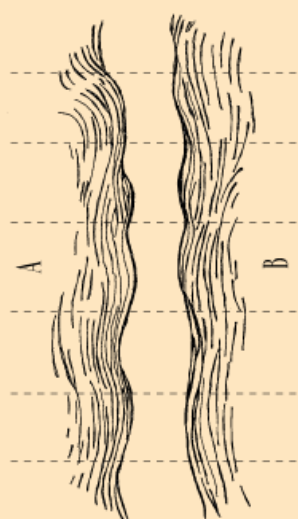


# Le Cours de Linguistique Générale 1916-2016

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# Saussurean linguistics in Brazil in the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century

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## 1. Starting point: reception of Saussure's ideas in Brazil

The first translation into Portuguese of the Course in General Linguistics (CGL) by Ferdinand de Saussure was launched in Brazil in 1971 with the purpose of "answering Brazilian universities demand"<sup>1</sup> (Salum, 2006, p. XIV). In the preface to this translation, Salum (2006, p. XV) assumes CGL is a classic book, "it is not modern Linguistics bible, giving the last word on the facts, but it still is the starting point of a concern still remaining in current agenda"<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, in our perspective, it already is a first view of CLG within the Brazilian scenario, i.e., CGL is a "starting point" to understand the enormous emergence of linguistics theories. As the book is read and widespread, it is being reedited, and consequently, the systematic exercise of discussing its reception and influence in Brazilian linguistic studies is also taking shape. So, in this work, our reflection starting points are the views on the reception of Saussure ideas in Brazil exposed in this exercise. As it is impossible for us to cover in depth everything that has been produced on the theme, we had to perform a selection. So, we have chosen to rescue such works we believe to be representative of this exercise and that put a light on a moment of Brazilian Linguistic, the moment of the reception of Saussure ideas in Brazil: De Lemos *et al.* (2003), Portela (2013) and Ruiz and Baronas (2016).

De Lemos *et al.* (2003) aim to talk on Saussure in Latin America in XX century. Within this scenario, the authors dedicate special attention to saussurean reception in Brazil and signalize that Saussure principles have been introduced in Brazil by Joaquim Mattoso Câmara Jr., recognized as the father of Brazilian Linguistics. According to the authors, Câmara Jr. has associated the notion of system in Saussure to Grammar, emphasizing language description. This misapprehension "in the name of possibly describing particular languages, is the most expressive deletion of saussurean linguistics"<sup>3</sup> (De Lemos *et al.*, 2003, p. 171). This way, they argue Saussure has not really been introduced in Brazil.

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<sup>1</sup> "atender à demanda das universidades brasileiras".

<sup>2</sup> "não é a bíblia da Linguística moderna, que dê a última palavra sobre os fatos, mas é ainda o ponto de partida de uma problemática que continua na ordem do dia".

<sup>3</sup> « au nom de la possibilité de description de langues particulières –, est l'expression majeure de l'effacement de la linguistique saussurienne ».

According to our point of view, the surprising homogeneity of Saussure introduction in Latin America is precisely connected to a fundamental misapprehension of this author's thoughts. In both cases, it is about the ignoring of the operation of language. Thus, we can say Saussure has not really been introduced in Brazil. (De Lemos *et al.*, 2003, p. 172).<sup>4</sup>

Regarding saussurean manuscripts reception, during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the authors advocate they have also not been properly received in Latin America and, consequently, in Brazil. "The reception of the manuscripts, the existence of important exegesis and the production of critical apparatus are not unknown in Latin America – the point is that they are discarded, as belonging to the past" (2003, p. 173)<sup>5</sup>. It should be noted the authors point out two reasons for the lack of interest in saussurean thoughts: the emergence of Noam Chomsky's Generative Grammar, and the incomprehension of the revolutionary ideas and concepts provided by Saussure, which cannot be perceived in CGL.

Portela (2013) analyses four textbooks propagating Saussure's ideas in Brazil with the purpose of understanding how saussurean thoughts were received through CGL: Camara Jr. (1964), Lopes (1976), Carvalho (1976), and Borba (1984). The author expresses his purpose as follows:

thinking about the saussurean thoughts by means of Brazilian Linguistics and Semiotic manuals used in graduate and postgraduate courses, noticing (1) which saussurean concepts are more frequently used, (2) which specific public these textbooks are directed to, and (3) how these works segment and systematize their content. (Portela, 2013, p. 15).<sup>6</sup>

Portela (2013) analyses demonstrate there is, in these four works, the recurrence of two textualization and discursive procedures, with direct impact on the propagation and didactic persuasion of the saussurean work.

Didactic programming emphasizes the dichotomies, which are generally presented in the order they appear in CGL: language/speech, signifier/signified, synchrony/diachrony, value/significance, associative/syntagmatic relations. (Portela, 2013, p. 21)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> « Selon notre point de vue, l'homogénéité surprenante de l'introduction de Saussure en Amérique Latine est liée, justement, à un malentendu fondamental de la pensée de cet auteur. Il s'agit, dans les deux cas, de l'effacement du fonctionnement de la langue. On peut donc dire que Saussure ne fut pas effectivement introduit en Amérique Latine. »

<sup>5</sup> « La réception des manuscrits, l'existence d'importantes exégèses et d'apparats critiques ne sont pas inconnus en Amérique Latine – la question est qu'ils sont écartés comme appartenant au passé.

<sup>6</sup> "refletir sobre o pensamento saussuriano por meio dos manuais de Linguística e Semiologia brasileiros utilizados em cursos de graduação e pós-graduação, observando (1) quais conceitos saussurianos são mais frequentemente utilizados, (2) a que público específico esses manuais são dirigidos e (3) como essas obras segmentam e sistematizam seus conteúdos".

<sup>7</sup> "A programação didática tem como foco as dicotomias, que são geralmente apresentadas segundo a ordem em que aparecem no CLG: língua/fala, significante/significado, sincronia/diacronia, valor/significação e relações sintagmáticas/associativas."

It should also be noted that, in this movement of propagation, dichotomies are presented as a milestone for linguistic studies, as a founding gesture. "Their influences and/or limitations are more rarely pointed out" (p.21).<sup>8</sup>

Concerning the target public, four textbooks select CGL audience as a reader with previous knowledge of the linguistic analysis levels (phonology, morphology, and syntax), even if at a basic level. This potential reader is the student of graduation and post-graduation Language courses, and researches. When the textbook authors rescue Saussure's biographical elements, they almost always portray him "as a premature and misunderstood genius who has lived his life in obscurity" (p. 21)<sup>9</sup>. Finally, Portela (2013) remarks the textbooks do not dwell on the problem of CGL authorship.

Ruiz and Baronas (2016) point of view on Saussure's reception in Brazil is taken from the analysis of a linguistic textbook, also discussed by Portela (2013): "Para compreender Saussure [Understanding Saussure]" (Carvalho, 1976). Ruiz and Baronas (2016) treat these textbook editorial peculiarities as a discursive event. The authors describe this event and, even if indirectly, discuss saussurean reception in Brazil.

According to the authors, the textbook of Carvalho (1976) has characteristic of a guide "produced according to the main theories presented in CGL"<sup>10</sup> (2016, p. 326). In this perspective, saussurean thought found in CGL is seen as a Brazilian version of this thought, whose purpose is only to reproduce it. For the authors, the large presence of CGL excerpts is an indication of this intention.

Along the parts of the text, we can see that Castelar de Carvalho, in dealing with the theories uses, as a way to support and validate his discourse, certain structural forms that aim to a possible substantiation, i.e., such structures allow one to believe that it is Saussure himself who is writing (Ruiz and Baronas, 2016, p. 327).<sup>11</sup>

In conclusion, the authors assert that, in Brazil, a discursive reading of Saussure's ideas history drives towards a didactic reconfiguration of these ideas. There is a strong necessity of showing the influences of these ideas, "contrary to what is (re)affirmed about a slightly complex and obscure work" (2016, p. 330)<sup>12</sup>.

These studies that deal with Saussure's reception in Brazil are limited to a certain moment of Brazilian linguistic history, a moment we could call initial: the last decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nowadays, Saussure's influence is obviously still present, and many researches keep in contact with his ideas. So, we believe it is relevant to go back to the subject and to rebuild the question on the points of view on saussurean linguistics in Brazil in these 21<sup>st</sup> century first decades.

## **2. Saussure in Brazil in the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century**

When we decided to carry out a reflection on saussurean linguistics in Brazil at the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century, a question was raised about the sources we should use. As

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<sup>8</sup> "mais raramente são apontadas suas influências e/ou limitações."

<sup>9</sup> "como um gênio precoce e incompreendido que viveu uma vida na obscuridade".

<sup>10</sup> "produzido de acordo com as principais teorias apresentadas no CLG".

<sup>11</sup> "Ao longo dos trechos, vemos que, ao tratar das teorias, Castelar de Carvalho, como forma de importar e validar seu discurso, utiliza certas formações estruturais que remontam a uma possível concretização, ou seja, tais estruturas possibilitam interpretar que é o próprio Saussure quem está dizendo".

<sup>12</sup> "ao contrário do que é tacitamente (re)afirmado sobre um obra ligeiramente complexa e obscura".

we could obviously not cover every Brazilian bibliographical production on Saussure, we decided to analyze the abstracts of papers presented at three events held in Brazil in 2013, on the occasion of the centenary of Saussure's death: Congresso Internacional 100 anos sem Saussure [100 years without Saussure International Congress], placed at São Paulo University (USP), in São Paulo; Jornada Internacional Ferdinand de Saussure e os estudos linguísticos contemporâneos [Ferdinand de Saussure International Journey and contemporary linguistic studies], placed at Federal University of do Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN), in Natal; and Jornada de Estudos Saussurianos [Saussurian studies Journey], placed at Campinas University (UNICAMP), in Campinas.

We recognize that this criterion can be seen as an inconsistent corpus on Saussure's reception in Brazil, as only based upon abstracts presented by participants of these three scientific events. On the other hand, we believe these papers present the state-of-art saussurean researches having taken place in Brazil, and, in this sense, although the conclusions we have reached may not provide results adequately deep, they can at least contribute to a further reflection and, so, to a reopening of a debate on this theme.

We have read all the paper abstracts, made up an index by themes and tried to delineate the research characterization adopted by the authors. This work resulted in two types of observations: one that points to the level of interest on Saussure's ideas and work, and another one that points to the nature of the themes, and approaching perspectives.

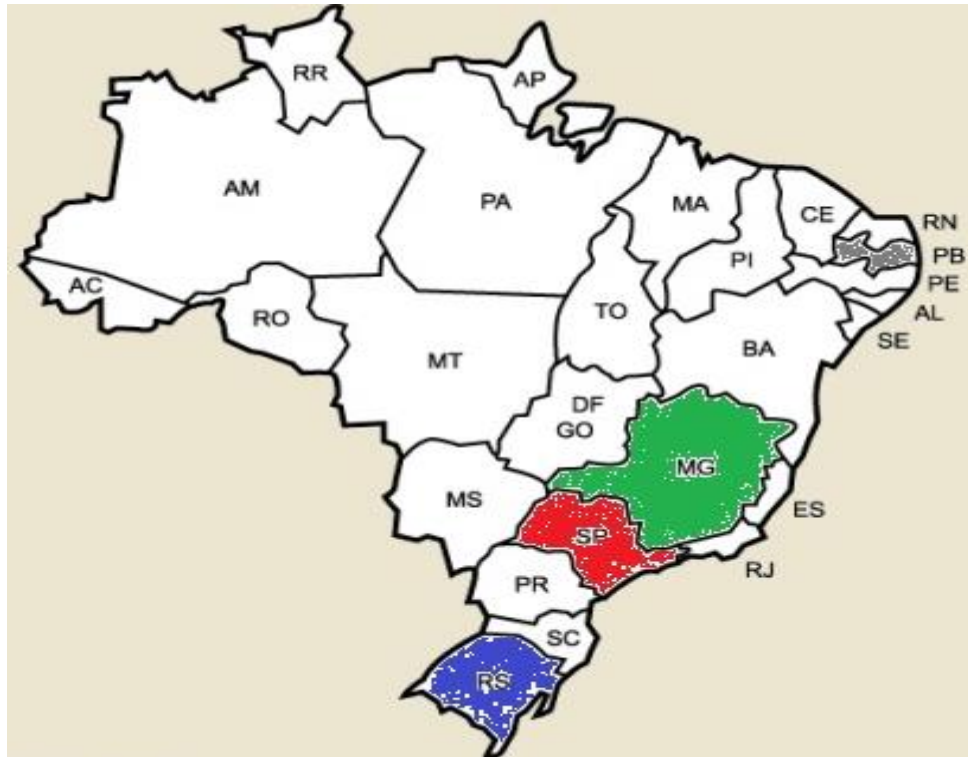
Considering Brazilian linguistic studies context, to begin with, we can assert in quantitative terms that Saussure is not a theme that generates a large number of researches. Altogether, these three events gathered 117 communications. It is an unimpressive number, if we consider data of post-graduation in Linguistics and Literature: 148 Academic Programs of master and doctoral degrees, and 5 Professional Programs, according to the four years evaluation (2013-2016) of Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES)<sup>13</sup>. Besides, we can also notice that, in geographic terms, Saussure is not a research theme that interests the whole country. If we consider the papers authors origin, the major interest is concentrated in South and Southeast states. Table 1 sums up quantitative data by region. Map 1 shows the paper distribution by state. most authors are from the states of Minas Gerais (MG), São Paulo (SP), and Rio Grande do Sul (RS).

	<b>UFRN Journey Natal</b>	<b>UNICAMP Journey Campinas</b>	<b>USP Congress São Paulo</b>	
<b>Southeast</b>	12	14	20	46
<b>South</b>	20	0	25	45
<b>Northeast</b>	21	0	1	22

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.capes.gov.br/avaliacao/sobre-as-areas-de-avaliacao>

<b>North</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>West Center</b>	3	0	1	4
<b>Total</b>	56	14	47	117

**Table 01: quantitative papers data by region**



**Map 01: Papers distribution by state**

This first examination allows a first conclusion. If, as argue De Lemos et al (2013, p. 173), interest on Saussure in Brazil declined during the 1970 decade, the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century scenario is not what we could expect: Saussure is more than creator of renowned dichotomies. Thus, it can be said there is an interest on Saussure’s thought in Brazil. On the other hand, it is less extensive than in the past and limited to punctual places interest.

This conclusion follows the opinion of Cruz, Piovezani and Testenoire (2016, p. 7) to whom, in Brazil, “current linguistics does not express a large curiosity on Saussure’s thought, even though the discovery of the new saussurean manuscripts raises a renewal of interest”<sup>14</sup>.

Concerning the themes and approach perspectives, communications revel a larger opening of interest fields on the saussurean work and thoughts in comparison to what was seen previously, in initial reception. One of the filed still is, in fact, the reflection on some of the main theoretical notions introduced by Saussure in CGL: dichotomies, value,

<sup>14</sup> “La linguistique actuelle ne manifeste pas une grande curiosité pour la pensée de Saussure même si la découverte des nouveaux manuscrits saussuriens suscite un regain d’intérêt”.

distinction of phonetics and phonology, meaning, and grammar. These reflections rely mostly on CGL, but also on the Writings on General Linguistics (Saussure, 2002), and, sometimes, on some not published handwritten notes.

However, an expressive number of researches presented in the three events operates a significant shift in this field of interest. As an example, we can mention the interest in developing dialogues between other thinkers as Benveniste, Ducrot, Jakobson, Coseriu, Lacan, Pêcheux and Bakhtin.

Reflections on the implications of some saussurean concepts to analyze children's speech and speech pathologies. In this case, we notice in a very particular way these researches points to Saussure's return claimed by De Lemos et al (2003, p. 173), that is to say that "search for a vision of language that can answer empirical and epistemological questions present in works on language acquisition and language pathologies"<sup>15</sup>.

Finally, two research angles are aligned with the most recurrent themes in Brazilian language studies: teaching and discourse. We have noticed, as an example, works that point to the use of saussurean concepts in approaches to teaching (teacher training, classical language teaching, and textbooks), and the return to the debate on Saussure's reference to discourse analysis in their most different conceptions (relation of language and subject, and language conversation in discourse, for example).

These research characteristics point to a second conclusion. Although current Brazilian Linguistics does not manifest a large curiosity for Saussure's thought, as is revealed by research scenario found in the events organized in 2013, these first decades of 21<sup>st</sup> century put light on the interest in discussing this thought's revolutionary nature. Besides, we can notice the interest on Saussure in Brazil is aligned to the big issues to which a great part of the researches dedicates themselves: teaching and discourse.

### **3. Closing words**

Our purpose in this work was to bring up a reflection on saussurean linguistics reception in Brazil, taking the first decades of 21<sup>st</sup> century as the focus. We have analyzed abstracts of 117 papers presented in three events that took place in 2013 in Brazil, at the occasion of the centenary of Saussure's death. In this sense, we understand this work as a contribution to the Brazilian linguistic ideas. According to Colombat, Fournier and Puech (2010) the task of making history of science is mainly to carry out two projects: 1) description of the ways under which different states of the knowledge were presented, and 2) description of theoretical changes, that is to say, from the fact of historically passing the knowledge of the object to another object, and from the representation of the knowledge to another knowledge.

We recognize we have not fully achieved this purpose. We also recognize that our conclusions may not present an adequate deep degree. On the other hand, we recognize they can further a reflection and renew the debate on the theme.

Lastly, we understand another debate shall be opened, regarding the new university professors and researchers' formation. According to Azevedo, Barbosa and Moraes (2017, p. 36), didactic presentation of saussurean fundamentals has nothing to do with presenting linguistics epistemic route, nor even providing discussions concerning the CGL elaboration paths. For the authors, it is about "a deadlock that must be lead by

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<sup>15</sup> "à la recherche d'une vision du langage qui puisse répondre à des questions empiriques et épistemologiques que se présentent dans notre travail sur l'acquisition du langage et de la pathologie du langage".



language Courses teachers in different Brazilian institutions”<sup>16</sup>. Therefore, the debate must bring up the question on the different saussurean receptions influence and on the academic formation in linguistic studies field.

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<sup>16</sup> “um impasse que precisa ser conduzido pelos docentes do Curso de Letras, em diferentes instituições brasileiras”.