
CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| The Arbitrariness of the Sign in Question - 100 years or Arbitrariness..... | 1 |
| Jean-Yves Beziau | |
| L'Arbitraire Saussurien: Résistances et Résolution..... | 5 |
| Cécile Mathieu | |
| Arbitrariness of the Sign, Arbitrariness of the Word, Arbitrariness of the Morpheme..... | 25 |
| François Nemo | |
| Arbitrariness of the Sign, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), Background and Formulation by Michel Bréal (1832-1915) | 47 |
| Vinicius Claro | |
| De l'Arbitraire du Signe aux Signes Artificiels: Condillac ou l'Ancre Linguistique de la Science..... | 55 |
| Jean-François Beets | |
| Disentangling the Web of Belief. Metatheoretical Status and Empirical Testability of Saussure's Principle of Arbitrariness..... | 75 |
| Hubert Kowalewski | |
| Exploiting The Arbitrary: The Opacity-Transparency Dynamics In The Patterns Of Language Use Of The Nath Panthi Davri Gosavi Community..... | 87 |
| Avinash Pandey | |

| | |
|---|------------|
| Beyond the Arbitrariness of the Sign: Language (Parole) and Thought between Saussure and Bergson..... | 107 |
| Francesco Parisi | |
| From the Arbitrariness of the Sign to the Trace of a Language..... | 125 |
| Noëlla Patricia Schüttel | |
| La Perspective Neuro-Médiale de l'Arbitraire du Signe de Saussure à la Lumière de la Neurophysiologie de son Epoque et des Recherches Actuelles..... | 139 |
| Marcin Sobieszczanski | |
| Le Débat sur la Nature Arbitraire du Signe Linguistique. La Thèse d'Emile Benveniste (1939) et la Glose de Mario Lucidi (1950)..... | 151 |
| Andrea Picciuolo | |
| L'Arbitraire du Signe comme Problématique dans la Linguistique Genevoise: Ch. Bally, A. Sechehaye et H. Frei..... | 175 |
| Anamaria Curea | |
| L'Arbitraire est-il une "Obsession" Saussurienne? A Partir de la Lecture Barthésienne de Saussure..... | 195 |
| Emanuele Fadda | |
| On the Asymmetry Between the Four Corners of the Square..... | 209 |
| Saloua Chatti | |
| PHASE: from Art to Neuroplasticity - The Case of Embodied Symbols | 225 |
| Tal Dotan Ben Soussan | |
| Psychological and other Apects of the Sign Arbitrariness..... | 271 |
| Miro Brada | |
| Quelques Remarques sur l'Usage du Terme "l'Arbitraire du Signe" . | 283 |
| Ludmila Lacková | |
| Saussure et la Philosophie: Un Essai de Reconstruction de la Théorie de la Langue..... | 295 |
| Ricardo Jardim Andrade | |

| | |
|---|------------|
| Signs – Arbitrary or Operational? Lessons from Studies on Algebraic Logic and Planned Languages in the Work of Louis Couturat..... | 323 |
| Oliver Schlaudt | |
| Structuration des Significations..... | 343 |
| Jean-Pierre Desclés | |
| The Arbitrariness of the Sign in Greek Mathematics..... | 379 |
| Ioannis M. Vandoulakis | |
| Les Paradoxes de l'Arbitraire. Le Négatif, la Différence, l'Opposition dans le Signe saussurien..... | 399 |
| Manuel Gustavo Isaac | |
| Arbitrariness Symbolic Key..... | 423 |
| Jean-Yves Beziau | |

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The Arbitrariness of the Sign in Question - 100 years or Arbitrariness

Jean-Yves Beziau

ABSTRACT. We describe the context in which this book was produced: a workshop organized at the University of Geneva in January 2017 within the celebration of the publication of 100 years of publication of Ferdinand de Saussure's *Le Cours de Linguistique Générale*, in continuity with a previous event on symbolic thinking organized at the University of Neuchâtel in 2005.

This book is related to the workshop *The Arbitrariness of the Sign in Question* I organized in Geneva, January 10-12, 2017, within a big event celebrating the 100 years of publication of Ferdinand de Saussure's posthumous book *Le Cours de Linguistique Générale* (CLG).

I was first in touch with the CLG when a high school student in the *Lycée Gabriel Fauré* in Annecy, France, in 1982-83. We had a very dedicated professor of philosophy, Miss Ancet, with whom we studied in detail the first chapter of the CLG.

I was always interested in semiotics, and having specialized in the science of reasoning, I naturally and progressively came back to the topic through my research in symbolic logic.

In 2002 I moved back to Switzerland to work at the University of Neuchâtel at the Institute of Logic and CdRS (Centre de Recherches Sémiologiques), a center created by Jean-Blaise Grize (1922-2013), a former student of Jean Piaget (1896-1980). In 2005 I decided to organize there an interdisciplinary workshop on symbolic language.

Jean-Yves Beziau



The idea was to promote interaction between colleagues of the University of Neuchâtel and put them together on a non-arbitrary basis. I succeeded to gather professors from many areas: Lytta Basset from theology, Alain Robert from mathematics, Daniel Schulthess from philosophy, Hans Beck from physics, Georg Süss-Fink from chemistry, Louis de Saussure from linguistics. We also had few colleagues from outside: Claudine Tiercelin from Paris, Jean-Claude Pont from Geneva, ... As a result I published a book with title “La peinture du symbole”, a word game that can be understood only by a true “chaussurien”.



100 years of arbitrariness

When hearing about the centenary of the CLG I decided to organize a workshop on the arbitrariness of the sign, as a kind of follow up of this first meeting. But the gathering was in some sense diametrically opposed, because the idea was to gather people from outside – I was myself an outsider, working at the University of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro.

I launched a call for papers and was quite happy with the result. We received a good variety of submissions. Some old friends I had not seen for years like Marcin Sobieszczanski appeared, as well as some recent ones, like my student Vinicius Claro and also some unknown colleagues.

We had people from many geographical origins: Italy, France, Greece, India, Brazil, Poland, Germany, Romania, Tunisia, Bulgaria, UK, Vatican, Czech Republic, Belgium, Switzerland.

Most of their papers are in this present volume. The papers are written either in French, either in English. CLG'100 was indeed a truly bilingual event.



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Jean-Yves Beziau

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