Seuren the desire to provide an accurate portrayal of the history of linguistics and to avoid myths that are probably inevitable parts of the history of academic disciplines.



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