



---

**The Prague Bulletin of Mathematical Linguistics**  
**NUMBER 87 JUNE 2007 87-90**

---

## REVIEWS

### **Saussure Studies in China.**

Zhao Ronghui (ed.)

Beijing: Commercial Press, 2005. v+495 pp.  
ISBN 7-100-04347-6/H·1087

Reviewed by Jun Qian, Peking University

This book (Chinese title *Suoxuer yanjiu zai zhongguo*) is a collection of thirty-three papers, selected from among three hundred papers published by the end of 2003. The collection is headed by the editor's introduction, followed by papers divided into four sections, Introduction to Saussure (2 papers), Bibliographical Studies of Saussure's Works (4 papers), The Roots of Saussure's Ideas (3 papers), and Studies of Saussure's Theories (23 papers).

"Saussure and Saussure Studies in China" (1-48), the editor's introduction, introduces Saussure (1-7) and Saussure studies in China (8-48). As regards the latter theme it covers a variety of issues, such as the translation of Saussure's works, bibliographical studies of *Course*, the roots of Saussure's ideas (Saussure and historical-comparative linguistics, Saussure and sociology, Saussure and psychology, Saussure and William Dwight Whitney [1827-1894], Saussure and economics), studies of Saussure's ideas (langue and parole, synchrony and diachrony, semi-otic conception of language, the arbitrariness of linguistic sign, value of the sign, Saussure's philosophy of language). Under each subheading relevant studies are succinctly introduced.

"Saussure in the World and in China" (49-65, Qi Yucun 1996) focuses on the dissemination of and introduction to the Saussure doctrine in different countries (Switzerland, France, Germany, former Soviet Union, the USA, Britain, Czechia, Denmark, and China). "The Myth of a Linguistic Master and Saussure as a Man" (66-76, Li Baojia 2001) attempts to answer questions like why Saussure was deeply dissatisfied with the diachronic approach, and why Saussure did not publish his theories in the form of papers or a monograph in his lifetime.

The four papers in the section Bibliographical Studies of Saussure's Works, i.e. "Two Books on Saussure" (77-113, Xu Guozhang 1983), "On the Russian Edition of Saussure's *Notes on General Linguistics*" (114-133, Xin Delin 1993), "Comparison and Explanation of Two Editions of

Saussure's *Course*" (134-150, Zhang Shaojie & Wang Kefei 1997), and "Keizaburo Maruyama's Study of Saussure's Manuscripts" (151-165, Wei Yulin 1999), deal respectively with Robert Godel (1957) and Tullio de Mauro (1972), N.A. Slijusareva (1990), *Course* (1916) and *Course* (1993), and Keizaburo Maruyama (1981 *Saussure's Ideas*, 1983 *How to Understand Saussure*, both in Japanese).

The section devoted to the exploration of the roots of Saussure's ideas consists of three papers. "The German Roots of Saussure's Linguistics Theory" (166-177, Yao Xiaoping 1993) compares Saussure with his German sources of influence in the areas of the conception of social psychology (Saussure and Hermann Paul [1846-1921]), the conception of system (Saussure and Wilhelm von Humboldt [1767-1835]), language and thought (Saussure and Humboldt), synchrony and diachrony (Saussure and Paul), syntagmatic relations and associative relations (Saussure and Paul). "Emile Durkheim's Sociology and Saussure's Linguistic Theory (178-186, Fang Guangtao 1997) believes that Saussure's linguistic theory and Durkheim's (1858-1917) sociology are identical or similar in some basic aspects. "The Economics Background of Saussure's Linguistic Theory" (187-199, Xiang Mingyou 2000) maintains that Saussure's ideas of synchrony and diachrony, the value of language, syntagmatic relations and associative relations are related with the then economics in varied degrees.

The last section Studies of Saussure's Theories tackles various aspects of the Saussure doctrine, such as langue and parole, synchrony and diachrony, semiotic conception of language, linguistic value, syntagmatic relations and associative relations, the nature of sign, the conception of society, the conception of time and space, the relation between language and writing, the relation between sound and writing, poetics, and Saussure's impact on modern Western thinking. It would be a daunting task to review all these twenty-three papers of such diversity and I would just translate all the titles so that those who do not understand Chinese could have some general idea of Chinese scholars' research interest. "Language, Speech, and Discourse" (200-210, Fan Xiao 1994, it offers the author's own conceptions of these notions rather than discuss Saussure.), "Saussure's Langue and Parole" (211-219, Yang Xinzhang 1996), "More Thoughts on Langue and Parole, Linguistics of Langue and Linguistics of Parole" (220-228, Cen Yunqiang 1996), "On Synchrony and Diachrony of Language" (229-245, Xu Siyi 1980), "Saussure's Semiotic Conception of Language" (246-255, Yue Meiyun 1994), "Reevaluation of Saussure's Semiotic Conception" (256-276, Lu Deping 2001), "Saussure's Theory of Linguistic Value" (277-289, Suo Zhenyu 1983), "Language: Grammatical System, Syntagmatic Relations and Associative Relations" (290-303, Nie Zhiping 1990), "Basic Principles of Saussurean Linguistics" (304-321, Pi Hongming 1994), "The Homogeneity Tendency in the Twentieth-Century Linguistic Research: Saussure's Linguistic Conception and Franz Boas' Methodology" (322-336, Chen Baoya 1997), "Linguistic Theory as a Universal Scientific Theory: Saussure's Linguistic Theory Viewed from a Phenomenological Perspective" (337-351, Xu Haiming 1998), "Arbitrary Sign System and Natural Sign System: Exploration of Saussure's and Halliday's Philosophy of Language" (352-361, Zhang Shaojie 2003), "The Philosophical Significance and Aesthetic Change of Saussure's Linguistic Model" (362-375, Yu Kailiang 2002), "System Study and Binary Thinking: On Saussure's Philosophy of Language" (376-388, Ju Yumei & Cao Chunchun 2002), "On Saussure's Conception of Society in His Linguistic Theory" (389-398, Zhao Ronghui

2000), "Saussure's Linguistic Theory in a Systemic Perspective" (399-409, Zhao Rixin 1996), "A Theme Eclipsed for about One Hundred Years: Conceptions of Time and Space in Saussure's Linguistic Theory" (410-423, Pei Wen 2002), "On Saussure's Remarks about Language-Writing Relation" (424-436, Zhang Pengpeng 1994), "Sound and Writing: Ferdinand de Saussure on Saturnian Verse Form" (437-445, Tu Youxiang 2003), "Restoring Saussurean-Jakobsonian Poetics to its Complexity" (446-455, Lan Luyi 1998), "Linguistic Foundation of Structuralism" (456-462, Gong Xiaobin 2002), "The Impact of Saussurean Linguistics on Modern Western Thinking" (463-472, Chen Benyi 2001), "The Life of the Saussure Doctrine" (473-474, Wang Xijie 2002).

There are two appendices at the end. Appendix One is a Chinese-foreign language contrastive list of foreign names. It would be of much more help if it were a name index. Appendix Two is a chronological list of Chinese publications on Saussure. There is no master bibliography or master references. The references originally at the end of each paper are re-arranged into the relevant places within the paper. As many of these papers are originally published in journals, they should have an abstract, key words, and an English title in line with academic conventions, and yet all these are absent in the collection.

The editor's effort is a laudable attempt and her merit lies in making available papers that are otherwise inaccessible as well as making an objective representation of Saussure studies in China. The collection could serve as a basis upon which one can observe and compare Saussure studies internationally (e.g. Skalička 1948; Jakobson 1959, 1971; Percival 1981; Čermák 1996; Garcia 1997; Joseph 2002:133-155; Koerner 2002:63-74, 131-150).

## References

Čermák, František. 1996. Ferdinand de Saussure and the Prague School of Linguistics. In Eva Hajičová, Oldřich Leška, Petr Sgall, Zdena Skoumalová (eds), *Prague Linguistic Circle Papers*, Volume 2. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1996, 59-72.

Garcia, Silvia B. 1997. *Zum Arbitraritätsbegriff bei F. de Saussure*. Münster: Nodus Publikationen.

Jakobson, Roman. 1959. Sign and System of Language: a reassessment of Saussure's doctrine. *Selected Writings II. Word and Language*. The Hague: Mouton, 1971, 272-279.

Jakobson, Roman. 1971. Saussure's Unpublished Reflections on Phonemes. *Selected Writings I. Phonological Studies*. The Hague: Mouton, 2nd extended edition, 1971, 743-750.

Joseph, John E. 2002. *From Whitney to Chomsky: Essays in the history of American linguistics*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Koerner, E. F. K. 2002. *Toward a History of American Linguistics*. London/New York: Routledge.

Percival, W. Keith. 1981. The Saussurean Paradigm: Fact or Fantasy? *Semiotica* 36, 33-49.

Skalička, Vladimír. 1948. The need for a linguistics of "la parole". *Recueil Linguistique de Bratislava* 1, 21-38. Reprinted in Josef Vachek (ed.), *A Prague School Reader in Linguistics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964, 375-390.

