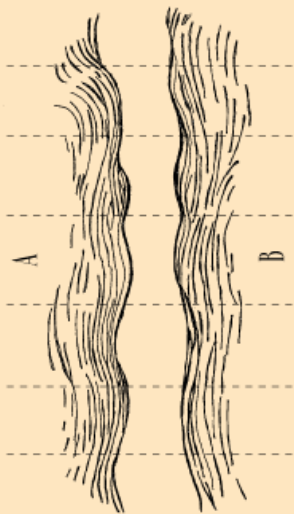


# Le Cours de Linguistique Générale 1916-2016

Genève - Paris • 2016 - 2017



## TRAVAUX DES COLLOQUES LE COURS DE LINGUISTIQUE GÉNÉRALE, 1916-2016. L'ÉMERGENCE, LE DEVENIR

Éditeurs scientifiques : Daniele  
GAMBARARA, Fabienne REBOUL.

Maria Hozanete ALVES DE  
LIMA, « Saussurean notes on the  
“facts of synonymy” in the dual  
essence of language »

Communication donnée dans la session de Daniele  
GAMBARARA, *Construction du CLG*, au colloque **Le Cours  
de Linguistique Générale, 1916-2016.**  
**L'émergence**, Genève, 9-13 janvier 2017.

CERCLE FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE

N° D'ISBN : 978-2-8399-2282-1

Pour consulter le programme complet de la session de Daniele Gambarara,

***Construction du CLG :***

<https://www.clg2016.org/geneve/programme/session-11/index.html>



# SAUSSUREAN NOTES ON THE "FACTS OF SYNONYMY" IN THE DUAL ESSENCE OF LANGUAGE

Maria Hozanete Alves de Lima  
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte - Brasil  
[hozanetelima@gmail.com](mailto:hozanetelima@gmail.com)

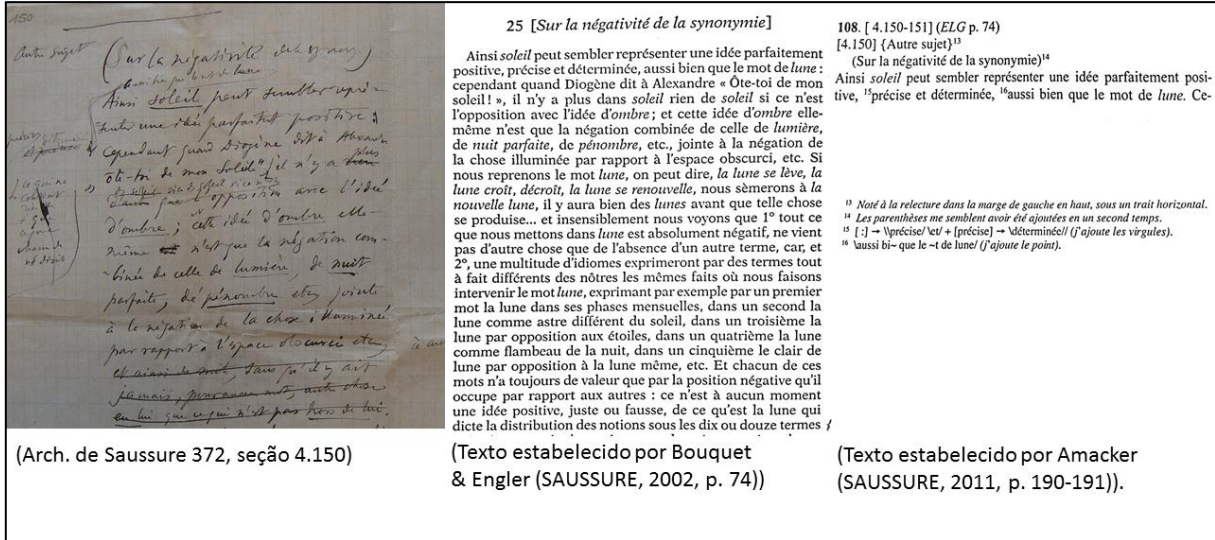
## 1. Initial Considerations

From a universe of approximately fifty thousand manuscript pages preserved, currently, at the Library of Geneva, in the section entitled *Arch de Saussure 372* (Saussure Archives 372) the work, *Écrits de Linguistique Générale* (ELG) – Writings in General Linguistics – were brought to the public in 2002, in France. Also brought to the public, in 2011, in Switzerland, was *Ferdinand de Saussure; Science du langage; De la double essence du langage* (SD) – Ferdinand de Saussure; *Science of language; The double essence of language*. These works comprised a set of specific manuscript texts by linguist F. de Saussure that allow us to contemplate the reflections of a linguist engaged in an intense discourse on language. In ELG (SAUSSURE, 2002) and SD (SAUSSURE, 2011), we find Saussure's notes about the "facts of synonymy". Although these notes seem fragmentary, following the path outlined by F. de Saussure in an attempt to define "facts of synonymy" and to determine the way they operate, it seems to us, clearly, a significant historiographical exercise in the science of language, especially, for those interested in the thought of the Genevan linguist. In this investigative exercise, we are guided by the following questions: 1. What reasons lead F. de Saussure to be interested in the "facts of synonymy"? 2. How does the linguist handle this type of linguistic manifestation?

On endeavoring this foray, we were moved by the apocrypha that surrounds the organizational configuring of the manuscripts in ELG and SD. From Bouquet & Engler (SAUSSURE, 2002), and Amacker (SAUSSURE, 2011), we know that the transference of the saussurean manuscripts – specifically those found in 1996, in the linguist's family house – from their place of "rest" to their deposal in the Library of Geneva, was accompanied by a series of facts that required scholars to conduct a thorough editing, exhibiting and establishment of the documents in *Arch de Saussure 372* (AdS). In this sense, to appreciate the saussurean discussion about the "facts of synonymy" we put forth, also, considerations of the editorial peculiarities constitutive of the establishment of the manuscripts.

## 2. The re-composition of the fragmentary: traces of the apocryphal

The discussions about the "facts of synonymy" are consolidated in a more explicit way, in ELG, in the sections numbered and titled "25 [*Sur la négativité de la synonymie*]", "26 [*Question de synonymie (suite)*]" and "27 *De l'essence*". In SD, the subjects related to these items are found in sections 106, 107 and 108 (see Figure 01).



(Figure 01)

To sketch what seems to be a more legitimate comparison, we rely on a saussurean manuscript (that presents the “facts of synonymy” as reflections), in order to appreciate, through a comparative trajectory – though succinct – the nature of this type of text and the way it was established, in the editions by Bouquet & Engler (SAUSSURE, 2002) and Amacker (SAUSSURE, 2011). We selected the manuscript fragments (see Figure 01) entitled “*Sur la négativité de la synonymie*” (On the negativity of synonymy) as it is these fragments that initiate, in the French edition, the questions that directly involve the facts of synonymy.

The cartography of the saussurean manuscript is replete with particularities: erasures, insertions, notes of ideas or phrases, writing between the lines; ultimately, an entire non-linear operation – indexes of stops and pauses in the scriptural thread. From this, we can suppose that, substantially, in the original itself, there are visible traces of an intense reflexive activity and of the presence of a radical otherness that the editions sterilize, minimize or fail to present altogether. Bouquet & Engler, in the edition of ELG, preserve paragraphs or ideas that are incomplete in the manuscripts by F. de Saussure. However, following a more intense path, Amacker overcomes this barrier, bringing, in his edition, marks of the saussurean reflexivity, which are vividly presented in footnotes. Bouquet & Engler (SAUSSURE, 2002), for example, respect the limits imposed by the editors of Gallimard: prioritize clarity, provide a smooth, linear reading for the reader. Amacker (SAUSSURE, 2011) attends to the issue of clarity, but, also, endeavors a differential establishment, which he justifies:

One can object that it would have been sufficient, to this end, to reproduce the critical text established by Engler. To answer, I must say that this was not really possible due, at least, to two reasons: first, the almost diplomatic presentation chosen by the Bernese scholar does not always allow a clear perception of the succession of stages of the text – where, obviously, this succession may be reconstructed with some certainty; secondly as I pointed out, certain readings are problematic; words that Engler considered unclear can be deciphered, the order

of fragments and additions on a page could sometimes be corrected. (AMACKER, 2011, p. 14. Preface. In. SAUSSURE, 2011 – author’s translation)<sup>1</sup>

The “order of the fragments” received Amacker’s special attention. Carefully, he leads his reader to the localization, in the ELG and in the Saussure Archives at the Library of Geneva, to the fragments he organized in SD. As seen in Chart 01, Amacker’s position in relation to Bouquet & Engler is clearly illustrated.

ELG – Text established by Bouquet & Engler (SAUSSURE, 2002)	SD – Text established by Amacker (SAUSSURE, 2011)
25 [Sur la négativité de la synonymie]	107. [4.153-156] (ELG p. 75-76) [4.153] {Question de synonymie (suite)}
26 [Question de synonymie (suite)]	108. [4.150-151] (ELG p. 74) [4.150] {Autre sujet} (Sur la négativité de la synonymie)

(Chart 01)

There is a very particular numbering system in SD. The textual “items” – “*Sur la négativité de la synonymie*” and “*Question de synonymie (suite)*” – undergo a different ordering than those in ELG. It is in number **107** of SD that we find the content of **26** in ELG and, in **108** (SD), the content of **25** (ELG). There are even other numberings, by which Amacker organizes a series of references, carefully explained in the preface of SD. In Chart 01, we see, in **107**, between parenthesis, the numbering **[4.153-156]** followed by information in brackets (**ELG p. 74**). In brackets, Amacker reports the pages of ELG where the fragment he mentions can be found; between parenthesis, the **4** refers to the section in which the saussurean manuscripts at the Library of Geneva can be found, followed by the written numbering placed on the pages of the manuscript. Returning to Figure 01, we find number **150**, on the upper part of the left corner of the page. Amacker declares that this numbering on the manuscript is not Saussure’s notation, but the result of the particular way the manuscripts, found in 1996, were reorganized and placed in the envelopes. The establishment of the saussurean texts, as per our findings, will always be a delicate question, and will always depend on the careful engagement of the historiographer.

In certain passages, the manuscripts themselves can offer indications, as small as they may seem, which allow us to establish a possible order. Considering, for example, the beginning of text “25 Sur la négativité de la synonymie”, as presented in ELG, the manuscript offers us a “clue” so that we can figure the place that it would occupy in the heart of a discussion. We speak of the conclusive “Ainsi” (thus), as it is described at the beginning of the fragment: “Thus, *sun* seems to represent a perfectly positive idea, precise and determined, as well as the word *moon* [...]” (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 74 – author’s translation).<sup>2</sup> This conclusive element, “ainsi” (thus), seems to begin utterances that must be influenced by other ideas written by Saussure at other moments.

<sup>1</sup> “On objectera peut-être qu’il aurait suffi à cette fin de reproduire le texte critique établi par Engler. En réponse, il faut dire que la chose n’était guère possible pour au moins deux raisons: en premier lieu, la présentation quasi diplomatique choisie par le savant bernois [...] ne permet pas toujours de se faire une idée suffisante de la succession des états du texte – là bien entendu où cette succession peut être reconstituée avec quelque certitude; en second lieu, comme je l’ai signalé, certaines lectures y sont fautives, des mots qu’Engler avait considérés comme illisibles ont pu être déchiffrés, l’ordre des fragments et des ajouts figurant dans une page a pu parfois être corrigé.” (AMACKER, 2011, p. 14. Préface. In. SAUSSURE, 2011)

<sup>2</sup> “Ainsi, *soleil* peut sembler représenter une idée parfaitement positive, précise et déterminée, aussi bien que le mot *lune* [...]” (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 74).

In the same vein, we can proceed with the fragment denominated “26 [*Question de synonymie (suite)*]”. The term “*suite*” (meaning – following, continuation, etc.) allows us to consider that this fragment “continues” discussions already written by F. de Saussure. Most likely, Amacker has followed many of these clues to organize the manuscripts in the SD edition. One of the more relevant modifications in our view were the fact that Amacker brought the discussion present in fragment “26 *De l’essence*”, from the ELG edition, as preceding those present in fragments “25 [*Sur la négativité de la synonymie*]” and “26 [*Question de synonymie (suite)*]”.

We can conjecture that the fragments in Amacker 107 and 108, would be a kind of first expression of a thought whose sequence and choices would be organized in a more homogenous version, being presented in 106 – which would correspond to the text “26 *De l’essence*” in ELG.

In any event, as we have already pointed out, the stance taken towards these manuscripts depends on the rigorous work of linguists and the personal investigations of each investigator. In certain situations, it seems difficult to justify a link between the manuscripts; in others, we can find similitudes of content between them, recognizing that Saussure takes up the idea repeatedly at distinct moments and in varied reflexive contexts.

The apocrypha end up surrounding the saussurean manuscripts, even with regard to the established order. Although, we have selected the texts that speak of the “facts of synonymy”, our objective is not, precisely, to try to mount each step, patching fragmentary texts together in an attempt to arrive at a complete thought, but to bring out the points that seem crucial to us in the developments about “facts of synonymy”.

In this sense, perhaps, more than following the apocryphal order imposed on manuscripts, it seems to be essential to discuss the concepts, the saussurean discursivity and to find the moorings in the weaving that was established in various moments and for various reasons.

### 3. The “negativity of synonymy”

In “27 *De l’essence*”, we find this passage duly significant:

The **synonymist** who marvels at all the things contained in one word, such as *spirit*, thinks that these treasures could never be contained there if they were not **the fruit of the reflection, of the experience, of the profound philosophy accumulated in the depths of a language by the generations who used it**. How much he may be right I will not examine, because, it is, in fact, contingent. **The first and fundamental fact is that, in any system of signs put in circulation, a synonymy will instantly establish itself**, since the contrary is impossible and would be equivalent to saying that one doesn’t attribute opposite values to opposite signs. As soon as a value is attributed, **it is unavoidable that an opposition between random ideas, coming by surprise, fits itself either in a sign, whose existence depends on its opposition to another, or in two or three signs by opposition to one or two others, etc.** (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 78 – author’s emphasis and translation).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> “Le synonymiste qui s’émerveille de toutes les choses qui sont continues dans un mot comme *esprit* pense que ces trésors ne pourrait jamais y être contenus s’ils n’étaient le fruit de la réflexion, de l’expérience, de la philosophie profonde accumulée au fond d’une langue par les générations qui s’en sont servies. En quel sens il peut avoir raison dans une certaine mesure, c’est ce que je n’examine pas, parce que cela est en réalité en tout cas le fait secondaire. Le fait primaire et fondamental, c’est que, dans n’importe quel système des signes qu’on mettra en circulation, il s’établira instantanément une synonymie, car le contraire est impossible, et reviendrait à dire qu’on n’accorde pas des valeurs opposées aux signes opposés. Du moment qu’on leur en accorde une, il est inévitable qu’une opposition d’idées quelconques venant à surprise se loge soit dans un signe existant par opposition à un autre ou bien dans deux ou trois signes par opposition à un ou deux autres, etc.” (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 78).

The term “synonymist” is not used haphazardly. We know that the studies about the facts of synonymy, as Bisconti (2012) clearly shows, are an ancient metalinguistic practice and constitute extensive questions and deep linguistic knowledge throughout the second half of the XIX century. Aurox (1985) points out that synonymy was – and still is – an object of reflection in collections of synonyms, dictionaries, semantic studies and lexicology. Saussure, certainly, knew these studies well. His own etymological research developed so that he could bring to light, in some measure, this metalinguistic practice.

In ELG, there is an interesting passage that discusses another point. This regards a specific discursive “field” about synonymy. Saussure circumscribed it and cites it throughout the passage (there are at least 2 similar passages in the ELG: Semiology = morphology, grammar, syntax, synonymy, rhetoric, stylistics, lexicology, etc., all being inseparable (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 45 – author’s translation)).<sup>4</sup>

Subsequently, in the former passage the following deserves mentioning: the “first and fundamental fact”, the “circulation”, and the “opposition” among signs.

Saussure demonstrates how in the word “spirit” there are other ideas not given beforehand, but rather resulting from the “circulation” of the word, “result of reflection, of experience, of deep philosophy accumulated in the depth of a language through the generations that it will serve” (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 78)<sup>5</sup>.

The word “spirit”, presenting, in itself, a difference in form with the word “soul”, a difference in meanings is therefore established. There would not be between these two forms a positivity that marked a common essence i.e. the idea that they communicate. The meaning, thus, rests on the pure negative fact of the opposition of values between the terms.

[...] it is obvious that the meaning rests in the pure *negative* fact of the opposition of values, as the time materially necessary to establish the positive value of the signs would have been hundreds and thousands of times unavailable. (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 77 – author’s translation).<sup>6</sup>

Saussure follows the question of “negativity” in the three fragments (as well as in the majority of the texts in ELG). We have selected 19 passages in which the term “negativity” or a synonym occurs in an easily detectable way: “negative position” (p. 74), “negative choice” (p.74), “negative ways” (p. 75), “equally negative” (p.75), “negative idea from the start” (p. 75), “negative terms” (p. 76), “negative categories” (p. 76), “negative values” (p. 77), “negative barrier” (p. 77), “pure negative fact” (p. 77), “negatively limited” (p.78), “negative reason” (p. 78), “could only be negative” (p. 79), “totally negative action” (p. 79), “NEGATIVE fact” (79), “essentially negative thing” (p. 80), “relative and negative values” (p. 80), “purely negative” (p. 80).

In the fragment titled “22b [Fundamental principle of semiology]” from ELG, Saussure assumes negativity to be the “the fundamental principle of semiology”:

There are not, in the language, either *signs*, or *significations*, but DIFFERENCES of signs and DIFFERENCES of meanings; which 1<sup>st</sup> only exist absolutely through each other (in both senses) being then inseparable and jointly inseparable; but 2<sup>nd</sup> don’t ever directly correspond.

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<sup>4</sup> “(Sémiologie = morphologie, grammaire, syntaxe, synonymie, rhétorique, stylistique, lexicologie etc., tout étant inséparable)” (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 45).

<sup>5</sup> “le fruit de la réflexion, de l’expérience, de la philosophie profonde accumulée au fond d’une langue par les générations qui s’en sont servies”. (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 78)

<sup>6</sup> “[...] il est évident que ces sens reposent sur le pur fait *néгатif* 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)

// From this one can immediately conclude: that everything, and in both domains (inseparable, however), is NEGATIVE in language - resting on a *complicated* opposition, but exclusively on an opposition, without necessary intervention of any type of positive data (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 70 – author’s translation).<sup>7</sup>

The “negativity principle” of the signs and significations “can be verified through the most elementary substructions of the language”<sup>8</sup> (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 71).

#### 4. Oppositionality and natural objects

Within the “facts of synonymy”, another principle is interposed as fundamental: there is no intervention of “positive data” that would be established through a possible “natural relationship” between the signs, the ideas and the material objects to which they could refer. The defense of non-positivity appears in the texts in a recurring pattern. The title example, we have taken:

1. In other words: if a word does not evoke the idea of a material object, there is absolutely nothing that can clarify its meaning, except in negative ways (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 75 – author’s translation);
2. If this word, on the other hand, refers to a material object, one could say that the very essence of the object is adequate to give the word a positive meaning (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 75 – author’s translation);
3. [...] there is no reason to expect that terms fully or even very approximately apply to identified objects, material or other (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 76 – author’s translation);
4. [...] At no time does the impression given by a material object have the power to create a single linguistic category [...] (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 76 – author’s translation);
5. [...] the existence of material facts is, as well as the existence of facts of another order, aloof from language (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 76 – author’s translation).<sup>9</sup>

In these passages, we have, on the one hand, the concept that no word “possesses an absolute [or positive] meaning”, seeing that the meaning is given by opposition to other words, whose nature is also negative; on the other hand, the fact that the essence of the material objects is, in its turn, aloof from the order of the language.

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<sup>7</sup> “Il n’y a dans la langue ni *signes* ni *significations*, mais des DIFFÉRENCES de signes et des DIFFÉRENCES de significations; lesquelles 1° n’existent les unes absolument que par les autres (dans les deux sens) et sont donc inséparables et solidaires; mais 2° n’arrivent jamais à se correspondre directement. // D’où l’on peut immédiatement conclure: que tout, et dans les deux domaines (non séparables d’ailleurs), est NÉGATIF dans la langue – repose sur une opposition *compliquée*, mais uniquement sur une opposition, sans intervention nécessaire d’aucune espèce de donnée positive (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 70).

<sup>8</sup> “se vérifie dès les plus élémentaires substructions du langage”. (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 71)

<sup>9</sup> 1. “Autrement dit: si un mot n’évoque pas l’idée d’un objet matériel, il n’y a absolument rien qui puisse en préciser le sens autrement que par voie négative.” (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 75); 2. “Si ce mot, au contraire, se rapporte à un objet matériel, on pourrait dire que l’essence même de l’objet est de nature à donner au mot une signification positive.” (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 75); 3. “[...] il n’y a aucune raison d’attendre que les termes s’appliquent complètement, ou même très incomplètement à des objets définis, matériels ou autres.” (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 76); 4. “[...] à aucun moment, l’impression même que fait qu’un objet matériel n’a le pouvoir de créer une seule catégorie linguistique [...]” (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 76); 5. “[...] l’existence des faits matériels est, aussi bien, que l’existence des faits d’un autre ordre, indifférente à la langue.” (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 76).



In platonic transparency: the essence of the object is intangible (positive, negative or whatever pole it happens to rest on); one only arrives at it – whatever it is – through language; one falls back on, ultimately, the negative, and by its associations (synonymic, among them), we return to the game of language.

Although the positivity is something to be avoided, whether in its relation to signs, between signs and ideas, or between signs and material objects, to consider the structure and functioning of language scientifically, Saussure does not neglect any operating factor in the “imagination” of the linguist and in the heart of Linguistics itself. Thus, he affirms:

As, in language, there is not any positive *unit* (of any order and of any nature that can be imagined) which rests on something besides *differences*, in reality, the unit is always imaginary, the difference only exists. Meanwhile, we are forced to proceed with the help of positive units, at the risk of being, from the start, incapable of dominating the mass of the facts (SAUSSURE, 2011, p. 163 – author’s translation).<sup>10</sup>

This is a curious passage, but followed by the admission that we, linguists, “are forced to proceed with the help of positive units, at the risk of being, from the start, incapable of dominating the mass of the facts” (SAUSSURE, 2011, p. 163).

But it is essential to remember that these units are an inevitable expedient of our **[mind]**, and nothing more: *as soon as we place a unit*, this amounts to say that we agree to set aside **[its differential character]** to attribute, temporarily, a separate existence to **[the parallélie]** (SAUSSURE, 2011, p. 163; words in bold inserted in a footnote by Amacker in his edition – author’s translation).<sup>11</sup>

We can shed a little light on the first reading: there is something positive in the language, which is asserted very strongly, in Saussure’s (2005) *Course in General Linguistics* (CLG), and ELG, as well as in the readings by specialists of the aforementioned works. It is the “necessary”, “contingent”, “fortuitous” relationship between the signified and the signifying, the signs and what is beyond the language. For the speaker of the language, this imaginary relationship is fundamental; for the linguist, it is necessary to know that language touches the exterior, in a specific way: “obliquely” (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 201). If it is possible to talk about “identity” and “positivity”, “it is necessary and essential to remember that these units are an inevitable expedient of our spirit”<sup>12</sup> (SAUSSURE, 2011, p. 163).

We turn, immediately, to Milner (2002), when discussing the relationship of the “association” between the signs and their properties:

This sign only has properties through the relations of difference, which its signifier maintains with all the other signifiers of the language – and its meaning, with all of the other meanings of the language. The relation of the internal link within one given sign requires the connection

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<sup>10</sup> “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.” (SAUSSURE, 2011, p. 163)

<sup>11</sup> “Mais il est essentiel de se rappeler que ces unités sont un expédient inévitable de notre [esprit], 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] pour prêter momentanément, une existence séparée à [la parallélie] (SAUSSURE, 2011, p.163).

<sup>12</sup> “Mais il est essentiel de se rappeler que ces unités sont un expédient inévitable de notre esprit.” (SAUSSURE, 2011, p. 163)

or better, the connections of the signs among themselves. In other words, the connection of the sign with itself is of the same nature as the connection of the sign with other signs. The internal is crossed again by the external.

At the end of the trajectory, nevertheless, a given sign really exists. While its particular combination is stabilized, it keeps its own positivity, even though this stability and this positivity depend on processes in which only differences and negativities operate (MILNER, 2002, p. 35 – author’s translation)<sup>13</sup>

These could very well be the “general obligatory rules that weigh on the linguistic method” (MILNER, 2002, p. 35 – author’s translation)<sup>14</sup>, and for this, to say, about the way of thinking, semiologically, about the “facts of synonymy”.

We bring, intentionally, here, the canonical voice of Saussure, from CLG, as a counterpoint to that which is said about him. With regard to this intersection of the external and internal discussed by Milner, Saussure (2005, p. 167-168 – author’s translation) attests, “Applied to the unit, the principle of differentiation can be formulated thus: the characters of the unit mix with the unit itself”.<sup>15</sup>

This conjunction between positivity and negativity, explicit in CLG (SAUSSURE, 2005), operates when – adopting the expression that is the title of the fourth sub-item of the chapter “Linguistic Value” in CLG – “The Sign [is] Considered in Its Totality” (SAUSSURE, 2005, p. 166). Only by apprehending the totality can we reach an understanding of the positive: the territory of the sign in which the task of linguistics - the empirical-conceptual task that comprehends the signified and the signifier in combination -, and it alone, combines with what in the language is external to it. “Although both the signified and the signifier are purely differential and negative when considered separately, their combination is a positive fact;” (SAUSSURE, 2005, p. 166 – author’s translation) and continuing “[...] it is really the only type of fact that the language encompasses, as the very linguistic institution is precisely to maintain the parallelism between these two orders of differences” (SAUSSURE, 2005, p. 166-167 – author’s translation)<sup>16</sup>. Ultimately, this entire network of relationship examined by Milner in the previous quotation, as well as by us in these notes and in the body of this work, are repercussions of the proposition – with which, in fact, Saussure closes this chapter on linguistic value – that “*language is a form and not a substance*” (SAUSSURE, 2005, p. 169)<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> “Ce signe n'a de propriétés que par les relations de différence, qu'entretient son signifiant avec tous les autres signifiants de la langue - et son signifié avec tous les autres signifiés de la langue. Le rapport d'association interne à un signe donné requiert le rapport ou plutôt les rapports des signes entre eux. Autrement dit, le rapport du signe à lui-même est de même nature que le rapport du signe aux autres signes. L'interne est retraversé par l'externe. En fin de parcours, cependant, un signe donné existe bien. Tant que sa combinaison particulière est stabilisée, elle a sa positivité propre, bien que cette stabilité et cette positivité dépendent de processus où n'interviennent que des différences et des négativités” (MILNER, 2002, p.35).

<sup>14</sup> “les contraintes générales qui pèsent sur la méthode linguistique” (MILNER, 2002, p. 35).

<sup>15</sup> “Appliqué à la unité, le principe de différenciation peut se formuler ainsi: les caractères de l'unité se confondent avec l'unité elle-même” Saussure (2005, p. 167-168).

<sup>16</sup> “Bien que le signifié et le signifiant soient, chacun pris à part, purement différentiels et négatifs, leur combinaison est un fait positif; c'est même la seule espèce de faits que comporte la langue, puisque le propre de l'institution linguistique est justement de maintenir le parallélisme entre ces deux ordres de différences” (SAUSSURE, 2005, p. 166-167).

<sup>17</sup> “*La langue est une forme et non une substance*” (SAUSSURE, 2005, p. 169).

## 5. Under the *light* and *shadow* of the examples

Milner (2002) exalts the saussurean philosophical potential and warns about the slight constitutive triviality in everything the linguist utters:

Saussure is a limpid author, but his limpidity disorients. To this, is added the acculturation he benefited from; the price to pay for it is the appearance of triviality: the reader often believes he is meeting something very well known. Yet, there is triviality in Saussure (MILNER, 2002, p. 17-18 – author’s translation).<sup>18</sup>

This slight triviality, that Milner arguably recognized in Saussure, certainly derives, for the most part, from the frank lucidity that helped the Swiss linguist to deal with the slight triviality existent in the language. “But the language being what it is, whatever way we approach it, we do not find anything simple; everywhere and always, this same balance in complex terms that conditions it reciprocally” (SAUSSURE, 2012, 168-169)<sup>19</sup>. To this we can add Amacker’s assertion. “Saussure engaged himself in the epistemological field that is hidden under our feet” (AMACKER, 1995, p. 8)<sup>20</sup>.

From this paradoxical perspective – a clarity that disorients – Saussure offers us some examples. One that he exploited could not be more “luminous”.

Thus, *sun* seems to present a perfectly positive idea, precise and determined, just as the word *moon*: however, when Diogenes said to Alexander “Get out of my sun”, there is no longer, in *sun*, anything of *sun* if not in opposition to the idea of *shadow*; and this idea of *shadow* itself is just the combined negation of the ideas of *light*, of *perfect night*, of *penumbra*, etc., added to the negation of the *illuminated* thing combined with obscured space, etc. (SAUSSURE, 2002, p.74 – author’s translation).<sup>21</sup>

The excerpt includes an utterance “Get out of my sun” that, we would boldly say, makes use of a “figurative meaning” – to use a saussurean term. However, what matters to Saussure, in the first place, in this excerpt, is to affirm three points: the non-positivity between the word and the idea (star that lights the Earth, etc.). The saussurean argument follows an unexpected path, because, thinking with his clarity “that disorients”, we would expect him to oppose the words “clarity” or “light”, possible synonyms, to the word “sun”.

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<sup>18</sup> “Saussure est un auteur limpide, mais sa limpidité désoriente. À cela s'ajoute l'acculturation dont il a bénéficié; son prix est l'apparence de trivialité: le lecteur croit souvent retrouver du bien connu. Or, il y a de trivialité chez Saussure” (MILNER, 2002, p.17-18).

<sup>19</sup> “Mais la langue étant ce qu'elle est, de quelque côté qu'on l'aborde, on n'y trouvera rien de simple, partout et toujours ce même équilibre complexe de termes qui se conditionnent réciproquement” (SAUSSURE, 2012, 168-169).

<sup>20</sup> “Saussure s'est engagé sur un terrain épistémologique qui se dérobe sous vos pieds dès que vous y prenez pied” (AMACKER, 1995, p. 8).

<sup>21</sup> “Ainsi *soleil* semble représenter une idée parfaitement positive, précise et déterminée, aussi bien que le mot *lune*: cependant, quand Diogène dit à Alexandre “Ôte-toi de mon soleil”, il n'y a plus dans *soleil* rien de *soleil* si ce n'est l'opposition avec l'idée d'*ombre*; et cette idée d'*ombre* elle-même n'est que la négation combinée de celle de *lumière*; de *nuit parfaite*, de *pénombre*, etc, jointe à la négation de la chose *illuminée* par rapport à l'espace obscurci, etc” (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 74; italique de l'auteur).

As Milner would say, “the reasoning leads almost inevitably to an hidden maxim: there are no synonyms; the entire difference in the signifier inducts a difference in the signified” (MILNER, 2002, p. 29)<sup>22</sup>.

In Diogenes’ sun, one needs to consider an infinity of factors. Saussure searches for understanding in the following ways:

1. “sun” – as occurs with other signs, the example of “air”, “water”, “tree”, “woman”, light” “moon” – does not link positively to the material element;
2. “shadow”, on the other hand, is a “combined negation” that gives the idea that there is light;
3. “light” is, also, “a combined negation” that gives the idea of “dark night”, “penumbra”, “obscured space”.

Therein the principle of semiological harmony is imperative:

“Thus, the existence of material facts is, as well as the existence of facts of another order, aloof from language. At all times, it moves forward and moves with the help of the formidable machine of its negative categories, truly released from any concrete fact and, for this very reason, it is immediately ready to store whatever idea that adds itself to the former ones” (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 65 – author’s translation).<sup>23</sup>

And thus the “synonymy of a word is, in itself, infinite, as long as it is defined in relation to another word” (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 77)<sup>24</sup>. Therein lies the fact of synonymy: the associative chain and the imagining of the resemblance, even if what underlies them is essentially negative. Those who are familiar with the CLG can recognize the mark of the theory of value in it, and the associative tree, even though infinite, “seeing that time materially necessary to know the positive value of the signs would be for us, one hundred times over, insufficient” (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 77).

There are other examples that deserve attention in the excerpts, but we will focus for a moment on the most specific situations. Saussure presents another curious reflection, though simple, as in the following:

One of the multiple aspects under which this fact presents itself is this one: a Christian missionary believes that he must inculcate, to a wildlife population, the idea of *soul* –; it happens that he has at his disposal, in the indigenous language, two words, one that expresses more the *breath*, for example, and the other more the *breathing*; - immediately, if he is wholly familiar with the indigenous language and though the idea to be introduced is something totally unknown for [...], - the simple opposition of the two words, “breath” and “breathing”, imperiously dictates, for some secret reason, which of the two is the best to express the new idea of soul, so much so that, in case he chooses unskillfully the first term instead of the other, it can only result in the most serious disadvantages for the success of his apostolic mission – – yet, this secret reason can only be a negative reason, since the positive idea of *soul* would

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<sup>22</sup> “Le raisonnement conduit presque inévitablement à un lemme caché: il n’y a pas des synonymes; toute différence dans le signifiant induit une différence dans le signifié” (MILNER, 2002, p. 29)

<sup>23</sup> “Ainsi, l’existence des faits matériels est, aussi bien que l’existence des faits d’un autre ordre, indifférente à la langue. Tout le temps elle s’avance et se meut à l’aide de la formidable machine de ses catégories négatives, véritablement dégagées de tout fait concret et, par la même immédiatement prêtes à emmagasiner une idée quelconque qui vient s’ajouter aux précédentes”. (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 65)

<sup>24</sup> “La “synonymie” d’un mot est en elle-même infinie, quoiqu’elle soit définie par rapport à un autre mot”. (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 77)

entirely escape, beforehand, the intelligence and the feeling of the people in question. (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 78 – author’s translation)<sup>25</sup>

The expedient of searching in other language for examples of particular demonstrations is common in the CLG. In the case of synonymy, in the excerpts we studied, Saussure goes further, touching on cultural and anthropological questions. If, for the user of a language, it is possible to establish any synonymic relationship between “soul”, “breath” and “respiration”, they cannot maintain a satisfactory relationship in another language, as Saussure clearly shows in the example about the indigenous community. Equally, one cannot make a *tabula rasa* of any idea contained in linguistic terms. Words such as “reason”, “intellect”, “intelligence”, “understanding”, “judgment”, “knowledge”, etc., also would not find, semiologically, their limits from an idea in a positive way, and a philosopher or psychologist with new or revolutionary ideas, would not find in these words or in the choice of any one of them with which he intended to name his discovery, one determined term that corresponded better than the others to the new distinctions (SAUSSURE, 2002). It follows that “No sign is, therefore, limited in the totality of positive ideas that it is, at the same time, called to concentrate in itself” (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 78, author’s translation)<sup>26</sup>.

Saussure progresses in his discussion on the facts of synonymy. It is a step forward on the questions on meaning itself and figurative meaning. Thus, he indicates the effects of non-positivity and negation (in the same way, difference and arbitrariness, even if they are not new notions, are, in these excerpts, very well exposed).

[...] that the name of the same object will serve for many others: thus, the *light of history*, the *lights of an assembly of scholars*. In this last case, one is persuaded that a new meaning (called figurative) intervened: this conviction comes purely from the traditional supposition that the word possesses an absolute meaning applying to a precise object: it is this assumption that we combat (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 75 – author’s translation)<sup>27</sup>.

The non-positivity – circumscribed in the meaning itself and in the figurative meaning – would be the only factor enabling the creation of utterances such as “the moon grows”, “the moon shrinks”, the “moon is new”, “the lights of an assembly of scholars”, “in the light of history”.

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<sup>25</sup> “Une des multiples faces sous lesquelles se présente ce fait est celle-ci: un missionnaire chrétien croit devoir inculquer, à une peuplade sauvage, l'idée d'*âme* -; il se trouve avoir à sa disposition dans l'idiome indigène deux mots, l'un exprimant plutôt par exemple *le souffle*, l'autre plutôt *la respiration*; - immédiatement, s'il est tout à fait familier avec l'idiome indigène, et quoique l'idée à introduire soit quelque chose de totalement inconnu à [...], - la simple opposition des deux mots "souffle" et "respiration" dicte impérieusement par quelque raison secrète sous lequel des deux doit se placer la nouvelle idée d'*âme*; à tel point que s'il choisit maladroitement le premier terme au lieu de l'autre, il en peut résulter les plus sérieux inconvénients pour le succès de son apostolat – or, cette raison secrète ne peut être qu'une raison négative, puisque l'idée positive d'*âme* échappait totalement par avance à l'intelligence et au sens du peuple en question. (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 78; italique de l'auteur).

<sup>26</sup> “Aucun signe n'est donc limité dans la somme d' idées positives qu'il est au même moment appelé à concentrer en lui seul”. (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 78).

<sup>27</sup> “[...] que le nom du même objet servira à beaucoup d'autres: ainsi *la lumière de l'histoire*, *les lumières d'une assemblée de savants*. Dans ce dernier cas, on est persuadée qu'un nouveau sens (dit *figuré*) est intervenu: cette conviction part purement de la supposition traditionnelle que le mot possède une signification absolue s'appliquant à un objet déterminé: c'est cette présomption que nous combattons. (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 75; italique de l'auteur)

Other examples deserve to be highlighted here, but, as we have said, we will not delve deeply into this question of literal and figurative meaning, in this paper, as the demands of a proper investigation are beyond its scope. For now, we rely on Saussure's affirmation that

This very fact, purely negative, of the opposition between comparable words, is also the only one that warrants the use of "figurative" uses; we deny, in fact, that these are figurative uses, because we deny that a word has a positive meaning. All types of usage that do not fall in the field of another word are not only an integral part, but are also a constitutive part of the meaning of this word, and this word does not have, in reality, any other meaning than the sum of the meanings not claimed" (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 80-81 – author's translation).<sup>28</sup>

## 6. Final Considerations

The saussurean writings, although fragmentary, are worthy of attention, since we are dealing with a linguist dedicated to the concepts and reflections we encounter in the CLG. In our reflection, we do not climb, obviously, all the steps to the reconstruction of the discursiveness on the "facts of synonymy"; beforehand, we sought to follow the saussurean discursiveness itself, finding in it the semiological principles of the language. We recognized the limits of our investigation: we do not discuss all the texts comprised in ELG and SD, nor the 50 thousand pages in the Library of Geneva. But we believe that the "manuscript notes" chosen, in their turn, deeply apprehend concepts and reflections whose density had already been seen in the CLG. As Visconti (2012) duly observed, Saussure, on discussing the "mechanism of synonymy", illustrates semiotic solidarity and the concept of value.

At the end of our exercise, we seek to make our way through the cracks already opened in linguistic historiography, through which the critical and philological works of Robert Godel (1957) and Rudolf Engler (1968, 1974) shine as beacons. In these works, the works of Saussure himself are put forth as well as the notes from his students whose ideas were not included or were "edited", for the publication of the CLG in 1916. A good example of this is the stance taken by Tullio De Mauro, in his critical edition of the CLG, with notes (305 in total) that cover the main ideas expounded in the CLG.

De Mauro affirms that Godel's work represents an analytical confirmation and "reveals that the first editors of the Course used these materials only in part and not always in an appropriate manner" (MAURO, 2013, p. 32). Amacker (2011) has confronted in his edition, as we have observed, the issue of the difficulty in the configuring the saussurean manuscripts.

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<sup>28</sup> "Et ce même fait, purement négatif, de l'opposition avec des mots comparables, est aussi le seul qui fait la justesse des emplois «figurés»; nous nions, en réalité, qu'ils sont figurés, parce que nous nions qu'un mot ait une signification positive. Toute espèce d'emplois qui ne tombent pas dans le rayon d'un autre mot n'est pas seulement partie intégrante, mais est aussi partie constitutive du sens de ce mot, et ce mot n'a pas en réalité d'autre sens que la somme des sens non réclamés." (SAUSSURE, 2002, p.80-81)

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