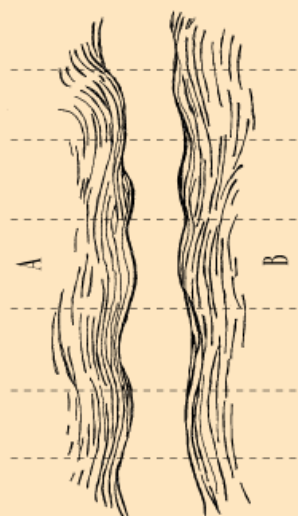


# Le Cours de Linguistique Générale 1916-2016

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

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The Harvard manuscripts and the  
first course on general linguistics »

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# The Harvard manuscripts and the first course on general linguistics

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## Introduction

The Harvard manuscripts are known by this name because they belong to the catalogue of Houghton Library at Harvard University. This set of handwritten pages number 177 pages in its 8<sup>th</sup> archive under the name of *Phonétique*. Its content calls our attention since it seems to include the theme of Saussure's first lessons at the University of Geneva. In spite of the long time elapsed between these manuscripts, presumed by Marchese (1995) to be from 1881-1884, and the first lessons in general linguistics, beginning 1907, Saussure had already shown in these manuscripts his concerns about the phonic aspect of the language - concerns which are essential to the foundation of modern linguistics.

The aim of this article is to put into perspective some aspects presented in the 8<sup>th</sup> archive – *Phonétique* – and in the first course of general linguistics, for which we are using Riedlinger's notebook, in order to show the movement of elaboration of some concepts fundamental in the *Cours* and to the linguistic theory of the sign.

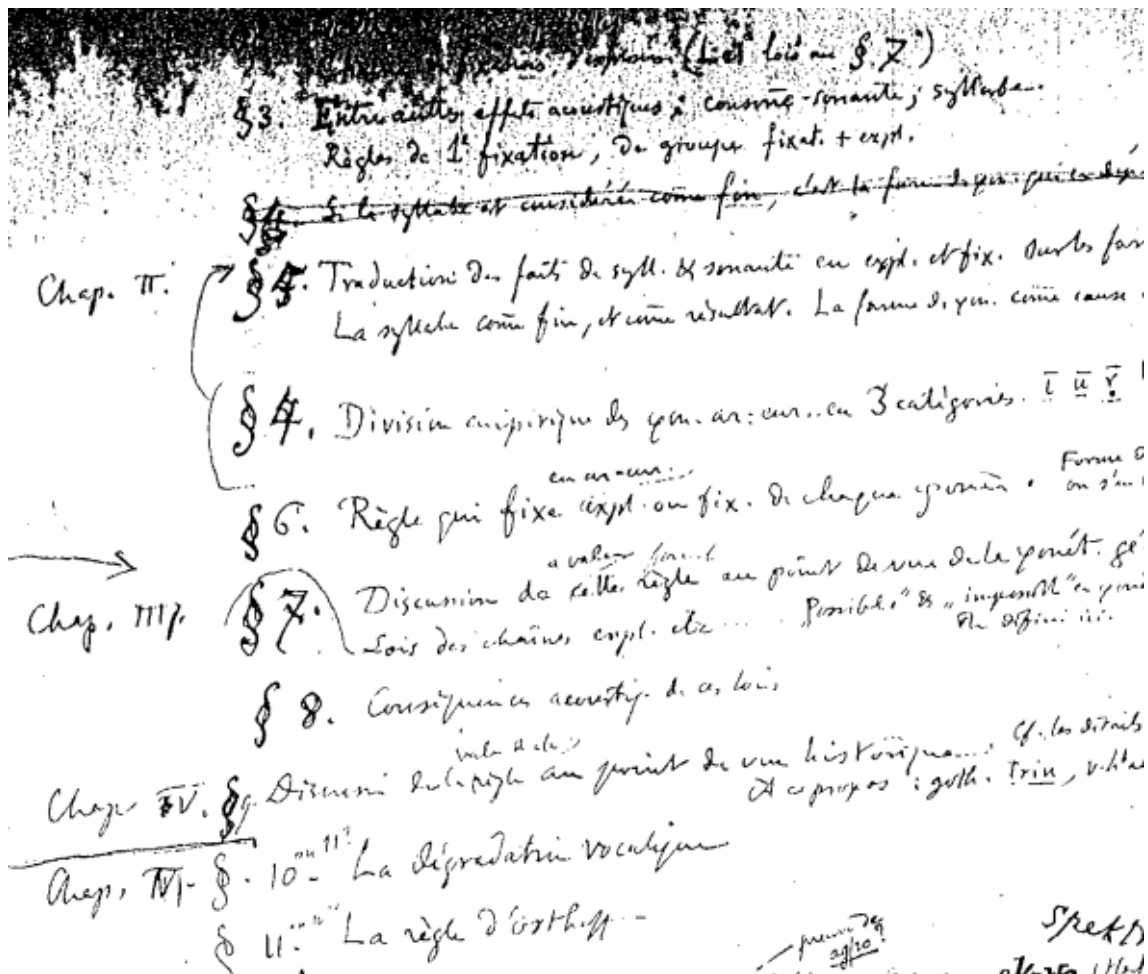
### 1. *Phonétique*

Catalogued as bMS. Fr. 266, this set of manuscripts has a total of 638 sheets, from which we selected some in archive 8<sup>1</sup>. Both Joseph (2012) and Marchese (1995) asserts that the manuscripts correspond to Saussure's classes in Paris from 1881 to 1884. Despite the date of the manuscripts, we have decided to give emphasis to its content, mainly because of the richness in detail it contains.

The 8<sup>th</sup> archive includes in page 8 a chapter division, suggesting that Saussure had perhaps organized his writings in some kind of book, as shown in the image below:

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<sup>1</sup> According to D'OTTAVI (2014), Jakobson may have bought the manuscripts from Saussure's son



The image, therefore, indicates a division of chapters. However, Joseph (2012) does not believe that Saussure had written this separation in the perspective of writing a book at that moment. According to Joseph's concept, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was common for teachers to organize their classes in chapters. Because of that, the chapter division may not be something made in view of a further publication. Marchese, as well as Joseph, defends that the manuscripts were the notes for the classes of *École des Hautes Études*, or, at least, they would be notes made during these classes. (cf. MARCHESE, 1995, p. XVII).

The manuscript includes developments about the syllable, phonemes, indo-european sonants and consonnes and goes through issues about the general theory in phonetics (we emphasize that the concepts of phonetics and phonology in the years of 1881-1884 differ from their present current acceptions). So we can remark that long before the first course in Geneva, Saussure was looking for the general theory, and still he was trying to distinguish sound – one of the central objects of study for the grammarians – from the phoneme and the acoustic. Though we are now going to delineate only some general overview from this manuscript, it is nevertheless possible to notice that its content was somehow reused in the 1907's lessons, as we will see in Riedlinger's notebook.

2. 1907's classes

<sup>2</sup> All the excerpts come from bMS Fr. 866 (8)

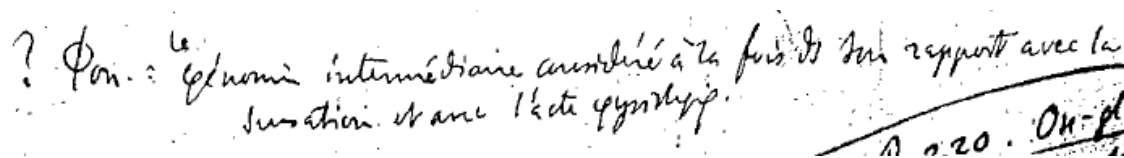
The first course on general linguistics was given by Saussure from January 1907 till July 1907. Stemming from Riedlinger's notes it is possible to notice that the course was divided in 3 notebooks and held the following topics: (1) in the first notebook there is introduction, analysis of linguistic's errors, phonology's principles, linguistics, causes for phonetics' changes, effects or consequences of phonetics' changes; (2) in the second notebook there is analogy, general principle of language creation, interior classification, prefixes, roots, analogy's conservative role; (3) and finally in the third course there is an analysis of internal and external history of indo-european's languages family, reconstructive method and its value, selective index and French terminology.

For this article we will only use, as the basis of our analysis, the part in the first notebook called "phonology principles" - according to Joseph (2012), this section of the book raises issues such as the nature of the phoneme as a unit and its connection with time. Thereof Saussure postulates issues about sound, time, acoustic and phoneme which are presented in the first appendix of the *Cours*. We will then make a comparison between some excerpts from *Phonétique* and the first course on general linguistics to investigate the elaboration movement of Saussure's concepts.

### 3. Phonétique's manuscript x Riedlinger's notebook I

As remarked before, there is a distance of approximately twenty and some years between the *Phonétique* manuscript, presumed from 1881-1884 and the first course on general linguistics, from 1907. In spite of this long lapse of time, it is possible to notice a close relation in content between these two periods of Saussure's elaborations, which substantiate the author's insistence in characterizing the definitions of the terms mentioned before and the importance of them in linguistics' studies.

Notice the excerpt on Saussure's manuscript:



? Phoneme.:<sup>the</sup> intermediary phenomenon considered at the same time [in] its relation with the sensation and with the physiologic act<sup>3</sup>

We compare this excerpt with the second page of the chapter "Principles of Phonology" in Riedlinger's notebook, a lesson in which Saussure points out the following: "F/f = phoneme = the sum of acoustic impressions and the articulatory acts, the unit heard and spoken, one conditions the other" (SAUSSURE, 1907, p.13).

Both fragments display Saussure's attempt at defining phoneme: between the years of 1881-1884, the phoneme was considered as an intermediary phenomenon in relation at the same time to the sensation and to the physiologic act; in 1907 the author postulated the phoneme as the sum of acoustic impressions and of articulatory acts. Which means that there are some points of convergence and some indications of movement<sup>4</sup> in saussurian's elaboration when comparing these two fragments: at one time the phoneme is

<sup>3</sup> « ? Phonème : le phénomène intermédiaire considéré à la fois dans son rapport avec la sensation et avec l'acte physiologique ».

<sup>4</sup> The notion of movement we refer here is the one we can find in Silveira (2007), which direct us to the idea of Saussure working out of a linearity and to consider all of his works as responsible for the foundation of modern linguistics.

conceptualized from two elements; in the first moment by the relation and in the second moment by the sum – although the formula taken as F/f also reflects a relation. The remarkable point in the likeness between the two excerpts is the seeking for the definition of phoneme, even if not related to the definition of acoustic image and sign which would come later in the *Cours*. Therefore, it is possible to notice Saussure’s urge to formulate questions about the phoneme which haunted him for more than 20 years.

In the two objects we are working with, we can now find the idea of homogeneousness connected to the acoustic impression. In the manuscript we find the following excerpt:

*identité*

~~Time of homogeneity~~ of acoustic sensation (of) /  
[Time of ~~homogeneity~~ <sup>identity</sup>] of the physic phenomenon

And in the first course on general linguistics we see the following:

[...] rather, we want to know if >the acoustic impression< is the same for the whole duration of the sound, and we must introduce different notations as soon as the sound changes (SAUSSURE, 1907, p. 13)

In these fragments we can encounter the “homogeneous time”, crossed out, and the identity related to the duration of sound, and these two elements elated to the acoustic sensation and the acoustic impression, respectively. Once more, we observe the fact that there are in both excerpts the distinction between the acoustic (acoustic sensation/acoustic impression) and the physic/sound, in other words, there is a search not only to describe the phoneme – as we saw in the previous comparison – but also to distinguish the acoustic from the sound, features which are also necessary for the definition of the linguistic sign. In spite of noticing the crossed out part of this excerpt – homogeneity -, we can probably say that here we find a term not addressed before in Saussure’s manuscript; however, “homogeneity time” is crossed out in the excerpt, and years later in Genève’s classes, the concept of homogeneity appears conditioning the formulation about the time duration.

In the last excerpt, we would like to underline the way Saussure searches for the definition of the acoustic and how this search is conducted according to the saussurian’s sense. Observe the following excerpt:

- 1° Faits acoustiques, <sup>en eux-mêmes</sup> sans sortir de ce domaine. Aucune définition; sentiment de l'oreille.
- 2° Faits physiologiques définis exclusivement par leur correspondance avec un fait acoustique; définition empirique et extrinsèque.
- 3° Faits physiologiques correspondant à un fait acoustique mais qu'on a réussi à définir sur caractères intrinsèques (la voie suivie part toujours du fait acoustique) <sup>et l'utilité qui en sortira.</sup>
- 4° Idem, défini partiellement sur caractères intrinsèques, partiellement sur caractères extrinsèques.
- 5° Faits phonétiques, <sup>(propr. 55)</sup> c.à.d. acoust. et physiolog. correspondants considérés de front dans leur corrélation. (Le fait acoust. sans définition, le fait physiolog. défini de l'une des 2 manières indiquées.)

“1<sup>st</sup> Acoustic facts <sup>in themselves</sup>, without leaving [] this domain. No definition; ear's feeling.

“2<sup>nd</sup> Physiologic facts exclusively defined by their correspondance with an acoustic fact, empiric and extrinsic definition.

“3<sup>rd</sup> Physiologic facts corresponding to an acoustic fact but that can be defined by intrinsic characters (the path followed always starts from the acoustic fact !)

as well as the benefits which will result

“4<sup>th</sup> Idem, partially defined by intrinsic characters, partially by extrinsic characters.

“5<sup>th</sup> Phonetic facts <sup>(1)</sup>, in other words acoustic and physiologic related considered together in their correlation.

(the acoustic fact without definition, the physiologic fact defined in one of the 2 listed ways)<sup>5</sup>”

Now we see Riedlinger's notebook fragment:

“The method generally followed in phonology manuals is not good because it forgets

- 1) <that> there are two sides to the phonatory act:
  - a) The articulatory side (mouth, larynx)
  - b) The acoustic side (ear)” (SAUSSURE, 1907, p. 12)

In these passages we can observe three components to both materials, they are: 1<sup>st</sup> the phonetic fact which appears to correspond years later to the phonatory act, once both have two elements - the acoustic/physiologic fact and the articulatory/acoustic side, respectively; 2<sup>nd</sup> the acoustic fact, ear sense, and the acoustic side of the ear too; 3<sup>rd</sup> the physiologic fact, empiric and extrinsic, and the articulatory side (mouth, larynx). One more time we see the necessity of defining and conceptualizing appears in both materials, and we also note the repetition of Saussure's need of articulating an item with two other items, as

<sup>5</sup> Transcription française du manuscrit :

1° Faits acoustiques en eux-mêmes, sans sortir [] de ce domaine. Aucune définition ; sentiment de l'oreille.

2° Faits physiologiques définis exclusivement par leur correspondance avec un fait acoustique, définition empirique et extrinsèque.

3° Faits physiologiques correspondant à un fait acoustique mais qu'on a réussi à définir sur caractères intrinsèques (la voie suivie part toujours du fait acoustique !)

et l'utilité qui en sortira.

4° Idem, défini partiellement sur caractères intrinsèques, partiellement sur caractères extrinsèques.

5° Faits phonétiques <sup>(1)</sup>, c'est-à-dire acoustiques et physiologiques correspondant considérés de front dans leur corrélation

(le fait acoustique sans définition, le fait physiologique défini de l'une des 2 manières indiquées)

well as his need to distinguish the phonology elements representing an essential element in the saussurian's study.

Thus, once Saussure himself claimed that the beginning of this first course on general linguistics is essential so his later approach of the general features of the language, it is obvious that it was legitimate to refer to his works of 1881-1884 in order to address the general issues of the language in coordination with the conceptualization of the linguistic sign.

### Final considerations

By way of conclusion, the manuscripts catalogued in Harvard as *Phonétique* and the first notebook of the first course on general linguistics present notions which are somehow recurrent in Saussure's definitions and conceptualizations. The linguist has shown in these two works a persistence in the search of the definitions and relations of the terms acoustic, phoneme and sound, mainly. These two moments reveal, therefore, the necessity that drove Saussure to conceptualize and distinguish these elements - elements that took later a key position in the concept of the linguistic sign.

In spite of Komatsu (1996) affirmation that the Appendix of the *Cours* appears out of place and heterogeneous when compared to the part dedicated to language, we notice that the Appendix can really appear external in the context of the book. However, from our point of view, it cannot be considered heterogeneous when related to the parts dedicated to the conceptualization of the language once we saw in these three excerpts the persistence of Saussure in defining and distinguishing the elements surrounding the phonic aspect. From this analysis we can find significant movements which lead us, of course in a non linear way, to the definition of the sign.

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