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'UNDOUBTEDLY A POWERFUL INFLUENCE': VICTOR HENRY'S *ANTINOMIES LINGUISTIQUES* (1896), WITH AN ANNOTATED TRANSLATION OF THE FIRST CHAPTER

JOHN E. JOSEPH

> The inclination to resolve the internal antinomies of this complex notion is the motivating force of Saussure's *Course*. In this respect, the master from Geneva had an illustrious predecessor among French linguists. Victor Henry, professor of comparative grammar at the Faculté des Lettres in Paris, addressed precisely this question in his book *Antinomies linguistiques*, published in 1896... This book, in which the questions, moreover, hold greater interest than the answers, undoubtedly exerted a powerful influence on Saussure's *Course* (Jakobson, 1942 [1990, pp. 89–90]).

At the time of its publication, *Antinomies linguistiques* (*Linguistic Paradoxes*) by Victor Henry (1850–1907) garnered a small number of reviews and was hardly ever cited. The first record of a linguist paying serious attention to it is a quarter-century later, when Charles Bally (1865–1947) devoted an article to the distinction drawn in the book's third chapter between 'transmitted' and 'learned' language (Bally, 1921). After another decade the preeminent European linguist of mid-century, Roman Jakobson (1896–1982), would begin referring to *Antinomies linguistiques* as the direct predecessor and inspiration for the *Course in General Linguistics* of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), the cornerstone of the twentieth-century study of language, which Bally had co-edited. And Jakobson's death would come at the time of a new surge of interest in the book, sparked this time by Henry's and Saussure's dual involvement at the turn of the century with a spiritualistic medium, an involvement read in the light of post-structuralism as a kind of covert antithesis to the structuralist enterprise, similar in nature to Saussure's secret research into hidden anagrams in Latin poetry (on which see now Helsloot, 1995).

Perhaps Henry did some crystal-ball gazing of his own: he had the perspicacity to dedicate the book to *future* linguists—you and me—rather than to his predecessors or contemporaries. Rereading it on the hundredth anniversary of its appearance, one cannot help feeling that the ignoring of it in its time tells us rather more about the time than about the book. It is a bold, innovative presentation of some underlying contradictions in the premises on which linguistics is founded, cast in the Kantian form of antinomies. The antinomy is a contradiction which the terms of received thinking do not allow us to resolve, leaving a paradox—but one for which careful analysis and confrontation of the contradictory positions (the 'thesis' and 'antithesis') can lead to a logical 'synthesis'. Henry devotes one chapter each to antinomies concerning the nature of language, the origin of language, and language and thought. A footnote (p. 63) says that he had originally envisioned a fourth chapter on the antinomy of form vs function (or rules vs usage) in language, but did not write it because the topic is actually dealt with sufficiently at various places in the existing chapters.

Correspondence relating to this paper should be addressed to Professor J. E. Joseph, Department of English, University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam Road, Hong Kong. [E-mail: jejoseph@hkucc.hku.hk]

Henry's initial training was in law, in which he held a doctorate, and he began his career as director of the municipal library of Lille. As the appended list of publications shows, while still in his twenties he began publishing on a wide variety of topics in linguistics, including historical work on Indo-European but also Quechua, Aleut, Chiquito, and Afghan. In 1883 he obtained his doctorate in philology with a pair of theses, one on the linguistic theories of Varro (especially the analogy–anomaly dispute), and the other on analogy in general and its role in the Greek language in particular. Analogy was a linchpin of neogrammarian linguistics, being the one major exception admitted to its inflexible sound laws, and the only entry point allowed to any adjacent discipline which might claim some interest in linguistic matters—particularly psychology.

Henry began teaching classical philology at the University of Lille, then in 1889 took up the Chair of Comparative Grammar at the Sorbonne, succeeding Abel Bergaigne (1838–1888). The Sorbonne named him *professeur titulaire* of Sanskrit, Comparative Grammar and Indo-European languages in 1894, by which time he had completed *Antinomies linguistiques* (according to a note in the text itself), which would however not appear in print until two years later. Bergounioux (1994, p. 203) implicitly links Henry's 'gradual abandonment of the study of Sanskrit' with the fact that the chair he had inherited from Bergaigne was eliminated upon his death in 1907. But any such link is dubious, given that the chair was actually in comparative grammar, and that Henry's bibliography shows his involvement in this area growing rather than diminishing with time, not least with the enduring success of Henry (1888a). In 1885 he began a significant programme of translating Sanskrit texts, for which a market may have been provided by the burgeoning membership of the Theosophical Society (a movement whose impact on linguistics is outlined in Hutton and Joseph, 1996).

As Jakobson notes in the passage which serves as epigram to this article, Henry is in some respects better at posing linguistic paradoxes than resolving them. This helps explain both the marginalization of the book in its time, when academic publishing did not usually allow for the posing of problems without solutions, and why it has found more favorable reception in the twentieth—particularly the late twentieth, when, in the wake of post-structuralism, aporia is the order of the day, and Henry's embarrassment lies not in insufficient solutions, but in offering solutions at all. For what he otherwise seems to grasp with rare clarity is that the linguistic antinomies he delineates really are insoluble, at least under the basic conceptions of language and languages available in his time, and indeed under those available in our own. Henry has no radically new linguistic worldview to offer, but he articulates the need for one so well that he surely deserves a place in the overall development of the structuralism that would take shape in the teaching of his younger contemporary, Saussure. The separate question of his 'influence' on Saussure will be taken up below.

Henry can glimpse the promised land in which he believes the future of linguistics will lie: the new kind of psychology that was developing even as he wrote. He would come to embrace it even more closely by the time of his 1901 book on the 'Martian' utterances of the sleepwalking medium. His instincts were right in one sense, wrong in another. *Antinomies linguistiques* establishes Henry among those disaffected with nineteenth-century linguistic theory and method as exemplified in the work of the neogrammarians. The disaffected include Michel Bréal (a considerable Bréal-Henry correspondence exists), Hugo Schuchardt (see Henry, 1886c), and increasingly as time went on, Saussure. Like their contemporaries in art, poetry, music and science, Henry, Saussure and to a lesser extent Bréal were striving toward something new, a 'modernism' that would break free of the old traditions. These

were fine as far as they went, but felt constraining to the mind dissatisfied with the bits of carefully ordered knowledge they made it possible to collect. Henry and Saussure may not have been fully aware of the modernist impulse within them, but its results are clear.

Insofar as he is groping toward modernism, then, Henry has picked a clear winner in the developing study of the unconscious, which, with the popular success of psychoanalysis, would come to play a key role in defining the modern for both the arts and the human sciences. Where his instincts were not so accurate was in thinking that this is where the new linguistics would emerge. As late as 1907, the year of Henry's death, when Saussure was giving his first course in general linguistics at the University of Geneva, Henry might have congratulated himself on his foresight (not that he or anyone else could have predicted the eventual influence of Saussure's teaching at the time). But by the second and third courses (1908–9 and 1910–11 respectively), Saussure had shifted the focus of his linguistics rather dramatically in the direction of the 'social', assigning it a great deal of work that Henry never really anticipates being taken away from the mind.

As Chiss and Puech (1987, p. 187) write, 'The temptation is great... to make Victor Henry the precursor of Ferdinand de Saussure—as Roman Jakobson notes in passing—in the sense that the laying out of an organized body of knowledge in linguistics may have been made possible by the examination of the legitimacy conditions for a general linguistics realised by the *Antinomies Linguistiques*'.[1] But such temptations are usually resisted on the grounds that Saussure cited so few precursors. He was after all teaching courses, not writing a book. As with any great thinker, it is tempting to link him with much else that was going on in his time and before, and responsible scholarship demands a certain restraint. Nevertheless, Henry's and Saussure's paths cross at two well attested and significant points.

The first concerns the medium Hélène Smith, whose glossolalic utterances in 'Sanskritoid' and 'Martian' were studied at first-hand by Saussure, made famous in a book by Flournoy (1900), and then partly 'decoded' in another book-length study by Henry (1901b). Henry's involvement with this case has been responsible for the revival of interest in his work that has occurred, particularly in France, in the last twenty years (see Chiss and Puech, 1987; Cifali, 1985; Desmet, 1992; Joseph, 1989b, 1990; Lepschy, 1974; Puech, 1985; Todorov, 1977, pp. 326–332; Yaguello, 1984, pp. 111–129). Henry appreciated the potential insight this case offered into the question of the unconscious knowledge of language—to a greater degree than Saussure, who was mainly concerned to debunk any notion that the medium's 'Sanskritoid' utterances were really coming through her from another world. The question of the unconscious mental functioning of language is intially taken up in the third chapter of *Antinomies linguistiques*, then revisited in Henry (1901b) in light both of the Smith case and of late-breaking developments in the psychology of the unconscious.

The second link is Bally, one of the editors of Saussure's *Cours*. Bally's 1921 article 'Langage transmis et langage acquis' opens as follows:

> In his *Antinomies linguistiques* (p. 59ff.), Victor Henry established a distinction between transmitted or natural language, which functions and evolves without speakers being conscious of it, and learned or artificial language, in which reflection and will play the principal role. Only transmitted language counts in the destinies of languages; the second type acts upon them only insofar as it takes on the characteristics of the first type. Thus the word *subjuguer* (subjugate), borrowed consciously from the vocabulary of Latin, remained on the margins of French until the moment when, used unconsciously, it turned into transmitted language. We may note in passing that, in choosing a borrowing to give an idea of learned language, Henry made a link whose full import he did not grasp, a matter to which we shall return further on.
>
> It is Henry's general thesis which will be discussed here. But it should be noted from the start that it agrees with a generally held view of languages: the constant usage speakers make of them leads them

> to think that they are entirely natural products, in other words that, having been assimilated automatically, they evolve according to laws which escape our grasp (Bally, 1921 [1952, p. 100]).[2]

As I shall discuss further below, the second paragraph spuriously links Henry's distinction with a 'generally held view of languages' to which Henry did not in fact subscribe. Without ever criticizing Henry by name (he is explicitly cited only one other time after the above opening), Bally sets out to problematize or deconstruct this simplistic view according to which 'natural' and 'artificial' language correlate with unconscious and conscious thought respectively, and the evolution of language is strictly a matter of the former. The link between learned language and borrowing, which Bally says Henry made but did not grasp the full import of (thus putting him in the same semi-conscious state in which Bally considers much linguistic change to occur), is actually the point at which this view deconstructs, for Bally maintains that *any* linguistic innovation, conscious or unconscious, constitutes a 'borrowing':

> ...From the point of view of speech, anything that is new for an individual, and, from the point of view of languages, any innovation which penetrates into an idiom via the hearers, is of the nature of a borrowing. The term 'borrowing' used to be applied only to foreign words adopted by a language (...), then was extended to dialectal elements which pass into the unified language (...), then to words from special languages (professional jargons... etc.) which enter general usage (...). But there is ultimately no difference in principle between these borrowings and those which the language owes to individual initiatives. The adoption of a cliché created by a trendy writer does not take place in any different way. And if a lower-class solecism let slip by the first person to utter it passes into usage, it is again in the same way that this takes place. A borrowing in a language has always begun by being a borrowing by one or more hearers who have propagated it by becoming speakers in their turn (Bally, 1921 [1952, p. 102]).[3]

Bally's critique of the notions of consciousness and naturalness in linguistics is impressive, the more so because he published them in a journal of psychology at a time when many psychologists took linguists' ruminations on conscious and unconscious language production at face value, adding to the trans-disciplinary prestige of linguistics. But has Bally misrepresented Henry's views, setting him up as a straw man? The answer is not entirely clear. Bally equates Henry's 'thesis' (Henry does not present it as such) with the popular notion that languages are entirely natural products. But Henry insists that all languages, whether transmitted or learned, are equally *conventional* (1896a, p. 57). On the other hand, because the language faculty itself is natural, Henry says that people are led 'naturally' into the false belief that the languages they speak are equally so. Thus, although languages are conventional, perceiving this takes a certain application of mind to which the majority of speakers will never attain (*ibid.*). Furthermore, even those educated speakers who do perceive it can do so only partially, since they are still liable to fall into the traps of naturalistic thinking about languages (*ibid.*), and furthermore will be conscious of their native language being more 'natural' to them than any language learned later in life (p. 58). Thus, Henry concludes that 'Every transmitted language *seems* natural; every learned language *appears* artificial' (p. 59, emphasis added).[4]

Certainly Bally might have been more precise and noted that Henry had in fact problematized the notions of consciousness and naturalness, and had not fallen thoughtlessly into a 'generally held view of languages' with simplistic equations from the one to the other. Yet Henry goes on to affirm that the way languages *appear* to speakers actually constitutes the primary reality with which psychologists and linguists need to deal; and that 'reality' as laid out by Henry corresponds very closely to the set of views Bally proceeds to criticize. In other words, Bally could have presented a more nuanced picture of Henry's views at the outset and gone on to criticize them every bit as cogently and effectively.

So Bally is almost off the hook—almost. In drawing a conclusion to his article he implies that what has been missing from this whole discussion is the *social* element, and

that the role of language in fulfilling the needs of both the social group and the individual creates an irreconcilable tension between communication and expression. Well and good; but he does not point out that Henry's invocation of the 'majority of speakers', whose inability to perceive the 'true' nature of language thereby *changes* its nature for all practical purposes, is a kind of social force; or that Henry himself alludes to that same tension between communication and expression (p. 47). Yet it is true that Henry never develops the social element in the way that Saussure, Meillet or Bally would do. The fact that it hardly ever penetrates the surface in *Antinomies linguistiques* makes for one of the most striking differences between it and the *Cours de linguistique générale*, though the difference is much less marked with Saussure's first course.

The third link between Henry and Saussure is less immediate. As noted at the outset, Jakobson seems to have been convinced, for reasons he never makes explicit, that *Antinomies linguistiques* had a crucial influence on Saussure's courses, and could even provide a key for understanding Saussure's real thought beneath the editorial meddlings that mask it in the published *Cours*. Statements tying Saussure to Henry crop up repeatedly in Jakobson's writings from 1932 to 1942.

> Saussure distinguishes two different aspects of language: on the one hand there is langue... on the other hand, there is parole... This stress on the dichotomy of language is truly an important virtue of Saussure's lessons. The analysis, the logical dissociation of the complex notion 'language,' is indeed necessary. The inclination to resolve the internal antinomies of this complex notion is the motivating force of Saussure's *Course*. In this respect, the master from Geneva had an illustrious predecessor among French linguists. Victor Henry, professor of comparative grammar at the Faculté des Lettres in Paris, addressed precisely this question in his book *Antinomies linguistiques*, published in 1896, in which he took as a motto the following Cartesian slogan: 'Divide each of the difficulties that I would examine in as many parts as possible and as would be required to resolve them better.' This book, in which the questions, moreover, hold greater interest than the answers, undoubtedly exerted a powerful influence on Saussure's *Course* (Jakobson, 1942 [1990, pp. 89–90]).

Similarly, Jakobson (1939 [1971a, p. 284]) makes reference to 'die von Victor Henri [*sic*] und Ferdinand de Saussure aufgedeckte Antinomie *langue–parole*' ('the *langue–parole* antinomy discovered by Victor Henri [*sic*] and Ferdinand de Saussure'). Elsewhere Jakobson is concerned to establish Henry as the source of a 'Hegelian' element in Saussure. In a paper about the work of the Prague Linguistic Circle which Jakobson wrote in 1932 and published in an Italian journal in 1933 he discusses the difficulties and ultimate uselessness of trying to trace the intellectual heritage of the Circle, for instance with regard to its Hegelianism (not a trait that later commentators on the Prague School have tended to focus on):

> It matters little where the work of the Circle acquired the Hegelian conception of the structure of the system and its dialectic. Is it from Russian science, or is it the case, as suggested in a recent work of Čiževskij, that the tradition of Hegel has never been interrupted and has always been productive? Or rather that once again the decisive role has been played by the theory of Saussure (into which elements of Hegel's doctrine of antinomies have penetrated, as it appears, via the *Antinomies linguistiques* of the Hegelian V. Henry)? (Jakobson, 1933 [1971b, p. 543]).[5]

In the 1942 commentary on Saussure cited above, this Henry-transmitted Hegelianism becomes a central characteristic of Saussure's thinking that Bally and Sechehaye, in editing the *Cours*, misinterpreted and misrepresented:

> We may note in passing that when he [Saussure] speaks of 'both the immutability and the mutability of the sign' or when he highlights other necessary connections between opposing factors within language, we are seeing the distinct influences of Hegelian thought, the stamp of which can already be found indisputably in Victor Henry, precursor of the Saussurian doctrine on linguistic antinomies (1896). Each of these antinomies is conceived, in Saussure's *Course*, as a unity of opposites. The editors of the *Course* misinterpreted this purely dialectic notion in Saussure's teaching and, fearing that he might be reproached for 'being illogical or paradoxical by attributing to language two contradictory qualities,'

> they mistakenly tried to present the opposition of antinomical concepts simply as a manner of speaking (Jakobson, 1942 [1990, p. 103–4]).

(The quotation in the last sentence is from one of the editors' notes to the *Cours*, p. 74.) One wonders what evidence Jakobson had for Henry's 'indisputable' status as a 'Hegelian' other than his use of the word *antinomies*—which is more accurately a Kantian legacy. And when accusing Bally of misunderstanding a Hegelianism shared by Henry and Saussure, Jakobson might have been expected to make some mention of Bally's paper-turned-book-chapter on Henry. Given Jakobson's slipperiness on these points, his testimony that Henry was an important influence on (or conduit of influence for) Saussure is perhaps not worth a great deal. On the other hand, Jakobson had an independent source of information on Saussure's teaching, in the person of Serge Karcevskij (1884–1955), who returned to Moscow from the University of Geneva in 1917 bringing with him first-hand impressions of Saussure's lectures that would henceforth have a shaping influence on Russian formalism. Still, if Jakobson had it directly from Karcevskij that Saussure had taken inspiration from Henry, why would he have used words such as 'undoubtedly' and 'as it appears' in the quotations above?

Pace Jakobson, Henry does not present a version of the *langue–parole* dichotomy as one of his linguistic paradoxes. Nor does he 'address' the question directly in any other form. The most one can say is that his use of the terms *langage* and *langue* reveals a certain awkwardness that suggests he may be wrestling with the problem, and that he proposes redefining 'dialect' to take account of any structural difference starting from the level of the individual (what would later be called the 'idiolect'). He does not give any such consideration to the meaning of *parole*, beyond mentioning the Humboldtian distinction between *energeia* and *ergon* in the 'synthesis' section of the first chapter. What he does consider in depth—and what Bally recognized as his major significance for the Saussurean view of language—is the matter of how language acquisition and production relate to the division between a conscious and an unconscious mind. Already in *Antinomies linguistiques*, and increasingly in *Le langage martien*, there emerges the modern picture of a mind, including a language faculty, whose real seat is the unconscious. For this among many other reasons I do not think (again *pace* Jakobson) that Henry can be called a 'Hegelian' in any meaningful sense.

In sum, I believe that Jakobson's instinctive wish to bring Henry into the structuralist–modernist fold is well motivated, though not for the reasons Jakobson gave. Yet those faulty reasons are instructive in themselves, even apart from the possibility that they may reflect 'inside' information passed on by Karcevskij.[6] Jakobson wants to (mis)read Saussure as having a central European phenomenological bent, and to blame Bally and Sechehaye for distorting him instead into some kind of Swiss rationalist. What better way to trump the authority of the editors of the *Cours* than by equating Saussurean thought with that of the neglected 'Hegelian' Victor Henry—neglected, that is, by everyone but Bally himself, who had made him the centre of a critique of pre-Saussurean linguistics. Jakobson could be reasonably sure that the audiences in Italy, Copenhagen and New York to whom he addressed his 1933, 1939 and 1942 papers respectively would never actually have read Henry, and so would be in no position to contradict him.

This is not to imply that Jakobson was engaging in any deliberate deception of anyone, other than perhaps himself. If his understanding of Saussure was formed on the oral tradition transmitted by Karcevskij some four years before he actually read the published *Cours*, it must have come as something of a shock to find the ideas which had so great an impact on him over those four years presented there in a very different

way than he had been led to understand them. Twenty years later we find him still trying to salvage Karcevskij's Saussure from the 'distortions' of the published *Cours*, with Victor Henry and the *Antinomies linguistiques* functioning as the wild card in this unspoken poker game between Jakobson and Bally.

Whatever the actual impact of Henry upon Saussure may have been, *Antinomies linguistiques* is an invaluable document for understanding the intellectual context within which Saussure's courses would be framed. One of only two significant book-length inquiries into 'synchronic' language theory of 1890s France (the other being Bréal's *Essai de sémantique* of 1897), it can be read as a kind of 'missing link' between Humboldt and Saussure on the one hand, and between developments in linguistics and psychology on the other. The centenary of its publication seems an appropriate occasion on which to present its first translation, starting with the introduction and first chapter in this article. A full annotated translation, with the original text on facing pages, will be issued by Pergamon in the course of the year.

The first chapter, on the nature of language, is based on the paradox that all the categories we use to analyse language 'are only abstractions with no external reality' yet a science of language exists that claims to study the 'life' of these categories. This antinomy may strike readers of this journal as Harrissian in character; but the paradox for Henry does not lie in the notion that a field of study concerned solely with abstractions could constitute a 'science'. Physics, chemistry, even mechanics each rests upon a primordial abstraction, and no one contests their scientific status. What Henry questions is the claim of linguistics to be studying the 'life' of languages and words.

He begins his investigation by defining his terms, and 'language' is the first one he takes on. He deduces that it could be something other than an empty term only if applied strictly to the linguistic mega-families like Indo-European. 'Dialect' on the other hand, should be applied in the case of any systemic variation, however minute. In this way we could recognise the fact that a Breton and a Peruvian 'speak the same language' from a historical point of view, alongside the synchronic fact that even two identical twins who understand each other's thought implicitly and can finish each other's sentences nevertheless have barely perceptible differences in the way they speak. Hence they do not speak the same 'language', or 'dialect', to adopt Henry's suggestion for eliminating the confusion. Yet he immediately retreats from his solution, saying that 'we have no choice' but to go on using the existing terminology, presumably because the force of social inertia is such that any attempt to improve the terminology would result not in a universal change, but only in more confusion. So he calls instead for a Lockean precision of definition, with one term used for one meaning. This is a case in point of Henry's questions holding greater interest than his answers, as Jakobson put it: Henry raises a fundamental paradox and points the way toward a radical solution, only to back off in favour of a slight modification of the status quo.

The next two sections are devoted to examining the concept of 'life' as applied to languages and words respectively. Given that he began the chapter by declaring them both to be nonexistent, one again anticipates a more radical outcome than Henry provides. He comes out in favour of the concept—again so long as good definitions are used, which will avert any possibility of misunderstanding. Furthermore, he holds that the term 'life' can be used *literally* with regard to one aspect of the word. For whereas language is 'a pure abstraction with no exterior reality', and the word *qua* vocal utterance is 'a pure abstraction, the fictive synthesis of all the vocal utterances... that it represents',

the word has at the same time a psychological reality 'as a spoken sign of our thought' in the unconscious mind. This means that words actually *live* within human brain cells, and die when the cells die.

Henry does not consider the possibility that the language, as an aggregate of mental signs, might be said to live in this sense as well. But here again he appears to point the way forward toward Saussure, in a number of regards—the notion of languages and words as pure abstractions, the idea that the word is a spoken 'sign' of our thought (which Saussure will reformulate so that word and thought are joint elements of an even more abstract 'sign'), that this sign is a psychological reality (which Saussure will turn additionally into a social fact). But before congratulating Saussure too much for taking Henry's ideas through to their logical conclusion, and deprecating Henry for not having the courage to do so in print, we should remember that Saussure never brought himself to put his radical thought into print either. His courses were purely oral, his anagram research kept hidden. Based on what they published, Saussure was by far the more conservative. The silence which greeted *Antinomies linguistiques* helps explain why: the time was not ripe for any discomforting overhaul of the status quo. It would be so soon enough, however. The Great War would bring the end of the old European social order, and only then would a wide audience be ready to embrace a radically new way of approaching language. Saussure's teaching begins to be 'discovered': a young Jakobson hears about it from Karcevskij, the published *Cours* meets with a steadily warmer reception, and one of its editors soon feels the need to train his sights upon 'an illustrious predecessor' of Saussure's who had 'undoubtedly exerted a powerful influence'.

LINGUISTIC PARADOXES

> To divide each of the difficulties I shall examine into as many subunits as possible and as necessary for best resolving them.
>
> Descartes

No science remains more strongly contested than linguistics—none more unjustly, to judge from its results—none more rightly if one takes it at its premises.

A paradox about its origins, within which all the others are contained: this science, whose subject is language as spoken in the open air, has yet to forget that it was born in the dusty confines of libraries. This ever young science of the living carries with it a disconcerting baggage of outdated concepts.

It is these paradoxes that I here try to present and resolve, one by one, while in the process recalling certain truths long recognized and too often misunderstood. I dedicate these pages to our students—historians, philosophers, and above all grammarians or future linguists. Those interested in the problems of language should be the last to be satisfied with mere words.

CHAPTER ONE

Nature of language

> Thesis and antithesis—I. Generalities—II. What is a language?—III. The life of language—IV. The life of words—Synthesis

Thesis. The categories of language[7], languages[8] and dialects, even of simple words, if examined closely, are only abstractions with no external reality.

Antithesis. There exists a science of language, which takes as its object of study the phenomena of the life of language, that is, the life of languages and the life of words.

1. Generalities

There is no language: there are only words.

There are not even words: there are only vocal utterances, which strike the air and awaken a meaning in our minds. That meaning is more or less clear at the precise moment when the utterances are produced. But an instant later, independently of the trace they manage to leave in our ear or our memory, the utterances cease to exist along with the vibrations which served as their vehicle. In the same way does lightning strike and disappear. The retina can retain its image, our consciousness can keep a memory of it, a snapshot can try to fix its impression; but it passes and nothing more.

The leaf is a well-known and universally accepted botanical category. Yet in nature there is no leaf, only 'leaves' in an indefinite number, and each leaf from the same oak tree, dead, living or yet to be born, has its distinct individuality. In the same way, the word *leaf* exists as such only in a dictionary, or as the sign of an idea in our mind. In reality, there are as many words *leaf* as the number of times this monosyllable has been and will be pronounced, by all speakers in the entire course of generations of the English language. For, each time, a new muscular effort is required in order to utter it, brought about by a conscious effort of the will; and never, in spite of this consciousness and in spite of all appearances, will the results of this effort be absolutely identical. Just as two leaves from the same oak will never be exactly alike, I could not pronounce the same word twice in a row without an unconscious and imperceptible difference.

The word, from the articulatory point of view, is nothing other than an abstraction[9] from all the vocal utterances, actual or possible, of all speakers, past, present and future, who have felt or will feel the need to communicate to someone else the notion which it expresses. And the language, in its turn, is only the imaginary sum of these multiple abstractions, including the relations capable of binding them to one another, which are equally abstract. In brief, there is no French language, any more than there is somewhere a physical person incarnating the French Republic, sexual selection or nature's abhorrence of a vacuum.

These considerations, however banal they may appear with a bit of reflection, will not fail to surprise those minds terrified by theoretical speculation. A science does not usually debut by declaring itself without an object. Doesn't physics admit that its 'natural forces' are only abstractions in which it envelops its ignorance? Chemistry that it doesn't know whether or not there are atoms? Mechanics that it makes no pretense of resolving the eternal enigma of motion, or even of affirming that motion exists? Every one of these lofty disciplines reposes on a primordial abstraction, yet none admits at its base an abstraction more familiar to everyone, less contested and, for that very reason, more deceptive than that of language. Since specialists have failed to penetrate sufficiently through the inanity of the terms they are forced to use, they substitute words for ideas, and, each of them, playing on words, innocently pulls the train of consequences along the track of an inflexible logic. They roll side by side and cannot join; each reasons rightly, and all are in error. From this arises, among scholars first of all—I do not speak of fantasizers, who still abound in this blissful anarchy—these controversies as heated as they are empty, which take away precious time from their discoveries (not that this is such a great loss), and these irresolvable misunderstandings which separate the Bopps and the Schlegels,[10] the Max Müllers and the Whitneys,[11] over an entire lifetime of common

efforts. Now, the only recourse against the tyranny of words is the careful analysis of ideas. If there is no language, if there are no words, what right do we have to speak of words and language in the pages which follow? And what meaning is the reader to attach to these symbols?

II. What is a language?

Let us take at random a Persian or a Hindu, a Ukrainian muzhik, an oxherd from Unterwald, a Neapolitan thief, a peasant woman from Finistère who knows barely a word of French—there are still some[12]—a worker from Chicago, a Peruvian planter. Let us put them all in the same room. We know in advance that they will understand each other only through gestures, and that even a polyglot will not understand whichever of their languages happens not to be in his repertoire. And yet, if we know anything else undeniable in advance, anything admissable without a shadow of a doubt by anyone who has merely skimmed the first elements of Indo-European linguistics, it is that—putting aside such isolated borrowings as the Persian's ancestors may have taken from Arabic, the Russian's from the Tartar languages, the Peruvian's from Quechua—*they all speak the same language.*[13]

They do not suspect it, and, even were they to live ten years under the same roof, they would never perceive it. At most they might grasp some resemblances in their ways of expressing themselves that are superficial and, in most cases, specious. The only way they could enter into communication would be to learn the others' languages, and the most determined linguist would be hard pressed to advise them any better way. But when the Persian learns to speak Low Breton, he will have acquired only a means of expression, and not an additional language, since Low Breton and Persian are essentially one. Yes, in all these languages from the four corners of the world, with no apparent link, spoken by people whose intellectual heritage seems to contain nothing in common, everything, deep down, is identical: the vocabulary, the grammatical system, all the way to the order which presides over the succession of words and, in a contrary motion, commands the linkage of ideas.

Now, to reinforce the contrast, let us take two native-born Parisians of the same age, social class, and level of education, who stop on the sidewalk to chat. They understand what each other is saying before they've even finished saying it; no nuance, no implication escapes them, and the sentence is barely begun before it calls forth the expected response. Now, don't rush to cry out at the paradox—it's only a point of view that is changing, so fleeting is the nomenclature and so inept for reproducing the reality of the facts—but these twin brothers *do not speak the same language.*

Listen to them: the dissonances, which even the best-trained ear may not pick up, do not fail to leave their traces on a more sensitive apparatus. One brother lightly sounds a mute *e* that the other drops entirely; one pronounces his *r* with a slight rolling of the tongue or the throat, while the other stifles the vibration as it begins.[14] Observe them: misunderstandings, impossible in the dull subject matter of everyday conversation, would become readily apparent as soon as they got onto some more elevated, less banal topic. This or that word does not have precisely the same meaning value[15] for both. The notion it expresses is wider for one, narrower for the other, with a nuance of admiration, pity, or disdain for one that the other does not recognize. Imperceptible differences at present, but with serious consequences in the future. It is only a matter of a mute *e* being more or less pushed, an *r* more or less vibrant, lips more or less closed, which makes today's Berliner pronounce the number four as /fiə/ (*vier*), whereas in French it is /kat/ (*quatre*).

And it is through a succession of infinitesimal nuances that one same syllable has ended up in French and English respectively with the two opposite meanings of *sat-isfait* ('satisfied') and *sad.*

In other words, if we mentally separate our two Parisians—if we take them out of their environment, and let them go start families in distant climes, in a time in which there existed neither railways nor shipping nor newspapers—who can doubt that when the vague traits which first gave individuality to their languages are transmitted to their descendants, they will increase generation by generation at the expense of the apparent unity? The *r*, more and more vibrated, pronounced finally with the extreme point of the tongue, will lose itself in an indistinct lisp, and the other *r*, less and less vibrated, pronounced finally deep in the throat, will be reduced to a kind of laryngeal gargle, so that the word *rare*, for example, will become something like /lɛ1/ in the first case, and /ha/ in the other. An expression favored by one of the subjects, which the other hardly ever used, will have disappeared in one place, while in the other it is so frequent that it has multiplied by imitation, giving rise to hundreds of analogous expressions. A simple word, like *sincere*—independently of changes in form which may have made it unrecognizable—might signify 'pious' or 'enthusiastic' to the descendants of the serious man, and 'idiotic' to the descendants of the ironist. If these two separated clans should come to meet after five generations of total isolation, they would still notice that their languages are fundamentally the same and would soon have things sorted out. At ten, fifteen, twenty generations of distance, depending on the speed of the evolution, they would still be able to detect an obscure relationship, but would not understand one another without effort. Beyond that, darkness, and the two subjects brought together will feel as foreign to one another as our Persian and Peruvian did a little while ago—if they have not kept any documentation of the past of their race, as no prehistoric population nor any contemporary savages have done.

And yet, if it is absolutely certain that the *supposedly different* speech of one group is already entirely contained (at least potentially) in the *supposedly identical* speech of the other group, one might be tempted to ask at what precise moment the two separated tribes ceased speaking the same language. But that is as unanswerable a question in its naïve subtlety as it is to know at what moment a man losing his hair becomes bald.—At the moment, one might say, when they have ceased to understand one another.—The limit is only imaginary and oscillates over a period of several centuries. What is more, people who do not understand one another right away can come to do so through reflection and with the help of some mental education. Two educated men, one Welsh, the other Breton, by means of carefully articulating their words and listening carefully, can converse together on simple subjects. But I doubt that one could say the same of a sailor from Paimpol and a shepherd from Glamorgan. Do these people, then, speak the same language or not? Only one point is indisputable: their respective ancestors had the same speech, if we go back beyond ten generations. As for fixing the epoch when this changed, speaking of the death of common Brittonic or the birth of Welsh and Breton, again, this would be playing with words, attributing life to clouds. Words are very docile, and clouds take all the forms the wind gives them. The problem is that there is nothing constant about them, and all contradictories are true in scientific inductions constructed with words.

Obviously, the confusion would lessen if we agreed to reserve the term 'languages' for the grand linguistic units which are irreducible, or at least have remained so until now—Greek, for example, relative to Hebrew, or Persian relative to Turkish—if it were possible to break with received habits just enough to denote simply as 'dialects' all the differences,

small or large, which have been produced and are still being produced under our noses within a particular linguistic unit. Then—if it were well understood, on the one hand, that there exist as many Parisian dialects as there are Parisians endowed with speech (excluding only deaf-mutes, total aphasics and suckling babes), and on the other hand, that Persian, German, Italian, Breton and a hundred other varieties are themselves only dialects, indefinitely differentiated from one and the same primitive language, no less unitary in its time than Parisian seems in ours—then, I submit, the objective notion of the infinity of speakers could completely replace the empty abstraction of 'language'. The phenomena of which this word is only the symbol and rough container would then appear in its true light, and we would begin to understand that linguistics, while it operates most of the time on the mummified documents of the past for lack of anything better, has as its goal the study of a complex ensemble of living realities; that its object, always changing, nevertheless remains always identical to itself; and that it (linguistics) has the right to posit as existing in the past only those phenomena it has observed and noted in the present.

But, after all, what matters are not words, but clear ideas. And if words can clarify ideas, it is on the condition that they not shock established traditions too much. So let us continue—we have no choice—to speak of language, even though we know that there is no language, but only people who speak. Let us continue to speak of language families, of particular languages, of dialects, sub-dialects, patois, correct or incorrect pronunciation, provided that we understand in every case, beneath each of these words, a single latent meaning, the same for everyone: namely, in each of the irreducible units of language that science has provisionally established, an indefinite series of variations which get attenuated imperceptibly as one descends from the race to the nation, the province, the canton, the family and finally the individual—or rather which are parts of individual and initially imperceptible nuances of pronunciation and expression, and which are aggravated by circumstances until they end up at dialectal scission or even at linguistic isolation. Without this synthetic view, the richest memory and the most varied polyglottism could not make a linguist; and the linguist who lets it slip from view for a single second—which unfortunately is all too easy to do—is surprised to find that he is pursuing the *chimaera bombinans in vacuo*.[16] How many thick books have had their best intentions devoured by that Rabelaisian monster!

III. The life of language

I have spoken of 'language' and I have just spoken of 'life', but obviously in such a manner that the two terms absolutely exclude each other. For, if language is not, then *a fortiori* it is not living. All there is that lives are people who speak. However the metaphor of the 'life of language' is still accepted in many domains, and the time is not distant when it will be seen more and more clearly as being only a metaphor. Nothing would be more childish than to go to war against a rhetorical figure, and, in truth, 'the life of language' is an association of words as legitimate and no less elegant than 'the ship of State' or 'the arm of the law'. All that can be asked of it is to remain inoffensive, by ceasing to have itself taken literally. What is needed is a good definition.[17]

To say that language evolves is to say that the various generations of individuals speaking a given language are actually bound, for reasons deduced above, to speak an idiom particular to each, more or less different depending on the distance from which one examines them. It is as much as to say, for example, that François Rabelais (*ca* 1483–*ca* 1553) would have had a hard time being understood by Robert the Pious

(*ca* 970–1081), and that the Sorbonne of today would not understand him much better. To say that language lives is to express exactly the same idea, with a nuance of precious conciseness, seductive perhaps, and in any case ambiguous. What evolves is not necessarily endowed with life—it could scarcely be otherwise, since life is only an accident of general evolution. The earth has changed a great deal since it flared up from the primal matter, and no one has ever managed to speak other than poetically about the 'life of the earth', at least before the day some living parasite began breaking through her old frozen crust. Yet the earth has the incontestable advantage over language of existing, of being a planet observed in space and a necessary support for our feet, whereas language is nothing without us, nothing outside us, nothing in itself but an abstract idea, and a useful term for designating a synthesis of phenomena. To endow this abstraction with life is already enormous; but, under the pretext that it has been endowed with life, to want to locate in it the essential and distinctive characteristics of life—birth, growth, assimilation, death, what finally constitutes a living organism—that is simply to adorn the dryness of scientific observation with the graces of style. Otherwise, it is to understand nothing about such observation.

A language is not born, or at least we have never seen one born. If we do not know by what slow work the first proto-human managed to set the faculty of speech in operation, we can glimpse enough to gauge with certainty that this gestation is unrelated to the laws of embryogeny. As for the languages which fall within our observation, there is not one which has been born. The child is a distinct being from its parents, whereas a so-called 'daughter' language is nothing other than the so-called 'mother' language having descended a few degrees on the scale of time. The creole of Reunion is seventeenth-century French, French is rustic Latin, Latin is Indo-European that emigrated to Italy, each with the transformations and deformations imposed on them by a long series of speakers, who varied in how faithful they were to the traditions of their parents. Latin appears dead to us, for the simple reason that we would no longer be understood by Cicero (106–43 BC) if we spoke French to him. But he could have understood Quintilian (*ca* AD 35–100), Quintilian could have understood Lactantius (*ca* AD 240–320), Lactantius could have understood Gregory of Tours (538–594), and Gregory could have understood the unknown clerk who transcribed the Oaths of Strasbourg in 842. Where then does Latin end? Where does French begin? And who can speak, other than figuratively, of 'the birth of French'?

A language does not grow. The new words with which its vocabulary is incessantly enriched owe their existence only to the individual initiative of one or more speakers, to an intellectual process undoubtedly infinitely less conscious than it is usually represented,[18] but which in any case has nothing in common with the organic and necessary laws of germination and growth. No one, so far as I know, has yet said *a bicyclable path*; however, if the need made itself felt, it is possible that someone might end up saying it. It could even be that one day the Academy would enter this precious acquisition in its dictionary. Now, once the word is pronounced or written, one does not have to be a genius to recognize the facile creation of a professional or an amateur who, thinking of the relationship of *truck* and *truckable*, and wishing to transport it to his machine, would likewise have modeled **bicyclable* on *bicycle*. No one, I think, would have thought, like Schlegel,[19] to imagine that **bicyclable* might be the blossoming of *bicycle* as the flower is of the plant.[20] Yet it is from these visionary conceptions that linguistics emerged. Yes, thank God, it has emerged from them, in every sense.

The essential property of living beings is that they assimilate certain matters foreign to their substance and eliminate the wastes of the assimilatory work. It would be superfluous to

point out that the latter function has no equivalent in language.[21] As for the first, we could note without difficulty that French, for example, has assimilated a certain number of English words. What does that mean? In actual fact, one of two things has happened: either an object invented in England (something *self-acting*, for example) was imported and imitated in France, and its name very naturally traveled with it; or a Frenchman who knew English, speaking to another who had at least a few notions of it, used an English word (*spleen*, *humour*, *snob*) to express a nuance that their own language could not express with the same precision, after which the word was repeated, spread, popularized by literature, to the point where it was more or less understood by everyone with an average education. There is no difficulty in imagining either case, but neither is there any resemblance to the exercise of an organic function of assimilation.

A language does not die. A language can escape from human memory: the parrot of the Atures,[22] sole survivor of his tribe, took with him the secret of his idiom's last syllables; the descendents of the Gauls speak French, which is as much as to say that they learned Latin and unlearned Gaulish. A language can be transformed, in which case it continues to exist, since it has done no more than change imperceptibly from century to century. Latin is not dead, since there are still people who speak Portuguese, Spanish, French, Italian, Rhetian and Romanian. More precisely, to stay consistent with the objective point of view we have been maintaining since the beginning, a language dies each time a speaker dies, and one is born each time a child begins to speak. But this observation—to wit, that we are all mortal—throws no light on what is meant by the commonplace of the life of language.

A language has no age, in fact it is eternally young, being rethought and recreated by each new speaker. If it is absurd to suppose and impossible to conceive a moment when Latin died and French was born, it is no less so to depict, for example, the Latin of the fourth century as a worn-out language, depleted of sap, or simply 'aged' with relation to the Latin of Cicero or Ennius. Taking the double metaphor to its conclusion would give rise to the paradoxical consequence that a language would begin to give birth the day on which it fell into decrepitude. All we can say is that the French of the St Eulalia sequence is five centuries later than the Latin of Commodianus, which is just as far from the Latin of Virgil—that, and nothing more. For to suppose that one is younger or older than the other would be like comparing the ages of John the Fearless and Henry IV. It is certainly true that John the Fearless was very old under Henry IV, but the interest of such an observation reduces to a chronological relationship. A language can vary from one century to another, become enriched or impoverished, precise or heavy. But no childhood can be distinguished in which it is formed, no maturity in which it remains stationary, no old age when it is deformed, since each generation—I mean, each speaker—forms it and deforms it simultaneously, and always by processes which remain identical to themselves across its entire history. To imagine anything else, and in particular to reconstruct mentally a 'period of pure roots' (under the pretext that a linguist needs 'roots', abstract categories which allow him to classify words), then one of 'suffixes', coming to attach themselves to the root as though with molecular affinity, or leaving it like the branch of a plant root—and so on, even to the point of imagining in the underlying layers of language some phenomenon or other that is not directly observable in its current flowerings—all this is to suppose some mythical time when man spoke other than with his glottis, and thought other than with his brain.

Thus, not one of the functions which constitute life actually applies to language, and the best reason for this, the one which sums up all the rest, is the one formulated at the outset:

language does not live, because it is not. Does this however mean that one must forbid oneself or others to use the phrase 'life of language'? Again, no, not if one takes words at their actual value. We speak of the life of a society, of a political or social institution, a religion, and no one has any illusion about the value of these metaphors. A religion is not born, since it only fixes into dogmas the elements of confused religiosity which exist prior to it, and it does not die, for nothing is more tenacious than a supposedly vanished belief. Finally, and above all, there is no religion, there are only people who believe or practice. Yet nothing prevents the coming together and falling apart of the diverse elements of a religious organism from being imagined as a birth and death, and taking on all their characteristics allegorically. And sticking to the same kind of example, the disintegration of the Latin declensional system and the crystallization of the prepositional periphrasis which replaced it furnishes a line of demarcation sufficiently neat and clear-cut that we can certainly be allowed to speak of the death of Latin and the birth of French—figuratively, neglecting the complex details, and on the condition of abstracting away the long centuries of infinitely slow movement which produced this radical transformation.

In view of this kind of simplification and abstraction—and particularly of the inevitable (or at least likely) passage of every language (so long as it is exempt from foreign influences and not impeded in its development) through the three successive states of monosyllabicity, agglutination, and inflection, with a final return to monosyllabicity and an indefinite reprise of the same cycle—Abel Hovelacque could very legitimately entitle one of the paragraphs of his book on linguistics 'the life of languages'.[23] Chinese, for example, is monosyllabic: not a word of it ever varies, and the relations of gender, number, tense, mood, person, whatever they may be (inasmuch as it is indispensable to indicate them) are each expressed, not by a modification of the word itself or by an ending adapted to it, but by a distinct word marked by an independent sign. But, by the very fact that there is a principal word expressing the idea and accessory words which modify it—what the native grammarians ingeniously call the 'full word' and the 'empty words'—there is already in Chinese, at least virtually, the same elements which we call 'root' and 'suffixes' in the agglutinating or inflecting languages. No doubt Chinese would have long since passed to the so-called agglutinative phase were it not precisely that its writing, which demands a special character for each principal or accessory word, did not hold it back in the monosyllabic phase, much more in appearance than in reality. Inversely, English, which descends from a language rich in inflections, has hardly any left: a much weakened possessive, a plural, two endings for person, that is about all. The rest is expressed by means of accessory words, and it takes three, *in the house*, to equal the single Sanskrit word *damê* or the Latin *domi*. Moreover, the vocabulary, except for long words of learned origin borrowed artificially from French, Latin or Greek, is nearly as monosyllabic as that of Chinese. We can say, then, in considering for each language only its structure and current morphological tendencies, that Chinese is in the progressive phase, English in the regressive phase, and here too we have metaphors borrowed from life.

We may observe, in passing, that this entirely naturalistic classification carries no prejudices concerning elegance or clarity of the means of expression. English and French, which have hardly any inflection left, are undoubtedly as beautiful and certainly as clear as German, which still possesses declension and rather complete conjugation, or as Sanskrit, the grammatical opulence of which discourages so many beginners.[24,25] It would be no less a mistake to assume that either simplicity or complexity holds at the beginning or the decline of a language, since a language has neither beginning nor end. The Bantu

languages of southern and central Africa, which show us a state of intellectual culture markedly inferior to that of even the least civilized European populations, abound with a multitude of nominal and verbal prefixes, correlated with each other and indispensable to the clarity of the discourse. It seems one's head would explode in trying to retain the smallest part of the mechanism which these excellent savages use with ease to express their rudimentary ideas. And it is well known what a great philologist has said about Basque: 'They say they understand one another amongst themselves; but personally, I don't believe it.' Nor does analyticity, whatever is commonly thought about it, necessarily guarantee precision of language. The already very abstruse ideas of Hindu philosophy appear to us even more so, indeed completely unintelligible, when they are transferred into the impossible monosyllabic jargon of the Celestial Empire, the only guise in which a Chinese brain can assimilate them. No less than birth and death of a language, vulgarity and elegance, heaviness and beauty, clarity and chaos, progess and decline, are wholly subjective terms. The common measure against which we unconsciously weigh all our linguistic acquisitions is still the legitimate ideal of the philologists, this admirable Greek language with which we were nourished in childhood yet which the next generation will not learn. What is beneath it we call imperfection, and what passes beyond it, decadence; and so strong are our mental habits that we must somehow get detached from ourselves in order to be persuaded that Attic or Hebrew is after all only one stage in the universal language, interesting in itself certainly, but no more so than Chiapaneco or Beauceron.[26]

But before this digression takes us too far, let us return to our outline of the evolution of language. Consider a language in its monosyllabic period: each word, full or empty, is an invariable syllable, and it is in putting the syllables in order one after the other, like the beads of a rosary, that we come to express the relationship of ideas. Undoubtedly the relational syllable was once an independent element that signified on its own. Today it is no longer anything in the isolated state; but when attached to a signifying syllable, the relational syllable takes on a new value and attributes it to the signifying syllable, just as in our numerical system zero is treated as a cipher. Then, little by little, the relational syllables, being less accentuated or pronounced more rapidly, come to join the signifying syllable, to make up a single articulatory group with it. This is henceforth perceived by the speaker as the basic and indivisible unit of the language, a word, a long word in which each syllable nevertheless keeps its own individuality, like the Hungarian *halhatatlanságomai* = 'my immortality' (object case). The syllable *hal* means 'die', and the other suffixes come one by one to add their value to the fundamental idea.[27] This is the agglutinative phase. Again under the influence of the accent, the suffixes thus grouped blend more and more into each other and into the fundamental syllable. With changes in pronunciation possibly added in as well, these various parts of the articulatory group get mixed and react on one another until they become nearly unrecognizable, as in the Latin word *sodālitātibus*, where only the most careful analysis—if even that!—can determine the precise role of each syllable by mentally undoing their intimate cohesion. This is the phase called inflection. But in spite of the holy trinity our linguistic textbooks present to beginners, it is not the endpoint for language, since language has no end.[28]

Again under the same influences, the endings of words weaken and fall, long words shorten at their endings and in the middle, reduce to two syllables or just one: Late Latin *paraveredus* ends up as German *Pferd* 'horse'. From then on it becomes more and more useful, then necessary, to introduce into the preposition some new auxiliary which indicates the relationship of the word to its neighbors, since the endings for gender, number or

case have become indistinct: so what in Latin was *paraveredō* is in German *dem Pferd(e)*. In other words, the language has become ripe for a new phase of monosyllabicity, which will lead to a new agglutinative stage; and so on *ad infinitum*. Far from the theoretical monosyllabicity of present-day Chinese showing us the primitive state of language, beneath it are perhaps twenty permanently inaccessible underlying layers of linguistic evolution, each in three stages. It is as presumptuous to think, with Schleicher, that human language began with monosyllabicity, as it is to teach, with Sayce, that it began with the sentence.[29] The truth is that we know nothing about it and never shall. Where does a circumference begin or end? If therefore it is this always rebegun cycle, this serpentine movement repeating its orbits indefinitely, that one wishes to call 'the life of language', I support it. All that matters is that we understand one another. Reduced thus to its true value, the term is short, convenient, even pictureseque, and completely harmless.

IV. The life of words

Some have also talked about 'the life of words', and this new formula, equivalent in appearance to the preceding but ultimately very different, at least claims a powerful authority: Arsène Darmesteter (1846–1888) chose it as the title of a minor masterpiece[30] of precision, method and elegance, in which he traced the laws governing the changes of meaning of words, their birth, their death, and the manifold accidents which make the dictionary of each language the moving and living image of the instability of the human mind. This book has been universally admired, but many an admirer has criticized its title as betraying a biological prejudice. Whether because the same presupposition infuses my own early work, or through a heartfelt conviction that this criticism rests on a mere misunderstanding, I have always refused to accept this too summary judgment. It is therefore incumbent on me to show here how the word can 'live', after having remarked that it is not. I recognize that this contradiction is no more difficult than the apparent paradox of the life of language. Insofar as it is true that the word, as a part of discourse and a phenomenon of language, is only a fleeting sonority which dies as it is born and has existence only at the precise moment when it is spoken, it is equally certain that the word, as the sign of a concept and as a mental phenomenon, is a permanent reality, which lives on the very life of the thinking subject of which it is an integral part.

Language, in whatever circumstances, presupposes the intimate and inseparable association of a concept and a sign designated to represent it.[31] The same is true even of silent thought to a very large extent, at least under the conditions in which it is produced today and which hundreds of centuries of spoken thought have created for it in the human subject. For the moment it does not matter which preceded the other.[32] They both exist, respond to one another, and are joined so closely in the brain which thinks them, that they appear to be one single thing. Each time a mentally sound speaker wants to communicate the concept to another, the sign comes, on its own, to his command. Even silently evoked, the one will never go without the other, since thought is an interior speech. We speak our meditation, we speak our most unconfessable desires, we speak our nocturnal dreams, and behind closed lips, there is an uninterrupted monologue—a dialogue if the self is multiple—which, from birth to death, goes on incessantly in each of our brains.[33] How then can we escape the conclusion that the word, as the sign of a conscious representation and a conscious representation itself, participates in the life of cerebral cells—cells whose life consists precisely and exclusively in the molecular and chemical modifications which make this indefinite series of representations possible?

I can foresee being accused of faulty reasoning. 'The cell lives', someone might object, 'and the concept is the phenomenon through which its life manifests itself. But the concept itself does not live'. Purely a quibble over words. Following the unknown modifications which are necessarily produced within the living substance of the cell, if the concept with which the cell is imprinted gets modified in its turn, the affliction suffered by the concept together with the word which represents it must also be an affliction biological in nature. If it is correct to speak of the death of a cell, for example in the brain of an amnesiac or an aphasic, it is equally correct to recognise the death of the concept or word whose imprint it contained. In fact we have no proof of the death of a brain cell other than the death of the concept or word, since only the latter can be observed directly. Ultimately, as Darmesteter wrote to me in response to the article I devoted to his book,[34] 'how the force which animates matter puts it to work is identical to how the force of the mind animates the spoken signs of our thought'. Or as he put it in his book (p. 176): 'mind and matter are simply two aspects of one single, eternally unknowable force: Being'.

If I have made myself understood, perhaps now the reader will glimpse the gulf which I believe separates those two seemingly identical expressions, 'life of language' and 'life of words'. The first is only a metaphor, useful so long as it is not deceptive, implying the synthesis of a thousand tiny facts which are the concern of linguistics properly speaking. The second is a truth of a general order, a metaphysical postulate, whose particular applications have essentially to do with psycho-physiology.

Some examples, chosen for their simplicity and appropriateness, will illustrate this fundamental distinction.

The fact that the words which were *cabállum* ('horse') and *cabállos* ('horses') in Latin two thousand years ago are *cheval* and *chevaux* in French today is a problem of pure linguistics. It is foreign to the life of words, for the sole and decisive reason—which cannot be repeated often enough—that *cabállum* and *chevál*, *cabállos* and *cheváux* are in reality the same word. To be sure, a physiological cause must have brought about the difference in pronunciation over the centuries. But we can make an abstraction of this cause, we can even ignore it—as in fact we do—with little consequence: the change of *ca* to *che*, of *b* to *v*, of the group *als* to *aus*, will remain no less a constant fact, sufficient in itself, capable of being generalized, translated into a scientific law and as such taking its place in a body of doctrine. The body of doctrine concerned, phonetics by name, therefore has nothing to do with the life of words.

The speaker who two thousand years ago said indifferently *caballum* for 'the horse' and 'a horse' came little by little to the absolute necessity of saying *illum caballum* in the first case and *unum caballum* in the second. Obviously, this was the result of a mental operation and a logical process, ones so simple that they scarcely need to be pointed out. Here the mental phenomenon, although unconscious, seems superficial: it is not even a problem, just a pure observation. We can go further: when in our time a working-class speaker says *vous faisez* for *vous faites* 'you do', when in the middle ages the popular language adopts *vous courez* for *vous keurtes* = Latin *cúrritis* 'you run', all this is by imitation of the usual and regular forms *vous mangez* 'you eat', *vous marchez* 'you walk', etc. Again the life of words is in no way at issue. Undoubtedly, *courez* is not exactly the same word as *cúrritis*, but it is the same as **currátis*,[35] and **currátis*—deduced as the logically rigorous solution to the mental equation *sálto: saltátis* = *curro*: *x* —[36] had nothing impossible about it in the Latin language, even though the ancient Romans did not create it. What can we say about it? Medieval speakers created it, because it defies good sense

that at least once over the long life of Latin, a form so easily invented was never ventured by a child or an illiterate, whom someone quickly corrected.[37] Here then it is strictly a question of grammar. It can be much more complex than in the very simple cases chosen here by way of illustration. But whatever facts may be observed or supposed, the operation they depend upon will be a matter of common sense. Explanations of the phenomenon, whether easy or difficult, clear or obscure, convincing or unconvincing, at least will never have recourse to the still unexplored arcana of psychological consciousness.[38] In short, morphology too is sufficient unto itself and avoids entering into the mystery of the life of language.

Here now is where the problem takes on a new aspect.

Two thousand years ago, every Latin speaker said *equos* 'horse' and *equa* 'mare'. The two terms corresponded like *bonus/bona* ('good', masculine and feminine respectively), and the whole force of inertia coming from the analogical structure of language,[39] like the whole logical force of the speaker, should have tended to maintain this correlation. Nothing of the sort: a thousand years later, *equos* disappeared, and French replaced it in common usage with another, equally Latin word, *caballus*, which had become *chevals*. Yet it continued to keep the feminine form *equa*, which had become *ive*. Just as Spanish today has *caballo* and *yegua*, French in the eleventh century had *chevals* and *ive*, which no longer show any trace of the former relationship, nor of any relationship for that matter. We can go further: the word *ive* in turn disappeared. A Latin word of the neuter gender, hence masculine in French, *jumentum* (pronounced *jument*), meaning 'beast of burden' in general, became specialised toward the twelfth century (Joinville) for the very specific meaning of 'female horse'. It consequently passed to the feminine gender, which is no less discordant with its ancient etymology than with its current form, since there is not a single other feminine French word ending in *-ment*. Two monstrosities piled on top of one another! In the sixteenth century, finally, the learned language tried, through a borrowing from Italian, to reconstitute the correlation which had so unfortunately been erased. It paired the masculine *cheval* with a feminine *cavale*, which penetrated literature extensively (appearing in the *Mesnagerie* of La Boétie [1530–1563]), but remained foreign to common usage. To summarize: two terms whose relationship was manifest and rudimentary are today entirely lost, and French has replaced them with two terms whose relationship is only accidental and artificial. It is accurate to say that between the first and the twelfth centuries of the Christian era, *equos* and *equa* died, and *cheval* and *jument* were born; for the first two no longer represent any concept, and the latter two, which previously represented different concepts, today represent, as substitutes, concepts which without them could not be expressed in the language.

How are such changes possible and conceivable? Logic should have tended to conserve the relationship *equos*: *equa* and to spread the relationship *cheval*: *cavale*; yet it is the abnormal relationship *cheval*: *jument* which definitively carried the day. Thus it is no longer a matter of simple facts which are easily accessible and translatable into syllogisms or formulas of mathematical equations, but of obscure, arduous facts hidden in the most intimate depths of the life of the mind. It would have required a partial amnesia striking the majority of speakers,[40] so that they momentarily forgot the word *equos* while remembering the word *equa*, which they would later forget in the form *ive*—forgetting too that a 'beast of burden' is not necessarily a horse, let alone a female horse, and that they had been taught to say *un bon jument* (masculine) and inventing from thin air the new agreement *une bonne jument* (feminine). If someone should object that they did not 'forget' the

words or agreement but rather did not learn them, this is merely to shift the question. For if the preceding generation did not transmit them to them, it is because they themselves had forgotten them. At any given moment in time, we must suppose an inexplicable break in continuity in the transmission of the spoken language in order for substitutions like these to have taken place contrary to all tradition and all logic; and this break in continuity implies the biological transformation or death of the portion of cerebral substance in which was imprinted the association of concepts which constitutes what we call the expressive value[41] of a word. And finally, since this substance is living, there is not a moment's doubt that such association and dissociation of concepts are particular forms of life.[42]

By life I mean organic life, but not conscious life. For it is recognised today that consciousness is an accessory pheonomenon which is superposed on life without necessarily accompanying it. In the case at hand, I should hardly need to point out that consciousness has played no role in the diverse processes which we have analysed, were I not obliged to insist from this point forward on a truth for which the evidence will be presented below,[43] namely that language is the putting to work of a complex system of unconscious forces.

In sum, over the ten to twenty centuries that the known history of French allows us to embrace, here is what happened:

The words *equos* ('horse') and *ive* ('mare', = *equa*) died. The association which had been established between the representation of these words and the representation of the objects 'horse' and 'mare' was broken with no possible restoration in the mind of a speaker which had previously contained them. There we really do have the death of a part (however infinitesimal) of the speaker's cerebral substance.

The word *jument* ('mare') was born—not anew as a vocal sound, since it already existed as such in Latin *jumentum* and French *jument* (both meaning 'beast of burden')—but, what is more important, as an association of concepts. For on the one hand it became associated with concepts of sexuality, intercourse and birth which had been utterly foreign to it, while on the other hand it lost the general meaning of 'beast of burden' which had previously been attached to it. This double evolution simultaneously presupposes the death of those parts of the organism where certain correlations were located, and the development of new biological elements capable of recording new correlations.

What is true of the word *jument* in the twelfth century is also true, though to a lesser degree, of the word *caballus* towards the fourth century. Although this word already signified 'horse', it did so in a less general way than *equos*, and one can imagine it taking on, generation by generation, all the life which *equos* was slowly losing.

For it goes without saying that this birth or death of words is accompanied by all the phenomena of incubation, growth and decline which precede organic birth and death, since the atomic particles of an organism which they involve cannot be born by spontaneous generation, nor die without gradual perishing.

Thus I hope to have shown that the expression 'life of words', used in the literal sense to designate the phenomena of obsolescence and change of meaning that words undergo, is entirely justified.

Synthesis.

1. Language, whether designating the general faculty of speaking or the exercise of this faculty—respectively what the Greeks called ἐνέργεια (energeia) and ἔργον (ergon)—[44] is, in both cases, a pure abstraction with no exterior reality.

2. It follows that the life of a language is a simple fiction of the mind, but—healthily understood—a licit fiction and a useful term for representing the ensemble of phonetic

and grammatical variations observed or inferred in every language in the course of its existence.

3. The word, as a vocal utterance, is either an expiratory breath no sooner produced than vanished, or else itself a vain shadow, a pure abstraction, the fictive synthesis of all the vocal utterances, past or future, real or possible, that it represents.

4. But the word, as a spoken sign of our thought, is a psychological reality, intermittent only for the conscious state, but permanent and living in the furthest depths of the unconscious ego.

5. It follows that the life of words, as signs of concepts and concepts themselves, is not at all a fiction, but a fact, a psychological or even a psycho-physiological fact, and not the least important aspect of human life.

NOTES

[1]My translation. Original: 'La tentation est grand... de faire de V. Henry le précurseur de F. de Saussure (ce que note au passage R. Jakobson) au sens où l'exposé d'un savoir organisé en linguistique serait rendu possible par cet examen des conditions de légitimité d'une linguistique générale que réaliserait [*sic*] les *Antinomies linguistiques*'.

[2]My translation. Original: 'Dans ses *Antinomies linguistiques* (p. 59 et suiv.), Victor Henry a établi une distinction entre le langage transmis ou naturel, qui fonctionne et évolue sans que les sujets parlants en aient conscience, et le langage acquis et artificiel, où la réflexion et la volonté jouent le principal rôle. Seul le langage transmis compte dans les destinées d'une langue; le second n'agit sur elle qu'en prenant les caractéres du premier: ainsi le mot *subjuguer*, emprunté consciemment au vocabulaire latin, est resté en marge du français jusqu'au moment où, employé inconsciemment, il a versé dans le langage transmis. Remarquons en passant que, en choisissant un emprunt pour donner une idée du langage acquis, Henry faisait un rapprochement dont il n'a pas saisi toute l'importance: nous y reviendrons plus loin.

'C'est la thèse générale de Henry qui sera discutée ici; mais il convient de remarquer d'abord qu'elle concorde avec l'idée qu'on a généralement d'une langue: l'usage constant qu'en font les sujets parlants les amène à penser qu'elle est un produit entièrement naturel, c'est-à-dire que, assimilée automatiquement, elle évolue selon des lois qui échappent à nos prises'. On the translations of *langage* and *langue*, see note 7 below. I have translated *langage acquis* as 'learned language' in order to avoid confusion with a reinvention of Henry's distinction popularized in applied linguistics since the 1970s, in which the passively and unconsciously assimilated *langage transmis* is called 'acquired language', and the actively and consciously assimilated *langage acquis* is called 'learned language' (see further Joseph, 1991). On the use of the terms 'natural' and 'artificial' across the history of language theory, see Joseph (1995).

[3]My translation. Original: '...au point de vue de la parole, tout ce qui est nouveau pour un individu, et, au point de vue de la langue, toute innovation qui pénètre dans un idiome par la voie des entendeurs, est de la nature de l'emprunt. Autrefois on appelait emprunts seulement les mots étrangers adoptés par une langue (...); on a étendu ce terme successivement aux éléments dialectaux qui passent dans la langue unifiée (...), puis aux mots des langues spéciales (jargons de métiers... etc) qui entrent dans l'usage général (...). Mais finalement il n'y a aucune différence de principe entre ces emprunts et ceux que la langue doit aux initiatives individuelles: l'adoption d'un cliché créé par un écrivain en vogue ne se fait pas d'une façon différente; et si un vulgaire lapsus échappé au premier venu passe dans l'usage, c'est encore de la même manière que cela se fait; un emprunt de la langue a toujours commencé par être un emprunt pour un ou plusieurs sujets entendants qui l'ont propagé en devenant parleurs à leur tour'.

[4]My translation. Original: 'Tout langage transmis semble naturel; tout langage appris apparaît comme artificiel...'.

[5]My translation. Original: 'Poco importa sapere donde i lavori del Circolo hanno ricevuto la concezione hegeliana della struttura del sistema e della sua dialettica. È alla scienza russa o, come risulta da un recente lavoro di Čiženskij, la tradizione di Hegel non ha mai avuto interruzioni ed è sempre stata produttiva? oppure anche qui la parte decisiva è stata quella della teoria del Saussure (in cui gli elementi della dottrina di Hegel sulle antinomie sono penetrati, come sembra, per mezzo delle *Antinomies linguistiques* del hegeliano V. Henry)?'

[6]Nor shall I speculate on the possible satisfaction Jakobson's vigorous ego may have taken from the fact that establishing *Antinomies linguistiques* as the starting point of modern linguistics would mean that the field and he share the same birthyear and 1996 centenary.

[7]*Langage*. Henry's use of the terms *langage* and *langue* (both of which translate into English as 'language', and correspond to different yet overlapping aspects of language) suggest that he was struggling with the same problems in sorting them out that Saussure would face, though unlike Saussure he does not attack the problems head on.

For the most part he uses *langage* to refer to a language as an abstract system, and *langue* to identify a particular language (French, English, etc.) or in contrast with 'dialect'. Saussure would use *langue* in both of these cases, reserving *langage* for the overall 'language faculty' that allows humans to speak, and for the sum total of *langue* and *parole*, the socially-shared language system and the speech which individuals produce by using it. When the context permits, I follow the lead of Roy Harris in his translation of Saussure, rendering *langage* as 'language' and *langue* as 'languages', though this works less well for Henry's distinction than for Saussure's (Translator's note).

[8]*Langue*, here in the commonplace sense of language as opposed to dialect. In Section II below (pp 127–128 [8–9]) Henry will propose extending the term 'dialect' to the level of the individual speaker, prefiguring what later structural linguists would term the 'idiolect'. He quickly retreats from the proposal, however (Translator's note).

[9]*Entité* 'entity', in its philosophical sense of 'an object considered as a being endowed with material consistency, yet whose objective existence is founded only on relationships' (*Petit Robert*) (Translator's note).

[10]Franz Bopp (1791–1867) famously refused to accept his older contemporary Friedrich von Schlegel's (1772–1829) characterization of Sanskrit as having internal inflection only, arguing instead that it has monosyllabic roots with suffixes and inflections. But much of Schlegel's theoretical framework rested precisely upon this characterization. For a summary of the dispute, see Verburg (1950 [1966, pp. 228–229])[22] (Translator's note).

[11]Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900) and William Dwight Whitney (1827–1894), the most famous linguists of late nineteenth-century England and America respectively, carried on a long-standing feud concerning many aspects of language and its relationship to both culture and evolution. A discussion of their dispute can be found in Seymour (1894 [1966, pp. 420–421]) (Translator's note).

[12]Finistère, in the extreme west of Brittany, continues to be one of the last areas in which Breton endures against the spread of French, though it is doubtful that any monolingual speakers now remain (Translator's note).

[13]All the individuals named are speakers of languages which have developed from the same prehistoric 'ancestral' language, Indo-European. The general nineteenth-century view, expressed most powerfully by Wilhelm von Humboldt (1836), is that a language is defined essentially by its historical origin. Since Persian, Russian, English and the rest share a common ancestor, they share a common essence, which means that they are 'essentially' the same language by this view.—With regard to Quechua, note that an early publication of Henry's was devoted to debunking a claim that it is an Indo-European language (Henry, 1878a) (Translator's note).

[14]The *e muet* (mute *e*) is not usually sounded in standard spoken French, so that the word spelled *langue* is pronounced /lãg/ with no vowel corresponding to the letter *e*. But a slightly rounded schwa is sounded (/lãgœ/) in poetry, song, and classical theater, in conversation for stylistic effect, and in southern speech. The pronunciation of French *r* continues to vary widely; the two to which Henry refers are the dental flap or trill common in rural varieties in certain regions, and the uvular trill traditionally associated with 'vulgar' Parisian pronunciation (Translator's note).

[15]*Valeur de signification*: cf. Saussure's discussion of 'value' and 'meaning' in the *Cours*, pp. 158ff. Henry refers in Section 4 below (p. xxx [22] and note 41) to *la valeur significative* 'expressive value' of words, which he defines as the association of concepts imprinted in brain cells. It is not clear whether this term is meant to be synonymous with *valeur de signification* (Translator's note).

[16]'Quæstio subtilissima, utrum chimæra in vacuo bombinans possit comedere secundas intentiones' ('A most subtle question: whether a chimera buzzing in a vacuum can devour second intentions')—François Rabelais, *Pantagruel*, Book 2, Ch. 7 (Translator's note).

[17]The radical powerlessness of metaphor and the perpetual danger it poses to clear ideas have perhaps never been expressed better than in this passage by George Eliot (*The Mill on the Floss*, I): 'It was doubtless an ingenious idea to call the camel the ship of the desert, but it would hardly lead one far in training that useful beast.' See the entire passage (Author's note).

[18]This point will be taken up in Chapter III, Section V (Author's note).

[19]On Schlegel, see note 10 above, and on his 'botanical' concept of language, see Salmon (1974) (Translator's note).

[20]Schlegel came up with this lovely image in discussing ancient and so-called primitive languages. Probably he himself would have found it grotesque, applied to contemporary languages. As if the processes of the human mind were a matter of chronology! Or as if a language were not always contemporary with the brain which thinks it! See below: *a language has no age* (Author's note).

[21]This is probably the first and last time the observation has been made that languages do not shit (Translator's note).

[22]The story of the parrot of the Atures, a tribe living at the mouths of the Orinoco in Venezuela, was brought back to Europe by Alexander von Humboldt, the famous German naturalist and brother of Wilhelm (see notes

13, 28, 44). It became part of 19th-century naturalist lore, being mentioned for example by Charles Darwin in *The Descent of Man* (1874, p. 281) (Translator's note).

[23]When these lines were written, Hovelacque (1846–1896) was still alive, and my friendship forbade a homage which would have offended his modesty. But today, as science mourns his recent loss, I might be allowed to recall that he was one of the clearest, most honest, most truth-seeking minds of his generation, and his book *La linguistique* (Paris: C. Reinwald, 1876) the most complete introduction, and the best suited to making linguistics understood, enjoyed, and accepted in its whole scope. In terms of generalities about the science of language, other things have been written since, but nothing better (Author's note).

[24]I am changing nothing in these lines or those which follow, written well before the publication of the admirable book by Otto Jespersen (*Progress in Language; with special reference to English*, S. Sonnenschein, London, 1894). But I refer the reader to that work for its fine analysis of detail, which the generality of the present study forbids me to get into. On the divergences in view which exist between the author and myself, see my article in the *Revue critique* **38**, p 501. (Author's note) [Translator's note: see Henry (1894b)].

[25]Since Henry's note (24 above) aims to establish the historical precedence of this passage over Jespersen's 1894 book, it may be worth pointing out that an earlier version of Jespersen's work had appeared in Danish as his University of Copenhagen doctoral thesis in 1891 (Translator's note).

[26]Chiapaneco is an extinct language of West Chiapas, Mexico. Beauceron is the dialect of the Beauce region of France (Translator's note).

[27]Viz.: *hat*, causative; *at*, potential; *lan*, negative; *ság*, nominal suffix; *om*, index of the first person singular; *at*, accusative: total 'having-for-object + my + fact of + not + being able + to make + die' = 'the property I have of not being able to be made to die' (Author's note).

[28]The 'holy trinity' are Sanskrit, Greek and Latin, the three supreme exemplars (in descending order) of the inflecting type. Their position as the cornerstone of European linguistics was only beginning to give way in the 1890s. It was Humboldt (1836) who established the division of languages into inflecting, agglutinating, incorporating, and isolating types, with inflection representing the highest point of linguistic structure, since in Humboldt's view it comes closest to reproducing the workings of the human mind (Translator's note).

[29]August Schleicher (1821–1868) is remembered particularly for championing the importation of the evolutionary model from biology into linguistics. That model is what led him to the view noted by Henry, which, among other sins, relegates languages like Chinese to the state of 'unevolved' dead-ends. Archibald Henry Sayce (1845–1933), an Assyriologist and Max Müller's successor at Oxford, is best known in language studies for his 1874 and 1880 manuals of comparative philology and linguistics respectively (Translator's note).

[30]Darmesteter (1887) (Translator's note).

[31]Cf. Saussure, *Cours*, pp. 99, 157, on the inseparability of the 'signifier' (= Henry's 'sign') and 'signified' (= Henry's 'concept'), which in Saussure's terms jointly make up the 'sign' (Translator's note).

[32]The question of the preexistence of the sign or of the thing signified is attached to that of the origin of language, which will be discussed below. In any case there is scarcely anything more to be said about it after Ernest Renan's (1823–1892) *De l'origine du langage* (Paris: Joubert, 1848) (Author's note).

[33]I can only refer the reader to the most penetrating study by Victor Egger on *Interior Speech* (*La Parole intérieure, essai de psychologie descriptive*, Paris: G. Baillière, 1883) and be content to have found such a source on a topic I am not competent to investigate myself (Author's note) Translator's note: the actual publication date of Egger's book is 1881.

[34]*Revue critique* **23** (1887), p. 282 (Author's note) Translator's note: see Henry (1887b).

[35]The asterisk designates forms which have no proven historical existence. Needless to say, it is not a question here of the subjunctive *currátis*, but of an indicative **currátis* of the first conjugation, of which classical Latin offers no trace (Author's note).

[36]Cf. Saussure's discussion of analogy in the *Cours*, pp. 221–237, which includes equations cast in this same form (Translator's note).

[37]The first person who said *vous courez* was corrected as well, but *there were too many of them*, and the barbarism carried the day. How many barbarisms does it take to form a refined literary language? (Author's note).

[38]Albert Riedlinger's notes from Saussure's first course of 1907 (I R 2.20–22 in the Engler critical edition) includes considerations on intentionality and consciousness that did not find their way into the published *Cours*, and that in fact (as discussed in Joseph, 1990) constitute Saussure's most detailed treatment of the subconscious or unconscious mind and its role in language production. Saussure struggles to agree with Henry that consciousness in not involved in the process of analogy, but cannot accept that it is fully unconscious either, and ends up having recourse to a state of 'demi-unconsciouness' in which the forms involved in the analogical equation are 'felt'. Discussion of these matters would disappear entirely from the second and third

courses, where the 'social' nature of language comes to have greater importance than psychological considerations. Somewhat ironic, then, that Saussure's son Raymond would become the pre-eminent Freudian psychoanalyst of his generation in France (Translator's note).

[39]By 'inertia' Henry means that language is resistant to change to the extent that its structure is analogical, 'makes sense' rather than being purely arbitrary. Saussure (*Cours*, pp. 107–8), locating inertia in the social rather than the psychological dimension, will come to precisely the opposite conclusion, that the *arbitrariness* of language structure makes change impossible. 'It is because the linguistic sign is arbitrary that it knows no other law than that of tradition, and because it is founded upon tradition that it can be arbitrary' (Harris translation, p. 108). Analogical change of the sort Henry is describing can occur in Saussure's *parole* (speech), and from there can affect the *langue* of a later generation; but then it is not the case that the language has changed, but that a new language has superseded it (Translator's note).

[40]Cf. again Saussure's discussion of analogy in the first course: '<L'analogie> suppose un oubli momentané de l'ancienne forme pour que la nouvelle surgisse...' (Engler edition, I R 2.20): 'Analogy presupposes a momentary forgetting of the old form in order that the new one might arise. . .' (my translation) (Translator's note).

[41]See note 15 above (Translator's note).

[42]A foreshadowing of Wittgenstein? Insofar as Henry is arguing for displacing the understanding of language away from the analysis of 'consciousness' and toward the living reality of people who use words, perhaps; but insofar as he wants to locate the life of words in physical brain cells, almost certainly not. In any case there is virtually no possibility that Wittgenstein read Henry (Translator's note).

[43]In Chapter III, Section V (Translator's note).

[44]The Greek terms *energeia* and *ergon* were made part of nineteenth-century linguistic discourse by Humboldt (1836 [1988, p 49]). The distinction he draws with them is actually closer to Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole* than to Henry's suggested distinction between something like Saussure's *langage* and *parole*. In holding that not only the general faculty of speaking but also the exercise of that faculty (both of which he subsumes under the term *langage*) are 'a pure abstraction with no external reality', Henry takes an extreme anti-realist position. Saussure, by contrast, will describe *langue* as a social and psychological reality, and *parole* as non-abstract, individual practice (Translator's note).

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