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Linguistic research

Philosophical Origins of Methodological Nomothetism of F. de Saussure's Concept

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Abstract: The article raises the problem of philosophical principles and origins of Ferdinand de Saussure's views. The editors of "Course in General Linguistics", C. Bally and A. Sechehaye, contributed to the emergence of stereotypes about Saussure as the founder of structuralism, who for the first time conceptually distinguished language and speech based on dichotomy, established the systemic nature of language as an abstract entity, developed a bilateral psychological theory of sign and divided linguistics into the synchronous and the diachronic. This prevented the synthesis of Saussure's concept as a holistic and internally consistent anthropocentric system of views. The conceptual analysis of the fundamental theses of Saussure's concept, given in Saussure's autographed materials, which appeared in 2002, showed that its most important feature is that it was an anthropocentric nomothetic proposition aimed at creating the foundations for the study of human language activity as such, language as such and speech as such. The Kantian idea of anthropocentric transcendentalism can be considered the principal philosophical source of Saussure's nomothetic project.

Keywords: nomothetics, anthropocentrism, methodology, concept, language activity.

Introduction

One of the most frequently raised problems in Saussurology is the problem of the philosophical and methodological principles and origins of Ferdinand de Saussure's views, i.e., the relationship between innovation and traditional continuity of his linguistic-semiological concept. There is no unity among researchers in either the first or the second problem. At the same time, a clear tendency can be seen. On the one hand, emphasizing the innovation of Saussure, scholars adhere to relatively stable stereotypes about the mentioned linguist as the founder of structuralism and linguosemiotics, the scholar who for the first time clearly theoretically and conceptually differentiated language and speech, approved the systemic nature of the language, developed a bilateral psychological theory of sign and divided linguistics into the synchronous

and the diachronic (a number of these stereotypes were considered in the monograph (Prosianyk, 2018). On the other hand, methodological and historical-scientific hypotheses about the foundations and origins of Saussure's views range from extreme objective idealism (pure metaphysics of the absolute) and phenomenology through subjective idealism and anthropocentrism to the point of extreme positivism. Taken out of the general context and taken out of the system, individual provisions and theses of "Course in General Linguistics" (as it is well known, edited and conceptually organized by C. Bally and A. Sechehaye, gave and continue to give scholars the opportunity to see Saussure as their supporter – and then he is credited with their only sensible views or those of their opponent, and then, the views of Saussure are subjected to devastating criticism from a great variety of methodological positions. The research considers the philosophical origins of the methodological nomothetism of the scientific concept of Saussure. The subject matter of the research is the nomothetic project of Saussure.

In 1996, Saussure's manuscripts (including a significant fragment of the monograph) were found in Geneva, in 2002 they were published under the title *Écrits de linguistique générale .Writings in General Linguistics)* in Paris (Saussure, 2002). This work have so far been translated only into Polish in 2004. A careful reading of the newly discovered autograph materials convinces that the authentic views of Saussure remain unknown to the general linguistic community. Saussure was far ahead of his time, so he was misinterpreted by both the publishers of "Course in General Linguistics" and most linguists of the twentieth century.

The main research methods used are the conceptual-analytical method for qualification and methodological assessment of theoretical provisions of the scientific concept.

The scientific novelty lies in the establishment and substantiation of methodological and philosophical-scientific sources of the concept of Saussure, outlined in the new autograph materials.

The book by R. Godel (1957) *Les sources manuscrites du Cours de linguistique générale de F. de Saussure (Handwritten Sources of the Course in General Linguistics of F. de Saussure)*, the publication of Saussure's drafts and notes in the second volume of the critical edition by R. Engler (Saussure, 1974) as well as their publication in 1990, in the USSR, by N. Sliusarieva entitled "Notes on General Linguistics" were the impetus for the revision of Saussure's views (Saussure, 1990). Ukrainian-Polish linguists O. Leszczak and M. Labaszczuk, back in the late 90s, defended the idea of reinterpretation of Saussure's concept precisely on the basis of "Notes" (Leshchak, 1996; Labashchuk, 1999).

The following works by Engler (1962), E. Koerner (1973), S. Bouquet (1997), A. Suenaga (2002) influenced the revision of the understanding of Saussure's concept raising doubts about the adequacy of the concept of the "Course" even before the publication of the draft of the monograph *De l'essence double du langage .On the Dual Essence of Language*) in *Écrits de linguistique générale* (Saussure, 2002).

However, the appearance of new Saussure's autographed materials was almost completely ignored by the scientific community for almost a decade. Thus, V. Kuznetsov's monograph "Scientific Heritage of the Geneva School of Linguistics", published in 2010 (Kuznetsov, 2010), gives the analysis of the concept of the Geneva School on the basis of the canonical text of *Course in General Linguistics*, published in 1916, and some manuscripts and documentary sources, archival materials. However, the author overlooked the new materials, which appeared in 2002. One of the first scientific works, which made an attempt to revise the concept of Saussure after the publication of *Écrits de linguistique générale* in 2002, was published in the scientific journal *Respectus Philologicus* in 2010. This is the work by Leshchak *Methodological Nature of the Translation of Scientific Text (notes on the margin of translation of F. de Saussure's work De l' Essence Double du Langage into Polish)* (Leshchak, 2010).

After the publication of the newly discovered materials in 2002, the interest in Saussure's scientific concept is gradually growing. The following works of the researchers of Saussure's creative legacy are in the field of vision: A. Frei (1950), M. Arrivé (2007), C. Mejia Quijano (2008), S. Estanislao (2009), P. Bouissac (2010), J. P. Bronckart and E. Bulea (2010), J. Coursil (2015), M. Kowalski (2016), D. Zolotukhin (2016).

All these works analyze certain theses of the "new" Saussure's concept, which demonstrate the contradictions between Saussure of the *Course* of 1916 and Saussure of the *Ecrits* of 2002, but these works have not done its conceptual analysis. The comprehensive reinterpretation of Saussure's scientific concept is presented only in the monograph *Ferdinand de Saussure: Demythologization of the Concept* in 2018 (Prosianyk, 2018).

1. Theoretical framework

First of all, it is necessary to summarize the conceptual analysis of the concepts of language activity, language, speech, attitude, value, semiology, and against its background, and to synthesize Saussure's concept as a holistic and internally consistent system of views. Systemic conceptual analysis of Saussure's ontological understanding of such concepts as *langage, langue, discours, parole, fait linguistique / unité de langage, rapport, relation, différence, opposition, diversité, valeur, association, quantités négatives, quantités relatives, signe, forme, signification, figure vocale*, convincingly testifies that the linguist in his views was:

1. an anthropocentrist: the object of linguistics is the language activity of a human being as an individual and species. Saussure denied that linguistic facts are given to us – either as material or as metaphysical entities,
2. a relationist-systemist: any element or phenomenon of language activity is a functional relationship, and language activity is a set of mutual relations. The scientist denied

the possibility of substantiality and atomistic autonomy of linguistic facts,

3. a sociopsychologist: each manifestation of language activity has both psychological and social dimension: in essence, it is mental or psychophysiological functions, in teleological and causal terms - social functions,
4. a semiologist: language activity by its purpose is a function primarily semiological, not cultural or cognitive.

In epistemology, instead, he was:

1. a functionalist: any object of linguistic research should be considered in functional connection with other objects and
2. a pragmatist: first of all, it is necessary to identify each object's relevant differences and characteristics, its linguistic or speech value.

The basis of understanding of Saussure's methodology is, in our opinion, the fact that his whole concept was an attempt to turn linguistics into a full-fledged science with its ideography – a description of individual facts and its nomothetics – an explanation of the main principles. Exactly this nomothetic project was his theory of language activity. Not understanding the concept of *langage* for the linguistic-semiological concept of Saussure and overemphasizing the concept of language (langue) led to the fact that most linguists did not understand the essence of the theoretical intention of the Swiss scientist and could not correctly interpret some of its theses.

It is interesting that using the term *langage*, the scientist never added an adjective with ethnic designation – French, German or Russian. Therefore, it was not about some national language activity but about the linguosemiotic experience of a human being. Therefore, the accusations about the impossibility of comparing the state of language with the state on the chessboard, made by R. Budagov with national argumentation, are inappropriate:

> The comparison with chess, which runs through the whole book by F. de Saussure, does not clarify but only obscures and distorts the whole problem. The system of chess game has no national differences: a Frenchman uses the same rules of the game as a Russian, a German, an Englishman, a Chinese, and the inhabitants of the distant Hawaiian Islands do. The language, on the other hand, is a deeply national phenomenon. To understand why the same features and properties of thinking, common to a wide variety of peoples, are expressed through a wide variety of languages, not only how the system of this or that language works, but also under what circumstances it has arisen, under what conditions it exists now must be known (Budagov, 1954, pp. 9–10).

Let us consider this argumentation. First, every metaphor or analogy is approximate and can never be applied on the basis of absoluteness. Saussure's metaphor with chess does not only outline the functional systematic character of language within the limits of language activity.

Chess as a game is a kind of activity, experience. According to the repeated instructions of Saussure, it has rules and units, which are

qualitatively different from linguistic units. The game is to make moves (appropriate changes), after which there is a certain idiosynchronous state (situation). Of course, this analogy is not perfect, but it was quite obvious to those who had to understand the idea of the difference between state (status) and change (modus) at the turn of the century. Second, in the above reasoning Budagov falsifies the facts, claiming that Saussure used this metaphor to "understand why the same features and properties of thinking, common to a huge variety of peoples, are expressed through a huge variety of languages" while this was the least Saussure was interested in. He was interested in purely nomothetic problems: "what it is", "what kind it is", and "how it is organized". The problem "why" was studied by all linguistics of the XIX century. Soviet Marxist linguistics, in this respect, was just such historical linguistics of the XIX century.

However, to a large extent, this state persists in many branches of Ukrainian linguistics and now, as pointed out by A. Luchik:

> At the present stage, unfortunately, comparative linguistics in Ukraine is empirical, it is characterized by a lack of ultimate goal, the uncertainty of ways of development and areas of research. To solve these problems, we need the construction of a coherent, consistent theory that would work for the development of national linguistics (2014, p. 38).

This is nothing more than a program of transformation of comparative linguistics from descriptive, empirical science into nomothetic science, i.e. deductive and explanatory, which was being built by Saussure as well. Third, returning to Budagov's point of view, it is not true that, knowing "under what circumstances" the system of this or that language "emerged", we will understand what it is, why it is just like that, how it functions and what will happen to it next. This is a typical myth of historicism. How can the knowledge of the history of the Slav's life explain what a species is, what the system of declension is, why palatalizations have taken place, and determinants have disappeared? How can the knowledge of the circumstances of the French nation explain the phonetic processes, the formation of the system of verb tenses or the category of gender? In conclusion, fourth, not all languages are unambiguous "deeply national phenomena". English, Spanish, Russian or German serve many nations, while there are multilingual nations. Therefore, this argument of Budagov is incorrect. To all appearances, the Soviet linguist did not understand that Saussure's idea was not to describe a language but to create a general linguistic nomothetics. Saussure did not deal with the problems of ideography. He proved this in his "Memoir", where he tried to deductively establish systemic trends that are not fixed in the form of facts. Speaking of the theory of language, Saussure meant language as such, speaking of utterances (speech) – of speech as such, and speaking of language activity – of language activity as such, and not of Russian, German, English or Chinese languages, speech or language activities. E. Makaev also emphasizes this:

> F. de Saussure by the purely deductive way came to many discoveries of paramount importance, in particular, such as the doctrine of the structure of Indo-European roots, especially two-syllable ones, the doctrine of Indo-European vocalism, the

> doctrine of sonantic coefficients, the doctrine of a single origin of ancient Indian verbs of V, VII, IX classes. We can think that the role of deduction in comparative linguistics will further grow in connection with the rapid and successful development of methodology of exact linguistics (Makaev, 1965, p. 10).

In resolving the problem of Saussure's laryngeal theory, the author calls it functional, bearing in mind the possibility of deriving theses not from the material but from the functions (ibid.).

The accusation in anti-historicism and positivism of Saussure's nomothetic project was perhaps the most frequent in Soviet linguistics: Misunderstanding of the social essence of language and the role of language in society, the idealistic interpretation of society itself as the sum of individuals caused an artificial and objectively unjustified division of the history of language into "externa" and "internal", as well as the opposition of "synchrony" and "diachrony", which eventually led to "panchrony" and "achrony", i.e. to the denial of the laws of the history of language as a social phenomenon" (Zadachi, 1952, p. 8). This is a typical biased Marxist critique with distortion of the facts. First, the "Course" nowhere states that the history of language should be divided into two – external and internal. The Marxists of the Stalin era considered all social phenomena only from a historical perspective through the prism of historical materialism. The nomothetic (Kantian) perspective was alien and incomprehensible to them. Therefore, Saussure's proposal to separate the development of language from the existence of language as a psychosocial function and, accordingly, the study of the history of language from its systematic research remained beyond the understanding of the authors of the editorial. Besides, the "Course" opposes external linguistics and internal one. This is an entirely different criterion, not directly related to the problem of historical ideography and system-synchronous nomothetics. It concerns the differentiation between the very essence of language activity and the external circumstances of its functioning. The authors of the editorial in "Problems of Linguistics" confused these two aspects, combining two completely different problems into one. When C. Bally and A. Sechehaye completed the "Course" with the famous passage about the study of language "in itself and for itself", they probably meant the very internal systemic linguistics, as the new one that arose from Saussure's concept. It was a wrong assertion to say that this alone should be the problem of linguistics. As proved by the Swiss scholar's notes, Saussure himself did not think so, but this phrase provoked numerous critics from the milieu of Soviet historical dialectics into subjecting Saussure's concept to methodological criticism. In addition, it is worth pointing at the inappropriateness of blaming Saussure for treating society as the sum of individuals. As a relationist and anthropocentrist, Saussure interpreted society as a semiotic-informational function, as a set of relations, including linguistic ones.

2. Analysis and discussion of findings

2.1 Anthropocentrism: the concept of language experience of a human being as such

One of the most critical misunderstandings surrounding Saussure's theoretical legacy is that positivists and materialists perceived the nomothetic project of the scientist as an ordinary descriptive theory. The tasks of nomothetics and theory are different. The theory simply synthesizes (generalizes and systematizes) research data, and nomothetics establishes the principles of such synthesis. Just as I. Kant (2006) did not describe individual anthropological phenomena and processes, but only tried to answer the question of what a human being is, his/her experience and consciousness as such, and Saussure, after years of comparative and neogrammatical ideography, tried to answer the question, what human linguosemiotic experience (language activity) is as such.. Both thinkers were interested in the problem, not *what is the existing human world or existing human activity?* because this is a typical ideographic question, but *what should the world or activity be in order to be called human?* In the notes of Saussure, you can find his repeatedly expressed idea that:

> Il est toujours question de ce qui se passe entre les termes du langage, or pour suivre il faudrait d'abord savoir ce qu'ils sont, ce qu'on prend comme étant, avant de parler des phénomènes entre les termes existants (The eternal question of what relations arise between the elements of linguistic activity, but to advance on this issue, you first need to know what they are, what we take for existing, before talking about the phenomena that relate to these existing elements) (Saussure, 2002, p. 257).
>
> In the monograph On the Dual Essence of Language the scientist writes:
>
> S'imaginer qu'on pourra se passer en linguistique de cette saine logique mathématique, sous prétexte que la langue est une chose concrète qui "devient" et non une chose abstraite qui "est", est à ce que je crois une erreur profonde, inspirée au début par les tendances innées de l'esprit germanique (To imagine that in linguistics, we could do without this sound mathematical logic under the pretext that language is a concrete thing that "becomes" and not an abstract thing that "is" – is, in my opinion, a serious mistake, initially inspired by the innate tendencies of the Germanic spirit) (ibid., p. 34).

In this phrase, a clear allusion to German metaphysics can be seen, presented in the philosophical conceptions of G. Hegel, F. Schelling, Novalis for whom language was a real entity, a living spiritual evolutionary organism that can be studied by observation and description without resorting to logical deduction. Even the neo-Kantians, under the influence of the philological tradition of dividing sciences into nomothetic and ideographic ones, reckoned linguistics among historical sciences and, hence, ideographic ones. It is worth mentioning here that in 1876–1880 Saussure was studying and writing his dissertation in Leipzig. Nevertheless, in 1870–1876, one of the most famous neo-Kantians and the author of the idea of nomothetics, W. Windelband, was lecturing there. It is hard to believe that Windelband did not leave behind a powerful Kantian trace among the Leipzig philosophers.

2.2 Nomothetism: the concept of principles of organization of language activity as such

Perhaps the most characteristic feature in understanding systemic world cognition by the Kantians was the division of all sciences into nomothetic (the science of principles) and ideographic (the science of historical facts). Windelband (2007) included contemporary linguistics in the sphere of the latter, because it was the historical linguistics of the Neogrammarian School. Saussure opposed this point in Windelband's views, proving that linguistics can and should become a science of general principles and values. Thus, Windelband's influence on Saussure could have been negative (that is, Saussure, based on Windelband's idea, came to the opposite conclusion: linguistics can and should have its nomothetics).

In one of his works, Leshchak (2002), considering the possibility of reinterpreting the well-known contraposition of sciences into nomothetic ("study of general laws and general in phenomena") sciences and ideographic ("maximum keeping track of individual events and careful description of specific individual facts") ones, pointed to an exciting feature of nomothetics, namely its anthropocentric nature, after all, generalization and establishment of general principles, in contrast to a pure description of individual facts, based on sensorics, corporality, requires methodological guidance, and, hence, the presence of human cognitive factor. In this case, both natural or exact sciences and the humanities or social sciences can have their nomothetic and ideographic aspects. The scientist illustrates his thoughts with the scientific activity of Saussure:

> A way out of this contradiction was once suggested by F. de Saussure, who showed on the example of linguistics that it makes sense to distinguish between linguistics of language (as a nomothetic, humanitarian and fundamental science) and linguistics of speech (as applied, ideographic, natural science). This happened, for example, with a scientific discipline that studies the signal aspect of human speech communication, which split into phonology (the science of phonetic laws and linguistic potentials) and experimental phonetics (the science of external speech sounds) (Leshchak, 2002, p. 221).

It is worthwhile to analyze what has been said critically. We can fully agree with the author that, first, Saussure tried to create a linguistic nomothetics (like exact and natural sciences) as a doctrine of the principles of organization of language activity (and not just the language, as Leszczak writes) second, that this task requires the dominance of methodological deduction over observation and description, and, third, that the opposition "phonology – phonetics" can be an example of such a distinction between nomothetics and ideography in linguistics. However, one cannot agree that the opposition between nomothetics and ideography coincides with the distinction between theoretical and applied sciences. Both phonology and phonetics can have their theoretical and applied aspects. In the end, in later works, the author himself comes to the same conclusion.

Conclusion

The nomothetic character of Saussure's concept is not one of the features of his concept but its basic typological feature. For Saussure, the elucidation of the general principles of the organization of human linguistic experience – linguistic activity – was identical with linguistics as such. At the same time, he was fully aware of the complexity and problematic character of this method of theorization. According to Saussure, in all areas of linguistics, it is very remarkable that, as soon as a judgment takes on a general nature, it begins to express either the most banal idea, too insignificant to declare about it, or the most paradoxical idea, with which the same people, who used to laugh, will blindly fight when faced with the same truth expressed in a simpler form).

The analysis of the sources of Saussure's anthropocentric nomothetics would be incomplete without mentioning the methodological controversy that took place in political economy at the end of the XIX century, namely the discussion between the historian G. von Schmoller and the supporter of psychological system-centrism C. Menger (2016). The fact that Saussure was interested in the course of this dispute is indicated by T. de Mauro in his comments to the "Course" (1999, p. 356). It is easy to guess on whose side Saussure's sympathies were if to take into account that Menger developed the theory of economic values, defended the idea that economic values do not exist outside human consciousness and are functions of human judgments, insisted on their pragmatic dimension (economic values depend on the subjective assessment of people and their needs), and at the same time strongly denied the historical-national, factual and descriptive-inductive nature of economic science, trying to create a generalizing systemic and universal ("cosmopolitan") methodology of economic research. It can be claimed that Menger and Saussure followed the same Kantian path of creating a nomothetic, systemic and anthropocentric concept of science, each in his field.

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Notes

1 See more about it in more detail in Leshchak, 2018.