

International Linguistic Association

Monthly Lecture Series

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Catching up to Saussure with Text Semantics

Fueled by the discovery of Ferdinand de Saussure's unpublished orangery manuscripts in 1996, the international resurgence of neo-saussurean linguistics over the last 3 decades has given us new ways to study languages as complex and diverse cultural objects. We are now seeing a re-convergence of linguistic perspectives that have been (bizarrely) separated from each other during the 20th century, including: (1) the revival of the historical and comparative linguistic tradition in which Saussure was a key player; (2) the "re-assembling" of the arbitrary division between syntax, semantics and pragmatics; and (3) the integration of rhetorical, hermeneutic and philological perspectives which have been pushed outside the scope of linguistics by the dominant logico-grammatical tradition. At the center of all this is a focus on *texts*.

Favoring a linguistics of *parole*, Saussure saw language as a creative textual activity that is inseparable from our social environment. He rejected the traditional dualism that leads us to view languages as instruments of thought or tools for communication. For Saussure, a language is "ever on the move, pressed forward by its imposing machinery of negative categorization, wholly free of materiality, and thus perfectly prepared to assimilate any idea that may join those that have preceded it"¹. In short, a language has no independence outside of its occurrences; it is always to be constructed. This is why he asserts that the identification of linguistic forms depends entirely on the methodology -- or point of view -- that constructs and interprets them. Thus, the purpose of proposing his well-known dualities (i.e., signifier/signified, *langue/parole*, synchrony/diachrony, etc.) was to offer a variety of perspectives that would enable a comparative description of languages as complex and ever-changing. Today, the continued development and application of saussurean principles in the field of Text Semantics (a.k.a. Interpretative Semantics) is helping us to discover new "observables" in linguistics and cultural sciences in general.

Saturday, October 7, 2017
11 AM - 12 PM
Borough of Manhattan Community College
Room: N452
199 Chambers Street, New York, NY 10007

NOTE: All attendees will be asked to show some form of ID in order to enter the college.

¹ Saussure Ferdinand de, *Writings in General Linguistics*, Oxford University Press, 2006, p.51.