

Saussure's *Sôme* (or *Aposème*) and *Parasôme* (or *Parasème*): Some New Reflections

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Abstract

Sôme, according to Saussure, is empty, and it has no beingness. So, the link between *sôme* and *parasôme* is arbitrary. Representation is the essence of the linguistic sign, which is realized by means of arbitrariness. If the sign has its own nature of existence, so does the concept that it represents. The associative combination of signs (signifiers)¹ and concepts (signifieds) will lead to the shifting and appending of one nature of existence to another. Thus, we have to choose the sign that is empty of inherent existence, a nonexistent being, a *sôme*. Saussure's "phenomenon", a kind of relationship and form, is a sound-image which is auditory in nature. In this regard, sound is obviously purer, emptier than writing and can better realize the sign's representative nature. The emptiness of vocal signs and our mental ability to grasp this emptiness indicate the advanced development of human spirit. Each linguistic element itself is empty, and the value and signification lie in the difference from other linguistic elements and coexistence with other significations. There is no absolutely positive and totally definite meaning of one word or sign. It takes difference and negativity to generate meaning, meaning from some linguistic state. Language is ambiguous, but this ambiguity can achieve or realize accuracy in a synchronic differential or negative relationship. In this sense, the power of language takes root in negativity and difference.

Keywords: *sème, sôme (or aposème), kénôme, emptiness, parasôme, parasème, negativity, difference*

1. *Sôme* is empty, and it has no beingness. So, the link between *sôme* and *parasôme* is arbitrary.

In his third course of lectures on general linguistics during 1910 and 1911, Saussure

said, “Le lien qui relie une image acoustique donnée avec un concept déterminé et qui lui confère sa valeur de signe est un lien radicalement arbitraire”. [The link connecting a given acoustic image with a specific concept and conferring upon it its value as a sign is a radically arbitrary link.] (Saussure, 1993, p. 76) The link is arbitrary, because a given acoustic image (a sign, a signifier) itself is empty. To help clarify his point, he observed: “On s’est servi du mot symbole pour désigner le signe linguistique, ou plus exactement ce que nous appelons le signifiant. Il y a des inconvénients à l’admettre, justement à cause de notre premier principe. Le symbole a pour caractère de n’être jamais tout à fait arbitraire; il n’est pas vide, il y a un rudiment de lien naturel entre le signifiant et le signifié. Le symbole de la justice, la balance, ne pourrait pas être remplacé par n’importe quoi, un char, par exemple”. [The word *symbol* has been used to designate the linguistic sign, or more specifically, what is here called the signifier. Principle I in particular weighs against the use of this term. One characteristic of the symbol is that it is never wholly arbitrary; it is not empty, for there is the rudiment of a natural bond between the signifier and the signified. The symbol of justice, a pair of scales, could not be replaced by just any other symbol, such as a chariot.] (Saussure, 1972, p. 101) In the Orangery manuscripts, Saussure wrote:

On commet cette erreur de croire [qu’il y a] 1. un mot comme par exemple *voir* existant en soi, 2. une signification, qui est la chose *associée* à ce mot. Or [in sé *voir* non è niente—Tullio De Mauro’s *complement*. Saussure, 2005, p. 105, n. 131], c’est-à-dire que c’est l’association même qui fait le mot, et que hors d’elle il n’y a plus rien. La meilleure preuve est que *vwar* dans une autre langue aurait un autre sens: n’est par conséquent rien en soi: et par conséquent n’est un *mot* que dans la mesure où il évoque un sens. *Mais, cela vu, il est donc bien clair que vous n’avez plus le droit de diviser*, et d’admettre d’un côté le *mot*, de l’autre sa *signification*. Vous pouvez seulement constater le *kénôme* $\cap$ et le sème associatif $\bowtie$. (Saussure, 2002, p. 93)

[We mistakenly believe (there to be) (1) a word such as *voir* for example which exists in its own right, (2) a meaning, which is the thing *associated* with this word. But [*voir* itself is nothing], in other words it is the association itself which makes the word, and without it there is nothing. The best proof of this is that *vwar*, in another language, would have another meaning: it is therefore nothing in itself: and thus is only a word insofar as it evokes a meaning. *But, once this is clear, it becomes obvious that you can no longer divide things up*, putting the *word* on one side, and its *meaning* on the other. The two things make a whole. All that one can do is to assert the existence of the *kenome* $\cap$ and the associative *seme* $\bowtie$. (Saussure, 2006, p. 63)]

According to Carol Sanders and Matthew Pires, “*kénôme* (difference, negative relationship) is a coinage (presumably from Greek *kenos* = empty) that Saussure himself did not continue to use”. (Saussure, 2006, p. 63) Tullio De Mauro also notes: “*kénoma*: dal greco κένωμα, ‘vuoto’, per indicare il guscio sonoro svuotato di significazione”

[*kénoma*: from the greek κένωμα, 'empty', indicate[s] the sound's shell, emptied of meaning]. (Saussure, 2005, p. 105, n. 132) In *Notes Item*, Saussure wrote:

(L)e mot de *sème* écarte, ou voudrait écarter, tout *prépondérance* et toute séparation initiale entre le côté vocal et le côté idéologique du signe. Il représente *le tout du signe*, c'est-à-dire signe et signification unis en une sorte de personnalité. (Saussure, 2002, p. 105)

[The word *seme* removes, or tries to remove, any *imbalance* and any initial separation between the vocal side and the ideological side of the sign. It represents *the sign as a whole*, i.e. sign and signification united in a sort of personality. (Saussure, 2006, p. 70)]

Vérité est que *parasème* et *aposeme* sont des notions capitales. (Saussure, 2002, p. 105)

[The truth is that *paraseme* and *aposeme* are crucial notions. (Saussure, 2006, p. 70)]

L'*aposeme* est l'enveloppe vocale du *sème*. Et non l'enveloppe d'une signification. (Saussure, 2002, p. 105)

[The *aposeme* is the vocal shell of the *seme*. Not the shell of a signification. (Saussure, 2006, p. 79)]

Je crois que dans le discursif on peut parler d'*aposemes* (de figures vocales). (Saussure, 2002, p. 105)

[I think that in discourse one may refer to *aposemes* (vocal figures). (Saussure, 2006, p. 70)]

Forme s'emploie pour *aposeme*, *sème*, et enfin partie matérielle du *sème* synchronique. (Saussure, 2002, p. 105)

[*Form* is used for *aposeme*, *seme*, and lastly for the material part of the synchronic *seme*. (Saussure, 2006, p. 70)]

Aposeme = cadavre de *sème*. (Saussure, 2002, p. 107)

[*Aposeme* = corpse of *seme*. (Saussure, 2006, p. 72)]

Il ne faut pas appeler (...) *aposeme* une formule phonique quelconque comme *-bd-*, mais seulement les formules phoniques qui ont un certain moment été le corps d'un *sème*. (Saussure, 2002, p. 107)

[One should not use *aposeme* for just any acoustic series such as *-bd-*, but only for acoustic series which have at some point embodied a *seme*. (Saussure, 2006, p. 72)]

(N)ous disons bien que diachroniquement c'est simplement le même *aposeme*, mais cela n'entraîne pas que ce soit encore le même *sème*. Voilà la différence. (Saussure, 2002, p. 108)

[We assert that diachronically it is simply the same *aposeme*, but that does not mean that it is still the same *seme*. That is the difference. (Saussure, 2006, p. 72)]

Les sujets parlants n'ont aucune conscience des *aposemes* qu'ils prononcent, pas plus que de l'*idée pure* d'autre part. Ils n'ont conscience que du *sème*. C'est là ce qui assure la transformation parfaitement mécanique de l'aposeme à travers les siècles. (Saussure, 2002, p. 109)

[Speaking subjects have no awareness of the *aposemes* they use in speech, nor indeed of the *pure idea*. They are only aware of the *seme*. That is what ensures the perfectly mechanical transformation of the *aposeme* through the centuries. (Saussure, 2006, p. 73)]

En faveur d'Inertôme. Même un terme comme *sôme* (σῶμα) deviendrait en très peu de temps, s'il avait la chance d'être adopté, synonyme de *sème*, auquel il veut être opposé. C'est ici que la terminologie linguistique paie son tribut à la vérité même que nous établissons comme fait d'observation. (Saussure, 2002, p. 113)

[*In favour of 'Inertôme'*. Even a term like *sôme* (σῶμα) would, if it had the chance of being adopted, fast become synonymous with *seme*, which is meant to be its opposite. Linguistic terminology here owes a great deal to the very truth we are establishing as observed fact. (Saussure, 2006, p. 77)]

Le signe, sôme, sème, etc. On ne peut vraiment maîtriser le signe, le suivre comme un ballon dans les airs, avec certitude de le rattraper, que lorsqu'on s'est rendu complètement compte de sa nature, nature double ne consistant nullement dans l'enveloppe et pas davantage dans l'esprit, dans l'air hydrogène qu'on y insuffle et qui ne vaudrait rien du tout sans l'enveloppe.

Le ballon, c'est le *sème*, et l'enveloppe le *sôme*, mais cela est loin de la conception qui dit que l'enveloppe est le *signe*, et l'hydrogène la *signification*, sans que le *ballon* soit rien pour sa part. Il est tout pour l'aérostier, de même que le *sème* est tout pour le linguiste. (Saussure, 2002, pp. 114-115)

[*Sign, sôme, seme, etc.* One cannot really master the sign, follow it like a balloon in the air, sure of catching it, unless one has a thorough understanding of its nature, a double nature which is neither just the material shell nor just mind, or just the hydrogen gas within, which would be worthless without the shell.

The balloon is the *seme*, and the shell the *sôme*, but that is far from the conception which considers the shell to be the *sign*, and the hydrogen the *signification*, without attributing anything to the *balloon* itself. It is everything to the pilot of an airship, just as the *seme* is everything to the linguist. (Saussure, 2006, p. 78)]

Ce qu'on appelle la signification est ce que nous appelons le *parasôme* et, à la différence du *sôme*, ne peut jamais être dégagée de manière à devenir pour elle-même un objet de recherche ou d'observation. Entendons-nous bien: elle peut devenir dans une certaine mesure un tel objet de recherche et d'observation à la condition qu'on en revienne sans cesse au *sème*, aux différents *sèmes* qui unissent ce *parasôme* à quelque chose de matériel, c'est-à-dire au *sôme*, mais ceci ne constitue rien de semblable à l'étude des *sômes*, que nous avons reconnue indépendante. (Saussure, 2002, p. 115)

[What is called signification is what we call the *parasôme* and, unlike the *sôme*, it can never be detached so as to constitute in itself an object of research or observation. Let us be clear: it may to a degree constitute just such an object of research and observation as long as reference is continually made to the *seme*, to the various *semes* which unite this *parasôme* to something material, i.e. to the *sôme*, but this in no way similar to the study of *sômes*, whose independence we have recognized. (Saussure, 2006, p. 79)]

Les parasèmes. Pour un mot quelconque faisant partie de la langue, un second mot, même n'ayant avec le premier aucune 'parenté', est un *parasème*. La seule et simple qualité du parasème est de faire partie du même système psychologique de signes, de manière que si l'on trouve, après observation, qu'un signe donné a sa complète existence hors des signes concurrents du système, *qu'il n'y a point d'importance à observer* pour un signe donné l'ensemble des signes concurrents, le mot de *parasème* devra tomber, et réciproquement il devra subsister si on constate qu'un mot n'est point complètement autonome dans le système dont il fait partie. (Saussure, 2002, pp. 106-107)

[*Parasemes.* For any word which belongs to the language, a second word, even if it is in no way "related" to the first, is a *paraseme*. The single, simple characteristic of a *paraseme* is that of belonging to the same psychological system of signs, so that if observation shows that a given sign has its full existence outside the concurrent signs of the system, if for a given sign *there is no point at all in observing* all the concurrent signs, the word *paraseme* should be rejected, and conversely it should be retained if it is found that a word is not completely autonomous in the system to which it belongs. (Saussure, 2006, pp. 71-72)]

We can thus indicate with this equation: *seme* (the sign as a whole) = *sôme* (or *aposeme*) (the vocal shell of the seme, vocal figure, the material part of the synchronic seme, corpse of seme, signifier) + *parasôme* (or *paraseme*) (signification, signified). *Sôme* is empty, and it has no beingness. So, the link between *sôme* and *parasôme* is arbitrary. Saussure wrote:

Y a-t-il une chose qui soit l'analyse *anatomique* du mot? Non. Pour la raison suivante: l'anatomiste sépare, dans un corps organisé, des parties qui *après abstraction de la vie sont néanmoins le fait de la vie*. Anatomiquement l'estomac est une chose, comme il l'était physiologiquement pendant la vie: c'est pourquoi l'anatomiste ne fait pas passer son couteau par le milieu de l'estomac, il suit tout le temps les contours, dictés et établis par la vie, qui le conduisent autour de l'estomac, et l'empêchent en même temps de confondre avec lui la rate, ou autre chose... Prenons maintenant le *mot* privé de vie (sa *substance phonique*): forme-t-il encore un corps organisé? À aucun titre, à aucun degré. De par le principe central que la relation du sens au *sôme* est arbitraire, irrémisiblement il arrive que ce qui était tout à l'heure *ἀπο-δεικ-τος* n'est plus qu'une masse amorphe *a + p + o + d + e + ...* (Saussure, 2002, pp. 257-258)

[Is there such a thing as the *anatomical* analysis of a word? No. For the following reason: the anatomist separates parts of an organized body which *even if life is put to one side* are

nonetheless still the matter of life. The stomach is one anatomical entity, just as it was a physiological entity during life: this is why the anatomist does not run a knife through the middle of the stomach, but always follows the contours, which have been dictated and established by life, and which lead around the stomach, and prevent it from being mixed up with the spleen, or with anything else ... Now if the *word* is deprived of life (its *phonic substance*), does it still constitute an organized body? Not in any shape or form. Following the fundamental principle that the relationship between the meaning and the *sôme* is arbitrary, what has been ἀπο-δεικ-τος remains now no more than a shapeless mass *a + p + o + d + e + ...* (Saussure, 2006, p. 184)]

Dans l'être organisé la fonction peut mourir sans que l'organe meure. Même le cadavre possède encore ses organes, ce qui est matière à la science anatomique. Dans le mot, il n'existe absolument rien d'anatomique, c'est-à-dire aucune différence de pièces fondée sur un rapport de la fonction et de la pièce qui jouait pour cette fonction, il n'existe qu'une suite de phonations entièrement *semblables* entre elles, en ce que rien n'était plus propre à constituer le poumon du mot que son pied. (Saussure, 2002, p. 113)

[In an organized being a function can die without the organ dying. Even a corpse still has its organs, which are the material of anatomical science. In the word, there is absolutely nothing anatomical, i.e. no difference in parts based on a relationship between the function and the part which carried out this function. There is only a sequence of acoustic productions which are perfectly *similar* to one another, in that lung and foot are all the same in the word. (Saussure, 2006, p. 77)]

Comparaison avec anatomie et physiologie. Les deux ne font qu'un pour la langue; l'erreur est justement de croire que la *grammaire* est la physiologie (étudiant la *fonction*) pendant que la phonétique—ou phonologie?—serait l'anatomie. Très utile de voir par où la comparaison pêche. L'œil ne ressemble pas à la main, ni le poumon à l'épine dorsale; et ainsi, même faisant abstraction de la fonction, l'anatomiste a devant lui dans chaque organe un *objet différent*. Mais aucune différence entre par exemple *-i-* signe du féminin et *-i-* signe d'optatif; il n'y a que matière brute dès qu'on retire la fonction conventionnelle en linguistique. C'est la fonction dont est investi un phonisme qui fait que nous accordons passagèrement le titre d'*organe* à ce phonisme, qui en lui-même ressemble à tous les autres phonismes, et est susceptible de prendre absolument (*tel qu'il est*) n'importe quelle fonction.

Remarque semblable sur *structure* d'un mot. Encore une de ces images qui sous l'illusion de la clarté recouvrent des mondes d'idées fausses et mal conçues. Un mot n'a aucune *structure*. Dès qu'on fait abstraction du sens des différentes parties. (Saussure, 2002, pp. 113-114)

[Comparison with anatomy and physiology. These two are inseparable in *langue*; it is a real misconception to believe that *grammar* is physiology (study of *function*) while phonetics—or phonology?—would be anatomy. It is very useful to see where the comparison goes wrong. The eye does not look like the hand, nor the lung the spinal column; thus, even when ignoring function, the anatomist has in each organ before him a *different object*. But no difference

whatever between *-î-* as a sign of feminine gender and the optative *-î-*, for instance; in linguistics once the conventional function is withdrawn, there remains only raw matter. It is the function embodied by a given acoustic production which leads to our giving the title of *organ* to this production, which in itself is like any other acoustic production, and may take on absolutely (*such as it is*) any function whatsoever.

A similar remark can be made for *structure* of a word. Another of these images masquerading as clarity while dissimulating mountains of false and ill-conceived ideas. A word has no *structure* when the meaning of the various parts is ignored. (Saussure, 2006, pp. 77-78)]

The *sôme* itself is void, which cannot be divided into organized parts. When the convention or relationship appears, the meaning or structure appears too. It is the emptiness of *sôme* that can introduce the pure convention or relationship.

The term *sôme* is from Plato's *Cratylus*. Plato wrote: "(S)ome people say that the body (*sōma*) is the tomb (*sēma*) of the soul, on the grounds that it is entombed in its present life, while others say that it is correctly called 'a sign' (*'sēma'*) because the soul signifies whatever it wants to signify by means of the body". (Plato, 1997, p. 118, 400C) It is easy to confuse *sôme* with *seme*, so Saussure wants to use the term *Inertôme*. "*In favour of 'Inertôme'*. Even a term like *sôme* (σῶμα) would, if it had the chance of being adopted, quickly become synonymous with *seme*, which is meant to be its opposite". (Saussure, 2006, p. 77)

In his research on Germanic legends, Saussure used *être inexistant* to signify that the sign (signifier, *sôme*, *aposeme*) is empty, void, and has no substantial identity:

'Que Wolf<Hug>dietrich soit le Théodéric fils de Clovis est incontesté et incontestable'... Symons. Cette phrase a de quoi rendre rêveur, d'abord en dehors de tout fait, parce qu'on ne sait pas, à un point de vue méthodologique, ce qu'elle peut signifier dans le domaine des études mythiques.

Il est vrai qu'en allant au fond des choses, on s'aperçoit dans ce domaine, comme dans le domaine parent de la linguistique, que toutes les incongruités de la pensée proviennent d'une insuffisante réflexion sur ce qu'est *l'identité* ou les caractères de l'identité, lorsqu'il s'agit d'un être inexistant, comme le *mot*, ou la *personne mythique*, ou une *lettre de l'alphabet*, qui ne sont que différentes formes du SIGNE, au sens philosophique. (Saussure, 2003, p. 387; 1986, p. 191) [That Wolf <Hug> dietrich is the Theodoric son of Clovis is undisputed and indisputable. ... Symons (son of Symon). This sentence has enough to perplex us, first because without any fact, we do not know, from a methodological point of view, what it can mean in the field of mythical studies.

It is true that we notice fundamentally in this domain, as in the similar domain of linguistics, that all the incongruities of thought are the result of insufficient reflection on what is *identity* or characters of identity, when it's a matter of non-existent being, like the *word*, or the *mythical person*, or a *letter of the alphabet*, which are only different forms of the SIGN, in

the philosophical sense. (my own translation)]

...il n'est que le fantôme obtenu par la combinaison fuyante de deux ou trois idées. (Saussure, 2003, p. 387; 1986, p. 192)

[...it is only the phantom obtained by the evasive combination of two or three ideas. (my own translation)]

N'est qu'une bulle de savon, n'est pas même une bulle de savon, laquelle possède du moins son unité physique et mathématique... (Saussure, 2003, pp. 387-388; 1986, p. 192)

[It is only a soap bubble, or even not a soap bubble, which possesses at least its physical and mathematical unit. (my own translation)]

In the Orangery manuscripts, Saussure expressed a similar opinion:

ÊTRE. Rien *n'est*, du moins rien *n'est* absolument (dans le domaine linguistique). ...aucun objet n'étant naturellement délimité ou donné, aucun objet *n'étant* avec évidence. (Saussure, 2002, p. 81)

[BEING. Nothing *is*, or at least in absolute terms nothing *is* (in the linguistic domain) ... no object being naturally bounded or given, and no object evidencing *being*. (Saussure, 2006, p. 55)]

We can quote Manuel Gustavo Isaac's conclusion to express our view: "Le signe n'est rien—le signe est le rien de la chose". [The sign is nothing—the sign is the nothingness of things.] (Isaac, 2010, p. 116)

2. The nature of the linguistic sign is representation, realized by arbitrariness and resulting in imperativeness.

In his second course of lectures on general linguistics between 1908 and 1909, Saussure explicitly pointed out, "...le contrat primitif, la convention de départ est ce qu'il y a de moins important; là n'est pas le fond des faits relatifs à un système sémiologique". [... the primitive contract, the initial convention, is what is least important; this is not the heart of the facts relative to a semiological system.] (Saussure, 1997, p. 13) In this sense, the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, as a primary truth, only exists in a flash while the sign which is created corresponds to the concept. Once it appears to be a social fact, the arbitrariness is of no importance, for it is already independent of the social fact relative to a semiological system. The core of the social fact is the passive acceptance of social products. Therefore, on the one hand Saussure sees the arbitrariness as the first principle of the linguistic sign, but on the other he regards it as a sort of imagination rather than its real existence, in that language is always an established fact, and what we face or live with are facts; we can't explore the origin of language formation. That is also why Saussure's

idea about the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign should be treated dialectically. He is bent on grasping the subtleties of the analysis and the blending of theory and we, consequently, can not take either one for granted. In addition to explaining the arbitrariness of a linguistic sign, Saussure also states:

Le moment où l'on s'accorde sur les signes n'existe pas réellement, n'est qu'idéal; et existerait-il qu'il n'entre pas en considération à côté de la vie régulière de la langue. (Saussure, 1997, p. 11)

[The moment in which we agree on signs does not really exist, is only ideal; and even if it did exist it wouldn't be worthy of consideration next to the regular life of the language. (Saussure, 1997, p. 11a)]

L'acte idéal par lequel, à un instant donné, des noms seraient distribués aux choses, l'acte par lequel un contrat serait passé entre les idées et les signes, entre les signifiés et les signifiants, cet acte reste dans le seul domaine de l'idée. C'est une idée inspirée par le sentiment que nous avons de l'arbitraire du signe, que nous reconnaissons n'appartenir à une réalité. (Saussure, 1993, p. 94)

[The postulated act by which, at a given moment, names were assigned to things, the act by which a contract was completed between ideas and signs, between the signifying and signified elements, this act is purely imaginary. It is an idea inspired by the feeling we have of the arbitrariness of the sign, but belongs to no recognizable reality. (Saussure, 1993, p. 94a)]

(N)ous distinguons à l'origine de tout état de langue un fait historique. (Saussure, 1993, p. 94)
[(W)e recognize a historical fact at the origin of every language state. (Saussure, 1993, p. 94a)]

Arbitrariness is not the essence of the linguistic sign but the way and means to realize it. If the sign has its own nature of existence, so does the concept that it represents. The associative combination of signs and concepts will lead to the shifting and appending of one nature of existence to another. Thus, we have to choose the sign that is empty of inherent existence, a nonexistent being, a *sôme*. The empty sign that humans find is "sound" (vocal figure). Saussure placed extreme value on sound, and repeatedly distinguished it from writing solely because sound is considered to be an empty sign. The associative combination between the empty sign (*sôme*) and the concept is arbitrary, in which no internal relation is involved. This case contributes to representing a concept in a nearly perfect way. Therefore, the nature of the linguistic sign is representation which is realized by arbitrariness. Once the realization becomes fact it cannot change with time and geographical distribution, and subsequently its imperativeness obliges people to accept it passively. So, arbitrariness is the way to realize the nature of a linguistic sign, while imperativeness is the result.

3. The nature of linguistic signs in representing concepts with their own valueless emptiness demands congenital arbitrariness.

Change is the way language exists in time. In the third course of lectures on general linguistics, Saussure looked into the formation of diversity within geographical continuity. In one lecture, Saussure stated, “Il n’y a pas d’exemple d’immobilité absolue. Ce qui est absolu, c’est le principe du mouvement de la langue dans le temps. ...même dans la plus tranquille des périodes, on ne verra jamais que le fleuve de la langue soit identique”. [There is no example of language not changing at all. What is absolutely constant is the principle of the movement of language over time ... even in the calmest period, one will never see the river of language remain the same.] (Saussure, 2002, p. 311) It echoes the famous words of Heraclitus: “One cannot step twice into the same river, nor can one grasp any mortal substance in a stable condition, but it scatters and again gathers; it forms and dissolves, and approaches and departs.” We also hear: “It rests by changing”. (Kahn, 1979, p. 53) And: “We step and do not step into the same rivers. We are and are not”. (Waterfield, 2000, p. 41, T3) Everything is constantly changing and nothing can stay the same. So are the diversities of language. Saussure frequently repeated Heraclitus’s notions in his theory that sign is arbitrary and conventional, and in his opinions about the immutability and mutability of the sign. In a letter to the Whitney Memorial Conference, he said:

L’objet qui sert de signe n’est jamais *le même* deux fois : il faut dès le premier moment un examen ou une convention initiale pour savoir au nom de quoi, dans quelles limites nous avons le droit de l’appeler le même; là est la fondamentale différence avec un objet quelconque, et la première source très simple. (Saussure, 2002, p. 203)

[An object acting as a sign is never *the same* twice: right from the start one needs some sort of examination or initial convention to discover in respect of what, and to what extent it may be called the same; this is what makes it fundamentally different from just any object, and is the first, very simple source. (Saussure, 2006, p. 140)]

What functions as a sign, according to Saussure, is sound (vocal figure) and acoustic impression (acoustic image). The link between the acoustic impression (the signifier) and the concept (the signified) must be arbitrary at first. Acoustic impression only extends itself in time: “ a) de représenter une étendue, b) de représenter une étendue qui n’est figurable que dans une seule dimension”. [a) of being extended, b) of being extended in a way which can be represented only as one-dimensional.] (Saussure, 1993, p. 93) The so-called “in respect of what, and to what extent” just means that human beings can differentiate and distinguish each unit with the help of his perception of the time dimension. “C’est l’impression acoustique qui donne le nombre des unités”. [It is the acoustic impression that gives the number of units.] (Saussure, 1993, p. 54) Acoustic impression determines units according to the differences of sounds spreading in time. The arbitrary relationship

between the signifier and the signified, established in time, perceives the identity of units through audition, thus forming a conventional relationship. The two processes are different and changing: “We step and do not step into the same rivers”. We both step and do not step into the arbitrary relationship. The arbitrary relationship is and is not. It only exists in the very beginning to examine and is no longer in existence once the identity of the linguistic units forms. Saussure chooses the term *idéal* (Saussure, 1997, p. 11) to designate the existing and non-existing arbitrary relationship. The fact that a linguistic sign, with its own vocal figure, empty and valueless, represents a concept demands congenital arbitrariness, or it is safe to say that arbitrariness is the foremost way to realize the representative nature of linguistic signs. This explains why Saussure deals with arbitrariness as the primary principle—it establishes it but makes it exist nominally only.

What Saussure is concerned with is the established fact of linguistic signs existing synchronically in the speaking subject's consciousness: “nous avons le droit de l'appeler le même” [it may be called the same]. It is an issue involving the identity of units. Lying between a speech act and a phonetic fact, acoustic impression is considered to be a medium through which the speech act can turn to, and be determined by, the phonetic fact. It shows that the establishment of sound units depends on acoustic impression. For this, Saussure said, “Un acte phonatoire est un fait (ou plutôt) un ensemble de faits physiologiques correspondant à un fait phonétique déterminé. Le fait phonétique nous étant à son tour donné par la sensation auditive, c'est d'après cette dernière seule que nous fixons les actes phonatoires”. [An act of phonation is a set of physiological facts corresponding to a determinate phonetic fact. Since the phonetic fact is given to us in its turn through the sensation of hearing, it is only by starting from the latter that acts of phonation are established.] (Saussure, 1995, p. 98)

Units are the results and limits of acoustic impression and time consciousness. Sound, hearing, and time each contributes to all. Saussure said, regarding the suitability between time and hearing: “Le temps est pour l'oreille ce que l'espace est pour la vue”. [What the time is for the ear is just as the space is for the eye.] (Saussure, 1995, p. 152) This is the starting point of his notions of acoustic impression and time consciousness.

4. Where there is difference, there is meaning.

Essentially, the linguistic sign is empty. Man projects his own ideas onto it and endows it with signification and value. Such psychological differentiation and its effect belong to the vocal sign. “(L)es signes existants évoquent MÉCANIQUEMENT, par le simple *fait* de leur présence et de l'état toujours accidentel de leurs *différences* à chaque moment de la langue, un nombre égal non pas de concepts, mais de valeurs opposées pour notre esprit”. [“Existing signs MECHANICALLY produce, by their simple presence and the accidental state of their *differences* at every moment of the language, an equal number not of concepts, but of values understood to be mutually differentiated”.] (Saussure, 2002, p. 87; 2011, p. 186) The unit of unconsciousness and the acoustic unit correspond and

conform to each other, and the opposition to the sounds of other signs evoked by each sign provides itself with meaning and value. This implies that meaning and value are in relationships, and not positive. The only thing that can be positive is the opposition of *valeurs* for our spirit. Saussure's "tout signe est une *opération* d'un ordre psychologique simple..., mais on ne peut pas parler tout le temps de cette opération en face des délimitations". [every sign is a simple psychological *process* ... but it is outside our scope to say more about this process.] (Saussure, 2002, p. 132) should also be interpreted in this respect. Or we can say that the definition or convention of sign, to a large degree, has not yet been established.

Language possesses duality, which is the quintessence of Saussure's linguistic theory. But as a unique feature, such duality can turn into identity in language. "Une *identité linguistique* a cela d'absolument particulier qu'elle implique l'association de deux éléments hétérogènes". [A *linguistic entity (identity)*—the quoter's note) is unique in that it involves the association of two distinct elements.] (Saussure, 2002, p. 18; 2011, p. 113) The association means it is the result of a mental operation. Signification and form (sign) are both products of conscious activity. Saussure calls it "un fait de conscience pur" [a fact of pure consistent]. (Saussure, 2002, p. 19; 2011, p. 116) Accordingly, the so-called identity of language is just the fact of pure consciousness. Hence, thought comes to be in complete conformity with sign, which arises from the fact that both thought and sign are spiritual things. The association between them is also attributed to them, both belonging to the spiritual scope. Saussure said, "Or le phénomène primordial du langage est l'association d'une pensée à un signe; et c'est justement ce fait primordial qui est supprimé dans la transmission du signe". [The central phenomenon of language is the association of a thought with a sign; and this central fact is nullified in the course of the sign's transmission.] (Saussure, 2002, p. 47; 2011, p. 71)

The transmission of sign in time dispels the association of thought and sign, which implies that after a period there will be no sign, no signification, but vocal figure and acoustic impression. For this, Saussure said,

1. La figure vocale en elle-même ne signifie rien. [The vocal figure in itself signifies nothing.]
2. La différence ou l'identité de la figure vocale en elle-même ne signifie RIEN. [The difference or identity of the vocal figure in itself signifies NOTHING.]
3. L'idée en elle-même ne signifie rien. [The idea in itself signifies nothing.]
4. La différence ou l'identité de l'idée en elle-même ne signifie RIEN. [The difference or identity of the idea in itself signifies Nothing.]
5. L'union de ce qui a une signification pour la langue: c'est a) la différence ou l'identité de l'idée SELON LES SIGNES; b) la différence ou l'identité des signes d'après l'idée; et les deux choses étant de plus indissolublement unies. [Meaning in language is the union of (a) the difference or identity of the idea IN THE SIGNS; (b) the difference or identity of the signs with respect to the idea; these two things are inseparably fused.] (Saussure, 2011, pp. 149-150; 2002, p. 73)

It implies that the association between thought and sign can be dispelled, which is to say, although thought is not constant, sign is not constant either; as long as there are differences, there are meanings, too. The meaning, of course, is relative and changing, for differences and oppositions are relative and changing.

5. The return to the speaking subject is to the distinctive consciousness or the difference consciousness.

It could be said that the phenomenology of language was established by Hendrik Josephus Pos's "Phénoménologie et linguistique" (1939). According to Merleau-Ponty, "Pos ... defines the phenomenology of the language not as an attempt to fit existing languages into the framework of an eidetic of all possible languages (this is, to objectify them before a universal and timeless constituting consciousness), but as a return to the speaking subject, to my contact with language I am speaking". (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 85) The return to the speaking subject, thus the language and the speaking subject, being subjects to each other, has mutuality and presentness. If "I" speak, "I" am in intersubjectivity with all the other speaking subjects, which is realized by language. Language achieves the systematic nature of synchrony through the speaking subject. Thus, it is the return to the speaking subject that truly bears the significance of linguistic phenomenology.

In Saussure's view, the universal and timeless constituting consciousness falls into *la langue* which is divided into internal phenomenon (consciousness phenomenon) and external phenomenon which can be controlled directly, while consciousness phenomenon for Saussure includes the inseparable integration of meaning and form. Instead of putting them in opposing positions, he differentiates the external vocal figure from the meaning-form (*la forme-sens*). (cf. Saussure, 2002, p. 17) Each form has its own meaning, the formation of which lies in the differences among those forms. The distinctive consciousness, in this way, is the constituting consciousness of the speaking subject. The return to the speaking subject is eventually to the distinctive consciousness, the difference consciousness. Thus, the vocal figure, influenced by the distinctive consciousness of the speaking subject, and defined by the difference consciousness, shows itself as a form. Saussure said:

Une forme est une figure vocale qui est pour la conscience des sujets parlants *déterminée*, c'est-à-dire à la fois existante et délimitée. Elle n'est rien de plus; comme elle n'est rien de moins. Elle n'a pas nécessairement « un sens » précis; mais elle est ressentie comme quelque chose qui *est*; qui de plus ne serait plus, ou ne serait plus la même chose, si on changeait quoi que ce soit à son exacte configuration. (Saussure, 2002, p. 37; 2011, p. 131)

[A form is a vocal figure which is experienced by the speaking subject as *determined*, that is both real and delimited. It is nothing more and nothing less. It does not necessarily have a precise 'meaning', but is experienced as something that *is*. It would not *be*, however, or would not be the same thing, if any part of its precise configuration were changed. (Saussure, 2006, p.

20)]

This is the main point of Saussure's linguistic phenomenology. A form is a vocal figure which is determined by the distinctive consciousness, so the form is the consciousness phenomenon or the internal phenomenon. My contact with the language I am speaking is a form. The form is delimited within a boundary: different boundaries, different forms. The form has variability and specificity, but not a constant foundation. Supposing it had one, it would be the distinctive consciousness. This is just the variation of form that shows the distinctive consciousness. It may be said that difference is the crux of Saussure's linguistic phenomenology. It exists in the feature of negativity: empty, arbitrary and indeterminate. The only thing that can be determined is its negativity. Saussure said, "Le langage est un phénomène; il est l'exercice d'une faculté qui réside dans l'homme. La langue est l'ensemble des formes concordantes que prend ce phénomène chez une collectivité d'individus et à une époque déterminée". [Language (*langage*) is a phenomenon; it is the exercise of a human faculty. The language system (*langue*) is the interlocking set of forms that the language faculty assumes among a group of individuals at any particular time.] (Saussure, 2011, p. 277; 2002, p. 129) What is worth concern here is the expression of "une époque déterminée". It indicates that the "phenomenon" Saussure spoke of is a sound phenomenon put in hearing which extends itself in time rather than writing, resorting to vision in space. Saussure realizes that the contemporary researchers, especially himself, "de la lettre on en vint à considérer le son articulé, sans y mettre quelque chose de conséquent, et du papier on passa au sujet parlant. ... La conquête de ces dernières années est d'avoir enfin nonseulement placé tout ce qui est le langage et la langue à son vrai foyer, exclusivement dans le sujet parlant soit comme être humain, soit comme être social []". [attention turned from the letter to the articulated sound and from paper to the speaking subject ... the achievement in recent years is to have finally located everything that is *langage* and *langue* in their rightful place, that is in the speaking subject as human being and as social being.] (Saussure, 2011, p. 281; 2002, p. 130) The difference between his concern and Franz Bopp's lies in that the latter has never seen language as a phenomenon, nor does it consider or observe language from the property of phenomenon. The phenomenon is one kind of relationship and form. In this sense, sound apparently is purer and emptier than writing and can better realize the sign's representative nature. To meet this demand, sound is undoubtedly the best medium among all human beings' command. Saussure knew that the sharp difference between the vocal phenomenon as a sign and other things lay in "1. la nullité interne des signes; 2. la faculté de notre esprit de s'attacher à un terme en soi nul". [1. the internal void of signs; 2. our mental ability to grasp a term that is in itself nothing.] (Saussure, 2002, p. 109) The emptiness of vocal signs and our mental ability to grasp this emptiness indicate the advanced development of human spirit. So, the difference here does not refer to the one among constant concretes but the relationship of difference, the phenomenon of difference itself. What has caused difference is arbitrary, non-constant, i.e. empty. Difference is realized by emptiness and

arbitrariness, and meanwhile presents itself as empty and arbitrary.

Though the term “the phenomenology of language” is not mentioned directly by Saussure, we can find a clear thread of thought in the specific discussion, that is, the phenomenon = the relationship = the unit = the fact itself. The identity of the unit is realized in time by acoustic image. All kinds of units are fractions in time, and compositions in effect. Fractions and compositions both are acoustic effects. The identity consists in relation and effect. It has no constant criterion, and is in the control of the will, which aims at and limits the impression, forming the unit. There are identities between forms and their use, ideas and their representation. To be a linguistic reality, the speech must have the identity of the mutual implication of the operation of a form and the representation of a concept, thus forming one linguistic unit. The formation of the linguistic unit is the result of the speaking subject's delimitation of inner consciousness and the linguistic feeling, for which the most important means is the relationship of difference.

6. The linguistic element itself is empty, possessing no meaning of its own; that it has meaning is due to its coexistence with other meanings.

When linguistic elements enter the consciousness of a speaking subject, the form and the concept, the signifier and the signified, and the acoustic impression and the idea, are all in the mutually delimitative relationship. We grasp concepts with forms and vice versa at the same time—it is realized through the consciousness of the speaking subject. Whether on the paradigmatic axis or on the syntagmatic axis or on their combination, signs are constructed as a whole in our minds. If we take the form as a starting point, its relationship with meanings, other forms and meanings of other forms, etc., will be produced. It will be the same when we start with meaning. In this process, the formation of a state keeps changing. Saussure often compares it to a chess game and explains that change of any element in language or any chess piece's position on a chessboard produces a new state. This indicates that the birth of a state doesn't stem from some historicity which can be derived or traced back, but from the contingent action of one element or chess piece, leading to the diversity of a linguistic state and the aforementioned chess game.

In a synchronic chess game or linguistic state, the existing value of each chessman or element depends on its position in the system, that is, its relationship with other elements, which is formed out of the associative and opposite relationship between chess pieces, or elements. Put another way, they are different from each other and their values do not rely on themselves, but entirely on their immediate relationship with others. Unlike chemical elements, they do not have an independent existing value of their own. The value of a chemical element is concrete and positive; the value of a linguistic element or a chessman, fluid in itself, is purely dependent on the state, the system, or the whole chess game, on the relations and its position, or on the distinctive feature. Saussure wrote:

De la même façon que dans le jeu d'échecs il serait absurde de demander ce que serait une dame, un pion, un fou, ou un cavalier, si on le considérait hors du jeu d'échecs, de la même façon il n'y a pas de sens, si l'on considère vraiment *la langue*, à chercher ce qu'est chaque élément par lui-même. Il n'est rien d'autre qu'une pièce valant par son opposition avec d'autres selon certaines conventions. (Saussure, 2002, p. 67)

[Just as in chess it would be absurd to ask what a queen, a pawn, a bishop or a knight would be, if considered outside the game of chess, so there is no sense, if language is really what is being considered, in seeking what each element is in itself. It is nothing other than a piece whose value depends on its opposition to others within certain conventions. (Saussure, 2006, p. 44)]

Morphologiquement, ou dans le domaine des *signes*, ...présence, absence, ou formes successives ont parfaitement la même valeur: c'est-à-dire chacune à chaque moment une valeur absolument quelconque, impossible à prévoir, résultant simplement et de minute en minute de ce qui existe autour de cela. Comme le signe premier ne valait rien, si ce n'est par les signes ambiants, il est fort inutile de se demander comment ceux qui en procèdent valent ceci, ne valent pas cela, et valent encore quelque chose alors qu'ils ont matériellement cessé d'exister—à moins de se décider à considérer les signes ambiants, qui seuls déterminent en effet la valeur et l'existence même de chaque signe. (Saussure, 2002, p. 68)

[*Morphologically*, or in the field of *signs* ... presence, absence, forms in succession: all have exactly the same value, i.e. at any moment each has a perfectly random, unpredictable value, which is the simple, ever-changing result of its surroundings. Since the first sign had no value other than that imparted by surrounding signs, it is quite pointless to wonder how those which arose from it have such a value, or do not have another value, and still have value after the end of their material existence—unless we decide to consider the surrounding signs, sole determiners of the value, and the very existence of each sign. (Saussure, 2006, pp. 44-45)]

Une figure vocale devient une forme depuis l'instant crucial où on l'introduit dans le jeu de signes appelé *langue*, de la même façon qu'un *morceau d'étoffe* dormant à fond de cale devient un *signal* à l'instant où il est hissé 1. parmi d'autres signes hissés au même moment et concourant à une signification; 2. entre cent autres qui *auraient pu* être hissés, et dont le souvenir ne coucourt pas moins à la [signification—*Tullio De Mauro's complement* (Saussure, 2005, p. 36, n. 46)]. (Saussure, 2002, p. 38)

[A vocal figure becomes a form from the crucial moment at which it is introduced into the interplay of signs called *langue*, in the same way that a *piece of material* lying motionless at the bottom of the hold becomes a *signal* at the moment that it is hoisted 1. along with other signs which are hoisted at the same time and contribute to some meaning; 2. from among a hundred other signs which *could have* been hoisted and the memory of which contributes no less to the (meaning). (Saussure, 2006, p. 21)]

The distinctive feature, rendered as a form, is one linguistic fact that differentiates this

form from the other. However, the distinctive feature is not pre-existent and positive, but contingent, caused by chance. Contingency is the natural development of emptiness; to be empty is to be contingent, too.

Form presents difference. Meaning and value are endowed by difference, so we can grasp concept, by means of the distinctive feature of form, and in turn, the perception of distinctive feature of form results from our understanding of the distinctive feature of concept. We can neither discuss concept *a* nor form *A* separately, unchangingly and absolutely, nor define concept fixedly from form or define form fixedly from concept. If we can define the existence of a fixed relationship, it then should be uncertainty and fluidity of the mutual definition of concept and form. Or it can be said that nothing is constant except that each element is in an inconstant relationship. For this, Saussure wrote:

Ce n'est pas la même chose, comme on le croit souvent, de parler du rapport de la forme et de l'idée, ou du rapport de l'idée et de la forme: parce que si l'on prend pour base la forme *A* on embrassera plus ou moins exactement un certain nombre d'idées *a d c*, (rapport *abc / A*) et que si l'on prend pour base l'idée *a* on embrassera plus ou moins exactement un certain nombre de formes *AHZ* (rapport *a / AHZ*).

On remarquera qu'il n'y a donc aucun point de départ ou point de repère fixe quelconque dans la langue.

Il faudrait pour qu'une autre chose se produisît que l'un des deux termes fût déterminé en soi; et c'est ce que nous supposons encore artificiellement par nécessité et dans une certaine mesure en parlant d'une idée *a* ou d'une forme *A*. Mais en réalité il n'y a dans la langue aucune détermination ni de l'idée ni de la forme; il n'y a d'autre détermination que celle de l'idée par la forme et celle de la forme par l'idée.

La première expression de la réalité serait de dire que la langue (c'est-à-dire le sujet parlant) n'aperçoit ni l'idée *a*, ni la forme *A*, mais seulement le rapport *a / A*; cette expression serait encore tout à fait grossière. Il n'aperçoit vraiment que le rapport entre les deux rapports *a / AHZ* et *abc / A*, ou *b / ARS* et *blr / B* etc. (Saussure, 2011, pp. 154-156)

[Despite what is often claimed, the relationship between form and idea, and the relationship between idea and form, are not the same thing. A basic form *A* will cover more or less exactly a certain number of ideas *a b c*, (relationship *abc / A*) and a basic idea *a* will cover more or less exactly a certain number of forms *AHZ* (relationship *a / AHZ*). It will be seen that in *langue* there is neither a starting point nor indeed any fixed point whatsoever.

For something else to have come about, it would have been necessary for one of the two terms to have been artificially delimited in its own right; and this is what in a way we necessarily assume in speaking of an idea *a* or a form *A*. But in fact in language neither ideas nor forms are delimited; there is no delimiting other than that of ideas by forms and forms by ideas.

The first formulation of the real situation would be to state that *language* (or rather the speaking subject) perceives neither idea *a*, nor form *A*, but only the relationship *a / A*; this

formulation would still be entirely rough and ready. What he perceives is the relationship between the two relationships a / AHZ and abc / A , or b / ARS and blr / B etc. (Saussure, 2006, p. 22)]

The sign as a whole (*sème*) is not only the relationship idea a / form A ; there are unfixed and opposing relationships between idea a and other ideas b c etc., between form A and other forms H Z , etc., too, thus $a/A = a/AHZ + abc/A$... According to this understanding, we can also rethink the *parasème*'s senses. It is because we know the sign as an ensemble from the differences of concepts (a meaning / another meaning) that from the perspective of linguistics, the linguistic element does not have a constant meaning of its own; its meaning is given by the differential and opposing relationships with other meanings. Therefore the connotation of the linguistic element is empty in nature, which can be substantial only by its coexistence with other meanings. This coexistence is either explicitly interdependent or implicitly hiding in the speaking subject's memory. Thus the consciousness of the speaking subject is the key to producing meanings. Saussure noticed that moral terms, such as "crime" and "passion", "virtue" and "vice", "lie" and "honesty", "disrespect" and "respect", etc., did not have moral nature at all in linguistics. He said:

On remarquera, en se plaçant au point de vue du moraliste, que si des mots comme *crime*, *passion*, *vertu*, *vice*, *mensonge*, *dissimulation*, *hypocrisie*, *honnêteté*, *mépris*, *estime*, *sincérité* se voient relégués linguistiquement sous de simples catégories négatives et passagères, il y a dans ce cas une véritable immoralité dans la linguistique ou dans la langue. Si cette immoralité était un fait attestable, je dénierai certainement à qui que ce soit le droit alors de cacher que la langue est immorale, ou de se refuser à la constatation d'un fait sous le seul prétexte que ce fait nous offense. Mais je ne vois pas en quoi la morale est plus atteinte que toute autre ramification de la pensée par l'inconvénient fondamental que l'on n'ôtera jamais de la langue.

Cet inconvénient, nous l'avons signalé après tous les autres chercheurs: il n'y a pas un seul objet matériel, nous l'avons vu, auquel s'applique exactement et exclusivement un mot; cela ne supprime pas l'existence de ces objets matériels. De même, il n'y a pas un seul fait moral, qu'on puisse exactement et exclusivement enfermer dans un certain terme; mais cela n'atteint pas un seul instant l'existence de ces faits moraux. Ce qui peut être proposé comme une question digne d'examen, c'est jusqu'où le mot correspond à un fait moral déterminé, de même qu'on est obligé de rechercher jusqu'où l'idée d'*ombre* par exemple correspond à un fait matériel déterminé. Les deux séries d'investigations ne relèvent plus de la linguistique. J'ajouterais, sans sortir du domaine linguistique, que le fait moral, lequel existe de par l'immédiate conscience que nous en avons, est probablement infiniment plus important comme facteur de la langue que le fait matériel n'arrivant que très indirectement et très incomplètement toujours à notre connaissance. (Saussure, 2002, pp. 37-38)

[It will be said, from the point of view of the moralist, that there is truly an immorality in linguistics or language if words like *crime*, *passion*, *virtue*, *vice*, *lie*, *deception*, *hypocrisy*, *honesty*, *disrespect*, *respect*, and *sincerity* are relegated linguistically to simple negative and

transitory categories. If this immorality were a demonstrable fact I would certainly not approve of anyone concealing that language is immoral, or of refusing to accept the statement of a fact simply because it offends us. However, I do not see how morals are any more affected than any other aspect of thought by the fundamental shortcoming of which language can never be rid.

The shortcoming, as we pointed out following all the other scholars, is this: there is no single material object, as we have seen, to which a word applies exactly and exclusively; this does not negate the existence of these material objects. Similarly, there is no single moral phenomenon which can be exactly and exclusively captured by a certain term; but this in no way undermines the existence of these moral phenomena. A question that would be worthy of investigation is the extent to which words correspond to any specific moral phenomenon, just as it is necessary to investigate to what extent the notion for instance of *shadow* corresponds to any specific material reality. These two lines of research no longer come within the ambit of linguistics. I would add, without leaving the sphere of linguistics, that moral phenomena, which exist through the immediate awareness that we have of them, are probably infinitely more important as a factor of language than material phenomena, which always only come to our knowledge (consciousness—the *quoter's note*) very indirectly and incompletely. (Saussure, 2006, pp. 20-21)]

In my opinion, the moral terms get their meanings from their opposing or differential relationship; there is not any independent, permanent, and objective linguistic fact. Specific moral phenomena, such as “virtue”, certainly exist, but do not exist alone as linguistic elements which need to be grasped by the speaking subject’s mind. They are juxtaposed or associated, with other dominant “virtues” or with the “virtue” hidden in deep consciousness, and juxtaposed with or distinct from our realization of “vice” existing obviously or latently in the depth of our minds. All those coexistent linguistic elements are synthesized to be the meaning (*parasème*) of “virtue”. As a linguistic consciousness, existing obviously and latently, syntagmatically and paradigmatically, it is an ensemble. So in Saussure’s view, the linguistic consciousness of “virtue” is far more important than the specific phenomena of “virtue”.

However, the question is how to obtain the totality. Or is there any possibility for human beings to pursue totality consciously? If we strive to seek definite and positive linguistic facts, we are likely to get nowhere, as the concrete linguistic facts are infinite. Saussure has condensed the object of linguistics into *la langue*, into difference, negativity, and relation, just because he intended to master the infinite with finite controls.

Déjà si l’on prend le *fer* et le *chêne*, on n’arrivera pas au bout de la somme de significations (ou d’emplois, ce qui est la même chose) que nous donnons à ces mots, et rien que la comparaison de *fer* avec deux ou trois mots comme *acier*, *plomb*, *or* ou *métal*, rien que la comparaison de *chêne* avec deux ou trois mots comme *saule*, *vigne*, *bois* ou *arbre* représente un infini travail. Quant à épuiser ce qui est contenu dans *esprit* par opposition à *âme* ou à *pensée*, ou ce qui est

contenu dans *aller* par opposition à *marcher*, *passer*, *cheminer*, *se porter*, *venir* ou *se rendre*, une vie humaine pourrait sans exagération s’y passer. Or, comme dès l’âge de quinze ou seize ans nous avons un sens aiguisé de ce qui est contenu non seulement dans ces mots, mais dans des milliers d’autres, il est évident que ce sens repose sur le pur fait *négatif* de l’opposition des valeurs, vu que le temps matériellement nécessaire pour connaître la valeur positive des signes nous aurait cent fois et mille fois manqué. (Saussure, 2002, p. 77)

[Even the number of meanings (or uses, which is the same thing) given to *iron* and *oak* cannot be exhausted. Simply comparing *iron* with a few words like *steel*, *lead*, *gold*, or *metal*, or comparing *oak* with a few words like *willow*, *vine*, *wood*, or *tree* is a never-ending task. As for plumbing the depth of content in *mind* as opposed to *soul* or *thought*, or *go* as opposed to *walk*, *step*, *journey*, *bear oneself*, *come*, or *travel*, it would quite simply be a lifetime’s work. Since at the age of fifteen or sixteen we already have a precise idea of the content not only of these words, but of thousands of others, meaning simply must be a function of the purely *negative* fact of opposing values. The time required to learn the positive value of signs would be hundreds or thousands of times too short. (Saussure, 2006, p. 52)]

That Saussure paid attention to the synchronicity of linguistic state and confirmed the anti-historical nature of language implies a close theoretical relationship with what is mentioned above. It is true that the meaning of a word comes from historical accumulation, but basically speaking, no matter what the period, it always coexists with other signs synchronically. Its meaning lies in the negativity: it is this sign, not others or distinct from others (this is not that). Diogenes said to Alexander, “Stand a little out of my sun!” The meaning of the “sun” here rests with the negation of “the shadow”. (cf. Saussure, 2006, p. 49) Of course, in a general way, such negativity involves the accumulation hidden in memory, but their self-representation can be synchronic and simultaneous.

There is no correspondence between signs and objects; the only thing that exists is the relationship of difference or negativity among signs.² The positive meaning of a sign cannot exist, and it takes difference or negativity to generate meaning from some linguistic state. Language is ambiguous, but this ambiguity can achieve or realize accuracy in a synchronic differential or negative relationship. From the point of view of positive and absolute meaning or value, words will always fail to express their meanings or convey the speaking subjects’ minds. However, with the help of the relationship of negativity or difference, the simplest yet the best operation, the language can successfully and faithfully express the user’s intention in a given synchronic state. Therefore, the power of language takes root in negativity and difference. It is the difference that exists, but there is no positive and solid viewpoint from which to examine a term, which is an empty or void, not a fixed being.

Dans d’autres domaines, si je ne me trompe, on peut parler des différents objets envisagés, sinon comme de choses existantes elles-mêmes, du moins comme de choses qui résument

choses ou entités positives quelconques à formuler autrement (à moins peut-être de pousser les faits jusqu'aux limites de la métaphysique, ou de la question de connaissance, ce dont nous entendons faire complètement abstraction); or il semble que la science du langage soit placée à part: en ce que les objets qu'elle a devant elle n'ont jamais de réalité *en soi*, ou à part des autres objets à considérer; n'ont absolument aucun substratum à leur existence hors de *leur différence* ou en DES différences de toute espèce que l'esprit trouve moyen d'attacher à *LA différence* fondamentale (mais que leur différence réciproque fait toute leur existence à chacun): mais sans que l'on sorte nulle part de cette donnée fondamentalement et à tout jamais négative de la DIFFÉRENCE de deux termes, et non des propriétés d'un terme. (Saussure, 2002, p. 65)

[Unless I am mistaken, objects of study in other areas can be said to have their own existence, or failing this to encapsulate certain positive things or entities requiring different formulation (unless perhaps facts are taken to the very limits of metaphysics, raising the question of the nature of knowledge, which we cannot go into). The science of language appears to be in a different situation, whereby the objects it must deal with never have any *innate* reality, are never *distinct* from other objects of inquiry. There is nothing underlying their existence other than *their difference*, or DIFFERENCES of whatever kind that the mind manages to attach to *the fundamental difference* (however, each one's entire existence depends on reciprocal difference). Never do we abandon the fundamental, eternally negative factor of the DIFFERENCE between two terms, rather than the properties of one term. (Saussure, 2006, p. 42)]

Comme il n'y a dans la langue aucune *unité* positive (de quelque ordre et de quelque nature qu'on l'imagine) qui repose sur autre chose que des *différences*, en réalité l'unité est toujours imaginaire, la différence seule existe. Nous sommes forcés de procéder néanmoins à l'aide d'unités positives, sous peine d'être dès le début incapables de maîtriser la masse des faits. Mais il est essentiel de se rappeler que ces unités sont un expédient inévitable de notre (esprit—*Tullio De Mauro's complement*, Saussure, 2005, p. 94, n. 118), et rien de plus: *aussitôt que l'on pose une unité, cela revient à dire que l'on convient de laisser de côté* (son caractère différentiel—*R. Amacker's complement*, Saussure, 2011, p. 163, n. 14) pour prêter momentanément une existence séparée à [une forme—*Tullio De Mauro's complement*, Saussure, 2005, p. 94, n. 120]. (Saussure, 2011, p. 163; 2002, p. 83)

[As there is no [positive] *unit* (of any order or nature) [in the language] which repose on anything other than *differences*, a unit can only be imaginary; only difference exists. Yet we have no choice but to proceed on the basis of positive units, for without these it would be impossible to bring order to the mass of facts. These units, though, remain nothing more than an unavoidable expedient of our (mind): *the simple positing of a unit implies* a decision to leave out (its differential character) and so grant a fleeting separate existence to (a form). (Saussure, 2006, p. 56)]

But, on the other hand, the difference and the relationship never have any innate

existence, and we can not inquire into them from a fixed perspective. The presence of difference is a negative fact, which is first identified by our spirit, and then gets its own value. In other words, the difference comes from negativity, which is determined and then turns into positivity; it is a result of retrospective reflection. But the retrospective reflection is a conscious action, and the presence of difference is not a result of conscious seeking; it is unconscious, accidental.

Our mind can easily grasp the relationships among terms, through which we can immediately grasp the properties of one term. It is nearly impossible to seek the properties of one term in isolation. Yet we have to observe the relationships by means of viewpoints. “Il n’y a aucun terme définissable et valable hors d’un point de vue précis, par suite de l’absence totale d’êtres linguistiques donnés en soi”. [No term is valid and definable outside a specific viewpoint, as a result of the total absence of innate linguistic entities’.] (Saussure, 2002, p. 81) Saussure wrote: “Les *en tant que*, les *au point de vue* de font fort réfléchir en linguistique. Ailleurs il y a une limite aux façons diverses d’envisager les choses, qui est donnée par les choses mêmes. En linguistique on peut se demander si le point de vue où on envisage la chose n’est pas toute la chose, et par conséquent en définitive si nous partons sur un seul point de quelque chose de concret, ou s’il n’y a jamais eu autre chose que nos points de vue indéfiniment multipliables”. [Formulae such as *when seen as* or *from the point of view* give considerable pause for thought in linguistics. Elsewhere, the range of approaches to things is limited by the things themselves. In linguistics one wonders if the viewpoint from which the thing is approached is not in fact the whole thing. This begs the question of whether linguistics has ever had any solid anchorage, or whether it comes down to a never-ending multiplication of viewpoints.] (Saussure, 2002, p. 67) Saussure continued: “*Considéré en tant que... En tant que ...* Mais à force de voir que chaque élément du langage et de la parole est autre chose selon les points de vue presque innombrables et également légitimes où on peut se placer pour l’envisager, il arrive un moment où ... et où il faut passer à la discussion de ces points de vue eux-mêmes, à la classification raisonnée qui fixera la valeur respective de chacun” [*Considered as ... In its role as ...* But by seeing each and every element of *langage* and of *parole* as something different depending on the almost limitless, equally legitimate viewpoints from which to observe it, eventually ... and these viewpoints themselves must be discussed, arranged into a logical classification which determines the value of each one.] (Saussure, 2002, pp. 76-77) We observe the linguistic fact from a viewpoint which is the framework, channel, and means; it is the imaginary production, not the fact itself. Unit, term, and element are all imaginary, temporal. So, they are empty, and they do not have any separate existence. It also indicates that the unit exists only in the mind. It is the framework of the mental operation, and is meanwhile the result of mental operations.

Notes

- 1 Saussure wrote: “Il faut savoir si l’on veut appeler *signe* le total (combinaison du concept avec image) ou bien si l’image acoustique elle-même peut être appelée *signe* (la moitié plus

matérielle). C'est une question que nous avouons ne pouvoir trancher. ...Il y a là un point de terminologie à résoudre; il faudrait deux mots différents. Nous tâcherons d'éviter les confusions qui pourraient être très graves". [We must decide whether we wish to call the whole a *sign* (combination of concept with image) or whether the acoustic image itself can be called a *sign* (the more material half). This is a question I admit I cannot decide.... This is a terminological point to be resolved: two different words must be found. I shall try to avoid confusions, which could be serious ones.] (Saussure, 1993, p. 75) In the paper, I call the acoustic image a sign.

- 2 "D'abord l'objet, puis le signe; donc (ce que nous nierons toujours) base extérieure donnée au signe, et figuration du langage par ce rapport-ci:

$$\text{Objets} \left\{ \begin{array}{l} * \text{---} a \\ * \text{---} b \\ * \text{---} c \end{array} \right\} \text{ Noms}$$

alors que la vraie figuration est: $a - b - c$, hors de toute connaissance d'un rapport effectif comme $* \text{---} a$, fondé sur un objet. Si un objet pouvait, où que ce soit, être le terme sur lequel est fixé le signe, la linguistique cesserait instantanément d'être ce qu'elle est, depuis le sommet jusqu'à la base; du reste, l'esprit humain du même coup, comme il est évident à partir de cette discussion".

[First the object, then the sign; hence (and this we will always reject) a prior external basis for the sign, and a depiction of language according to the following relationship:

$$\text{Objects} \left\{ \begin{array}{l} * \text{---} a \\ * \text{---} b \\ * \text{---} c \end{array} \right\} \text{ Names}$$

whereas in fact the real configuration is: $a - b - c$, outside of any knowledge of a functional relationship such as $* \text{---} a$ based on an object. If an object could at any point be a term which fixes the sign, linguistics would immediately undergo a profound and comprehensive transformation; so too would the human mind, as this discussion makes perfectly clear.] (Saussure, 2002, p. 230)

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(Copy editing: Curtis Harrison & Glen Phillips)

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