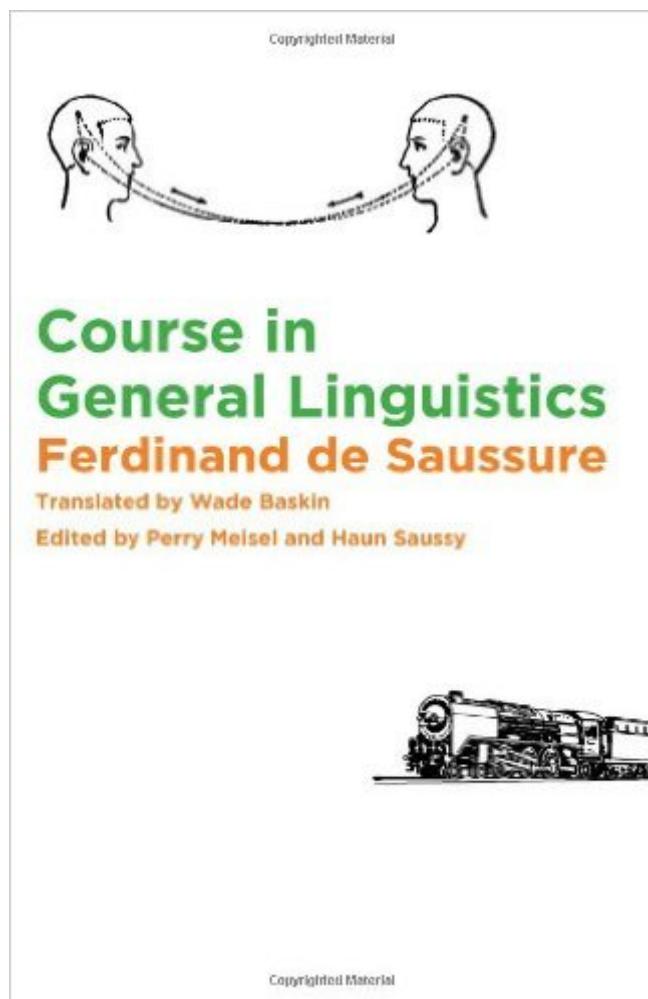


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# Course In General Linguistics



## Synopsis

The founder of modern linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure inaugurated semiology, structuralism, and deconstruction and made possible the work of Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Lacan, thus enabling the development of French feminism, gender studies, New Historicism, and postcolonialism. Based on Saussure's lectures, *Course in General Linguistics* (1916) traces the rise and fall of the historical linguistics in which Saussure was trained, the synchronic or structural linguistics with which he replaced it, and the new look of diachronic linguistics that followed this change. Most important, Saussure presents the principles of a new linguistic science that includes the invention of semiology, or the theory of the "signifier," the "signified," and the "sign" that they combine to produce. This is the first critical edition of *Course in General Linguistics* to appear in English and restores Wade Baskin's original translation of 1959, in which the terms "signifier" and "signified" are introduced into English in this precise way. Baskin renders Saussure clearly and accessibly, allowing readers to experience his shift of the theory of reference from mimesis to performance and his expansion of poetics to include all media, including the life sciences and environmentalism. An introduction situates Saussure within the history of ideas and describes the history of scholarship that made *Course in General Linguistics* legendary. New endnotes enlarge Saussure's contexts to include literary criticism, cultural studies, and philosophy.

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## Customer Reviews

When Ferdinand De Saussure died in 1913, he had spent a lifetime investigating the complex role that language played in the way that human beings learned. His interest, therefore, was limited to

explicating the issues faced by his fellow theorists. He had no abiding interest in literature, sociology, psychology, or any other discipline than linguistics. Fortunately, after his death, several students combined their lecture notes to publish posthumously the COURSE IN GENERAL LINGUISTICS in 1916. One cannot overstate the colossal ramifications of this book. Despite the fact that it was written with a French speaking scholar in mind who had more than a passing familiarity with Proto-Indo European languages, serious students in various disciplines were quick to note its potential to advance their respective causes. Within a few decades, his theories became bedrock assumptions for those who sought to uncover an overarching set of rules that would account for the behavior of discrete units within that system. De Saussure begins by distinguishing between the entire spectrum of language discourse (langue) and the individual spoken utterances of single words (parole). He was not concerned with parole. His focus was on langue. He had the controversial idea that langue did not exist as an actual entity in the physical universe. Langue had to be constructed from parole. The inference was that all languages, however unrelated semantically, yet shared a common structure. It is his relentless urging that all languages had this shared root that allows moderns to call him the Father of Structuralism. Further, he devised a conceptual tool to describe how langue and parole interact to produce meaning. Any word could be reduced to a simple structure--the sign.

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