The Flournoy Affair:

An Inquiry into

Ferdinand de Saussure’s Analyses of Glossolalia

Elliot Cooper
For my family:
   Paul, Margaret, Carrie, Kitana
   and Mutsumi.
Contents

Preface i

Introduction 1

Chapter 1: Müller’s Utterances and Saussure’s Analyses 24

Chapter 2: Interpretations of the Flournoy Affair 61

Chapter 3: The Synchrony and Diachrony of a Case of Glossolalia 87

Chapter 4: Evolution of a Mechanism 125

Chapter 5: Symbolism and Saussure’s View on Glossolalia 153

Conclusion 175

References 192
### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CGL</td>
<td><em>Course in General Linguistics</em>, Ferdinand de Saussure, Roy Harris (trans.), (Open Court, Chicago, 1986). Numbers refer to pages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Des Indes</td>
<td><em>Des Indes à la planète Mars: étude sur un cas de somnambulisme avec glossolalie</em>, Theodore Flournoy, 3rd Edn (Genève, Eggimann, 1900). Numbers refer to pages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIPM/S</td>
<td><em>From India to the Planet Mars</em>, Theodore Flournoy, Sonu Shamdasani (ed.), (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1994). Passages abridged from the original translation are indicated by ab. [abridged] n. [note] p. [page number from which the section was abridged].</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References to texts presented in chapter one.

- **M(X)**  
  ‘M’ stands for Müller’s transcribed glossolalic utterances or automatic writings presented in chapter one. ‘X’ stands for the number of the text.

- **S(X)**  
  ‘S’ stands for Saussure’s analyses of Müller’s texts presented in chapter one. ‘X’ stands for the document number.
Abstract

The sources for Ferdinand de Saussure’s thought on the psychology of language are few, and there has been little consensus over their interpretation. Yet, there is one group of writings by Saussure on language and mental operations that has been largely excluded from debate. From 1896 to 1899, the experimental psychologist Théodore Flournoy called on Saussure’s expertise in a study of a case of somnambulism with glossolalia. The subject of Flournoy’s study was Catherine-Élise Müller, who believed that she could communicate with the spirits of the dead, even if it required speaking a language she had never learned. In her somnambulist state she sometimes claimed to make contact with a few inhabitants of 15th century India. On these occasions, the sitters at her séances witnessed her speak and sing in sounds which, she said, were Sanskrit.

Flournoy found Müller’s explanations charmingly ludicrous. Nonetheless, as Saussure himself was to find, something in the speech she did produce seemed disturbingly like the Sanskrit Flournoy had himself been exposed to in the undergraduate unit he took on the subject. But how was she able to speak a language without the usual requisite knowledge?

Saussure began his analyses of Müller’s utterances with the view to discover what, if any, Sanskrit they contained. But his line of thought soon turned a corner when he began to consider what kind of mental operation would be capable of assembling the sound combinations that Müller produced. Flournoy found the linguist’s ideas to be good evidence for his theory of Müller’s condition, and quoted large sections from Saussure’s analyses in the resulting book of the study, Des Indes à la planète Mars: étude sur un cas de somnambulisme avec glossolalie (1900). Those analyses – a series of twelve documents in the form of letters and other hand-written notes that Saussure passed on to Flournoy – have been published in Théodore et Léopold: De Théodore Flournoy à la psychoanalyse (1986), a hard-to-come-by book by Théodore Flournoy’s grandson, Olivier Flournoy. The present study offers all twelve of these documents in full English translation.

Of course, the fact that the father of modern linguistics spent valuable time attending séances, and analysing the seemingly meaningless speech of one individual, has
attracted some attention. The majority of commentators who have expressed an opinion on Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia – Todorov (1977), Certeau (1980), Yaguello (1984) and Gadet (1986) – have found them useful as a way of creating a link between Saussure’s general linguistics and symbolism. By arguing that Saussure should have recognised a ‘logic of symbolism’ in Müller’s glossolalia, these authors claim to have discovered a point of failure in his thought. But that ‘logic of symbolism’ is at odds with what Saussure did have to say on symbols in his later analysis of German myths. By framing Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia as an irrational display of sympathy for the scientifically disreputable topic of spiritism, they have long prevented any sustained investigation into this highly interesting episode of Saussure’s career.

Should we interpret Saussure’s participation in Flournoy’s study as a moment of poor discretion, or recognize it as an important event in the history of ideas? Recent accounts by Fehr (1995), Gasparov (2012), Joseph (2012) and Feshchenko and Lao (2013) show that there is more to Saussure’s ideas about Müller’s attempts to speak Sanskrit than had previously been suggested. Though these three treatments are promising, the question of the value of Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia is still in abeyance, because no one has submitted the ideas they hold to the kind of close consideration that befits a thinker of Ferdinand de Saussure’s stature.

In a close reading of Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia, I argue that they contain valuable information about the development of psychological ideas that would later be presented in Saussure’s *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916). I offer two examples of how Müller’s glossolalia provided Saussure with a stimulus for thinking differently about the mental operations behind language. First, I discuss Saussure’s methodological strategy in his analyses, and its relation to his famous dual synchronic and diachronic linguistic methods. Second, I discuss how Müller’s glossolalia helped him develop what he would later call, ‘the language mechanism’. Saussure’s application of his ideas, I argue, allowed him to think more concretely about these psychological aspects of his general linguistic theory.

This study finds that Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia are of exceptional value in understanding the early workings out of his key psychological ideas, including synchrony, diachrony and the language mechanism. With a close reading of the primary texts, this study contributes a new understanding of some much overlooked documents, and sheds light on the psychological underpinnings of the *Cours*.
Preface

There is a pleasure in catching a genius doing something strange. Consider the case of Paul Broca, the founder of French anthropology, whose most resounding achievement was to discover that parts of the human brain correspond to specific human faculties. On October 19, 1876, Broca made a pact of mutual autopsy with a group of his colleagues (Hecht 2003: 8). As each of them died, those who remained were obligated to cut out, measure, weigh, and preserve the brain of the deceased. Why would anyone want to cut open the skulls and remove the brains of their friends and colleagues? How perverse, how morbid, one might think. But also: how utterly fascinating. The enjoyable strangeness of historical facts such as this one sometimes makes us overlook the often simple and rational explanations for their actions. (They needed human brains to pursue their research, and saw an opportunity to assert themselves as scientists by engaging in practices considered taboo by the Catholic Church.) Rarely is such apparently odd behaviour discussed seriously with the view to discover whether the motivations were rational, or if the outcomes of such actions hold particular scientific, theoretical, or historical value. In the case of Broca we are fortunate to have Hecht’s (2003) balanced exposition, yet in many other cases it is the strangeness that wins out over the ideas. As I began my research into (what was initially a project on) Saussurean thought and psychoanalysis, I was aware of certain influential suggestions that Saussure had an
obsessive side to his personality, shown in his writings on anagrams (Starobinski 1979 [1971]), and in his privileging of speech over writing in linguistic analysis (Derrida 1977 [1967]: 30-64). What I realised, however, was that while speculation over another side to Saussure’s personality may be in some sense entertaining, it does not benefit our understanding of his thought. If we are to understand the value of what he was trying to do in his ‘unorthodox’ moments, then his state of mind should be treated as rational, just as in any normal discussion of his better known ideas.

In 2009 I contacted some well-known Saussure experts looking for clues about where Saussure might have learned what he knew about psychology. One of Saussure’s recent biographers, Claudia Mejia Quijano, wrote a long and generous reply in which she mentioned that Saussure had assisted a colleague in a case study of abnormal psychology. That colleague was the professor of experimental psychology at the University of Geneva from 1891 to 1920, Theodore Flournoy, and his study was published in 1900 under the title Des Indes a la Planète Mars: étude sur un cas de somnambulisme avec glossolalie.

In Des Indes Flournoy describes many strange automatic phenomena manifested by a medium he called Hélène Smith (I will henceforth refer to her by her birth name, Catherine-Élise Müller). These phenomena mostly occurred while she was in a somnambulist state, and with several witnesses or ‘sitters’ gathered around her. Sometimes she spoke accurately on matters that, when conscious, she appeared to know nothing about. At other times she would, it seemed, speak languages that she had never learned. In her view, she was a vessel conveying messages from external ‘spirit’ sources (FIPM: 263-264). For her claim that her knowledge came from spirits, Müller depended heavily on the extreme unlikelihood of her knowing the information she divulged, and the accuracy of that information. In practice she was only occasionally accurate. But when she made statements that were obviously erroneous, the fact that she was in a trance state protected her against accusations of improbity. For many of the sitters, the accuracy of some of her phenomena made her more ambiguous revelations seem quite convincing. When Müller began to speak in tongues, Flournoy was sceptical but
impressed. He wondered if his theory of her other phenomena would extend to her glossolalia (e.g. *FIPM*: 143).

The episode of Saussure’s career that I shall henceforth call the *Flournoy Affair* begins as follows: In May 1896, Flournoy asked Saussure for assistance in analysing Müller’s glossolalia. Saussure was interested and asked to see some of the texts Flournoy had collected. These texts took several forms. Some were transcriptions of Müller’s spoken ‘Sanskrit’, others were of another language she claimed was Martian. Other texts in Müller’s hand appeared to employ the Sanskrit writing system, Devanagari, and a similar script to represent Martian sounds and words. Saussure firstly evaluated Müller’s ‘Sanskrit’, and was amused to find some similarities with genuine Sanskrit here and there. Secondly, he theorised a mental process which might be capable of producing the utterances. Saussure continued to work with these two ways of thinking about Müller’s glossolalia for the four years he was involved in the study (1896-1899). In 1897 he even attended four séances to hear Müller’s speech directly.

Anyone simply looking for strangeness is going to find it here, and, predictably, that is what has happened. Todorov (1982 [1977]) set the tone of debate by framing Saussure’s analysis of Müller’s glossolalia as obsessive, and arguing that Saussure ultimately accepted her scientifically inadmissible claim that she had learned Sanskrit in a past-life. Even if we agree with this highly questionable interpretation, to leave the matter there would be unfair to Saussure, and to the various traditions trace their origins back to Saussure’s thought. It is more profitable to try to discover if Saussure’s considerations of glossolalia lead to any developments in his own emerging theory of language. Though it may be too much to claim that any of Saussure’s general linguistic ideas *originate* in his analyses of glossolalia, I argue that the application of his ideas to the problems presented in Müller’s glossolalia helped him *clarify* elements of his linguistic method. We can observe, for example, that his two approaches to analysing Müller’s glossolalia display significant parallels with what he would later call synchronic and diachronic methods. He also began to see language use in terms of operations that were in some sense mechanical. Though he did not use the term ‘mechanism’ in his analyses of Müller’s glossolalia, or in any known earlier work, his idea of a ‘mental process’ (see
chapter 1, S2) shows a strong resemblance with the language mechanism he would later describe in his courses in general linguistics. Because Saussure observed a single speaker, who spoke in a very individualized way, we might think of Saussure’s role in Flournoy’s study *Des Indes* as an example of particular linguistics, but towards the end of the Flournoy Affair it becomes clear that the ideas he worked with had general applications.

As I looked into this episode of Saussure’s career, the cursory treatment it has received in the literature struck me as unjust. Undeniably, Saussure’s collaboration with Flournoy yields points of great interest about his thought on language and human psychology. He first approached Müller’s Sanskrit as a grammarian (S1), by making comparisons between her speech and genuine Sanskrit. But he soon began to produce evidence for a theory of how a speaker’s knowledge of language is systemically processed in speech assemblage (S2). As far as I am aware, no linguist had applied such a sophisticated psychological framework in linguistic research until this point. Yet these points of interest have been overlooked, largely as the result of a peculiar interpretation of events which seeks out and emphasises oddball aspects of history. It is that way of seeing – and not any actual evidence present in the texts – which implies that Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia are of questionable worth. It will be my strategy at every point to resist such a reading.

Most, but not all, of the translations in chapter one, have already appeared in English, but incompletely and spread over three texts. Sections had already been translated by Vermilye¹ (*FIPM*: 316-330), Slater (Yaguello 1991: 96), and Shamdasani, Baron & Cohen (*FIPM/S*: Appendix Two pp. 288-335). Much of the credit for the effort to put

¹ The extensive abridgements of Vermilye’s 1901 English translation of *Des Indes* render it inadequate for studies of Saussure’s contribution to that text. Controversially, Vermilye made no acknowledgement of his abridgements, but it seems that he was not wholly responsible. In a review of *FIPM*, James Hyslop exonerates Vermilye for damage his English version does the original:

> The translation of this work has been well done and offers, except for its abbreviations for which the translator is not responsible, the English reader a good opportunity to study a most important case of secondary personality simulating spiritism. Apart from this defect, which amounts almost to a mutilation for the scientific man, the work is one of the best contributions that I know to the study of a very obscure set of phenomena until the patience is shown to unravel its tangled threads. (1901: 94-95)
these documents into English belongs to them, but there are reasons why their translations are not entirely adequate for the present study. The source text for Vermilye was Flournoy’s *Des Indes*, as it was for Shamdasani, Baron and Cohen. This means that they translated from an already mediated text, and not the original documents that Saussure produced for Flournoy’s study. Slater translated from Yaguello’s quotation of a primary text, but this amounts to a mere paragraph of one out of the twelve documents in question. I therefore opted to do my own full translation from Saussure’s documents as they are presented in Olivier Flournoy’s, *Théodore et Léopold: De Théodore Flournoy à la psychoanalyse* (1986). For details on Sanskrit and the Devanagari system of writing, I referred to books on Sanskrit that are listed in the catalogue of Saussure’s personal library (see Gambarara 1972), including W. D. Whitney’s *Sanskrit Grammar* (1879) and Max Mueller’s *A History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature* (1859). All quotations of Saussure’s documents in this study are from my translations (indicated with labels from S1 to S12), and when referring to Th. Flournoy’s text I have used existing English translations (*FIPM* and *FIPM/S*), except in cases where I have deemed reference to *Des Indes* to be more accurate.

**Acknowledgements**

This project would not have been possible without financial assistance from the Australian government in the form of APA and RTS scholarships. I was also greatly assisted by a scholarship provided by the University of Canberra’s Faculty of Arts and Design. My sincere thanks goes to the staff of the Faculty of Arts and Design, the University of Canberra College and the Ngunnawal Centre for providing me with tutoring work and other general support.

Halfway through this project I made a decision to change my lifestyle in a dramatic way, which meant having a distant relationship with my university. It would have been impossible to discover and access most of the resources I have made use of without Google Books, Archive.org, and the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* website Gallica. Though I do not know them and they do not know me, the teams who administer these
websites and compile the invaluable data they make available have been my librarians. I extend my sincere thanks to all of them for the great work they do.

There are many people who I must thank individually. I would firstly like to thank Paul Magee for his untiring encouragement and supervision. For the final year of this project Russell Daylight’s support and influence has been crucial. Russell suggested the phrase ‘the Flournoy Affair’ for its “chime” with the Dreyfus Affair, a scandal played out in Paris simultaneously with Saussure’s collaboration with Flournoy in Geneva, and involving (as vehement Dreyfus advocates) Saussure’s closest Parisian colleagues (see Lynn-George 2005; 2006). For me ‘the Flournoy Affair’ fits well with the controversy of Saussure’s contact with the world of spiritism. Jen Webb and Adam Dickerson make up the remainder of my supervisory panel and have always been willing to answer as accurately as possible, my often inaccurately worded questions. I extend an additional thanks to all my supervisors for time spent reading drafts, for their well-considered comments, and for patience in pointing me in the right direction in the face of my tardiness in understanding the hints they offered. Thanks also to Markus Uhl who helped me nut out some nagging problems in my translations. Any remaining inadequacies in the text are my own.

My gratitude goes to friends and family who have been with me along the way. Paul Collis, the Mackay family, Dave Pretty, Danielle Medek, Agustin Zsögön, Ana Clarissa Negrini, Mike Fraser, Taro Miyazaki and Shoko Okuyama have all played an important personal role. My parents, Margaret and Paul, have been an unflinching support. To them there was never any question that I would finish this project, despite my growing doubts over the last few years. Thanks to my sister Carrie and my niece Kitana. Finally, I want to thank my wife Mutsumi who makes each day better than the last.
Introduction

On June 20, 1897 a medium named Catherine-Élise Müller and her circle gathered to hold a séance in the home of Theodore Flournoy, professor of experimental psychology at the University of Geneva (FIPM: 201). As the séance began Müller became cataleptic and Flournoy rapidly ran several tests, determining that her heart rate and respiration were normal, but that she was insensitive to pain (ibid: 68-69). Following this apparent physiological lapse, she described a great fortress in India called Tchandraguiri built by the Hindu naïk, or leader, Sivrouka in 1401 (ibid: 10, 277-278). She identified herself as an Arabian girl named Simandini, whom Sivrouka had bought and made his eleventh wife (ibid: 277). The sitters of the séance followed the narrative silently. Some of them had been convinced by the story, while others remained sceptical. Next, Müller, still as Simandini, sat on the floor and began to sing a tune (ibid: 326-327). The song was not in the Arab dialect Simandini had spoken in her childhood, but in Sanskrit, the language of her master. As she sang, a specialist in Indo-European languages knelt beside her to quickly note down the sounds he heard (ibid: 327):

\[
Gâya gaya naïa ia miya gayâ briti...gaya vaya yâni pritiya kriya gayâni i gâya mamatua gaya mama nara mama patii si gaya gandaryô gâya ityami vasanta...
gaya gaya yâmi gaya priti gaya priya gâya patisi... \text{(M9)}
\]
Simandini ended her chant and addressed the Indo-Europeanist as her friend, calling him Miousa. By an extraordinary coincidence he too had lived at Tchandraguiri. (In another Hindu séance Müller – at that time also claiming to be Simandini – had revealed that Flournoy was Sivrouka.) As the Indo-Europeanist looked back over his transcription he noticed that there was something Sanskrit-like about it, perhaps because of the complete absence of f (S8), or perhaps because of the high frequency of a (S5). Here and there the transcription even suggested a full Sanskrit word to his mind. It sounded like Sanskrit, but it was not Sanskrit (S5). He would refer to them as “Sivroukian phrases” (S2), after Sivrouka, or “Sanskritoid” (FIPM: 324). In the three further séances he attended, Müller persisted in calling him Miousa (Des Indes, 302 n. 2), but he would not answer to it. For his name was Ferdinand de Saussure.

Over the two years he had been studying her phenomena, Flournoy had amassed a good deal of evidence indicating that the stories Müller told were constructed from sometimes accurate information acquired over her present lifetime (FIPM: 307-308). He further hypothesised that this information was stored in her unconscious memory (ibid: 58, 313). His idea was that when Müller saw a purpose for this unconscious information she could access it through a normal psychological mechanism, which he called ‘teleological automatism’ (ibid: 58). Müller’s claim that he was the reincarnation of Sivrouka appeared to be an act with the purpose of distracting him from his psychological investigations (ibid: 277). He later discovered he name Sivrouka in a book on ancient India that was in the Geneva library that Müller may have accessed (ibid: 300). He never found the origin of Miousa, but it probably arose with the similar intention of drawing Saussure’s attention away from non-Sanskrit elements of her ‘Sanskrit’. When she was conscious Müller did not recall – or did not admit that she recalled – the origins of her revelations. Instead, she embraced the idea that her mysterious knowledge was communicated to her (or through her) by spirits (ibid: 396-397). To the process of storing information in one’s memory while nonetheless keeping that information secret to oneself, Flournoy applied the term ‘cryptomnesia’ (ibid: 276). The relationship of cryptomnesia to teleological automatism is that in cryptomnesia “the perceptions and memories (which ordinarily serve as points of departure) furnish the materials for the elaboration of teleological automatisms” (Flournoy 1911: 114 n.1).
Müller’s attempts to speak Sanskrit without ever having learned it, presented a challenge to her capacity to elaborate from a small amount of unconsciously acquired information. There is a large difference between reproducing simple facts and speaking a language fluently. In one of several moments of Des Indes in which Flournoy wrote of Müller as “a good psychologist” (FIPM: 52), who was also conducting research into the capabilities of the human mind, he made the following optimistic comment:

This research of originality [i.e. Müller’s glossolalia] – which, however, she has never extended beyond the purely material part of the language, never having an idea that there might be other differences in languages – represents an effort of imagination with which she must be credited. Homage must also be rendered to the labor of memorizing… She has sometimes, indeed, fallen into errors; the stability of her vocabulary has not always been perfect. But, finally, after the first hesitation and independently of some later confusions, it gives evidence of a praiseworthy terminological consistency, and which no doubt in time, and with some suggestive encouragement, would result in the elaboration of a very complete language – perhaps even of several languages. (FIPM: 254-255)

Reproducing vocabulary is no different to reproducing facts, but we see in this passage that Müller had not grasped the idea that language is more than a group of names for things. (Years later, Saussure would observe “there is the superficial view taken by the general public… sees that language is merely a nomenclature” [CGL: 16].) By her own testimony, Müller disliked the study of language (FIPM: 17). So it would have been out of character for her to realise, as did Saussure, that “[w]ords as used in discourse, strung together one after another, enter into relations based on the linear character of language” (CGL: 121). But simple words were easy for her to reproduce. Flournoy was able to establish that Müller had many opportunities to absorb vocabulary. Her mother tongue was French. She knew some German, which she learned unwillingly for three years during school, as well as a few words of English (FIPM: 17). Her father had an aptitude for language learning and “spoke fluently Hungarian, German, French, Italian, and Spanish, understood English fairly well, and also knew Latin and a little Greek” (ibid.). But Sanskrit is not among these, and osmosis has its limits. The chances of her being a
fluent speaker of Sanskrit were – even in Flournoy’s optimistic view or her abilities – quite simply nil. Yet, it was possible that she knew a few Sanskrit terms from books, and therefore – at a stretch – something of the character of Sanskrit speech. Flournoy wanted to know exactly what aspects of Sanskrit Müller knew and how she acquired them (e.g. ibid: 332).

There is something strange about these circumstances which must be dealt with openly. It is necessary to ask, what was Müller’s speech? It was not French, or any of the languages she had studied at school or heard her father speak. Neither was it Sanskrit, as she claimed. In fact, it was not a language. Flournoy called it glossolalia (ibid: 11). Glossolalia is a, “way of talking [un parler]” (Certeau 1996 [1980]: 37), that is “noncommunicative” (Goodman 1969: 237), and includes a “wide range of sounds from animal-like grunts and ‘gibberish’ to well-patterned articulations… [and] involves utterances of varying lengths, lasting from a few seconds to an hour or more” (Hine 1969: 212). But these statements do little to delimit the phenomenon. Fortunately some authors have been able to make more specific observations. Goodman has observed that “[g]lossolalia is not productive. Once an audio-signal has been internalized, it becomes stereotyped” (1969: 237). Samarin states that the most important determining factors of a glossolalic speech act “are three: namely, the role of the speaker, the purpose of the speech act, and the setting or the context of the speech” (1972: 124), just like language, except that he defines glossolalia as: “Unintelligible extemporaneous post-babbling speech that exhibits superficial phonologic similarity to language without having consistent syntагmatic structure and that is not systematically derived from or related to known languages” (ibid. 122, italics in original). It seems that glossolalia is something like language, but not language. So it is strange, that Saussure, a linguist would be interested in observing it. But Müller’s ‘Sanskritoid’ was a type of glossolalia called xenoglossia, defined as the “ability to reproduce the sounds of another language without any apparent instruction” (Griffiths 1986: 141). This xenoglossia raised questions of a more obviously linguistic nature, relating to acquisition and use. As a psychologist, Flournoy could theorise the process by which Müller unconsciously acquired a vocabulary, but he would have to rely on Saussure to analyse elements of speech beyond mere mechanical reproduction.
Predictably, the spiritism aspect of this history requires us to dwell on the notion of strangeness a moment longer. Scientists conducting research in taboo areas such as spiritism have always faced controversy. That is why I call Saussure’s involvement in Flournoy’s study ‘the Flournoy Affair’. Controversy has the power to obscure less dramatic yet more accurate and therefore more valuable and useful interpretations of historical events. I believe that such a power has been exerted on the case in question (see below and chapter 5). The less dramatic interpretation of events I am interested in involves finding the significance of the Flournoy Affair for Saussure’s ideas about the role of psychology in language. In this introduction I discuss the circumstances and content of the Flournoy Affair and suggest that this is a much more valuable chapter in the history of linguistics than is generally considered. While a secondary literature on the subject does exist, there are important elements of Saussure’s thought on glossolalia that have gone unaddressed. In response to this dissonance between primary and secondary texts I propose the need for a thorough account of the concepts that Saussure dealt with during the Flournoy Affair, and test the hypothesis that these analyses of glossolalia are in fact of much greater value than has been previously suggested. That value lies in the way he analysed transcriptions of living speech, and the concepts that evolved as he thought through the problems presented by Müller’s glossolalia. This grappling with living speech, I argue, made way for the crystallization of important elements of Saussure’s theory of general linguistics. More directly, points of the Flournoy Affair appear to offer the earliest expressions of central parts of Saussure’s synchronic method and ‘language mechanism’. Controversy and speculation over whether Saussure believed in spirits offer us nothing. What does hold potential value is Saussure’s response to glossolalia as a linguist, and how it may impact our understanding of his theory of language.

Ferdinand de Saussure has been called the founder of modern linguistics (Bauer 2007: 41; Kearney 1993 [1986]: 240), structuralism (Bouissac 2010: 1), and semiotics (Chandler 2002: 1). From Bloomfield to Chomsky, linguists have recognised their debt to him (Harris 2004 [2001]). One linguist has gone so far as to argue that Saussure’s ideas are so influential that all linguists today are in some sense Saussureans (Wolf, 2000). Among Saussure’s great achievements was his dual definition of language as
**langue**, the system, or rules and conventions of language, and **parole**, language as it is used (Chandler 2007: 9). He recognised that language should be studied in a given moment, and as a historical phenomenon. Accordingly he developed two corresponding methods of linguistic inquiry. One would deal with synchrony, or individual language states, the other with diachrony, or the historical aspects of language (*CGL*: 93). From this separation he was able to assemble a robust conceptual framework for a dynamic understanding of language as both static and changing. Interaction between thought and the verbal representation of thought was a central consideration. The concept that drove the development of Saussure’s theory of that complex relationship was the sign, a linguistic unit with two arbitrary components of *signifié* and *signifiant*. Structuralism, perhaps the most important twentieth century intellectual movement among the social sciences, has its kernel in Saussure’s formulation of the linguistic sign (Sanders 2004b: 2). This means that Saussure’s sign has set the program for one hundred years of investigation into language and culture. Of much importance to linguistics today is the process by which the sign operates (e.g. Harris 1987; Croker et al. 2000; Moro 2008), a process which Saussure termed the “language mechanism” (*CGL*: 126). Saussure never published these ideas. Rather, he set them out in three courses in general linguistics from 1907 to 1911 (Bouissac 2010: 1). If a small yet committed group of students had not taken careful notes, linguistics would be without the text that makes it what it is today.

Both Saussure and Flournoy were appointed to the faculty of the University of Geneva in 1891 (Nicholas & Charvillat 1998: 285; Joseph 2012: 375). We know that they crossed paths when Flournoy’s student (and cousin) Édouard Claparède distributed a questionnaire on synaesthetic experiences (Nicholas & Charvillat 1998: 285). Saussure was interested enough in the study to respond in a very detailed way about the mental associations he made between colours and vowels (Saussure 1983). That study, *Des Phénomènes de Synopsie* (1893), was ultimately completed and published by Flournoy himself, and he chose to include an extended discussion regarding the detailed responses of “the eminent linguist M. X” (see Joseph 2007b). It is unclear whether Saussure and Flournoy maintained a close friendship from that time, but the relationship appears on the record again in 1896 (S1). This time Flournoy had been pursuing his
scientific interest in spiritualist phenomena by attending the séances of a local non-professional medium named Catherine-Élise Müller (Le Clair 1966: 47-48; FIPM: 1). When she started speaking in what sounded like Sanskrit Flournoy found himself outside his area of expertise and called on colleagues to help, among them Saussure (*Des Indes*: vii). In the correspondence between Flournoy and Saussure we can witness both a professional working relationship and a warm personal connection. Flournoy would later quote almost all of Saussure’s commentary on the glossolalia in the published version of his study *Des Indes à la planète Mars* (1900). It would seem that Saussure and Flournoy were close friends who held each other in high regard.

We learn from the correspondence between Flournoy and William James (Le Clair: 1966) that the monotony of the experimental laboratory work caused Flournoy to turn his attention to the challenge to science presented in spiritualist phenomena (29). For Flournoy, many of the claims of spiritualists had been satisfactorily explained by James, Frederick W. H. Myers and others (*Des Indes*: x). He believed that ‘spiritualist’ phenomena could be better explained as psychological phenomena (*FIPM*: 29). He saw that a robust theory of the psychological causes of spiritual phenomena would yield an important contribution to his field (*FIPM*: 405). On December 18, 1893 Flournoy wrote to James complaining of the difficulty of finding an appropriate medium.

> I try to penetrate into the spiritualistic world of our city, but it is rather difficult. At present they do not have very outstanding mediums; I should be very content, indeed, if I were only able to observe closely those who experience the phenomena about which I hear, but they surround themselves with solitude and darkness. (in Le Clair 1966: 29)

A year later he finally gained entry to one of the spiritualist circles of Geneva with an invitation from August Lemaître (*FIPM*: 1). On September 4, 1895 Flournoy wrote to James,

> I was forgetting to tell you what has interested me most during the last six months; it is a certain medium (nonprofessional, unpaid) of a spiritualist group into which they agreed to accept me in spite of my neutral position. I have
attended about twenty of the séances, of which a third were here at my home; psychologically, it is very interesting, because this woman is a veritable museum of all possible phenomena and has a repertoire of illimitable variety: she makes the table talk, – she hears voices, – she has visions, hallucinations, tactile and olfactory, – automatic writing – sometimes complete somnambulism, catalepsy, trances etc. All the *automatism, sensory and motor*, of Myers, – all the classical hysterical phenomena – present themselves in turn, in any order and in the most unexpected fashion, varying from one time to another. The *contents* of these phenomena are always of former events, going back a few or many years, being perfectly correct, generally having to do with the ancestors of the persons present. (Le Clair 1966: 47)

The medium suited Flournoy’s needs for the reasons that she did not charge a fee to attend her séances, and her phenomena were sufficiently vivid to warrant investigation (ibid.). Flournoy was impressed by the “diversity of content” (*FIPM*: 60) Müller presented in her séances. Not only did she manifest automatic phenomena, but she also incorporated a wide variety of sensory hallucinations (e.g. ibid: 21, 63, 66, 97, 106). Flournoy would spend the next six years collecting evidence of the natural causes of Müller’s phenomena.

The phenomena of primary interest here are Müller’s strange speech acts, called glossolalia. For *Des Indes*, Flournoy observed three varieties of Müller’s glossolalia: Sanskritoid, Martian and, briefly, Ultra-Martian the language of the inhabitants of a Martian moon (*FIPM*: 261). As we have seen, in Müller’s view it was not she who spoke Sanskrit, but her 15th century self of a past-life, a princess of Tchandraguiri in India, named Simandini (*FIPM*: 277). By contrast, the Martian and Ultra-Martian were posed as having contemporary sources. Müller claimed to travel to Mars ‘in spirit’ and would speak Martian words to the sitters at the séance, where she remained ‘in body’ (*FIPM*: 146-147). During the 1890s the existence of a Martian speech community appears to have been a very real possibility for many. The works of the most renowned astronomers of the time, such as Camille Flammarion (e.g. 1907 [1880]: 390-391) and Percival Lowell (e.g. 1895: 234), contain much speculation about canal-dwelling
Martians. For anyone inclined to believe in these imaginary beings, the idea that they used language, much the same as humans, appears to have been a foregone conclusion. Müller took her belief in the Martian tongue a step further, by speaking that language (*FIPM*: 142-144). For some of the sitters it might have been quite plausible that the sounds Müller ejected from her lips in spurts was in fact the language of the inhabitants of Mars, but they also had to believe her explanations of how she could write it speak it, and even sometimes translate it. According to her story, Müller was taught to write in Martian characters by a Martian sorcerer named Astané (ibid: 201). But, unable to speak her own thoughts, she merely repeated Martian words she heard spoken by beings she met on Mars. Sometimes her spoken imitations were followed with translations from a spirit named Esenale, who had recently lived on both Earth and Mars, but was now a disembodied space-dweller (ibid: 165). Just as was the case with her Sanskritoid, Müller never claimed responsibility for the Martian speech.

Esenale’s translations offered a means of determining the grammatical structure of the utterances. Flournoy wrote that, “[t]he process of creation of Martian seems to have consisted in simply taking certain French phrases as such and replacing each word by some other chosen at random.” (ibid: 254). Thus, Flournoy’s task of analysing the Martian was simpler than he might have expected. Not only did each Martian term have a corresponding French term, but the syntax of Martian also matched the French (e.g. ibid: 220-221). Even in its written form, Martian was so similar to French that Flournoy was able to assemble a Martian alphabet from Müller’s written Martian texts.

![Fig. 1. Catherine-Élise Müller’s Martian Alphabet collected by Theodore Flournoy (*FIPM*, 208).]
The Martian alphabet lacked five of the sounds represented by the characters of the French alphabet and contained only two signs that did not have individual equivalents in French writing. These two sounds (ss and ch) are, however, common in French phonology. The evidence showed beyond reasonable doubt that the Martian was, as Flournoy put it, “only an infantile travesty of French” (ibid: 241).

A Martian language would serve the purpose of convincing some observers that Müller’s spirit journeys to Mars were genuine, and its composition required nothing outside her normal language abilities (ibid: 156). Flournoy had already applied this explanation to a diverse array of apparently supernormal feats. She would diagnose illnesses and prescribe cures (ibid: 398-401), locate lost objects (ibid. 401-406), relay messages from dead relatives of the sitters (ibid: 406-413), and, as we have begun to see in the case of Simandini, tell exciting stories from her past lives. She claimed that she achieved all of these phenomena by the intervention of spirits, and that none of them was by her own construction. Her proof that her extraordinary phenomena were bestowed upon her by spirits, was that they involved information that she seemingly could not possibly know. In Flournoy’s view Müller was quite capable of producing all of these phenomena with her very limited knowledge of the kinds of scenarios suggested in the séances. As the knowledge need not be conscious, Flournoy’s theory was not contradicted by Müller’s claim of ignorance. When her scant unconscious knowledge had a purpose to fill, her somnambulist state would allow her to access and produce it. All that was required was a confident countenance, which Müller maintained naturally (ibid: 1). The drama of the ancient spirits and the interplanetary travel dissolved in Flournoy’s explanation; Müller’s phenomena required nothing more than slightly unusual operations of mental faculties possessed by all humans.

Though he could not explain the finer details of Müller’s strange ‘languages’ himself, Flournoy asserted that all of Müller’s purportedly supernormal abilities were phenomena constructed by “normal psychological processes” (FIPM: 402). In his view, the riddle of the Martian language could be resolved as “cryptomnesia, pure and simple” (ibid.). The idea that the Martians Flammarion and Lowell had written about spoke a language very similar to that spoken in Geneva was stupefying. He called the Martian
cycle a “curious mixture of Oriental exoticism and of childish puerility” (ibid: 255). After the nature of the Martian had been revealed to Flournoy it became “wearisome” (ibid: 261). In a final experiment, he made a simple demonstration of the suggestibility of Müller’s phenomena. During October 1898 while Müller was awake, he expressed to her his “utter scepticism as to the Martian” (ibid: 263), and (on October 16th) showed her “the full translation of the Martian texts” (ibid: 264), and its “fundamental resemblances to French” (ibid.). Seventeen days later, Müller’s Martian visions and speech were replaced with a new ‘ultra-Martian’ dream with its own language (ibid: 268). Suggestibility explained the sources of many of Müller’s idea and cryptomnesia explained how she acquired vocabulary, but Flournoy’s theories of unconscious mental processes were insensitive to the problem of why Müller’s glossolalia was not random but structured (ibid: 268).

Saussure’s involvement began in May 1896 when Flournoy asked to meet with him to discuss Müller’s strange utterances (see date of S1). In his initial observations of Müller’s Martian and Sanskrit, Flournoy saw an opportunity to learn more about the mechanisms behind her phenomena by analysing linguistic evidence (FIPM: 197). Flournoy had collected a few good transcriptions of Müller’s glossolalia, and in May 1896 he carefully copied them out in a letter to Saussure (S1). At first he tackled the problem as a historical linguist, simply comparing the transcriptions of Müller’s Sanskrit with the Sanskrit of the Brahmins (S1). In his first long and careful response Saussure showed that Müller had spoken some Sanskrit sounds and even a few words (S1). Whether there were enough Sanskrit sounds and meaning to call Müller’s utterances Sanskrit was a more difficult question. He did not immediately dismiss the possibility that there was some Sanskrit in what Müller said. On the other hand continuous meaning was never obvious and in every case required much interpretation if it was to be found. As we saw above, Saussure adopted other terms for Müller’s Sanskrit such as ‘Sanskritoid’ and ‘phrases sivroukiennes’ (O. Flournoy 1986, 193), and there were times when he could not take it very seriously (e.g. S1; S6). But the problem of how Müller was introducing structural elements into these utterances seems to have been enough to sustain his keen interest through to the publication of Flournoy’s study of Müller’s phenomena, Des Indes à la planète Mars which appeared in December 1899.
On June 19, 1896, about three weeks after first encountering the texts of Müller’s glossolalia, Saussure wrote to Flournoy about a connection he saw between the Sanskritoid and the Martian (S2). As the Sanskritoid and the Martian came from the same mind, it occurred to Saussure that despite differences in their phonetic character, they could well be assembled from the same “simple process” (S2). Saussure gave a detailed breakdown of one of Müller’s utterances to show how it could have been constructed from Müller’s very scant knowledge of languages other than her native French (see above p. 2). He then located in the simple process a series of rules that Müller appeared to be unconsciously following. Saussure summed up that process as, “haphazardly inserting new forms in the places marked in her mind for each new word in French” (S2). Obviously restricted by her lack of knowledge of Sanskrit, Müller had little freedom with the sounds she could choose. Saussure found that she was additionally inhibited by the rules belonging to the language sounds she employed. There was a system behind her glossolalia, and he found in “the Sivroukian phrases something analogous to the Martian” (S2).

By breaking down Müller’s utterances to their constituent parts, Saussure saw that her Sanskritoid-Martian process ultimately created nothing. Most elements came from an established language system, while some arbitrary sounds appeared here and there. Müller imposed only one rule, “not to let the audience suspect that it is French” (S2). In other words, all but one of the forces in the process belonged to one or other language system and Müller followed these unwittingly. This process strongly foreshadows Saussure’s later characterisation of language as “a structured system”, or Langue:

Amid the disparate mass of facts involved in language, it stands out as a well defined entity. It can be localised in that particular section of the speech circuit where sound patterns are associated with concepts. It is the social part of language, external to the individual, who by himself is powerless either to create it or to modify it. (CGL: 14)

Each attempt on Müller’s part not to speak French brought forth a sound Müller knew from another language, and with each sound came the syntactic rules of its usage. The speech process described by Saussure in his letter to Flournoy of June 19, 1896, (S2)
draws into question the very possibility of will or creativity in human speech. Saussure’s inclusion of a social dimension to Flournoy’s theory of teleological automatism contains implications for his theory of language as it is used, or parole. Thus, the detail in the description of Sanskritoid-Martian speech can immediately be seen for its theoretical weight and historical importance. Saussure’s later criticism of psychology reflects the position he established in analysing Müller’s glossolalia:

[T]he psychologist...studies the mechanism of the sign in the individual. This is the most straightforward approach, but it takes us no further than individual execution. It does not even take us as far as the linguistic sign itself, which is social by nature. (CGL: 16)

Saussure’s discussion of Müller’s process of assembling glossolalia is in one sense such a study of individual execution. But in another sense it is a complex application of the theory of the sign, and because that analysis gives specific examples of the operation of the process, we can see it as perhaps Saussure’s clearest discussion of the ‘language mechanism’ which would later appear in the *Cours de linguistique générale*.

Saussure’s breakdown of Müller’s Sanskritoid-Martian process is the most striking example of a mental process in Flournoy’s argument. This machine-like process accorded with Flournoy’s ideas of teleological automatism and cryptomnesia, but was much more detailed and precise. This detail and precision are demonstrated in his many comparisons between Müller’s Sanskritoid and the Sanskrit of the Brahmans and his analyses of Müller’s written Devanagari characters. In 1899 as Flournoy was preparing *Des Indes* for publication, Saussure continued to assist by giving careful commentary of the printing proofs (S6). At this time he produced an additional short text to help communicate the relationship between Sanskritoid and Sanskrit. In this text he distorted the Latin of Cicero in a way that he saw as equivalent to Müller’s Sanskritoid distortion of the Sanskrit of the Brahmans (*FIPM/S*: 319 n. p. 206). Saussure’s four-year involvement in Flournoy’s study of Müller’s somnambulism with glossolalia is a fascinating contribution by a linguist to psychology in an era when both fields of study were in the midst of becoming what they are today. Though, as we have seen, Flournoy’s study has been duly praised by historians of psychology for the discovery
cryptomnesia (e.g. Ellenberger 1970: 423). Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia have not been well recognized.

Most commentators who have taken up the Flournoy Affair have overlooked Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia and focused on a later incident. That incident came in 1901 following the publication of a text on Müller’s Martian utterances by Saussure’s former Parisian colleague Victor Henry. As we have seen, Saussure had pointed out in 1896 that Müller carefully avoided saying anything in French, and in this text Henry pointed out that the absence of \( f \) in the Sanskritoid (and the Martian where \( f \) appeared only seven times) may be part of Müller’s avoidance of \textit{français} (Henry 1901: 23). Saussure had noted Müller’s avoidance of French as one of the rules of her unconscious speech process. But the commentators made an issue of the fact that Saussure had not made the symbolic connection between \( f \) and \textit{français}. Tzvetan Todorov (1982 [1977]) was the first to take an interest in this apparent irregularity. He presented an argument that suggested Saussure had an obsession with Müller’s glossolalia. His reasoning was that the enthusiastic way Saussure approached the problems of the glossolalia caused a repression of the symbolic role of \( f \) in Müller’s language process. Therefore the inability of Saussure to admit a symbolic relation in Müller’s glossolalia was a symptom of his obsession. Todorov adds that this obsessional character prefigures the fanatical frame of mind with which Saussure approached his anagram research between 1906 and 1909 (ibid: 265). Todorov additionally claims that Saussure’s refusal to change his theory to include symbolism indicates that he accepted the only other explanation articulated at the time, namely the past-life origin of Müller’s Sanskrit. Given that this false dichotomy is not the only logical infelicity in Todorov’s critique, it is surprising that no one has taken a critical view of his position\(^2\). But underlying Todorov’s argument is the central claim that Saussure failed to engage with symbolism and, therefore, the role of the (Freudian) unconscious in language. This is a serious point which requires due attention.

\(^2\)There may be one subtle exception in Jakobson & Waugh’s citation, “cf. Todorov 1977” (218). As Grafton (1997) writes ‘cf.’ “indicates, at least to the expert reader, both that an alternate view appears in the cited work and that it is wrong” (8).
Todorov is far from being alone in his attempt to make Saussurean and Freudian doctrine engage, and, like Todorov, most writers choose the space between sign and symbol for that engagement. Ogden and Richards (1923) asserted that the “analysis of the process of communication is partly psychological” (8). Following this assertion they defined the science of “Symbolism [as] the study of the part played in human affairs by language and symbols of all kinds, and especially their influence on Thought” (ibid: 9, caps in original). Ogden and Richards were critical of both Saussure (ibid: 4–6) and of psychoanalysis (ibid: 13) for inadequacies in their conceptions of symbols. Despite their criticisms many thinkers from a variety of fields have considered linking Saussure’s linguistic sign with Freud’s symbol a worthwhile enterprise. In place of ‘symbol’ Lacan (2006 [1966]) used the term ‘letter’ “[w]hence we can say that is in the chain of the signifier that meaning insists, but that none of the chain’s elements consists in the signification it can provide at that very moment” (ibid: 419). In the psychoanalytic scenario, the psychoanalyst must receive the letter (epistle) the analysand sends them by reading the meaning of their letters (i.e. written characters, or spoken sounds). Barthes (1973 [1964]) explains Lacan’s recruitment of Saussure’s sign as “signifier and signified have only a floating relationship and coincide only at certain anchorage points” (49). Derrida (1977) frames the link between unconscious symbols and signs as: “[u]nconscious experience… produces its own signifiers” (209-10). Many others give their own variation on this theme.

But while drawing a link between Saussurean signs and Freudian symbols may seem natural and useful in psychoanalysis, or literature studies, or semiotics, it is not at all apparent that this is a harmonious marriage in linguistics. Culler (1977 [1976]) writes “Freud’s psychological explanations are usually presented as causal explanations… Linguistics, on the other hand does not pretend to causal analysis:… it shows why the sequence has the form and meaning it does by relating it to the system of the language.” (76). This is not at all to say that Saussure did not incorporate ideas from psychology (e.g. CGL: 16), and certainly the origin of those ideas has been hotly debated. Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia are also valuable in helping understand his stance on psychological processes. Saussure gave a quite specific formulation of the language mechanism that he would discuss in more general terms twelve years later in his courses.
in general linguistics. He saw in Müller’s glossolalia that a few rules imposed at will did not greatly hinder the systemic core of language. In making this observation he showed the dominance that a language system has over the way a speaker constructs an utterance. In this observation lies a validation of Saussure’s linguistic method, and resounding evidence in support of his language mechanism. It may be that Saussure was never so clear about his psychological ideas as he was in his analyses of glossolalia.

The Problem

Despite the existence of several works which appear to address Saussure’s role in the Flournoy Affair we are presented with this problem: there is no critical appraisal of the value of Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia. Instead, critics have focussed on events that followed the publication of *Des Indes* involving a different publication by the linguist Victor Henry. Henry (1901) made an observation that Müller’s avoidance of *f* was a symptom of her avoidance of *français*. This avoidance of *f* was later taken to be a “symbol” operating in Müller’s glossolalia by commentators who have viewed Henry’s observation as both obvious and correct. But this has also left them with the troubling fact that Saussure did not acknowledge this as a symbolic operation. Whether the claim for the presence of symbolic operations is correct or not, Saussure’s failure to recognise it has been interpreted by Todorov (1982) and others as evidence that he was not of sound mind. While the idea of symbol causality in Müller’s glossolalia may have some explanatory power, it is not at all obvious and I can see nothing which confirms that that claim is correct. Yet this has been the consuming focus of criticism on the Flournoy Affair (Todorov 1982; Yaguello 1991; Gadet 1989; Certeau 1996) while important issues of historical facts and potentially valuable linguistic theory contained in Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia have gone unnoticed.

To further contextualise the reading that Saussure may have been thinking irrationally, it is necessary to acknowledge that this is a wider issue in studies of Saussure’s various writings. Some commentators occasionally confuse Saussure’s thought about psychological aspects of language with his personal psychological state. Three episodes
in his life have been marked out as periods of borderline insanity. In the *Cours* (the last of these episodes), Derrida (1976 [1967]) mocks Saussure’s position that writing is secondary to speech and the object of linguistics is constituted by, “the spoken word alone” (*CGL*:H: 24-25) and through strategy of systematic exaggeration takes Saussure to have been ranting insanely about the immorality of the written word as “contamination”, “sin” and “a garment of perversion and debauchery” (Derrida 1976: 34-35), the second almost simultaneous episode (1906-1909) has seen him rendered a “demented seeker of anagrams” (Lecercle 1990: 30) for the three years he spent researching an ancient poetic convention, which appears to have existed only in his imagination. The earliest episode that has promoted commentators to question Saussure’s sanity is the subject of the present study, which finds him obsessed with an imaginary language and sympathizing with spiritualist ideas (Todorov 1982). In response to speculation about Saussure’s irrationality, the literature yields rejoinders that they are “unsupported by any evidence from the *Cours*” (Daylight 2011: 79), and “uncharitable” (Gordon and Schogt 1999: 139).

**The hypothesis**

In the present study I investigate the hypothesis that Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia are essential to understanding his thought on method and psychological aspects of language. My hypothesis challenges the main view expressed by commentaries on this topic on two counts. Firstly, I reject the idea that Saussure’s apparent failure to find symbolism in Müller’s glossolalia is of greater importance than any other element of his analysis of glossolalia. Secondly, I assume that what Saussure had to say on glossolalia may be just as important as any of his other writings. As such there is the potential for Saussure’s thought on glossolalia to have significant repercussions upon how we perceive Saussure’s greater body of work on linguistics. The fact that Saussure did not take the step of recognising *f* as a symbol of *français* may well be an important indicator of his thinking on Müller’s glossolalia. Also, the fact that Saussure was working with a psychologist seems important as the circumstances may have given rise to influence being passed between them. Much of Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia are based on a
formal conception of the mental processes at work between thought and speech. Given that Saussure’s views on mental aspects of the sign are not well understood, any one of these points makes it unlikely that Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia are only of interest to us for something he did not do. Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia contain much detail about his view of the mental processes by which thought is transformed into speech. This detail does not appear in his other writings or lectures. I propose that Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia are of much value to the study of his thought on general linguistics, and therefore to linguistics generally.

**Location and Method**

The present study is intended as a work in the history of linguistics. In particular it is an investigation into Saussure’s thought on mental operations associated with the sign. This area of research has been greatly advanced in recent work by Joseph (2000b; 2005; 2007a; 2008a; 2008b; 2010; 2012) on the mental status of the sign within the scope of the development of Saussure’s thought. The purpose here is not to extend modern semiotic theory, but to investigate little-known aspects of its history. Joseph takes the view that the history of linguistics is indistinguishable from linguistics (2000a: 201). Koerner believes the history of linguistics constitutes, “a branch of the history of ideas in a manner unequalled by any other discipline” (1973: 3). Aarsleff also locates the history of linguistics as a “contribution to the history of ideas” (1967: v). The present work is intended as a contribution in that tradition. At the centre of my investigation are early theories of the mental apparatus behind sign function; the psychology of a speaker’s ability to communicate. Three general questions will guide the investigation:

- How did Saussure apply his diachronic and synchronic methods?
- How did Saussure conceptualise mental operations in language use?
- What is the difference between Saussure’s semiology and symbolism?

My plan of engagement with Saussure’s analysis of glossolalia is to fully and directly address Saussure’s thought on Müller’s glossolalia without reference to external factors such as opinions (whether my own or others’) about Saussure’s mental state. Following
Shapin and Schaffer (2011 [1985]) I will “play the stranger…to adopt a calculated and an informed suspension of [my] taken-for-granted perceptions” (6). Shapin and Schaffer state that the one great advantage the stranger has over the member is that “the stranger is in a position to know that there are alternatives to [the] beliefs and practices [of a culture]” (ibid.). To explain the Flournoy Affair I saw it necessary to engage in careful study of the biographies of Saussure and Flournoy, to read their letters, and to suspend any interpretation that would focus on the strangeness of the Flournoy Affair. I take this position in response to previous engagements that have dealt selectively with the documents Saussure produced for Flournoy’s study. I also resist the introduction of external factors such as facts about Saussure’s personal life. In this way I have endeavoured to approach the ideas expressed in Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia as ideas, and to avoid the distractions of this episode of Saussure’s career that have led some theorists to confuse Saussure’s ideas about linguistics with their own foregone conclusions regarding his character. No doubt some elements of the history I will discuss here are strange, but these elements of strangeness will be excluded from the discussion of ideas. It will be of no interest here whether Saussure was a demented linguist, a spiritualist sympathizer, or, for that matter, a bugling pirate.

The Chapter Map

This dissertation consists of an introduction, five chapters and a conclusion. It has been my aim to keep the format clear, and with as little deviation from a standard structure as possible. The format does however carry some features which differ from convention and of which I would like to make the reader aware. As the distinction between primary and secondary sources is central to my discussion, it was inappropriate to address them in a single literature review chapter. The primary sources appear in full in chapter 1, and the secondary sources are reviewed in chapter two. Chapter two also contains a a summary of my central argument for the purpose of making clear the difference

---

3 For a photo of Saussure in fancy dress see ‘Un génie: F. de Saussure’ biographical note by Franck Jotterand accompanied by an interview with Claude Lévi-Strauss by L. A. Zbinden in Gazette de Lausanne, 16.02.1963 p. 17.
between the approach of the present study and approaches that have been taken in other commentaries. In chapters three and four I provide evidence in support of the conclusion of my central argument. In chapter five I take a strong position against an argument in the secondary literature which attacks a premise in my central argument. In the conclusion I summarise the contents of chapters one to five and restate the results of the study. In the following paragraphs I elaborate on the content of the chapters indicated in the format I have described.

This introduction has stated the context of the research, articulated the problem and posed a hypothesis. The context for research is Ferdinand de Saussure’s involvement in a study of a case of somnambulism with glossolalia principally conducted by Theodore Flournoy during the 1890s. Saussure’s role in that study was to analyse two varieties of glossolalia uttered by a spiritualist named Müller; one, which resembled Sanskrit, another, which was claimed to be Martian. The historical fact of Saussure’s involvement as a part of his life I refer to as ‘the Flournoy Affair’. The twelve documents that Saussure produced in response to the glossolalia of Catherine-Élise Müller I collectively refer to as his ‘analyses of glossolalia’. The problem which has been identified is that the analyses of glossolalia have not received their due evaluation in the secondary literature. I contend that these analyses of glossolalia are in fact of much greater value than has been previously suggested. I followed this point of contention with the hypothesis that Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia are essential to understanding his thought on method and psychological aspects of language.

In chapter one I provide a dossier Catherine-Élise Müller’s glossolalia texts (comprising transcriptions of her speech and her own texts of automatic writing), and Saussure’s analyses of those texts. This dossier is set out in two sections. The first section consists of a selection of fifteen texts of Müller’s Sanskritoid utterances accompanied with notes regarding what is known about their transcriptions. These fifteen texts are those that Saussure directly commented on. The second section consists of twelve documents in English translation containing Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia intended for Flournoy to use in his research into Müller’s spiritualist phenomena. Each of Saussure’s documents is accompanied by a contextualizing statement containing explanations of
Saussure’s approach to Müller’s utterances and writings, as well as historical and technical information necessary to understanding their content. This dossier represents the primary texts that are referred to throughout the discussion and analysis.

In chapter two I review the secondary literature on Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia and state the argument in favour of the hypothesis. The review covers every text I have found that mentions the Flournoy affair, but its aim is to distinguish themes that arise in secondary texts that offer more than mere mentions. Only a handful of such texts exist. Three of them, Fehr (1995), Gasparov (2012) and Joseph (2012) suggest a connection between some of Saussure’s ideas about glossolalia and his general linguistic theory. Fehr expresses the view that there is continuity between the glossolalia-producing mental process Saussure proposed in his analyses of glossolalia and the language mechanism of the *Cours*. Gasparov sees Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia as disorderly, but of some value. Joseph gives a comprehensive historical account of those analyses in his biography of Saussure. The remaining texts Gadet (1989), Yaguello (1991), Certeau (1996) take a position which has been repeated with only slight variation since its first iteration in Todorov (1982). Because this position is presented in the majority of secondary texts it appears to be a position that has exerted the most influence. This view holds that Saussure’s analyses are invalid because he failed to recognise a symbolic dimension in Müller’s glossolalia. I propose the opposite – that an acknowledgement of a ‘symbolic dimension’ in Müller’s glossolalia would have invalidated his analyses. In contrast to the reasoning found in Todorov and those who have followed him, I state that I intend to show that Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia contain applications of general linguistic ideas, as well as substantial development of those ideas.

In chapter three I identify the methodology employed by Saussure in his analyses of glossolalia as a practical application of his famous methodological distinction between synchronic and diachronic linguistics. I argue that Saussure took two approaches in his analyses of glossolalia. One approach was a comparison between Müller’s utterances and the Sanskrit of the Brahmins and reflected Saussure’s training as a comparative grammarian. The other was an attempt to establish how much Sanskrit Müller actually knew and involved the theorization of how Müller’s utterances were produced. I call
these the ‘grammatician approach’ and the ‘systemic approach’ respectively. I then turn to the question of substantial development to discuss the possibility that these two approaches emerge from Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia. I argue that the ‘grammatician approach’ and the ‘systemic approach’ brought Saussure closer to the methodological distinction between synchronic linguistics and diachronic linguistics which appears in the Cours.

In chapter four I argue that the “simple process” (S2) Saussure theorises in his analyses of glossolalia was instrumental in the crystallization of Saussure’s later concept of the ‘language mechanism’. Saussure used that process to explain the production of Müller’s utterances. It consisted of a series of rules that limited her ability to speak in familiar language and forced her to speak in a way that sounded somewhat like Sanskrit. To support my claim that substantial development of this concept took place, I show that Saussure did not use a mechanical metaphor to describe the operation of speech before the Flournoy Affair, and that the language mechanism he described in the Cours was a generalization of what he had first found evidence for in Müller’s glossolalia. I further show that in 1896 Saussure theorised a sophisticated machine-like language process which saw generalization towards the end of the Flournoy Affair, when Saussure constructed a ‘Latinoid’ version of Müller’s Sanskritoid to better communicate the process to a wider audience. In doing so, he made the idea of an utterance-producing mental process into a theory of the relationship between speech and language system.

My main claim in chapter five is that Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia can clarify the limits of symbolism in Saussurean semiology. I problematize Todorov’s argument with a demonstration of how the mental relation that Henry proposed between $f$ and français can be explained more simply if it is not taken to be a symbol. I then locate Todorov’s move as part of a wider and not always warranted effort to connect Saussure’s theory of the linguistic sign with Freudian symbols. But Saussure’s considerations of symbols at various points during his career show that he did not deny the existence of symbolic operations, but that symbols only fall within his sign theory insofar as they are intentional articulations. From that point I differentiate the causal type of symbol that Henry proposed, and argue that because the Saussurean sign does not have a referent,
causal relations do not make sense in Saussurean semiology. Therefore, I claim that Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia help to clarify his position on symbols; they stand as an example of the broad explanatory power Saussure saw in signs as opposed to the more limited (or specialised) potential for symbols to explain linguistic phenomena.

In the concluding chapter I summarise my findings, discuss the implications of these findings and presents the results of the study. I discuss the answers to the general questions and the hypothesis that Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia are of greater value than has been generally perceived. Based on the argument in this thesis I reassert my claims that Saussure’s method of analysing glossolalia was an important step in the crystallisation of central aspects of his general linguistic theory: his dual synchronic and diachronic linguistic methods, his language mechanism, and his delimitation of the sign.

The Flournoy Affair is a misunderstood period of Saussure’s career, but the analyses of glossolalia Saussure produced are a rich and rigorous consideration of psychological phenomena and living speech. Throughout this study I challenge the interpretation of the Flournoy Affair as an oddball moment in the history of linguistics. Instead, I favour the position that the Flournoy Affair is a scientific moment in Saussure’s career. It is scientific because elements of his thought were tested and, once tested, were improved to fit the data. In his analyses of glossolalia we can see the crystallisation of Saussure’s methodological distinction between synchronic and diachronic linguistics and that his analyses contain the most elaborated formulation of his language mechanism. A first glance gives the strangeness of Saussure at a séance, but the last look reveals a historic meeting between psychology and linguistics.
Chapter 1: Müller’s utterances and Saussure’s analyses

Introduction

In this chapter I present the primary texts of the Flournoy Affair in two groups. The first group consists of the texts of Müller’s glossolalia and graphic automatisms that Saussure directly referred to in his analyses. These texts are labelled M(X), where M stands for Müller and X equals the numerical order in which Saussure mentioned them. It is not always clear who transcribed which text, but Müller’s spoken glossolalia was generally transcribed by Flournoy or a colleague. M1-6, M8 and M10-12 were either transcribed by Flournoy, Lemaître or Cuendet (FIPM: 4). M9 was transcribed by Saussure. Four texts were written by Muller herself. M7 is a letter in French containing some Devanagari characters as a result of her graphic hallucinations. M13 is Müller’s transcription of words she saw in a dream, and M14 is a conversation she heard in a dream. M15 is an example of Müller’s automatic writing. These texts are lifted from Flournoy’s book, Des Indes and provided here so that readers can gain a sense of what Saussure was looking at as he wrote his analyses.

The second group of texts has been translated from transcriptions of Saussure’s analyses which appear in the original French in, Théodore et Léopold: De Théodore Flournoy à la psychanalyse (1986) by Olivier Flournoy, Theodore Flournoy’s grandson. These texts are labelled S(X), where S stands for Saussure, and X corresponds to the
chronological order in which the documents were written. Long sections of these
documents had already appeared in quotation in *Des Indes*, but the great benefit of O.
Flournoy’s text is that it gives readers a direct sense of Saussure’s writings on
glossolalia. (The most direct sense comes from the ‘Latinoid’ document presented here
as S8, which O. Flournoy presented in facsimile.) Some of the documents are letters,
whereas others are devoid of epistolary conventions. They include different types of
analyses, technical points regarding Sanskrit phonology, occasional jokes, and other
oddities which do not appear in Th. Flournoy’s long quotations of those documents in
*Des Indes*. I introduce each of Saussure’s analyses with a note to provide information
that appears to be missing for outsiders, but would have been understood between
Saussure and Flournoy.

**Müller and her tongues**

Flournoy tells us that as a child Catherine-Élise Müller had a particular distaste for the
study of foreign languages, but many opportunities to acquire foreign words and sounds
by osmosis. At school she attended German classes only reluctantly (*FIPM*: 17). Yet
she was exposed to languages frequently in her formative years. Her father was a
Hungarian merchant and a polyglot (ibid.). She had no apparent experience of the
Sanskrit language, yet she confessed to having “great taste for that which is original and
connected with the Orient” (*FIPM*: 265). Flournoy believed that Müller first
encountered names of Hindu deities and royalties by following up on her interest in
books on India (ibid.). In such books she may have also come across other words
suggestive of the sounds of Sanskrit. According to both Flournoy and Saussure’s
theories of Müller’s glossolalia, these remnants of languages would be the corpus from
which she would assemble her many strange utterances. Flournoy called this type of
phenomenon *cryptomnesia*, which he described as, “reappearances of memories
profoundly buried beneath the normal waking state, together with an indeterminate
amount of imaginative exaggeration upon the canvas of actual facts” (*FIPM*: 276).
Cryptomnesia was Flournoy’s theory of how Müller came to use knowledge that she
had no recollection of ever having acquired. The historian Henri Ellenberger has viewed
Flournoy’s discovery of cryptomnesia as an important contribution to a late nineteenth
century debate among psychologists and philosophers regarding “whether the individual retains an unconscious record of the totality of the memories of his entire life” (1970: 318). We will see (here and in chapter three) that Flournoy and Saussure appear to have differed in opinion regarding the accuracy of such an unconscious record.

Though foreign languages were not among Müller’s earliest phenomena, there seems to have been a focus on language from the beginnings of her interest in spiritism. In 1892 she attended her first séances where she produced her earliest automatic writings (*FIPM*: 36-37). Many of Müller’s séances concerned her own spiritual adventures in a variety of ‘cycles’ including the Hindu cycle, the Martian cycle, the Ultra-Martian cycle (on a Martian moon), the Lunière cycle (on our Moon) and the Uranian cycle (on Uranus) (Flournoy 1901: 136). Each of these had their own corresponding language (ibid.). Though when conscious she knew nothing about Sanskrit, she held that the speech which passed over her lips during her Hindu trances was Sanskrit (*FIPM*: 292).

Flournoy reported that Müller was “absolutely convinced that she never saw or heard the least fragment of Sanscrit of any other Oriental language” (*FIPM*: 336), and that she was firmly of the opinion was that all of her unusual phenomena, spoken and written, or otherwise, were of spirit origin and therefore beyond reproach (*FIPM*: 142).

The majority of her texts were spoken or sung and, as such, it was necessary to transcribe them. The transcription process itself was highly problematic. Most transcriptions were the work of Flournoy or his colleagues August Lemaître and a “Prof. Cuendet, vice president of the Geneva Society (spiritistic) for Psychic Studies” (*FIPM*: 4). Though standardized transcription did exist at the time it was a relatively new technology, and not even all linguists were yet putting it into practice*. Saussure’s transcription of one of Müller’s songs (M9) may be the only exception. Müller’s written texts are problematic for other reasons. Her Devanagari characters are poorly drawn and hard to recognise. Most often they are used to represent a part or all of a French word. Frequently the leading character of a French word would be in Devanagari with the following characters in alphabet (e.g. M7). The differences between Sanskrit and French

---

4 Incidentally, Saussure had himself offered an amendment to the standard phonetic transcription of Sanskrit two years earlier at the 1894 International Congress of Indo-Europeanists (Joseph 2012: 403-406). Saussure and Paul Oltramare, another of the linguists who assisted in the analysis of Müller’s Sanskritoid (see *FIPM*: 315), were also the secretaries of that conference (Anon. 1897: 6).
phonology meant that in writing this way she could introduced an extra vowel into a word (e.g. दान्स [=*daans] in M7, see S4 for Saussure’s explanation), while remaining ignorant of what she had done. She only very rarely wrote whole Sanskrit words entirely in Devanagari. The alphabet Müller referred to as Martian was also employed in some of Muller’s writings. Many of the characters in that alphabet strongly resembled Devanagari characters (e.g. FIPM: 205, 223), while the phonetics of the system very closely mirrored French (see FIPM: 208).

In all instances she attributed her Sanskritoid phenomena to a secondary personality. Her Sanskrit speech, she claimed was the voice of her 15th century former-life self, Simandini (FIPM: 10). Simandini would speak her Sanskrit in séances and occasionally write some Devanagari characters outside of séances, such as while Müller was composing the letter presented here as M7 (FIPM: 333). Sometimes Müller – speaking as her spirit-guide personality, Leopold – would give a translation of what Simandini had said (FIPM: 317). Because Simandini and Leopold were personages sharing Müller’s body, Leopold claimed that he was able to render Simandini’s Sanskrit in French by translating Müller’s feeling as Simandini spoke (ibid.).

**Glossolalia texts**

I hope that one day Flournoy’s letters to Saussure will become available, as they would offer the most accurate idea of what Saussure had before his eyes as he worked through the problems of Müller’s glossolalia. In lieu of Flournoy’s letters, I provide the glossolalia texts that Saussure directly references in his writings. Of the 15 texts only one of them is Martian (M6), and it appears that that is the only Martian Saussure had available to him when he remarked in his second letter to Flournoy, of June 19, 1896, that he saw the Sanskritoid as “analogous to the Martian” (S2). It is noteworthy that this change in thought (which would have dramatic implications) came about in reaction to just four Martian ‘words’. Yet on November 3, 1899, after viewing the Martian texts that appeared in the proofs of Des Indes, Saussure remarked that his position was unchanged:

> It was a great pleasure to be further introduced to Martian, but without
discovering anything further regarding the ‘key’ to seeing a fixed relationship between the French and Martian forms. (S10)

The transcriptions themselves raise some questions for which I have been unable to find satisfactory answers. One important question is: ‘who transcribed which texts?’ I have marked the texts that were either written by Müller or transcribed by Saussure. For the remainder, Flournoy only tells us that the bulk of the texts were transcribed by himself, Lemaître or Cuendet (FIPM: 4). A second question is: ‘how should we interpret the diacritical marks?’ Flournoy offers no advice regarding the meaning of the diacritical notations in the transcriptions, nor whether any standardized notation had been employed. Given that, except for Saussure, the scribes were not linguists, and phonetic transcription was a relatively new technology at the time, it seems that the exact accentuation and tone of Müller’s glossolalia has been lost.

M1: Hindu names

Simaṅdini (first appeared May 26 1895, Des Indes: 267)

Mitidja (undated, Des Indes: 296)

Adél (undated, Des Indes: 208)

M2: Phrase 1, scene of religious blessing, September 15, 1895.

atiêyâ…ganapatinâmá. (Des Indes: 263)

M3: Phrase 2, Scene of tenderness No. 1, undated


M4: Phrase 3, response to admonishment, undated

adaprati tava sivrouka . . . nô simyô sinonyedô . . . on yediô sivrouka.

(Des Indes: 296)

M5: Phrase 4, 2nd scene of tenderness, undated

mama plia . . . mama naximi (or naxmi) sivrouka . . . aô laos, mi sivrouka.

(Des Indes: 296)
M6: Martian titles, February 2, 1896, with word-for-word translation.

métiche C. médache C. métaganiche S. kin’t’che
Monsieur C. Madame C. Mademoiselle S. quatre. (Des Indes: 204)

M7: Fig. 37, letter, undated

Le ne fais pas doucet bien ces jours, j’ai bien d’appetit et me ferait que dormir, surtout en cet instant. Le fume sit ma bette, les bouloubl sont treb ma chambre. Ils chantent à qui mieux et sont bien finalement d’etres revénens. Ils sont accompagnés de Kama qui se la joue plus entre deux et que j’ils fréquent le chevrene. Joli qu’ils sont superbes et tout en fleurs.

(FIPM: 333).

M8: ‘song’ first rendition, May 22 1897

Ga hïa vahaïyami . . . vassén iata . . . pattissaïa priaïa.. (Des Indes: 301)

M9: ‘song’ second rendition, transcribed by Saussure, June 20, 1897

Gâya gaya naïa ia miya gayâ briti...gaya vaya yâni pritiya kriya gayâni i gayâ mamattua gaya mama nara mama patti si gaya gandaryô gaya ityami vasanta...
gaya gaya yâmi gaya priti gaya priya gaya patisi... (Des Indes: 302)

M10: context unidentified, May 2, 1897

[1] pritivi. [2] ...balava santas...émi bahu pressiva santas... (Des Indes: 309)

M11: context unidentified, March 28, 1897

prâïapati. (O. Flournoy 1986: 191)

M12: [context unidentified, December 13, 1896]

ékã...bahu... Sadour. (O. Flournoy 1986: 192)
M13: [Hindu words heard in a dream and transcribed by Müller, undated]

M14: [Conversation between Simandini and Sivrouka experienced by Müller during hypnogogic state, and noted down after waking, March 1, 1898.]

    [Sivrouka:] Mes nuits sans repos, mes yeux rougis de larmes, Simandini, ne toucheront-ils point enfin ton attamana? Ce jour finira-t-il sans pardon, sans amour? — [Simandini:] Sivrouka, non, le jour ne finira point sans pardon, sans amour; la sumina n’a point été lancée loin de moi, comme tu l’as supposé elle est là, vois-tu! — [Sivrouka:] Simandini, ma soucca, maccanna baguea, pardonne-moi encore, toujours! (Des Indes: 299)5

M15: [written words by Müller, undated]

gava, vindamini, jotisse. (Des Indes: 300)

---

5 [Sivrouka:] “My nights without repose, my eyes red with tears, Simandini, will not these touch at last thy attamana? Shall this day end without pardon, without love?”
[Simandini:] “Sivrouka, no the day shall not end without pardon, without love; the sumina has not been launched far from me, as thou hast supposed; it is there – dost thou see?”
[Sivrouka:] “Simandini, my soucca, maccanna baguea—pardon me again, always!” (FIPM: 324)
The author of the analyses

Saussure famously referred to his career as “thirty years of silence” (qtd. in Morpurgo Davies 2004: 28). Following the two promising manuscripts he published in 1878 and 1880 he only published short works in *Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris*. In 1894 after returning to Geneva, he presented the first and only paper that he would ever give at an international conference. That paper was a significant work on Lithuanian accentuation, and it earned him a linguistic law (Joseph 2012: 422). In 1909 when asked about the development of the ideas in his courses in general linguistics he replied that those ideas had occupied him fifteen years earlier (*SM*: 29), therefore suggesting that he had had no new ideas since 1894. Given that he had not published anything on general linguistics, and several works with similar ideas had appeared during the 1890s, this statement may have been his way of asserting his ownership of the ideas he presented in his lectures. That is more or less how the comment has been understood by historians of linguistics, especially Koerner (1972; 2008) and Aarsleff (1982). But the Flournoy Affair contests this view of Saussure. His analyses of glossolalia, conducted between 1896 and 1899, show him very actively thinking through, applying and developing his general linguistic ideas in original ways.

When Flournoy came to Saussure with a question, Saussure answered enthusiastically. In 1893 Saussure had responded to a questionnaire regarding synaesthesia from Flournoy’s psychology laboratory – actually drawn up by Flournoy’s student and cousin Édouard Claparède – in painstaking detail. He gave very specific thoughts regarding the colours of vowels (Flournoy 1893: 50-65; Saussure 1983; Joseph 2007b). Flournoy found the response to be such an exemplary case that he printed it in full in the final report of the study. In May, 1896 Flournoy met with Saussure to discuss the problems presented in Müller’s glossolalia (O. Flournoy 1986: 184). Saussure was very interested in the project and responded promptly and in much detail showing where the transcriptions corresponded to Sanskrit, however loosely (S1). He then went on to employ a different approach, this time incorporating some of Flournoy’s ideas into his analysis. As I have indicated, with this second approach he was not interested in whether Müller’s utterances were one or other language, but in how her mind operated to create the peculiar forms in her speech. Undoubtedly, the idea of linking linguistics
with psychology distinctly piqued Saussure’s interest, and the following letters and notes that he passed on to Flournoy show him making clear steps in this direction.

**Saussure’s analyses**

To assist the reader, I introduce each text with information about elements which require further explication. Such elements include obscure texts, names of colleagues and points of assumed knowledge between Saussure and Flournoy which an outsider could not know without further research. For ease of reference I also state which of the fifteen glossolalia texts Saussure mentions in each document. The pseudonym Flournoy used for Müller, Hélène Smith, has already been encountered in the introduction. It should be noted that in these documents “the medium”, “Mlle Smith” and “Mlle X.” all refer to Müller.

**Letter of June 1, 1896**

Saussure began his first letter to Flournoy by expressing his interest in the phenomena Flournoy had described to him. In the textual analyses that follow, Saussure tried to find Sanskrit words, but the odds were against him. He had not been witness to Müller’s exact pronunciation, and the words had been transcribed in a non-standardized Romanisation. His solution was to consider a large margin of error in the transcription and to speculate broadly on Müller’s intonation. The Sanskrit words Saussure suggested were only those that might have had some phonetic agreement with Müller’s utterances. In most cases it was impossible to know the intended meaning of her words. With the comparative approach he used in this first analysis, Saussure struggled to discover combinations of words that make any sense. His attention was caught by one text, the meaning of which Müller appeared to know when she performed it with an appropriate gesture. But the fragments are short and of questionable quality, and Saussure likens finding meaning in these texts to a game.

Glossolalia texts referred to in S1: M1, M2, M3, M4 and M5.
Malagny, June 1 1896

Dear colleague and friend,

I needn’t tell you how much your amiable letter has interested me from one end to the other, but let me tell you that I am a little ashamed to receive so much of your time and your kindness; I was convinced that I asked you for nothing more than a few sentence fragments that had issued from the medium, and you wanted me to know every detail.

I am unfortunately very little versed in things pertaining to the history of India, and I fear that if M. Barth, who is a first rate authority in these areas, does not know the king Sivrouka, there is little to hope for. For the sake of being conscientious I looked at the Marlès book you mention as your source. The name of Sivrouka seems to me odd for a Hindu name. The title Nayaka (prince) which is attached, however, is common.

I have attached a sheet with the remarks that came to my mind when reading the gibberish of Simandini. But you will want to offer me the occasion to speak about it with you again, which would please me greatly. Could you please indicate a good time to meet? Unfortunately I only come to town on Wednesday or Thursday, but it is very easy to meet me where you prefer on Wednesday from 10 to 12 or Thursday from 11 to 12 e.g. university.

Again, a thousand thanks.

My dear friend and colleague, you have my fondest sentiments of devotion.

Fd de Saussure.

To make it simpler, if you happen to be at the University at 10am on Wednesday, I will wait for you until 10:15 in the entrance hall. It is no trouble to
me if you write that you prefer another time.

- Simandini reminds me of Sanskrit sīmantinī which may have been a proper name here and there, but usually it was nothing more than a (poetic) word for “woman”, femina.

- Mitidja brings almost no Hindu to mind except for its final –dja (meaning born of or born).

- Adél, unless it had been heavily mangled, has no Hindu at all.

Ganapatināmā in the sentence atietô… ganapatināmā naturally draws the eye as it not only contains the name of the well-known god Ganapati, but immediately after it is nāma ‘name’. (I don’t know how she has assembled this construction, but it is not necessarily done incorrectly).

It is curious that this fragment is mixed up with the name of a divinity and was pronounced with a sort of solemn emphasis and a gesture of religious blessing.

In the ‘scene of tenderness’, I must say that for my part, at the outset I did not hesitate to understand mamapriva as mama priya ‘darling, or my beloved.’ Even if I had not had this in mind, and with no mention of anything that could indicate the nature of the scene, I would have surely heard it in the same way. Only afterwards, following your comments, did I find the translation of the “finger” so I have to mention that I was free of any preconceived ideas (apart from your word “tenderness”).

Another of these epithets can tolerably be read as

mama sadiou Sivrouka

= mama sādhō
(my good or excellent)

The rest of the phrase, with the exception of tava (‘of you’) offers nothing clear in its present state. The syllable bag- in bagda could, even without translation, be thought of as bhaga- (“bonheur” [= happiness]), but it is surrounded by incomprehensible syllables.

In phrase 3 (response to admonishment) the last words could vaguely be considered to form the word anyêdiuḥ, with the u pronounced as French ou, (‘day after’) repeated twice, and secondly, in Adapratī tava I interpret the first word as adya-prati tava ‘from today’, which, combined with other syllables, themselves adequately triturated, could be something like:

adya-prati tava, Šivrūka…

… yōṣin] na anyêdiuḥ, anyêdiuḥ.

‘Today [-itself] from you, Sivrouka, [? that I am etc. ?? wife] not another day, always another day.’ The remainder (if it has any meaning at all!), as far as I can see, is unrelated to the scene.

The only words here (if we ignore our ears) are prati and tava.

In phrase 4 (2nd scene of tenderness) words mama plia are obviously the same as the above mama priva, i.e. priya mama, my beloved.

Naxmi could be Lakshmi ‘beauty and good fortune.’

Additionally, ao laosmi Sivrouka may contain asmi ‘I am.’

In sum, it should be clearly understood that any kind of continuous meaning, where I amused myself to find it, is for the moment only a game.

On the other hand there are sometimes two words like mama priya that one grasps perfectly well that have somehow found their way to the mouth of your medium.

Besides that, many words without connections like tava, nāma, and the name
Ganapati etc.... are also pure Sanskrit.

Another observation: In the little one understands I cannot help but notice that there are rather suspicious things such as the construction, and sometimes word order, and perhaps also the accuracy of the forms (though the text is too confused for us to rely on forms).

For example, I do not remember that one can say in Sanskrit ‘my Sivrouka’ nor ‘my dear Sivrouka’. (One can say mama priya ‘my beloved’, substantively, but this is something quite different to mama priya Çivruka). It is ‘my dear Sivrouka’, however, that occurs most frequently. I do not however want to affirm anything too absolutely, especially when in certain periods such as the 15th century much haphazardly made Sanskrit appeared in India.

In the scene of tenderness No. 1 there is also apa tava which, if it means what was claimed, ‘far from you’ (see the translation of the ‘finger’), is a pure barbarism...

Now, it is always possible to imagine that because the 11th wife of Sivrouka was a child of Arabia she did not have time to learn to express herself without fault in the language of her dear lord and master before her short life ended on the stake...? This is one explanation just like any other, don’t you think?

Last observation: Most surprising of all is that Mme Simantini spoke Sanskrit and not Prakrit (the relationship of Sanskrit to Prakrit is that of Latin to French, one formed out of the other, one is the academic language of the time, while the other is spoken).

In the Hindu drama, we see kings, Brahmins and persons of high rank regularly use Sanskrit, and one might wonder if it was consistently the case in real life. But women of all ranks, even in the drama, spoke Prakrit. A king addresses his wife in the noble language (Sanskrit), and she always responds in the vernacular.

If the idiom of Simandini is Sanskrit, it is very unrecognizable. In any case it
is not Prakrit. One only needs to look at some of the forms, for example, *priya*, that in all vulgar dialects would be rendered *piya* without *r*.

Might Simandini have been a blue stocking?

**Letter of June 19, 1896**

In his search for the origin of Müller’s knowledge of Hindu names, Saussure contacted Indianist and professor at Liege, Charles Michel. Michel wrote that he was interested in the case and would continue to search for answers, but did not immediately recognise the name Sivrouka (see O. Flournoy 1896: 188-190). Saussure included Michel’s reply with his letter to Flournoy (O. Flournoy 1896: 183; S1). But Saussure was not only interested in historical comparison; he also wondered about the causes of Müller’s strange phenomena. A breakthrough came with the idea that the Sanskritoid and the Martian are produced by the same process. To explain what kind of process he had in mind, he produced his most elaborated discussion of the mental process that produces speech. This process he suggested relied entirely on the notion that speech is immutably systemic. In other words, all parts of speech are ruled by the system to which they belong, or conversely, a speaker may only produce a language unit in accordance with what they understand of the language system. Because Müller’s knowledge of the languages she was trying to produce was cripplingly limited (*FIPM*: 331), Saussure was able to observe her speech sounds and deduce the simplified relations by which she passively put them together. Even though the only Martian Saussure had seen was the text of Martian titles from February 2 of the same year (M6), this provided him with the important clue that Müller was simply replacing each French word with a constructed equivalent Martian ‘word’. The Sanskritoid phrase he chose to analyse had grammatical complications that did not appear in that first Martian text and could not be explained simply as a process of substitution. Rather it was necessary to think of the Sanskritoid systemically, to discover why Müller assembled sounds the way she did. Using his understanding of language as a system, he was able to outline his “impression” (S2) of was going on in her mind.

Glossolalia texts referred to in S2: M2 and M6.
Malagny, June 19 1896

Dear friend and colleague,

I submit to you a letter from my friend Michel (highly regarded Indianist; professor at Liège) to whom I have written to see if he by chance remembers the name of Sivrouka, explaining to him roughly how the issue arose. I thought of Michel because of his fabulous memory for bibliographical information; he has some notoriety throughout the world as a kind of living directory, regularly knowing which chapter to indicate as the source of the information you are looking for. But alas, even Michel, as you will see, does not know Sivrouka!

It seems that you have had the commendable good fortune of meeting him yourself once in Strasbourg. In this regard I am forced to wonder if it was indiscreet of me to name you in my letter. It seemed slightly ridiculous, vis-à-vis Michel as a correspondent, to keep the mystery of the person wishing to be informed. I did not tell him to share these details with his colleague Delboeuf, and I would be sincerely sorry if the idea which has passed through my head has caused a disadvantage. At least I can assure you that in my letter, the only issue I broached was the bibliographical question; the rest of the information was given as separate but necessary.

On the other side of it, the interest with which he takes to the problem promises us that in subsequent searches there is a good chance, with a flair that I know well, he will find something. Especially since Michel’s scholarship is far from being confined to scientific things, he may be able to find a novel or travelogue series that contains the names sought.

As for the ‘Sanskrit phrases’ mixed in with the dream, he speaks only on trust. I did not give him the actual sentences. I note this as a precaution about his letter so that you do not mistakenly mention Michel among those who recognized
Sanskrit in these sentences.

My dear friend, please convey my thanks once again to Mme Flournoy for her friendly reception the other day.

Sincerely yours,

F. de Saussure.

PS – Rightly or wrongly, I am now disposed to see in the Sivroukian phrases something analogous to the Martian interspersed only at intervals with Sanskrit shreds.

As a simple illustration of my idea, or rather my impression, suppose Simandini wants to say this sentence: ‘I bless you in the name of Ganapati’.

While she is in the Sivroukian state the only thing that comes to her is the idea not to say, or rather not to pronounce anything with French words. Nevertheless French words are the theme or substratum of what she will say, and the law that governs her mind is that familiar words are each rendered with a substitute of exotic appearance.

The important thing is: it must firstly and above all not appear to be French in her own eyes; and she is satisfied by saying, for example, Madame as Maguish or Mademoiselle as Manogadish, haphazardly inserting new forms in the place marked in her mind for each word in French.

It remains only to add (in my instinctive ‘explanation’) that sometimes the substitution is completely arbitrary and sometimes it will be influenced or determined by the memory of a foreign word, whether it be English, Hungarian, German, Sanskrit – with a natural preference for the idiom that best accords with the location of the scene.

That given, I try to tighten my gaze upon these hypothetical workings with an example of how a particular phrase is emitted: “I bless you in the name of Ganapati.”

1. Je. “Je” is forced to change. Does her memory provide her with an exotic
word for *je*? No. Then one is chosen at random $a = \text{“je”}$. [Perhaps it has in fact been inspired by the English *I*, pronounced *ai*, but this is not necessary.]

2. *Vous bénis* [lit: you bless]; or *bénis vous* [lit: bless you] because if, for example, the word *I* was suggested by the English it may follow that the English construction occurs involuntarily in the words placed immediately afterwards.

   Consequently we mark,

   bless you

   for: *tyê yo*.

   The *yo* (you) may have been taken from the English you. The *tyê* = bless, could be taken from anywhere, as in Martian.

3. *in the name of Ganapati*: Of course the name of Ganapati is outside of any mechanism, and had to be taken from somewhere as it is. The remainder *in the name of*… that can be expressed with *nâmâ*, either by recollection of the German *Nâme*, or the revival of a Sanskrit *nâma*, also used sometimes. And finally the construction, opposing the order of French words will come on the wings of the German *Nâme*, after the German *in Gottes Namen*, *in Ganapati’s Namen*.

   This figuration is a simple process that I wish to show you. I attach no point of importance to the specific phrase I have used here.

   In sum, the gibberish takes its components from where it can, and half the time is invented with the only rule not to let the audience suspect that it is French. Naturally, it is, I repeat, my impression, such as it is, that I give you.

**Letter of June 30, 1896**

In this next letter Saussure returns to making comparisons, but within these comparisons Saussure appears to be taking Flournoy’s idea of teleological automatism in his own direction. Saussure was especially concerned with fine points of spelling in the names appearing in texts written by Müller. Flournoy had discovered that the name “Sivrouka Nacaya” appears in an obscure text called *General History of India, Ancient and Modern, from the Year 2000 B. C. to our Own Times* by Marlès (1828). (Saussure had
already alluded to this text in S1 above.) As this appeared to be the only text mentioning
the name Flournoy was convinced that this was the source of Müller’s Sivrouka. But
Saussure questioned the source on the basis that Müller’s spellings of the naïk’s name
and his fortress differ from that source. Flournoy was willing to put these small
discrepancies down to forgetting; Saussure was not. Flournoy would never quote this
letter in Des Indes but he did take the time to defend himself against Saussure’s
criticism without mentioning that it came from Saussure (see FIPM: 305).

Glossolalia texts referred to in S3: M3, M4 and M5 contain Sivrouka, but the spelling
‘Sivruka’ only appears in FIPM in quotation attributed to Saussure (FIPM: 319). The
alternative spelling of Tchandraguiri – Tchadraguiri – cannot be found in FIPM.
Readers must consult Des Indes (265) as the spelling appears to have been normalised
in the process of translation to English (FIPM: 305). This normalisation creates no
problem for the internal consistency of FIPM, but it does render Saussure’s criticism
incomprehensible.

S3
(Translated from original French in O. Flournoy 1986: 195)

June 30, 1896

Dear friend,

I passed on your thanks on to M. Michel along with my own, and at the same
time I mentioned the two book titles given in the new letter from M. Barth, as
well as the Simandini phrases of which I had spoken to him very briefly in my
first letter. He wants to write to me again on these two topics, though I asked him
not to reply and should have simply thanked him for his promise not to ignore
even this small problem. If you find it useful for your purposes to hold on to the
information contained in his letter, the easiest way would be for you to keep the

6 Dow 1803, History of Hindustan, Translated from the Persian of Férishta, London, and, Buchanan 1807,
A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar, London.
original rather than to bother copying it out, as I do not need it anymore.

Sincere wishes to you,

Fd. de Saussure

June 30.

PS. Isn’t it that *Sivrouka nayaca* is printed in Marlès as I write it, the first with *k*, the second with *c*? If this detail is found in the spelling of the ‘finger’ dictation, it could be safely presumed that we needn’t to look farther than Marlès for the origin of the dream. But, unless I am mistaken, didn’t the finger dictate *Nayaka*?

On the other hand, it is found that *Tchadraguiri* has been dictated with *gu*, rather than with a simple *g*. And *Sivrouka* with *ou* and not with a simple *u*? This last name, if I am not mistaken, had to be dictated twice, the first day when the name was expressed by the finger and then on the day when it translated the sentence *ou mama priva ... Sivrouka*.

**Document of (late) June, 1897**

The 4th document is devoid of epistolary conventions, so it is unclear how it came to arrive in Flournoy’s hands. It is a concise lesson in Sanskrit phonetics followed by a discussion of the problems in Müller’s usages of Devanagari characters. Although the hypothesis that Flournoy will maintain in *Des Indes* – that Müller mechanically reproduced forms that had been sighted in print but not heard – is already implicit in the previous letter, it is first explicitly broached here. While Saussure principally concerned himself with errors in Müller’s written characters, the best proof for the mechanical reproduction hypothesis comes from an instance of speech. Müller pronounced the letter *u* as in French front-rounded */y/* rather than as the Sanskrit back vowel */u* , indicating that she did not know what the word sounded like. As this document follows Saussure’s attendance at one or more séances he had suspicions of this type of error in pronunciation, but the very limited syllabary that Müller employed during his attendances made verification difficult.
Glossolalia texts referred to in S4: M7 (written characters), M8, M9, M10, M11 and M12.

S4

(Translated from original French in O. Flournoy 1986: 191-192)

- Sanskrit grammars usually provide letters of the alphabet not in vertical columns, but arranged in 10 classes, reproducing the order and divisions of the Hindus:

1. a â i î u ü etc. (Vowels)
2. ê ai ô au (Diphthongs)
3. k kh g gh ı (guttural consonants)
4. č čh ġ ġh ı (palatal consonants)
5. ṭ ṭh ḍ ḍh ṇ (retroflex consonants)
6. t th d dh n (dental consonants)
7. p ph b bh m (labial consonants)
8. y v r l (semi-consonants)
9. ç § s (sibilants)
10. h.

Is it just a coincidence that of the seven letters of Mlle. X. there are four, maybe five, mimicking the initial letter of a class: अ (a) ; ए (ê) ; त (t) this is rendered poorly as त or त; प (p); and finally perhaps छ (in छद्यिवा) could be the initial letter of class 5: ठ turned in the wrong direction.

This remainder is indeed ठ = d (‘संस मa chambre’) which is not the initial letter of the class and is relatively very well formed in your copy. Otherwise, there is the letter standing for i; yet this one, which for Mlle. X has the form ठ, bears no
relation to the Hindu letter ड.

The vocabulary is somewhat increased with the new ‘communications’. Among other forms that did not appear in the earlier texts are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Word and Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 22</td>
<td><em>gaïa</em> (in the “Hindu chant”), apparently = <em>gâya</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 20</td>
<td>‘song’ (the second rendition).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1897)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2, 97</td>
<td><em>pritivi</em>. Sanskrit <em>prthivī</em> earth. (Usually transcribed <em>prthivī</em>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 28, 1897</td>
<td><em>prâîapatî</em>. could by chance be <em>Praîâpati</em>, the master of generations, a known deity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 13, 96</td>
<td><em>êka</em>. Sanskrit <em>êkah</em> ‘one’ or ‘only’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>bahu</em>. The Sanskrit <em>bahu</em> ‘much’ is a very common word,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>but it would be interesting to know if Miss X. pronounced it <em>bahou</em>, or <em>bahü</em> as in the French <em>battu</em>, <em>tondu</em>. This last fact would be one of the most glaring proofs that she mechanically repeats written forms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The new ‘texts’ are also interesting, despite being poorly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>formed, in the sense that for the first time one can also</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>catch a trace of inflection. The word previously known as <em>sado</em> (vocative <em>sadhô</em> oh good, oh loyal!) appeared again on December 13 as <em>sadour</em> (nominative <em>sâdhur</em> the good, the loyal).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 May 97</td>
<td>and on May 2, alongside <em>bahu</em>, I find <em>bahava</em> (= <em>baha</em>-vaḥ, the nominative plural of the same <em>bahu</em> meaning <em>multi</em>),</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
all the more curiously, it is placed immediately in front of santas, another plural. (Santas = being, bahavah santas in good Sanskrit means ‘being numerous’).

Letter of May 20, 1899

Until this point Saussure had refrained from making a clear statement regarding whether he thought Müller’s utterances or writings contained Sanskrit. In this next letter Saussure appraised a few potential words of Sanskrit, then, without mincing his words, asserted that it is not Sanskrit. He maintained his earlier theory of how Müller ‘makes Sanskrit’. By speaking in a certain way, her speech coincided with a Sanskrit word here and there, nothing more. He supported this verdict by referring exclusively to the Sanskrit-like characteristics of her utterances. Because there is no consideration of a language system here, his comments might be read as either a supplement or an alternative to the language process he set out in S2.

Glossolalia texts referred to in S5: M14.

S5

(Translated from original French in O. Flournoy 1986: 199-204)

Creux de Genthod, May 20 1899.

Dear friend,

Sumina brings nothing to mind; attamana is at the very most âtmânam ‘friend’ (taken as the accusative, because the same word has in the nominative a very different form: âtmâ). But I hasten to add that in the context where attamana appears the Sanskrit word could not even be used in this way and that it basically means ‘soul’ in philosophical language, or common sense, or has some other academic meaning.

Regarding maçoucca macanna baguea, these words do not appear for the first time. If I remember correctly, they can be found almost unchanged in one of
the fragments you collected three years ago. At least, I am sure, you have already seen *mama souka* (represented today by *ma souka*); the first version was more intelligible, corresponding without difficulty to Sanskrit *mama soukha* (oh my happiness, oh my delight!).

The syllables that follow are less well formed, though they do have a few points of correspondence to Sanskrit. I think I have noted in the past that the particular form collected as *baguea* could refer to different words containing *bhâga* (fortune, happiness).

To the question of whether all this is actually “Sanskrit”, the answer is clearly *no*. We can only say that it is a mishmash of syllables among which;

1. there are indisputably some sequences of eight to ten syllables giving a sentence fragment with a meaning (especially in the case of exclamatory sentences e.g. *mama priya* my beloved! *mama soukha* my delight!).

2. we can also say that the other syllables, though unintelligible in appearance, are never anti-Sanskrit in character. That is to say, they do not appear in groups that are materially in conflict with the general figure of the Sanskrit words.

Finally,

3. the value of this latter observation is moreover diminished quite considerably by the fact that the medium never launches into complicated strings of syllables and strongly affects the vowel *a*. Sanskrit is a language wherein the proportion of *a* compared to other vowels is about 4/1, so it is likely that in pronouncing three or four syllables with *a* one would remotely chance upon a Sanskrit word.

I am at your disposal if that is useful.

Sincerely,

Fd. de Saussure.
Commentary on proofs [undated, early October 1899]

As Flournoy began to make his preparations for the publication of *Des Indes*, he sent on the proofs of the sections containing Saussure’s comments on the Sanskritoid. Saussure found the proofs satisfactory, but nonetheless returned them with comments mostly detailing the accuracy of forms. A long section discusses a form he did not remember having seen ‘ञञञञ’. Saussure found this combination of characters was troubling because they do not denote a Sanskrit word, but could potentially denote one of two French words. Saussure noted that written Sanskrit consonants are by default pronounced with a, unless a diacritical mark is used to indicate silence. This diacritic is called virāma and appears below the character (Whitney 1879 [1950]: 6). In Romanised script ञ��� spells out plìs. If diacritical marks had appeared below the first two characters it could be taken as French ‘plis’ (folds/pleats), yet diacritical marks are absent, and so the values of the four characters become plàs, ‘palais’ (palace), also a word in French. If palais was intended it suggests she knew a rather unintuitive point about Sanskrit phonetics. If she meant plis then she did not know that point, which would be easier to explain, but why would Simandini be talking about pleats? Saussure seems unable to move on from the problem even when commenting on other figures. A series of new words are also discussed, among which he finds jotisse, which he interprets as ज्योतिस ‘constellation’. The plis/palais issue would never reach a satisfactory conclusion, but in the other words he discussed here Saussure found strong support for the theory that Müller’s Sanskrit came from books and not from ever hearing the language spoken.

Glossolalia texts referenced in S6: M7, M13 and M15.

S6

(Translated from original French in O. Flournoy 1986: 195-198)

(I have written this without having read or rather reread your pages 18-19 of the proof which contained everything I said about it myself in an absolutely clear and concise form. Do not change a word of your text as it presents perfectly the position that I have come to occupy. If I return the papers in my mail it is because
the verso contains some observations on Fig. 38, the rest, for their part, may be taken as a simple *momento.*

*Letters in fig. 37:* As you may have noticed, *a, e* and *d (आ, ए, द)* are drawn correctly. The *r* of *radyiva* is not as good, and is at the limit where it could be doubted whether it is in fact *r.* When there is the figure *T* for *i,* it is possible, at a pinch, that Mlle Smith had believed she was again using Devanagari, but here things are much more complicated than in the preceding cases.

Indeed the proper letter for *i* is ह, and this letter bears no striking analogy with Mlle Smith’s *T.* But it should also not be forgotten that *i* always comes at the end of a syllable, as in *pi.* It is written as follows:

If it is brief, पि (= *pi*), which is identical to that of Mlle. S. placed *on the left* of the consonant (and is connected to the consonant with a kind of embrace).

If it is long, पी (= *pī* or *pî*), with the same drawn *on the right* of the consonant (connected by a slightly different embrace).

If Mlle Smith’s *T* is inspired by Devanagari, it is certainly the latter figure which has done the inspiring. This is very easy to analyse because the character for the brief *i* is drawn on the left of the consonant, contrary to the sense of the writing. She has not taken care with the embrace, or the value of *i* or not *i,* or the fact that such a *T* could not be employed in an independent manner without a supporting consonant, but such difficulties were not to stop her. As for the rest, it is clear that she has not drawn her characters from the middle of a word, but from the simple groups given, with transliterations, as reading exercises at the beginning of any grammar, such as की *kî,* ती *tî,* भी *pî,* ली *lî,* etc.

In fig. 38 I do not recall चंट. The other numbers and letters are correct.

चंट, does not strictly contain Devanagari save the प, but we can assume, as you have done, that छ is for छ (l), and secondly that *T* is intended to mark *i* as
in fig. 37.

Now, it is difficult to decide whether with the first two letters पू (प लू) Mlle. S. intended to write a replacement for the French pa-la- (the word therefore being palais [palace]) or a replacement for French p-l- (the word being plis [folds]). प लू cannot normally be read in a way other than pa-la- because all consonantal signs are naturally followed by a provided it does not have diacritical marks indicating either silence (पू लू = pl) or a vowel other than a. Mlle. Smith herself observed this principle in लूमे = lame\(^7\) [blade]. It is true that she did not know it in दान (fig. 37), and even more clearly in राध्यवा.

(Regarding these inconsistencies it is no trouble to make the addition of the distinction in the case where reproduction of the a is genuine, as in lame and the first syllable in dans, and where it is simply graphic – owing to the French spelling – as in the second syllable of palais. It is also no trouble to insist upon asking a further question: how could Mlle. Smith have heard of attaching her ट to the preceding ल? Did she want to produce la-i- which was the case with the i placed independently (लू इ and not ला)? Or, did she want to produce l-i-? Well, her ट is correct, but on the conditions that 1. an embrace is made (ली), without which its grouping ला gives a completely different value: là; 2. with the embrace the value obtained is not exactly li, but lì. Of course, this is all a matter of conscience. It would be positively ridiculous to go into too much detail in the face of such a poor attempt.

*Isolated words* cited on p.8 of the proofs: You do not give them justice! In my opinion this is the best production of Mlle. Smith’s Sanskrit muse. I gave her one good point as I read these six or seven words of which I had previously been unaware. I especially like:

\(^7\) See fig. 38.
smayamana (apparently copied from Sanskrit smayamàna “smiling”); primarily stands out because it is a form of four syllables and naturally deserves to be more accurate than the words of 2 or 3 syllables which, we must content ourselves to say, are nothing special and are also the most inexact. And, secondarily, due to the consonant cluster sm, because it is also very rare that Mlle S. attempts a Sanskrit word with two consonants in a row, whatever they are. Finally it is even rarer that smayamàna should take on a grammatical and lexical character such as the Greek lego-meno-s, rather than simply being a participle. At no point has the ‘Sanskrit’ of Miss S. given so many disappointments in its grammatical nullity. Invalidity extends not only to flexions (dominus, dominican) but also to all kind of formations (eg. carus, carissimus; fero, ferendus and the like). The form smayamana at least provides a small grammatical contribution in the last category (very easy for a person who only takes that which passes under the eyes when opening a grammar).

jotisse. Another excellent word, if one accepts that it is Sanskrit, is jyôtis (pronounced djyôtis ‘constellation’). It would be worthwhile to investigate whether this word was pronounced in the astrological séance (which I did not attend). Among the Hindus astronomy is called ‘the science of jyôtis’, and at every new mention of jyôtis there are favourable or unfavourable constellations, constellations marking the course of the moon, etc.

sumanas. This is the perfect graphical reproduction of the Sanskrit sumanas (benevolent), which appears here and there in all the grammars, even serves as a model of declension. Now for sumanas all grammars imply a form that must be pronounced soumanas (the French u, as in lutte or nul is unheard of in Sanskrit). On the other hand, in the ‘continuous sentences,’ as far as can be ascertained, Mlle S. seems to have taken care with ou, for example in pronouncing souka correctly, transcribed by convention as sukha, and then contrary to what one would think, the ou spreads with a general profusion. Is it only in sumanas that she was suddenly fooled by the writing? Or is this something that she could have incorrectly observed while hearing it? Or is that the word was not heard, but that it originates from a script by Mlle S. (thus not indicating whether it was pronounced
in one way or the other)? I can only ask about the points that would need to be known to make a judgment on the form of the otherwise remarkable sumanas.

Other “single words” you mention have a looser similarity with Sanskrit words, but could be based on fairly small deformations of a given word.

**Letter from Cologne, October 15, 1899**

When Saussure received the proofs for correction from Flournoy he was soon to depart for England to see his sister. He had planned to write his reply quickly and send it before departing, but he thought it better to spend a little more time to remind himself of the work he had done. Through a series of unfortunate circumstances the task was delayed again and again. Stylistically this letter is more poetic than the others. Saussure describes his difficulties in finding opportunities to work on the proofs in elaborate metaphors, and quotes Voltaire: “the best is the enemy of the good”. He had sent his comments on proofs from Amsterdam a few days earlier and Flournoy, who was on a tight schedule, had quickly made corrections and sent Des Indes to the printers. This letter was intended primarily as an apology for causing problems with the print schedule, but it would be the cause of greater problems. Saussure recognised that the time it took him to grasp the unintelligible words indicated that readers coming to this text for the first time would be much more bewildered than he, and therefore a great deal of care must be taken with their explanation. He mentioned his idea to produce a text that might have an equivalent relationship to Latin, as the Sanskritoid to Sanskrit. This way Flournoy could take advantage of the fact that his readers would have a much greater familiarity of Latin than of Sanskrit. The kind of distortions that occur in the Sanskritoid texts could therefore be communicated to a wider audience with a Latinoid.

(Translated from original French in O. Flournoy 1986: 204-205)

Cologne, October 15, 1899.

Dear friend
You will have received a few sheets of notes I made in Amsterdam the day before yesterday. I did not have time to accompany them with a word to explain that, even if they arrive in time, I did not make any presumption that you would send them on as a contribution to your book, but they were a delayed signal (delayed a hundred times) whose passage remotely soothed my conscience. As it turned out, these miserable notes were the cause of a delay in your publication, and I owe you an explanation which unfortunately will not change the weight of my sins. The moral of this story is to give a new proof that the best is the enemy of the good. I thought at first on receiving proofs that I would return them to you the next day with corrections. I can only say that the time it took me to educate myself on the ‘Sanskrit’ of Mlle Smith made me look a little ridiculous. Inevitably, I was still trying to find my way into the detail of the first proofs, and provide interpretations for the unintelligible words that peppered the text. But to remove these passages from the proofs – despite the broad freedom that you grant me – was to mutilate your own text and the sequence of ideas contained therein. I had thought there would be a simpler way to express my opinion the moment you did me the honour of engaging it, namely to summarize it in something like a Latin pastiche, asking you at the same time to practice large cuts to the earlier quotations, taken from my first letters. Whereupon I left for England ... it was fatal. It cannot be that difficult to get a sense that it is impossible in the lifestyle of an English holiday to devote just two hours to work, the entire organization of time and hospitality allows nothing of the kind, and I have bounded along in dreadful remorse, little by little filling the paper that you received, without even successfully dispatching it to you from England. If I could repair anything by meeting you, I would be available to come to Florrisant⁸ towards the end of the week, but it is understood that this is not to further delay your print order, and only if a chance to make a decent shot at it arises by some accident beyond this date. In this case it is with great pleasure and relief that I would see you with the proofs. Your letter can find me at ‘Vufflens sur Morges’ until Thursday.

⁸ Flournoy’s home in Geneva.
Believe me, dear friend.

Your affectionately devoted,

Fd. de Saussure.

Latin pastiche [undated, late October, 1899]

It seems that Flournoy replied in favour of Saussure’s idea of a Latinoid equivalent to the Sanskritoid. There is no indication that this document is a letter, so perhaps Saussure quickly produced the ‘Latin pastiche’ and passed it on in person. This pastiche is a distorted Latin; the word sounds like Latin and a couple of the words are indeed Latin, but there is no apparent meaning in most of the words, or sense in any combination of words. Some conjugations are obviously Latin but they are attached to roots which are meaningless. These are the kind of things that attentive readers with some education in Latin would pick up, whereas the number of readers who would have been able to get a sense of the distortions in the Sanskritoid would have been far fewer. Much to Saussure’s surprise Flournoy was impressed enough to make the costly decision to halt the printing of Des Indes to insert the Latinoid text and quote the explanation (almost) in full.

S8

(Translated from original French in O. Flournoy 1986: 200-203)

Suppose the following words were pronounced in a scene of “Roman” somnambulism,

Meâte domina mea sorôre forinda inde deo inde sîni godio deo primo nomine... obêra mine... loca suave tibi ofisio et ogurio... et olo romano sua dinata perano die nono colo desimo... ridère pavère... nove...

Here are the comments that would suggest this is a specimen of ‘Latinoid’: It is only necessary to read the text to see that it is calculated such that all remarks
apply to the ‘Sanskrit’ productions of Mlle. Smith with a simple change of the name.

1. If one seeks a sentence there is no general meaning comprehensible. From time to time, however, the words form a sequence that can be followed for a portion of a sentence.

2. Taken in isolation, like a collection of words that could have come out of the dictionary, a few words are impeccable, like domina. Others are half correct (ogurio etc.). Others still, have no clear identity with a Latin word (obera, etc.).

3. Whether the words form a sentence or not, and whether the sentence is formed of correct words or not, the ‘text’ is completely poor on the particular point of grammatical endings. One does not see anything that resembles very characteristic endings such as –orum or –ibus, and there are no consonant endings at all; no -os,-is,-us, or even -um at the end of a word. It seems that the fixing of correct grammatical conditions to the words had been for the author an insurmountable challenge.

4. The same line of thought which seems to manifest in the endings also appears in the fact that only words that are extremely simple in their consonantal structure are used e.g., do-mi-na, avoiding such forms as octo, somnus, semper, culmen, which provide a complication.

Conversely it should be noted:

1. That the text does not mingle ‘two languages’. There are so few Latin words in the text, but it does not mix in a third language such as Greek, Russian or English, and therefore in a primary and negative sense, the text offers a precise value.

2. It also provides an accurate value in the failure to offer anything contrary – by the absence of the meaning of words – to Latin, even in places where words compare with nothing. Now take this, no longer in the Latin but in the Sanskrit of Mlle Smith: Sanskrit never contains the consonant f. Though it is negative, it is a
significant fact. f is effectively a foreigner to Sanskrit. On the other hand, in the free invention of Sanskrit, the chances of not creating Sanskrit words using f would be one hundred to one against, since this consonant appears as legitimate as any other if fact is not known.

Letter, [undated, late October 1899]

When the proofs of the pages including the ‘Latin Pastiche’ were ready, Flournoy sent them on to Saussure for his approval. Of course there was no time for major changes and Saussure accepted the proofs without question. He did however mention one thing that had finally caught his attention after many frustratingly close encounters. Müller’s word radyiva is equivalent to the Sanskrit word for ‘blue lotus’. It is a tiny addition but even this Flournoy would insert into Des Indes (300) before resuming the printing process. It is odd that Saussure should bring this point up at all, and it may only have been the result of a lapse in memory – there will be others – for he had recognised the form radyiva only about a month earlier, but without giving a translation.

S9

(Translated from original French in O. Flournoy 1986: 199)

Dear Friend

I have made two insignificant modifications to the new proofs that you have passed on to me.

I did not know that you had intended to publish the Latin pastiche; I thank you for the several occasions on which you make my observations much more fluid and understandable. They seem absolutely clear in the current text.

Here is a PS to another part of the Hindu chapter. The word radyiva is the equivalent of Sanskrit rādīva ‘blue lotus’. I do not see how I could have skipped over the word, as it is one of the clearest that exists.

Yours truly, F. S.
Letter of November 3, 1899

This letter is the last of Saussure’s comments on the proofs sent on November 3, 1899. A letter to Flournoy from William James who was staying at his brother’s home in England at the time confirms that the book was printed before the year was out. James commented that he had “read the first seventy-five pages and last seventy-five pages of the volume” (Le Clair 1966: 90) before the New Year. The final printing of Des Indes must have been well underway. Saussure offered one final and very particular criticism regarding diphthongs. But this may well have been too pedantic for Flournoy.

S10

(Translated from original French in O. Flournoy 1986: 206)

Dear friend

You will have received the corrected sheets you were good enough to lend me. It was a great pleasure to be further introduced to Martian, but without discovering anything further regarding the ‘key’ to seeing a fixed relationship between the French and Martian forms.

As for the essay that accompanies the language texts, I can only tell you that I found it enlightening, and conducted with a method that is the envy of many glossologists. Since you did me the honour to asking, I can see nothing further that needs to be done.

Sincere wishes to you, and apologies again for having detained the proofs too long.

Fd de Saussure

Friday 3.

Linguists always protest when you refer to sounds like eu (and oi) as diphthongs. I performed this formality just to be on the safe side; this is not to say that the Martian gives an appropriate reason for reforming these traditional terms, as they have no importance here.
**Letter of May 14, 1901**

Following the publication of *Des Indes* Victor Henry became interested in Müller’s Martian and began working on his own analyses of the Martian vocabulary. Henry sent some of his Martian ‘etymologies’ to Flournoy. Flournoy was impressed and suggested that a book might be published (Joseph 2012: 456). Henry consented, and a short volume soon appeared under the title, *Le langage martien, étude analytique de la genèse d’une langue dans un cas de glossolalie somnambulique* (1901). Saussure responded with displeasure. The offending passage was a section in which Henry discussed Müller’s use of Magyar in the construction of the name of her Martian translator, Esenale. In Henry’s view this was a combination of the Magyar word for donkey ‘csacsi’ and the name Alexis. Saussure could not remember who Alexis was, nor could he see how Henry had arrived at these components. It seemed to Saussure that using the Magyar word for donkey was a misuse of the method he had himself attempted to apply in his analysis of Müller’s Sanskritoid phrases. In the last line of this letter Saussure made a cutting remark, suggesting that this book would make Henry the laughing-stock of his colleagues in Paris.

S11

*(Translated from original French in O. Flournoy 1986: 209-210)*

Creux de Genthod, May 14

Dear Friend,

Thank you for your letters and your communication telling me of the Gampert dinner. I was still counting on having the opportunity to read them and to make a little visit to *Florissant* before my departure for the countryside, and then I encountered what you might call life’s mechanism of putting a thousand little things in your way, which deprived me of the pleasure of seeing you.

With regard to Victor Henry, I hoped that he had put his finger on a genuine key to the Martian with his idea of comparing it to Magyar. His hypothesis occurred to me as very interesting in that one of the main characteristics of the
Martian – the limitation to a small range of vocalic timbres (a phenomenon known as ‘vowel harmony’) – has its only analogy in the group of languages to which Magyar belongs. In fact – and this is where my disappointment emerges – Henry arrives at a unique comparison between Martian manir ‘writing’ and Hungarian iromány ‘writing’, without giving a second example of the coincidence.

The book then presents (regarding Ésenale) a broad multilingual play on words, where in the most favourable circumstances Magyar could only be introduced under the cover of the French word Alexis (Why Alexis, nobody knows). Here we are truly at the point of pure rambling. Under these conditions, twenty thousand hypotheses would be as easy as one.

I am surprised that he gives you permission to publish, as he has some good friends in Paris who would find the story of Alexis amusing.

Yours sincerely

Fd de Saussure

Letter of May 16, 1901

Flournoy pointed out Saussure’s error, and Saussure apologised for his mistake. In this last letter Saussure reflected that he might himself have been responsible for inspiring what he still saw as Henry’s wild speculations. That kind of speculation is certainly one direction that Saussure’s method was open to; however it is worth noting that Saussure did not pursue it himself. Saussure was very careful to speculate only on the process with language forms that he could say with a high degree of certainty that Müller had available in her unconscious memory. Henry was less constrained in his speculation, perhaps as a result of his experience of Müller’s glossolalia being derived from Des Indes, and a few letters from Flournoy. Saussure’s approach was certainly conservative and scientific, but Henry’s approach offered a freer way of thinking through what was going on in Müller’s glossolalia. Saussure ended this letter by taking a more philosophical stance about his difference with Henry. Perhaps both views had a valuable point.
May 16, 1901

Dear friend

I must make amends for M. Henry. Having loaned the copy I received of India and Mars to a person who still has it, I was unable to refresh my memory on the identification of the terrestrial Esenale, and I was wrong to consider the name of Alexis as a simple bridge to arbitrarily imagined puns. Thank you for pointing out the matter.

The play on words is certainly less weird now, but I’m confounded that you do not seem to be struck differently by the likeness between Al-csacsi and Alexis; and above all by the notion that it could show that the entirety of Martian can be navigated by searching for Magyaroid items.

I do not know if I should not blame myself for being the indirect inspiration for the frivolities that Henry wrote to you, with my lucubration on – tyé – yâ ‘I bless you’, which featured the same quasi-rambling guess at its character, and was thus able to give this excellent colleague an appetite for seeing something in what you were doing that is largely fantasy. It is true that I gave an illustration of what, in my opinion, could happen here and there, but that I did so without insisting on the example.

Since I have just been supplied atyêyâ by chance, I want to tell you that I believe it can now be explained as a Hindu word (it had in your thoughts, as far as I can remember, a certain interest because the word was the very first that had been uttered under the influence of the Hindu dream). The hypothesis would be to find atyêyâ in Sanskrit â-khyêyam in the sense of: ‘recitandum, vocandum, nominandum, appellandum.’

So that the whole sentence
atyêyâ ganapatinâmâ

(=âkhyêyam gaṇapatenâma)
takes a form comprehensible and perfectly translatable ‘Recitandum (est) Ganapatis nomen’.

One scruple stops me, and I would be very pleased if M. Victor Henry were to assist me here, if you write to him: the verb ǣkhyațum is not very commonly used in this manner, verging on the sense of INTOCARE. It is not generally used in the sense of repeating a name, but of assigning a name. But the different passages that I have in my memory make my own scruple uncertain. Once again, I would like to hear the opinion of such a learned friend as M. Henry.

Affectionately yours,

Fd. de Saussure

Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented the texts of Catherine-Élise Müller’s glossolalia and English translations of each of the documents in which Saussure analysed those texts. I have also given explanatory notes where necessary. The analyses begin as an earnest comparative study, but Saussure was soon involved in deciphering the language mechanism behind Müller’s strange utterances. Once he had found a psychological key to the utterances it all seemed very simple. Saussure even made occasional sarcastic remarks about Müller’s genius, and suggested that he should give her marks for her work. But the difficulty of the linguist’s work is that language is so complicated, and for that reason Müller’s puerile constructions were a little treasure. Because they were so simple, Saussure was able to speculate with some certainty about the origins of sounds and even about how those sounds were unconsciously combined. Saussure’s achievements in these documents may not be immediately obvious, but they are substantial. In the remainder of this study I will aim to make two of these achievements clear.

---

9 I would read the name Ganipatis.
Chapter 2: Interpretations of the Flournoy Affair

Introduction

When I began to look for secondary literature on the Flournoy Affair I found that the earliest commentator took a particular view, and that the few who chose to comment later briefly summarized that same view. In *Le langage Martien* (1901), the book that had so displeased Saussure (S11), Henry suggested that Müller’s correct exclusion of *f* from her ‘Sanskrit’ speech might be no more than an expression of her efforts to exclude her mother tongue, *français*. He reasoned that Müller excluded *f* because, “*f* must appear to her as the ‘French’ letter *par excellence*” (Henry 1901: 23 my trans.). When Todorov (1982) encountered Henry’s text in the 1970s, this *f-français* connection struck him as a fact of Müller’s glossolalia. With the benefit of Freudian psychoanalytic theory, he could see Müller’s exclusion of *f* from her Sanskritoid speech as a symbolic operation. Todorov then pursued the problem of why Saussure failed to acknowledge this symbol. His answer was to diagnose an instance of repression in Saussure’s mind and claim that Saussure unconsciously wanted to believe that the Sanskrit was genuine (1982: 260). From that point on Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia were deemed worth mentioning for their strangeness, but too frivolous for serious analysis. With one essay Todorov had opened and slammed shut the door on the Flournoy Affair.
Recently, John E. Joseph (2012), and Boris Gasparov (2012) have discussed the Flournoy Affair without reference to Todorov’s view at all. The earlier focus on Saussure’s purported psychological struggle appears to be irrelevant to these new accounts of the Flournoy Affair. They do not champion Henry’s interpretation of the problem, nor do they hint that Saussure was losing his grip on reality. Joseph gives a thorough historical account of events, and Gasparov sees in the Flournoy Affair linguistic analyses which are unusual not without value. Fehr (1995) had earlier been more specific about what that value might be. He expressed the view that the documents Saussure produced on Müller’s glossolalia could be workings out of certain parts of his general linguistics especially ‘the language mechanism’. Feschenko and Lao (2013) have given further attention to the Saussure’s subjective psychological approach (76) with particular attention to Saussure’s attempt to recreate Müller’s psychological state in producing his ‘Latinoid’ text. These authors reopen the door to inquiry, but we are yet to see a deep consideration of how instrumental Saussure’s observations of Müller’s glossolalia were in the development of his general linguistic ideas.

To follow the evolution of the secondary literature we must look at the view first presented by Todorov, and repeated by Gadet (1989), Yaguello (1991), and Certeau (1996), before moving on to different ways of seeing the case in some differing appraisals by Jakobson and Waugh (1987 [1979]), Fehr (1995), Gasparov (2012) Joseph (2012) and Feschenko and Lao (2013). The present chapter consists of two main sections. First, I state and discuss the two main assumptions in which earlier authors are united. Then I show where authors who have followed those assumptions have differed. I also give some attention to the wider influence of this view in works that offhandedly mention the Flournoy Affair. Second, I discuss commentaries that present views which take different stances on the Flournoy Affair. At the end of the second section, I set out a preliminary statement in support of my own hypothesis that Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia are valuable.
An Obvious Causal Relation?

Tzvetan Todorov features Saussure’s thought on glossolalia in his essay, ‘Saussure’s Semiotics’ (1982). In this essay Todorov works with an idea of a symbol that seems at first to be something like the inverse of what we might traditionally understand as a symbol. The symbolic relation that he discusses is that the absence of something stands for the absence of something else. But that might well be the same as something standing for something else. For example, just as a Christmas tree might stand for the concept of ‘Christmas’, the absence of money in someone’s bank account stand for their lack of a livelihood. Notice that there is also, potentially, a causal relation in both of these. The presence of a Christmas tree is caused by the nearing of Christmas. Equally, the absence of money in a bank account is caused by the absence of gainful employment. To readers who know the ‘semeiotics’ of C. S. Peirce, these might seem like indices, rather than symbols, but there is one other element of the particular symbol in question that allowed Todorov to connect it, not with the work of Peirce, but with that of Freud. Henry’s statement that Müller “avoids [French] as much as she can” (1901: 23 my trans.) refers to an unconscious operation, and might also be read, ‘she repressed French’. By Todorov’s reckoning, the stand for relation that Henry identified in Müller’s Sanskritoid is not evidence for, but rather, a symptom of her avoidance of French.

The referent of this symbol is a rule that Müller had apparently unconsciously imposed on herself, not to speak French. Here it is in its initial form Saussure’s letter of June 19, 1896:

[T]he law that governs her mind is that familiar words are each rendered as a substitute with an exotic appearance.

The important thing is: it must firstly and above all not appear to be French in her own eyes. (S2)

The symbol which stands for Müller’s rule not to speak French is the absence of the initial sound of français from her Sanskritoid. This absence of f was significant because it was one of only a few things she got right in her attempts to speak it, and also because
this was an unexpected thing for her to get right. In his discussion of the ‘Latin pastiche’ of October 1899, Saussure wrote:

[F] is effectively a foreigner to Sanskrit... in the free invention of Sanskrit, the chances of not creating Sanskrit words using f would be one hundred to one against, since this consonant appears as legitimate as any other if fact is not known. (S8)

Because he offered no alternative explanation for this phenomenon, Saussure appears to imply that Müller knew this fact about Sanskrit, and that has caused controversy. Some commentators have expressed the view that in his analyses of glossolalia Saussure failed to make a further important and obvious connection between these two observations.

We can note, however, that these two observations were made three years apart from one another and remained separate in his analyses. On one hand, he observed on June 19, 1896 that her rule was “not to pronounce anything in French words” (S2), and on the other hand, he observed in late October 1899, that Müller correctly excluded the sound /f/ from her Sanskrit-like speech (S8).

Very soon after the publication of Des Indes, in his own book, Le langage martien: étude analytique de la genèse d'une langue dans un cas de glossolalie (1901), Victor Henry made a connection between these two points.

If one general thought completely occupies Mlle Smith’s subconscious at the time she is assembling the sounds of Sanskritoid or Martian, it is surely that ‘French’ must be entirely avoided: her entire attention must be focused on that point. Now the word ‘French’ (français) begins with an f for this reason, f must appear to her as the “French” letter par excellence, and thus she avoids it as much as she can. (Henry 1901: 23, my trans.)

The benefit of this explanation is that Müller’s apparent knowledge of a fine point of Sanskrit phonetics can be explained as a product of a phenomenon which has nothing to do with Sanskrit at all. At first glance it seems that all that is required is a simple and attractive coincidence. But Henry was claiming a more than he explicitly said in the above passage. One step is missing from his reasoning, for it is not the letter f that is
absent from Müller’s Sanskritoid, but the sound it stands for, /f/. Additionally, the expression, “she avoids [f]” (ibid.), loses sight of the idea that it is her “subconscious” (ibid.) that is performing this operation. Therefore, if Henry’s claim were stated explicitly it would be more like: Müller’s unconscious rule not to speak French caused her not to produce the speech sound /f/. Stated in this way we can see that there might be somewhat more mental work involved in getting from not- français to not-f. But, Henry’s explanation holds a lot of appeal and strength in that it does not depend on Müller having any knowledge of Sanskrit at all, to produce exactly the observed effect.

We can also commend Henry’s intuition for pointing out the connection between f and français very soon after Des Indes was published. Indeed, because it was so obvious to Henry, the fact that Saussure did not mention a connection between f and français has become a bewildering problem for some. This bewilderment is the point from which Todorov (1982) began his criticism of the Flournoy Affair, and his position has become a standard in the literature. To understand this position we must keep in mind two premises that are key to it:

1. Müller’s avoidance of français unconsciously caused the exclusion of f from her Sanskritoid.

2. #1 is so obvious that to miss it requires an explanation itself.

Todorov’s reasoning is that of the psychoanalyst. For Todorov, if he were able to repeat what Saussure wrote back to him, Saussure might well have come to terms with the logic of the symbol he had missed. The power of this simple appearance of correctness has been such that no one has yet been compelled to question the notion that Müller’s avoidance of français caused her to exclude f. Some commentators have ignored this connection, but two assumptions remain unchallenged, and for this reason the arguments that contain them maintain the illusion that there is little of value in Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia.

Henry’s remark suggesting a causal link between f and français seems to have struck Todorov (1982) as both obvious and significant. The unsaid parts of Henry’s explanation (noted above), regarding causality and the equivocation of written character and sound, present no problem for Todorov. He introduces a novel way of describing
the operation that apparently took place in Müller’s unconscious mind by referring to that operation as symbolic (259). The causal power of the symbolic relation comes out of its mental apparentness (Henry 1901: 23). Indeed, since \( f \) is obviously the first letter of \textit{français} it does appear to be quite an intuitive proposition that there could be a causal relationship between them. If that is the case, then it should be considered part of her speech-producing mechanism. But it seems that in Todorov’s discourse the use of the term ‘symbolic’ circumvents the need to imagine further mental steps or rules in the mechanism. Todorov thus avoids baseless speculation that the rule in Müller’s mind of ‘\textit{no \textit{français}}’ entails a specification of ‘\textit{don’t even say the first letter of \textit{français}}’ with an unspecific claim that the relationship between \( f \) and \textit{français} in Müller’s mind is ‘symbolic’, a term which recalls dream-logic. In the world of dreams, Todorov seems to be suggesting, \( f \) is a sufficient representation of \textit{français}.

The ‘Latinoid document’ (S8) is where we find Saussure’s observation that Müller’s Sanskrit “never contains the consonant \( f \)” (S8). Todorov refers to this observation as “the troubling absence of \( f \)” (Todorov 1982: 258) and lays out that ‘trouble’ as follows:

\[
\text{[H]ow can we explain that Mlle Smith has guessed such a specific feature of the Sanskrit language without recourse to occult powers (since deception is ruled out from the start)? Would it have sufficed to glance through a treatise on Sanskrit to notice this? (Todorov 1982: 258)}
\]

Flournoy would have firmly answered ‘yes’ to Todorov’s last question. ‘Glancing through a treatise on Sanskrit’ was Flournoy’s explanation for \textit{all} Müller’s Sanskrit knowledge (\textit{FIPM}: 334, also \textit{FIPM/S}: 318-319 n. p. 204). This might be sufficient for Müller to pronounce – probably with a French accent (e.g. ‘\textit{bahu}’ in S4) – Sanskrit words she had seen in a treatise, but to notice that the sound \( f \) was absent from all the words she observed and then extrapolating from this observation a principle in the construction of the language system, would have required a level of astuteness difficult to fathom. Understandably, Todorov does not accept Flournoy’s explanation that Müller could have noticed such a specific feature in a glance. He finds that Henry’s observation solves the problem in a much more satisfactory way. Todorov’s reading of this scenario is that Saussure, being a linguist, should have acknowledged a symbolic connection the data seemed to be suggesting, namely, a connection between Müller’s avoidance of
français and her avoidance of /fl/. That he did not make this connection prompts Todorov to question the rationality of Saussure’s thought.

Todorov points out that though no extended discussion of symbolism appears in the *Cours* Saussure treated the matter during the same period (1909-1910) in his notes on German myths, foremostly the Nibelugen. In these notes Saussure used the term symbol to refer to a change in a given myth over time where something had come to stand for a previous image in the myth over time. As Todorov writes “these myths have become ‘symbolic’ by virtue of deformations: lacunae, omissions, errors in transmission lead the modern reader toward a symbolic interpretation” (266) But symbols are something that never exist for the storyteller; they are not intentional signs. Saussure wrote,

> We may recognize a symbol that is explained as not having been a symbol at first…. Symbolic interpretation exists only in the hands of the critic…. For the person who is listening to a story being told, as for the rhapsodic narrator who is repeating the story as he heard it from his predecessor, it is the gospel truth that Hagen threw the treasure into the Rhine – and consequently there is no symbol in the end, as there was none at the beginning either (in ibid).

Saussure was a linguist and it seems natural that he conceived of symbols in so far as they played a role in linguistic phenomena. According to his description, symbols were similar to a diachronic phenomenon, but the changes that occured to create them were not changes in the state of the language. Instead they were the product of “deformations: lacunae, omissions” (ibid); what he called “natural errors in transmission” (in ibid.). There is no obvious connection between this conceptualization of the symbol that Todorov draws out of Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia. For Todorov the main point of interest is that “Saussure’s work appears remarkably homogeneous today in its refusal to accept symbolic phenomena” (269).

Todorov’s application of the ‘symbolic’ introduces a way of thinking about causality in Müller’s utterances. He writes:

---

10 The only exception is some brief comments distinguishing ‘symbol’ from ‘sign’ “[f]or it is characteristic of symbols that they are never entirely arbitrary… They show at least a vestige of natural connexion between the signal and its signification” (CGL:68).
To make this discovery, one has only to recognize that the logic of symbolism is not necessarily the same as that of language; or even, more simply, that alongside language there exist other modes of symbolism that we must first learn to perceive. The letter \( f \) symbolizes “French” owing to a relation that is not characteristic of language conceived as a system of signs. (Todorov 1982: 259)

This is the most difficult part of Todorov’s discussion to follow because he claims that Saussure could have momentarily overlooked standard logic and his own theory of language as a system of signs to discover – with no objective evidence – that ‘\( f \) symbolizes “French”’ (ibid.). But Todorov has not yet revealed his direction. What we must take away from the above reasoning is that Saussure “does not admit diversity among symbolic systems” (ibid.). Here Todorov is asserting that there are other ways of thinking through this problem, but that Saussure stuck so rigidly to his own narrow theory of signs that he was unable to see the spiritualist hazard in his path. In Todorov’s eyes Saussure would have done better to relax his theory of signs, accept that Müller’s exclusion of \( f r a n ç a i s \) causes the absence of \( f \) in her speech and work on the logic of that relationship later.

In Todorov’s view, Saussure (and Flournoy) would have ideally found answers in the work of Sigmund Freud, a Viennese neurologist who was gaining notoriety at the time for his work on hysteria. Todorov writes:

[I]n Flournoy’s book, unceasing attention is paid to the subconscious (and he cites approvingly the studies in On the Psychological Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena by Breuer and Freud). Saussure, in a way, is not far from the solution. (Todorov 1982: 260)

Indeed, if Saussure could have taken a more psychoanalytical view, he might have seen the symbolic value in the absence of \( /f/ \) in Müller’s Sanskritoid. Todorov finds Flournoy’s three references to Breuer and Freud (Des Indes: x, 319, 320 n. 2) to be tantalizingly close encounters but, he says, Saussure is “unable to transcend the limits of his own premises, and he stops short on the threshold of discovery” (ibid: 261). If a mental operation which prevented the utterance of \( /f/ \) as a by-product of avoiding \( f r a n ç a i s \) could be shown with the data collected, Saussure may well have found it
significant. But he shows no interest at all in this idea, even after having read Henry’s work. The fact that Saussure read Henry’s book, in which the symbolic connection is offered, and still made no acknowledgment of it, suggests to Todorov an enigmatic denial of an obvious truth. Todorov finds further evidence of repression in the way Saussure responded to Henry’s book. Saussure appears to have been somewhat perterbed that Henry had applied his method in an unstructured way such that, as Saussure wrote, “twenty thousand hypotheses would be as easy as one” (S11). For Todorov, the letter Saussure sent to Flournoy about this issue is another indicator of a psychological battle, and this psychological battle is what prevented the linguist from turning his analysis in the right direction.

In Todorov’s view Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia were limited by a theory of signs which led him to obsess over unimportant details (1982: 256). If he had not worried about such fine details he might have appeared indifferent to Müller’s claim that she spoke Sanskrit in a past life. But the details did worry him. Todorov says, “The analysis of the ‘Hindu’ language seems to have fascinated Saussure to a degree that is difficult to fathom” (ibid.), and describes the great care with which Saussure carried out his analysis: “he attended séances and suggested possible interpretations of her case” (ibid: 257). For Todorov, Saussure’s Latinoid document (S8) shows that in his zeal to explain the composition of the Sanskritoid, he overlooks a simple and obvious solution (ibid: 258). As we have seen, S8 includes precise descriptions of each point of resemblance between the Latinoid and the Latin. Saussure said, “A few word are impeccable. Others are half-correct” (S8), but that the text is, “completely poor on the particular point of grammatical endings” (S8), and words are “extremely simple in their consonantal structure” (S8). In making such detailed accounts of the structure of Müller’s glossolalia Saussure opened himself up to the criticism that Todorov would make: Saussure was overly concerned with Müller’s glossolalia. Todorov’s point here is that Müller was not just repeating something she had seen or heard she was somehow making Sanskrit-like words, occasionally correctly, and Saussure tried too hard to prove his case that she had acquired this ability in her present lifetime.

Clearly a past-life explanation should have been out of the question. But Todorov does not see the obsession over details, or the apparently irrational reaction to Henry (1901)
in S11, as isolated events, and proposes that Saussure might also have accepted a past-life hypothesis (Todorov 1982: 260). To support the idea that Saussure may have been mentally unstable, Todorov connects the Flournoy Affair to Saussure’s later apparently irrational attempts to discover an ancient poetic convention wherein words representing a poem’s theme – such as the name of a deity who appeared in the poem – were used anagrammatically in the poem’s assemblage (Starobinski 1979: 12-13). This anagram research, which began six years after the Flournoy Affair, has also sometimes been interpreted as a research project driven by madness and obsession (e.g. Lecercle 1991: 30) something that Saussure hinted at himself when he wrote on an undated page in his anagram notebooks “I suffer from a morbid horror of the pen, and ... this work for me is the experience of sheer torture, quite out of proportion to its relative unimportance” (Starobinski 1979: 3). Todorov suggested that Saussure had a similar episode of ‘sheer torture’ leading him to be bamboozled by a simple psychological phenomenon (Todorov 1982: 260).

In Todorov’s view, Saussure’s lack of an explanation for the absence of f presents an indication of Saussure’s psychological state and therefore the untrustworthiness of his analyses. He points to a moment in which Saussure seems to give Müller too much rope:

Rather than relate these Sanskrit utterances to French (for it is obvious that Mlle Smith does not know Sanskrit), he confines himself to a logic of referential plausibility: why does this language resemble Sanskrit when women ought to speak Prakrit (as if Mlle Smith, alias Simandini, had really attended the ceremonies that she describes, ceremonies that took place centuries earlier and thousands of miles away)? (ibid.)

This ‘referential plausibility’ was in fact part of the method Flournoy employed. He too looked for reasons why the historical accounts Müller gave could not be correct. For example, he compared a letter that Müller wrote in her Marie Antoinette personality with one of the historical Marie Antoinette held in the Geneva Library to show differences in the handwriting style and signature. But Todorov claims that Saussure pursues the referential context into dangerous territory for a scientist.
Unable to look squarely at the symbolic relation itself, Saussure attends only to
the referential context – an all-the-more paradoxical approach in that, unless we
accept transmigration of the soul, this context is purely imaginary. (ibid.)

At this juncture Todorov says another symbolic operation was apparent, but not one
belonging to Müller’s thought processes. Much in the same way that Müller’s avoidance
of français was represented in the absence of f from her Sanskritoid speech, Saussure’s
avoidance of symbols was manifested in his unconscious refusal to acknowledge a very
obvious symbol, even if that meant accepting a scientifically inadmissible explanation.

Repression where the symbol is concerned proves stronger than the prevailing
scientific taboo ruling out recourse to the supernatural. (ibid.)

Although what Todorov expects Saussure to have noticed is not fully worked out, that
he did not at least notice in it something as simple and straightforward as a relationship
between Müller’s rule against français and her absent f is a clear instance, Todorov
claims, of unconscious repression.

In Todorov’s view, Henry did nothing more than point out the obvious. His approach
was much freer than Saussure’s, and Todorov interprets his freedom as openness to
other logics. In individual Martian words, Henry sought to discover any combination of
any language sounds that Müller could have plausibly known. Saussure, on the other
hand, took the view that the sounds would likely be simple and few. And he focussed on
how those sounds were combined into more complex forms. Todorov claims that
Saussure would have had to alter his reasoning in order to use Müller’s rule of avoiding
French to explain Müller’s avoidance of f. “To make this discovery” writes Todorov
“one has only to recognize that the logic of symbolism is not necessarily the same as
that of language” (1982: 259). Therefore, Todorov claims, Saussure could have
discovered what Henry discovered if only he were to include in his theory a logic of
symbolism (ibid.). On one hand, the connection Henry made does not seem to fit with
the general direction of Saussure’s discussions. On the other hand, Todorov points out
that there is a penalty for not making it. Not only does the step seem obvious and
significant, not taking it carries a damning implication: Saussure “is more prepared,
confronted as he is with an apparently insoluble problem, to acknowledge the
supernatural (transmigrations of Mlle Smith’s soul) than to modify his method of investigation” (ibid.).

The seed of this explanation has already been sewn in the initial image Todorov gave of Saussure being inordinately fascinated with the Sanskritoid. This fascination, Todorov argues, caused Saussure to hold to his method despite a moment of conflict with a basic scientific principle. Todorov sees only two alternatives: one, alter the method to comply with science or; two, forget science and stick doggedly to one’s own principles. If one must make a choice between these two alternatives, then it is fair to say that a reasonable thinking person would take option one and side with Todorov. That person would see that the absence of $f$ in Müller’s Sanskritoid is a manifestation of the mental work of avoiding français. To choose the other option would be irrational. But according to Todorov, Saussure was not simply wrong, he was losing his grip on reality. This explanation has the benefit of avoiding a direct attack on Saussure’s genius because it renders him incapable of choosing “the right path” (ibid: 261). Todorov then looks for the benefit that might be gained from Saussure’s errors, writing, “his impasses have exemplary value: they anticipate those of a large sector of modern linguistics” (Todorov 1982: 265). Todorov does not explicitly say what impasses of modern linguistics he means, but we can gather that he is making a serious criticism: in his fascination with Müller’s Sanskritoid Saussure failed to notice the role of symbolism in her glossolalia. This was an oversight he was unable to rectify, and, by implication, linguists who followed him inherited his inability to understand the role of the symbol, and therefore the role of the unconscious, in language use.

In his discussion Todorov actually identifies two symbols: one which stood for an operation in Müller’s Sanskritoid, and another which stood for Saussure’s non-acknowledgement of the symbolic connection between the two parts of the first symbol. What this discussion tells us about the symbol is that it is unconscious in its location and causal in its function. Müller’s unconscious negation of français caused her negation of $f$, just as Saussure’s unconscious negation of logic other than that of his own theory of the sign caused his blindness to the obvious connection between $f$ and français. Ultimately Todorov is interested in something that Saussure did not do, and he clearly states that this thing which Saussure did not do falls outside the logic of linguistics.
Even today (i.e. the 1970s when Todorov first published his article), he goes on, linguists do not consider the realm of the symbolic to be part of linguistics. It may be one thing to show that Saussure had a close encounter with a symbol in his theoretical work and chose either consciously or unconsciously to ignore it. But it is certainly quite a different thing to claim that the decision not to include symbols in a linguistic framework is a sign of irrationality. There may be other (more useful) ways of understanding the direction that Saussure took.

Several commentators have read Todorov’s argument as though it were already established as common sense. Therefore their commentaries are characteristically short, and directly address Saussure’s thought on Müller’s glossolalia for no more than a few paragraphs. For Yaguello (1991 [1984]), Certeau (1996 [1986]) and Gadet (1989 [1986]) the point of greatest interest is, like Todorov, Saussure’s relationship with the logic of the symbol. There is invariably a sense of bewilderment in their comments over Saussure’s apparent inability to accept ‘symbols’ into his method, and link linguistics with psychoanalysis. Yaguello writes,

In his commitment to scientific rigor, he thus fails to come to terms with the dream dimension: this first encounter between linguistics and psychoanalysis is pretty much of a flop. (Yaguello 1991: 96)

Yaguello focusses on Müller’s Martian but adopts Henry’s hypothesis that the absence of f “can no doubt be put down to [Müller’s] unconscious desire to avoid any convergence with French” (ibid: 102). Unfortunately, despite a longer discussion of Henry’s “etymologies” (ibid: 96), where Yaguello approaches the Sanskritoid she does so directly, and says nothing further about how Saussure thought through the problems presented in Müller’s glossolalia.

Certeau (1996) rephrases Todorov’s view in these terms: Saussure’s analyses of Müller’s glossolalia show that, “the non-sense of glossolalic discourse sets a trap for interpretation and drives it to delirium” (34). A less dramatic way to put this would be to say that because Saussure listened for Sanskrit he imagined that there were genuine aspects of Sanskrit present in Müller’s glossolalia. Certeau claims Saussure allowed himself to be caught by Müller’s trap and therefore was unable to see the obvious truth
about the knowledge that Müller appeared to possess but did not. The ‘obvious truth’ assumed here is: “In omitting the $f$, [Müller] was obeying a rule: ‘The word “French,”’ as Victor Henry notes, ‘begins with an $f$; for this reason the $f$ must appear to her to be the “French” letter *par excellence*, and thus she avoids it as much as possible’” (ibid: 37). For Certeau the view of Todorov, repeated by Yaguello, had reached the status of common sense. Certeau is critical of Saussure’s expecting to hear Sanskrit in Müller’s utterances (ibid: 38). He writes, “Rather than entering a language, [Müller] exited one (French)” (ibid.). In Certeau’s view, instead of conceiving of Müller’s glossolalia as something like Sanskrit, he could have approached it as a “vocalization of the subject” (ibid: 41), in other words, speech that arises unconsciously.

Gadet’s (1989) major claim regarding the analyses of glossolalia is that Saussure’s recognition of a symbolic operation at this point would have situated linguistics within a psychoanalytic framework and shown that motivations of speech are not limited to language.

In this first encounter with the symbolic, as in the second, [i.e. the anagrams] Saussure comes close to recognizing that not everything concerning *langue* is explained by *langue* – and turns away from what he has glimpsed. (Gadet 1989: 98)

This poetic turn of phrase is a very close repetition of Todorov’s earlier statements, “he is unable to transcend the limits of his own premises, and so he stops short on the threshold of discovery” (Todorov 1982: 261) and, “Saussure’s first contact with the symbolic thus ends in failure” (ibid: 265) also, “[Saussure’s] impasses have exemplary value: they anticipate those of a large sector of linguistics” (ibid.).

There are two assumptions forming the basis of a standard view. These are the assumption that the avoidance of $f$ was the symbolic avoidance of *français* and the assumption that that symbolic avoidance was obvious. The position was first put forth by Todorov (1982) and there have been three rearticulations of the position by Certeau (1996), Yaguello (1991), and Gadet (1989). I say rephrasing because the central claims that Saussure could not open his logic to the “emotional content of language” (Yaguello 1991: 89), or the “vocalization of the subject” (Certeau 1996: 41) or the “recognizing
that not everything concerning *langue* is explained by *langue*” (Gadet 1989: 98) seem to boil down to Todorov’s criticism of failure to recognise “a relation that is not characteristic of language conceived as a system of signs” (1982: 259). Along with the two assumptions they all hold in common, these claims about Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia make the view they express a standard in the literature.

A variety of other texts perpetuate that standard view with very quick and subtle comments about the great linguist Saussure and his foray into the scientifically disreputable world of spiritualism. They tend to mention Saussure’s attendance at séances, or his involvement in spiritualism without further explanation. Mireille Cifali (1994 [1982]) writes, “at these meetings… Élise Müller spoke Sanskrit in the presence of Ferdinand de Saussure” (270). Tony Castle (1992) adds a note that Ferdinand de Saussure was “[a]mong the experts Flournoy consulted regarding Smith’s linguistic productions” (31, n. 2). Daniel Rosenberg (2000) says that Saussure (and others) “pursued analyses of Smith’s Hindu in almost delirious detail, combing the transcripts for linguistic evidence. Saussure, in particular, argued that the ‘words’ that Smith articulated were constructed ‘in some inexplicable manner, but not necessarily false’” (online). Mazzeo (2004) mentions the case in passing. Carol Sanders (2004a) mentioned the case in an essay on Saussure but (probably because of the later friendship between Flournoy and Jung) unfortunately mistook Flournoy for C. G. Jung (42). John Grey (2011) also commented on *Des Indes*, writing that with her Martian utterances Élise Müller “had subliminally invented what Flournoy’s friend the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure recognized as a genuine (if childish) language” (ibid: 95). Obviously there are some errors here, perhaps through misremembering of certain facts, or an academic game of Chinese whispers. These comments appear as lighter moment in discussions of a related topic, mentioned for its novelty or strangeness.

Todorov (1982) sees a riddle unwittingly posed by Saussure, and timidly solved by Henry, and takes this story as a kind of parable of the problems with modern linguistics. Saussure takes the role of linguistic science stubbornly holding to principles which fail in the face of the problem before him. Henry plays the role of the outsider who points out the obvious solution. But Saussure, stubborn and steadily losing his mind, is unable

11 Also known as ‘Telephone’ or ‘Message Game’.
to accept this solution and carries on using impractical and cumbersome logic to address the problems of language. All the while it is obvious to every other analytic thinker that if linguistic science were to have accepted the logic of the symbol, linguistics would have benefitted incalculably. Todorov and those who follow his view suggest that the connection Henry pointed out was so obvious that Saussure was mad not to see it. This impasse in Saussure’s reasoning is seen as a wilful denial of a logic that was being set out simultaneously by Freud in his work in psychoanalysis. Todorov believes that Freudian psychoanalysis had the potential to further the revolution in linguistics brought on by Saussure’s Cours and almost certainly would have, were Saussure not suffering from a bout of irrationality at the time. More recent commentaries give no heed at all to Saussure’s psychological state or riddles about symbols. Interestingly, it seems there are things worth discussing that don’t begin with f.

In sum, there is an agreement amongst several authors on two central points. Firstly, that in Müller’s Sanskritoid included at least one symbol in its construction and secondly that Saussure failed to acknowledge it. This symbol has a causal status in Müller’s mind because her avoidance of français caused the absence of f in her Sanskritoid speech. But it is not intentional, because she did not intend to communicate to others the fact that she was avoiding French. The supporters of Todorov’s position take the stance that the existence of this symbol in Müller’s Sanskritoid is sufficiently supported by the fact that it is obvious. This leads to their second point of agreement, that Saussure’s failure to acknowledge the operation of this symbol in Müller’s Sanskritoid is so surprising that all of Saussure’s writings on glossolalia are of questionable merit, excepting their function as evidence of this single “impasse” (Todorov 1982: 265).

---

12 Todorov, Yaguello, Certée, and Gadet appear to have been unaware that Saussure had been dealt a traumatic blow at the time he was most involved in Flournoy’s study. Not long before Saussure attended Müller’s séances, his third son André was born and died (Joseph 2012: 431). But these authors do not at all imagine that Saussure was struck with grief, merely that he was confused.
Beyond a dismissive view of Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia

Jakobson and Waugh (1987 [1979]) devoted just two paragraphs to Saussure and Flournoy’s collaboration concluding, “[n]o matter what the results of the joint work of linguists and psychologists were in this case, it should be seen as a stimulus for further interdisciplinary steps, and in particular, for a bilateral structural analyses of glossolalia also in its individual, delirious manifestations” (218). While this statement is non-committal about Saussure’s conclusions, it contains the important step of agreeing philosophically with the efforts made by Flournoy and Saussure. It is in this light that I shall discuss works by Fehr (1995), Gasparov (2012) and Joseph (2012). For them, it seems, Henry’s solution to the riddle of the absence of f in Müller’s glossolalia is a non-event. Fehr pursues the question of whether Saussure’s discussion of atiêyo Ganapatinâmâ (S2) contains possible earlier version of the language mechanism. Gasparov (2012) briefly discusses Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia as an unorthodox but innovative incorporation of psychological ideas in linguistic work. Joseph (2012) gives a detailed biography, which necessitates the temporal separation of Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia from the Henry episode. After a long period of homogeneity in the discourse surrounding the Flournoy Affair, these three authors have produced three differing views unrelated to the not f symbol for not français that so fascinated Todorov.

Johannes Fehr (1995) was the first to consider that Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia may have impacted the formation of Saussure’s general linguistic ideas. He did so by showing continuity between those writings and Saussure’s general linguistic thought. Fehr identifies the clearest example of a concept we generally consider as belonging to the Cours in Saussure’s analysis of Müller’s production of Sanskritoid (S2). Fehr sees in this particular analysis how Saussure unravelled a mechanical process that Müller unconsciously employed to turn a French phrase into a Sanskritoid phrase. For Fehr this analysis signals the emergence of Saussure’s genuine interest in Müller’s glossolalia. Fehr states that Saussure saw in Müller’s glossolalia an opportunity “to study the psychological functioning of a linguistic mechanism” (1995: 99, my trans.). The ‘language mechanism’ is the mental apparatus which facilitates the operation of the sign and therefore of langue. Thus in Fehr’s eyes the analyses of glossolalia contain at least
one clear instance of Saussure grappling with an idea that would become central to his later theory of general linguistics.

Fehr focusses his comments on the postscript to Saussure’s second letter to Flournoy (S2), which he quotes in full. He follows that quotation with a statement that he will limit himself to two essential points:

[I]n his analysis of the ‘Hindu’ phrase atiêyo Ganapatinâmã, Saussure applies Flournoy’s idea that the appearance of supernormal faculties can be explained if they are reduced to psychological processes operating on a subconscious or subliminal level. The deliberate way in which Saussure applies this idea suggests that Flournoy had passed on to him the first notions of subliminal psychology, even the nascent psychoanalysis on which the Genevan psychologist relied heavily, explicitly referring, among others, to Freud. (Fehr 1995: 100-101, my trans.)

Fehr’s first point is very easy to agree with, but it is also very general. According to Saussure’s discussion in S2, the French phrase Müller intended to say was, “je vous bénis au nom de Ganapati,” and as she spoke her mind suggested non-French sounds to represent each unit of that phrase. Sounds she unconsciously judged to be ‘French’ (or of another language that was likely to be recognised by her audience) were substituted for other available sounds. On the other hand, the “subconscious or subliminal level” (ibid.) Saussure was working with does not appear (except for self-imposed rules), to be a psychological agent. The only action her unconscious can take is to disregard sounds that do not follow her rules of not speaking French. In Saussure’s view the rest of the process is systematic. If a sound is disregarded the replacement sound is suggested by the system, and so is the order in which the sounds are arranged. Fehr goes on to emphasise the fact that Saussure, “nowhere used a strictly psychoanalytic concept, he never spoke of the [Freudian] ‘unconscious’, nor of ‘repression’” (Fehr 1995: 102, my trans.), which may lead us to question the purpose of Fehr’s second essential point.

In his second “essential point” (ibid: 100), Fehr sets up a potential channel of influence running from Freud, through Flournoy, to Saussure. Flournoy references Freud (1895) in Des Indes (319 n. 1) to offer the case of Anna O. (an Austrian woman who spoke
English while hypnотised) as a comparison. But the other psychologists he mentions are Pierre Janet, Max Dessoir and Frederic W. H. Myers, none of whom were psychoanalysts. Accordingly, Fehr does not extend the Freudian influence he sees in Flournoy through to Saussure, adding, “strictly speaking there is no psychoanalytic concept in these lines, but nevertheless there are phrases which make us prick up our ears” (1995: 99–100, my trans.). Presumably Fehr’s intention here is to suggest that Saussure’s thought came closer to that of Freud with his involvement in Flournoy’s study, but the channel of influence he suggests seems too vague to have had a definite impact.

The Freudian aspect that Fehr points to in Saussure’s way of thinking can be understood as follows. The process of substitution that Saussure discovered in Müller’s Sanskritoid speech is a process whereby each French word of a given sentence is replaced by a Sanskritoid word. Additionally, the construction of the Sanskritoid words follows a set of strict rules. Because the substitution process is thoroughly structured, Saussure was able to analyse the units from which the Sanskritoid was composed. Yet this analysis does not result in a translation of the underlying meaning in the way that free association might draw a repressed thought from the patient. The meaning Müller intended to express was in her mind, in French, as she spoke. Saussure’s analysis in S2 began with the Sanskritoid utterance “atyêyâ ganapanâmâ” (S2), and the French translation “je vous bénis au nom de Ganapati” (Des Indes: 304). The results of Saussure’s analysis are the language units that have been used in the mental assemblage of the utterance. Because the process Saussure devised aims to discover what Müller needed to know in order to compose her Sanskritoid, and not the meaning or desire behind her strange articulations it is difficult to follow Fehr when he says, “if we are looking for a psychological model by which to understand Saussure’s language mechanism I can see that in the same years Freud developed his word association treatment” (Fehr 1995: 102, my trans.).

Further on, Fehr suggests that interesting point’s argument is that these two elements of system devised in S2 appear to be an early iteration of the ‘language mechanism’ of the Cours.
In the manner Saussure presents and develops this linguistic model [i.e. the language mechanism], can we not think that the psychological experience he had, during the analysis of a medium’s glossolalic sentences, is decisive? (ibid., my trans.)

Fehr points out that this understanding of the place of language as external to the individual was maintained by Saussure through to the Cours: “la langue n’est pas une fonction du sujet parlant” (in Fehr 1995: 91).

We may find Fehr’s final comment more comprehensible after glancing at the Cours version of the language mechanism. Two axes, which Saussure calls associative and syntagmatic (CGL: 122-123) comprise the mechanism. The associative axis is an aspect of langue which operates in absentia (ibid.) and refers to all those associated signs which remain unspoken. The syntagmatic is the in praesentia (ibid.) aspect of language and limits the associative process to linear sequences which Saussure calls parole. Fehr sees that the later concept of syntagmatic relations generally covers any rules (phonetic or grammatical) a speaker employs to construct an utterance, including any rules like those employed by Müller. Saussure’s final iteration of the langue-parole distinction did not come about until his first lectures in general linguistics in 1907 (Joseph 2012: 506-509) Fehr is in line with Certeau’s summation that Saussure did not approach Müller’s glossolalia as a “vocalization of the subject” (1996: 41). But, by viewing Saussure’s work on glossolalia as part of the development of Saussure’s ideas, Fehr is the first to suggest that the position Saussure did adopt in a positive light.

Without making direct reference to the f-français connection favoured by others, Boris Gasparov (2012) says that Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia were unusual, but not irrational.

As we can see, Saussure did not buy the idea of previous incarnations and primordial memories. But in addressing the phenomenon of Hélène’s discourse, which apparently transcended rational explanation, he turned to analytical procedures that clearly overstepped the bounds of any orderly linguistic analysis. What Saussure envisioned as a kind of subliminal proto-speech that might have been surfacing in Hélène’s speaking consisted of disjointed scraps of memory –
half-distorted foreign words and expressions, some mythological names, a
general idea of how a solemn or passionate speech should sound – that were
ostensibly adrift in Hélène’s mind, coalescing almost randomly into a discourse
that might suggest, at least in the form of scattered hints, something that had a
relevant meaning. (Gasparov 2012: 166)

Gasparov does not see Saussure’s overstepping the bounds of orderly linguistic analysis
as incoherent. Indeed, this analysis is reminiscent of his earlier study on Phrygian
manuscripts is in that Saussure does not at any point consider anything other than a
linear reading of the utterences (Recueil: 542-575). Just as with his later anagram
research, Saussure was, Gasparov argues, extending linguistic practice in a direction
that had the potential to say something meaningful about the unconscious process of
turning thought into language.

Hélène’s pronouncements, delivered in an emotionally charged, occasionally
fiery tone and florid to the point of obscurity, represented a “poetic” discourse of
a kind, whose unconscious associative underpinnings Saussure attempted to
disentangle in his analyses. (Gasparov 2012: 167)

Gasparov sees the potential for further elaboration of Saussure’s psychological ideas,
but does not follow with a discussion of Saussure’s conclusions.

Whereas Todorov was preoccupied with something Saussure did not do, Joseph (2012)
takes a positive view by attending to what Saussure did do. We have seen in the
documents that there is in fact quite a lot of material. Saussure contributed ten
documents to Flournoy’s study analysing in considerable detail various aspects of
Müller’s Sanskritoid vocabulary (S1-S10). He analysed the words she uttered on several
levels, looking at the individual sounds, how those sounds were combined into words,
and in the rare cases that were available, how words were combined into phrases. He
gave close attention to her written Devanagari characters. He also attended four séances
to hear her speak Sanskritoid first-hand. Finally he attempted a theory of the mental
operations that produced these utterances. As Flournoy prepared Des Indes for printing
Saussure continued to assist by commenting on proofs and contributed a further
document (S8) to attempt to communicate his findings to a wider audience. Joseph (2012) offers a thorough discussion of each stage of Saussure’s work.

Interestingly, the connection that Henry made between Müller’s absent *f* and avoidance of *français* does not seem to be of any particular importance to Joseph. Despite this disagreement with the conditions of Henry’s position, Joseph is the most prolific supporter of Victor Henry’s linguistics today. In 1996 Joseph even prepared a full English translation of Henry’s most influential linguistic work, *Antinomies Linguistiques* (1896), but only the first chapter ever made its way into print (Joseph: 1996). Joseph refers to Henry’s history of “showing Saussure up” and says that Henry pointed out “some rather glaring things that Saussure had missed” (2012: 456). In particular Joseph is concerned with the fact that Saussure did not mention the Hungarian influence in Müller’s Martian. Questions relating to who said what about *f* are less alarming in Joseph’s view.

Unlike Todorov and his followers who unquestioningly accept that Freudian psychoanalysis greatly benefits linguistics, Joseph refers to Freud only once in relation to the Flournoy Affair. The reason is to note Flournoy’s reference to Breuer and Freud’s 1895 study of Anna O. As we saw above, Fehr is quite convinced that this single mention – an invitation to readers to compare Muller’s glossolalia with Anna O’s hysterical forgetting of her mother tongue and insistence on conversing only in English (*FIPM*: n. 157) – is evidence enough to claim that Flournoy took his concept of the unconscious from Freud. Therefore, reasons Fehr, Saussure received his notion of the unconscious ultimately from Freud. Joseph avoids all such speculation. He also seems reticent about the suggestion that Flournoy had much influence on Saussure, although he is quite open to the notion that influence had flowed in the opposite direction (2012: 395-397). The view of Todorov, and those who have followed him, requires instead that influence did flow from Flournoy to Saussure such that Saussure could receive ideas that had flowed from Freud to Flournoy.

In their recent investigations on the unpublished papers of Theodore Flournoy, Vladimir Feschenko and Newman Lao (2013) have attempted to consider the collaboration between Flournoy and Saussure “on an interdisciplinary scale, in discussing how theoretical linguistics and religious psychology identify and conceptualize their subject
matter when encountering marginal and paranormal states of consciousness” (68). Feschenko and Lao perceive two parties involved in glossolalia, which they define as “a communicative act where the participants are represented by the glossolalist, on the one side, who produces the glossolalic speech, and the glossologist, on the other, who interprets the mysterious language” (69). In the case of Catherine-Élise Müller, then, both Flournoy and Saussure are glossologists of which Feschenko and Lao see Flournoy as the better. For “Flournoy saw in the sound (the phoneme) the marks of effort, which precedes the image” (77) whereas Saussure’s analysis took a narrow, and mistaken, approach of seeking out signifieds for speech sounds that never achieved meaning because of the broader psychological issue that Müller’s “images were in rupture with her self” (ibid.).

Feschenko and Lao contribute some interesting suggestions for a novel conceptualization of Saussure’s approach to Müller’s glossolalia – such as contrasting Saussure’s subjective psychology with Bergson’s studies of déjà-vu (74) – but their paper is little more than another summary of the collaboration between Flournoy and Saussure. They offer no clear statement about Saussure’s thought on psychology, and they shy away from analysis, or even an extended discussion, of Saussure’s linguistic efforts to understand Müller’s glossolalia. Ultimately they end on a well-worn trope that underlying Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia is a “mistake… in trying to find a signified from these so-called signifiers – a conscious mistake that, incidentally, shed some considerable scientific light on the nature of borderline consciousness and glossolalic phenomena” (77). The importance of Feschenko and Lao’s paper lies in the fact that it is the most focussed work on the collaboration between Flournoy and Saussure to date. It indicates that we are still in a period of creating awareness and making introductions to the topic that is submitted to an in-depth analysis for the first time in the present work.

Of all the authors who have taken an interest in the Flournoy Affair, only Fehr (1995) has hinted that the ideas Saussure expressed in the period might hold a place of importance for his later linguistics. Unfortunately his reasoning is the hardest to accept. He claims that Saussure was interested in Müller’s case because he wanted to observe a real language mechanism, but he does not give a thorough explanation regarding what
made Müller’s ‘language mechanism’ more appropriate than that of ordinary language users. Fehr asserts that the idea of cryptomnesia (the notion of unconscious operation necessary to the process Saussure proposed) came from Flournoy. But this is followed by an unsupported claim that Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia should be understood within a Freudian ‘word-association’ framework; a turn which totally neglects Flournoy’s role in this episode of Saussure’s life.

Finally, while Todorov’s argument has been the most influential to date, it is problematic because it never fully engages with Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia. It only deals with those writings obliquely to evidence Todorov’s view that they reflect symptoms of mental illness. The claim that Saussure suffered mental illness does not arise from these texts. Rather, Todorov has already been convinced of this view by Starobinski’s (1979) argument addressing Saussure’s later anagram research. Thus Todorov’s argument has a circular structure, that is to say his conclusion lies among his premises.

Due to the incompleteness of most commentaries, Joseph (2012) is the firmest footing on which a debate regarding the Flournoy Affair may stand. While he gives a thorough historical account, many theoretical questions remain open for further exploration. The present study will seek to find areas of interest – and therefore of value – to linguistics and semiotics. I will address the terms ‘general linguistic ideas’ and ‘substantial development’, and show that Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia do contain general linguistic ideas and reveal substantial development of those ideas. A ‘general linguistic idea’ is a statement that treats language as a general, or social, phenomenon. In the ‘Dual Essence’ manuscripts, Saussure wrote:

Now, it is fundamental to and inherent in the nature of language that from whichever side – whether appropriate or not – one tries to tackle language, there can never be found individual entities, that is entities (or quantities) that can be defined in themselves and about which a generalization can subsequently be made. But there is FIRST OF ALL generalization, and nothing other than generalization. (WGL: 8)
It may be that certain aspects of Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia would have compelled him towards fully grasping the implications of the above position. I will focus on what I see to be the clearest general linguistic ideas that Saussure worked with during the Flournoy Affair. The first of these that I will address is Saussure’s idea of analysing glossolalia in two ways (to be argued in chapter 3). I will explore the extent to which these are earlier versions of Saussure’s dualdiachronic and synchronic linguistic methods as expressed in the *Cours*. The second general linguistic idea I will address is the psychological process which produced the ‘Sanskritoid’ utterances (to be argued in chapter 4). I will also examine its place in the development of Saussure’s later concept of the language mechanism. Finally, I will address the status of symbolism as it has been introduced in the secondary literature (in chapter 5). There, I will discuss the role of symbolism in Saussure’s semiology, and argue that Saussure’s social conception of Müller’s glossolalia contains a much more powerful explanation than the position of symbolism espoused in the literature.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have presented the secondary literature on the Flournoy Affair and differentiated the position of the present study. I located two assumptions maintained by a group of texts, and called the view that these assumptions constitute a standard, which took on the status of common sense in the literature. This standard view makes the claim that Saussure’s analyses are failed analyses because he did not acknowledge a symbolic operation in Müller’s glossolalia. It also characterises Saussure as suffering from a non-specific obsessive disorder which entailed the repression of a symbol in Müller’s glossolalia which is obvious and he should have acknowledged. Three texts take different positions. The earliest of these, Fehr (1995), finds a place for Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia in the development of his general linguistic ideas. The most recent texts, Gasparov (2012) Joseph (2012) and Feshchenko and Lao (2013), pay no heed to the view instigated by Todorov (1982), and look for value in areas of Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia that have been overlooked. Several other authors have made unanalytical references to the Flournoy Affair, and in doing so contributed to the image that this episode of Saussure’s career is only novel for its strangeness. In the
introduction I said that I would resist that strangeness and seek to expose the underlying concepts of the Flournoy Affair. Here I have begun to present my view that Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia are valuable documents. This value is dependent upon the presence of two elements: general linguistic ideas, and substantial development of those ideas. The remainder of this study will be concerned with revealing the existence of those elements in Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia, and what their existence means for Saussurean theory.
Chapter 3: The Linguistics of Not-Language.

Introduction

When Saussure set out to analyse glossolalia, there were no precedents in the literature for him to draw on. Of course, glossolalia has existed in some form, probably for as long as language, but nobody had systematically collected samples or attempted to analyse it (FIPM: 197). In his approach to Müller’s peculiar utterances, Saussure explored different angles as he thought of them. While the analysis often seems unstructured, it is possible to observe two distinct thought-lines running through it. One of them resembles a diachronic method in the sense that Saussure made comparisons between state A (the Sanskrit of the Brahmins), and state B (Müller’s Sanskritoid). The other method resembles a synchronic method, because Saussure turned his attention towards establishing what Müller’s glossolalia was, and why it was the way it was in terms of purely contemporary considerations. In other words he attempted to discover the state of Müller’s utterances. He did not treat Müller’s glossolalia as a language system that might be employed by a given speech community. Rather, he looked for the relationship of the glossolalia to such language systems. I will call the first approach grammarian, because in this mode Saussure compared Müller’s glossolalia to forms that he knew from ancient texts. I will call the second approach systemic, because it was an attempt to understand the process by which a variety of language units came together in her spoken sequences.
As his analyses proceeded, Saussure moved between the two approaches. First, he approached the glossolalia as a grammarian and attempted to compare various words from Müller’s utterances to the Sanskrit of the Brahmins. Unable to locate the majority of Müller’s ‘words’ among known Sanskrit forms, Saussure made an interesting decision. He decided not to dismiss these sounds as random, and instead chose to consider that Müller was reproducing forms that she knew. This meant that most of the sounds that Müller combined in her utterances were much more modern than she claimed. When he saw a more promising direction Saussure would change tack. I argue that this freedom in his method allowed him to think through issues in general linguistic theory and advance his ideas. My aim in this chapter is to show that Saussure advanced his general linguistic theory, by finding other ways to think about and analyse language use.

The dual nature of Saussure’s approach is already evident in his first two documents. In S1 he looks for concordances between the transcriptions of Müller’s utterances and Sanskrit. He also attempts to find reasons for discordance. In this approach he uses the resources available to him from his grammarian training. He translates words he could recognize, worked through etymologies, reconstructs sounds that varied from the forms he knew and made allowances for variations in transcription. Despite generous allowances, Saussure recognised only a few words in Müller’s glossolalia, and for these he gives whatever interpretations he can. Beyond the putative words he was able to read in the transcriptions, this mode of analysis reveals a few Sanskrit words in her utterances. In S2 Saussure switched to a systemic mode of analysis. This time he wrote on the mental operation that he perceived as producing Müller’s glossolalia.

In his systemic approach Saussure attempted to study the process by which Müller’s unconscious mind was manufacturing her utterances. This process draws on minimal language resources – sounds, phonemes, specific grammatical forms and written characters – that might be required and that Müller was likely to have possessed. Saussure theorised that random selections of sound combinations were very rare, and that in principle all combinations were somehow guided by language systems. To reveal Müller’s process of linkage Saussure carefully showed how one sound had a systemic
connection with the next sound. By analysing the peculiarities in both Müller’s utterances and her attempts to write Sanskrit he was able to theorise that such systemic connections are pervasive. Müller’s attempts to speak Sanskrit were foiled at every point of linking one language unit to the next, by the fact that she knew almost nothing of the target language of her speech. Similarly, her attempts to write Sanskrit were foiled because she had no Sanskrit vocabulary and she did not understand how Devanagari characters represented vowels. Therefore Saussure was able to study an unusual case of speech construction whereby a speaker knows neither how to speak nor how to write, but insists on speaking and writing nonetheless. In this chapter I put forward the case that Saussure’s dual grammarian and systemic approach to Müller’s glossolalia falls within his general linguistic thinking. In doing so I will evaluate the role this dual approach played in the development of Saussure’s later dual synchronic and diachronic approach that appears in the *Cours*.

**The grammarian approach**

The majority of Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia are characterised by comparison. By the time Saussure received the first list of transcriptions of Müller’s glossolalia in May 1896, Flournoy had been collecting these texts for close to eighteen months (*FIPM*: 1). Flournoy wanted to know what could be said about them from a linguistic perspective and in particular whether they contained Sanskrit as Müller claimed. Saussure proceeded to make etymological analyses comparing words from those texts to Sanskrit words they resembled, and could therefore potentially be derived from. But he also found other ways of making comparisons. Saussure compared Müller’s Sanskritoid to general characteristics of language systems. This allowed him to judge whether the words might actually have a systemic connection when uttered in combination; in other words, syntax. He compared the Sanskritoid speech of a hypothetical real person of Simandini’s learning and social status living in Simandini’s time and place to see how well it resembled what is known from the historical record. Müller could not supply any rational information about how she acquired her knowledge of Sanskrit, so Saussure applied Flournoy’s idea of cryptomnesia to ask, how much Sanskrit could someone
learn by osmosis? In other words, he compared Müller’s Sanskritoid to that of a hypothetical unconscious learner of Sanskrit. In the majority of Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia he conducted some kind of comparison.

The purpose of this section is to discuss the grammarian aspects of Saussure’s analyses. Here we will see Saussure not only as a comparativist, but also as an innovator, working through the challenges of how to deal with the speech of an individual when that speech does not appear to belong to a known language system. With his comparisons Saussure set about defining Müller’s glossolalia in relation to linguistic and psychological facts. Once certain definitions were reached, theoretical efforts could begin. In this sense the grammarian approach can be largely thought of as a process of data collection and interpretation. Of course, there was much potential for error. Müller’s Sanskrit pronunciation was not that of an Arab-born Hindu princess, but probably that of a French-speaking Genevan shop assistant. The quality of transcription was also questionable, and so Saussure allowed for a wide margin of error when comparing the transcribed words to Sanskrit.

The first grammarian approach Saussure employed attempted his analyses of Müller’s glossolalia was the etymological approach that almost any linguist of the era would have used to approach the matter. This can be seen in the statements of the other linguists Flournoy consulted. For example the Indo-Europeanist Paul Oltramere suggested *ganapatinama* could be equivalent for ‘who bears the name Ganapati’ (*FIPM*: 194). The “former missionary in India” (*FIPM*: 4), A. Glardon, saw in the same word, “an epithet of honor, literally, ‘named Ganapati,’ familiar name of the god Ganesa” (ibid.). Glardon also picked another word, *tvandastroum* which, he said, “approaches the Hindustani *tandarast* (or *tandurust*), ‘who is in good health’ – *tandurusti*, ‘health,’ coming from two words *tan*, ‘physical condition,’ and *durust*, ‘good, true,’ of Persian origin” (*FIPM*: 198). This kind of statement is representative of Saussure’s comparisons of other words. For example, Saussure takes the words ‘kana

---

13 See entry as December 13, 1896 in S4, on ‘bahu’. After having attended a séance Saussure takes issue with Müller’s French pronunciation of Sanskrit words. This point of pronunciation would become an important piece of evidence that Müller acquired her Sanskrit words from a Sanskrit grammar book, rather than in the less likely scenario of having heard Sanskrit words spoken.
mitidya’ to be ‘khana mitidya’ meaning “to eat for mitidya” (FIPM: 196); according to the Hindu story Mitidja was Simandini’s monkey. He also wrote,

Simagdini reminds me of Sanskrit simantinī ... a (poetic) word for “woman”, femina. (S1)

I did not hesitate to understand mamapriva as mama priya ‘darling, or my beloved.’ (S1)

mama sadiou Sivrouka
= mama sādhō
(my good or excellent). (S1)

Saussure took the analysis to a deeper level than the other linguists when he finds words that differ in initial sounds,

Naxmi could be Lakshmi ‘beauty and good fortune.’

Additionally, ao laosmi Sivrouka may contain asmi ‘I am.’ (S1)

He used another technique of separating syllables and reading across word breaks, such as in “adaprati tava sivrouka” (M4) to find, “adya-prabhrti ‘from today’” (S1). Even more impressively, in the remainder of that same utterance, “nō simyō sinonyedō . . . on yediō sivrouka” (M4) he found,

… yōṣin] na anyēdiuḥ, anyēdiuḥ.

‘Today [-itself] from you, Sivrouka, [...] that I am etc. ?? wife] not another day, always another day.’ (S1)

Saussure found quite a few words that he conditionally accepted as Sanskrit and, more rarely, words he said were ‘pure Sanskrit’. But he only found Sanskrit in very short samples and used a litany of guarding terms to qualify his judgements. A few of these guarding terms are:

can tolerably be read as...

[can] even without translation, be thought of as…
could vaguely be considered to form…
could be something like…
may contain... (S1)

In one marginal case he says we might find a Sanskrit word “if we ignore our ears” (S1). On the other hand, in the few cases where he finds forms that were equivalent to Sanskrit words he says so without qualification:

...there are sometimes two words like *mama priya* that one grasps perfectly well that have somehow found their way to the mouth of [the] medium.

Besides that, many words without connections like *tava, nāma*, and the name *Gaṇapati* etc.... are also pure Sanskrit (S1)

The word *radyiva* … the equivalent of Sanskrit *rādjīva* ‘blue lotus’... is one of the clearest that exists. (S9)

So Saussure recognised the presence of some Sanskrit words in Müller’s utterances. He also accepted that Sanskrit words were present in her mixed Devanagari and alphabet writing as in the *radyiva* example of M7 [₹adyīva]. In most cases forms were considerably distorted, but there is no doubt that Saussure found individual Sanskrit words in both Müller’s utterances and her written texts.

Additionally, Saussure wrote about how he made mental connections and that some of them are suggested to him by circumstance, rather than the transcriptions he had before him:

In the ‘scene of tenderness’, I must say that for my part, at the outset I did not hesitate to understand *mamapriva* as *mama priya* ‘darling, or my beloved.’ Even if I had not had this in mind, and with no mention of anything that could indicate the nature of the scene, I would have surely heard it in the same way. Only afterwards, following your comments, did I find the translation of the “finger”. So, I have to mention that I was free to establish a preconceived idea (apart from your word “tenderness”). (S1)
In this example the words were spoken and transcribed clearly enough for Saussure to understand their meaning as “my beloved” (S1), from the transcription. Interestingly, Saussure shows his awareness of the power of suggestion when he concedes that he had read the word ‘tenderness’ in Flournoy’s letter, before the meaning. This leaves a question mark over whether Saussure would have found meaning in Müller’s ‘mamapriva’ were it presented to him on its own. On the other hand, the meaning of atietô... ganapatinâmâ, (S1) the first part of which contains no Sanskrit, is also indications such as a gesture that suggested she understood what she was saying.

The potential for comparison to genuine Sanskrit language to explain Müller’s glossolalia was extremely limited, allowing Saussure to do no more than single-out words on the basis of their phonetic similarity to Sanskrit forms. Saussure was a master of this style of analysis as can be seen in his many short studies published in the Bulletin de Société Linguistique de Paris between 1876 and 1889 (reprinted in the Recueil). The instances where he found ‘pure Sanskrit’ were important for Flournoy’s psychological study, and fitted well with his theory of teleological automatism. But even with Saussure’s flair for the task, the data accumulated in this process had little linguistic value. In his earlier etymological writings Saussure would choose a term in a later state of a language and show clearly that it had been derived from an earlier state. But Müller’s utterances were spoken “without connections” (S1). Here we see an important impasse in Saussure’s analysis. Later he would express clearly the importance of establishing states of language prior to historical analyses. This is his famous reversal of the methodological order in linguistics where the synchronic approach precedes the diachronic approach (CGL: 100). In Müller’s utterances we see a very clear example of the limitation of the diachronic method when it is performed independently of a prior to the synchronic method. Diachronic analysis assumes two language states to compare, and so as far as diachronic analysis is concerned, Müller’s utterances were a language state.

It seems that while making comparisons between Müller’s utterances and a general idea of language system the problems with her Sanskrit (and Martian) were much more obvious. Saussure realised that Müller’s larger the sample was, the less it looked like a
language system. Multi-syllable words yielded almost no Sanskrit at all, continuous speech relied heavily on a process of combining a variety of consonants with a (i.e. M9). This seemed to further support Flournoy’s theory that Müller had been exposed to a Sanskrit grammar at some stage (FIPM: 334) – potentially while in a trance-state (ibid: 335) – and that this allowed her to store a few forms and phonetic aspects of the language in her unconscious. Saussure peppered his analysis with statements that remind us of this fact:

...any kind of continuous meaning, where I amused myself to find it, is for the moment only a game. (S1)

[T]he medium never launches into complicated strings of syllables. (S5)

smayamana (apparently copied from Sanskrit smayamâna “smiling”); … because it is a form of four syllables it naturally deserves to be more accurate than the words of 2 or 3 syllables which, we must content ourselves to say, are nothing special and are also the most inexact. (S6)

Müller’s inability to say anything with a normal level of language complexity is one of Saussure’s most damning counters to her claim that the language Simandini spoke (through her) was Sanskrit. The Sanskrit words that Saussure discovered are inconsequential in his systemic view, because no language consists entirely of sounds used to refer to things. Saussure would clarify this view in his courses in general linguistics with his several criticisms of the nomenclaturist view of language (CGL: 16, 65, 112). In Saussure’s view signifie ds come into being simultaneously with the signifiers. If we think of Saussure’s approach here as comparison to a general notion of language system, there may be some room for an argument that he took Müller’s Hindu utterances to be genuine Sanskrit in terms of the type and frequency of the sounds employed. Saussure observed that somehow both Sanskrit and Müller’s Hindu utterances contain an abundance of /a/ and no /f/. A given language system includes some of the sounds humans are capable of producing and excludes others. Saussure observed the abundance of /a/ and the absence of /f/ on separate occasions three years
apart, but he never offered a satisfactory explanation as to why Müller’s Hindu utterances contained this apparently systematic element equivalent to Sanskrit. As we saw in the previous chapter this, along with another aspect of Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia, has given rise to the criticism that Saussure gave too much plausibility to Müller’s claim that she learned Sanskrit in a past life.

Todorov criticises what he calls Saussure’s “logic of referential plausibility” (1982: 259), meaning that in making comments about what language a historical Simandini would have spoken, he offers Müller’s story too much credibility. The trouble with Todorov’s criticism is that it is difficult to see what else Saussure might have done. Even for someone who looks only for evidence against Müller’s story it seems quite plausible that they would consider the question, if Simandini existed what would her speech have been like? The usage of referential plausibility that was of particular concern to Todorov appears in S1. In this document Saussure first considered the similarity of some of Müller’s glossolalia to certain Sanskrit words, then suddenly changed his approach to make a point about historical accuracy. He said that Sanskrit is the wrong language for a woman to speak in that place and time.

Last observation: Most surprising of all is that Mme Simantinî spoke Sanskrit and not Prakrit (the relationship of Sanskrit to Prakrit is that of Latin to French, one formed out of the other, one is the academic language of the time, while the other is spoken).

In the Hindu drama, we see kings, Brahmins and persons of high rank regularly use Sanskrit, and one might wonder if it was consistently the case in real life. But women of all ranks, even in the drama, spoke Prakrit. A king addresses his wife in the noble language (Sanskrit), and she always responds in the vernacular.

If the idiom of Simandini is Sanskrit, it is very unrecognizable. In any case it is not Prakrit. One only needs to look at some of the forms, for example, priya, that in all vulgar dialects would be rendered piya without r.

Might Simandini have been a blue stocking? (S1)
Saussure’s argument in S1 is that the resemblance between Müller’s utterances and Sanskrit words do not support her claim that these utterances are Sanskrit. Saussure’s point that they are not Prakrit is superfluous to that argument. That he felt the need to include such a comment at all suggested to Todorov that his initial conviction that Müller could not possibly speak Sanskrit had been unsettled as he looked over the transcriptions of her speech.

Saussure’s comment about Prakrit may have been superfluous, but isn’t Todorov taking this too seriously? Whether sceptical or credulous, a method of comparison must be applied to objects that are by nature comparable. To compare Müller’s Sanskritoid texts with Sanskrit it was necessary for Saussure to accept that in principle Müller was trying to speak Sanskrit, and that whatever resources she possessed that could advance that effort, she would use. The exact details of how she had come to be a speaker of that language did not compromise the correctness of her usages. But there is no denial of her ability at the outset, and so it seems that Saussure offers a little plausibility. Nonetheless, in Saussure’s effort of linguistic analysis he need not have acknowledged any part of the past life claim for her Sanskrit abilities. The required information could be established by comparison of Müller’s speech to Sanskrit and not how or when she had acquired vocabulary. Thus the irrelevance of his historical comment makes him appear to believe Müller’s past life explanation of language acquisition. To put it another way: say I greet you more or less correctly in Egyptian Arabic, and I claim that I learned Egyptian Arabic from a moo-cow on the moon. If my interlocutor replies, ‘no you didn’t’, the fact that I have greeted them more or less correctly in Egyptian Arabic is unaffected. While any rational observer knows that there are no moo-cows on the moon, the response ‘no you didn’t’ denies that I was instructed in Egyptian Arabic by a lunar bovine, but it does not deny the existence of my illustrious teacher. Perhaps they think moo-cows on the moon speak Jamaican Creole. If we understand Saussure’s Prakrit

---

14 This may bring to mind the issue of definite descriptions discussed in the philosophy of language notably by Russell (1917), Kripke (1980), etc. Todorov appears to have referred to Russellian descriptions when he wrote “If romanticism [Todorov uses this term synonymously with symbolism] is defined by the resolution of all contraries, sooner or later it is bound to encounter the classic-romantic pair: if it absorbs the opposition, it achieves one of those paradoxes that Bertrand Russell knew how to explain” (1982: 189). This dismissive line about Russell foreshadows Todorov’s unwillingness to find a resolution to the dilemma he poses with Saussure’s ‘logic of referential plausibility’. That dilemma
comment to be anything more than a joke, we might, as Todorov did, observe that Saussure appears to avoid contradicting Müller’s claims of metempsychosis. But the ‘blue stocking’ comment (which was excluded from Des Indes and Todorov was therefore unaware of) was surely designed to raise a smile.

On the other hand, the term ‘logic of referential plausibility’ quite accurately describes the main method used by Flournoy in tracking down factors contributing to Müller’s teleological automatisms. He goes to great lengths to seek out historical accounts of the characters in the various stories in Müller’s séances. He compares the ‘Giuseppe Balsamo’ and ‘Marie Antoinette’ writings Müller produced with actual letters written by the real Balsamo and the real Antoinette (FIPM: 68-75 and 212-213 respectively). This method operates on the tentative plausibility of Müller’s claims to discover points where they match the historical record. This allowed Flournoy to show with some confidence where Müller (unconsciously) took her information from and what she created in her dreams. Flournoy found – in the Geneva Library – a mention of a prince Sivrouka in an old text on India by De Marlès (1828), which we have already seen Saussure mention in S1. By giving Müller and her stories a little rope, Flournoy was able to separate the information she had to have acquired somehow, from the imaginary parts of her stories.

Among the colleagues that Flournoy contacted, nobody had heard of Sivrouka, or for that matter of De Marlès (S2; O. Flournoy 1986: 187). Saussure noted that the other names were also unusual:

Simandini reminds me of Sanskrit simantini which may have been a proper name here and there, but usually it was nothing more than a (poetic) word for “women”, femina.

- Mitidja brings almost no Hindu to mind except for its final –dja (meaning born of or born).

---

resembles the problems posed in definite descriptions as follows: The denier of Russell’s formulation ‘the present king of France is bald’ faces similar problems to Saussure in denying ‘In a past life Müller learned Sanskrit’. The retort ‘no he is not’ to Russell’s formulation means, ‘the present king of France is not bald’. Saussure’s answer to Müller’s Sanskritoid that, ‘she would have learned Prakrit, not Sanskrit’, fails to deny that Müller had a past life in India.
- Adél, unless it had been heavily mangled, has no Hindu at all. (S1)

On the other hand, it was no surprise that Müller made use of names of deities, as these were quite commonly known.

Ganapatināmā in the sentence atietō... ganapatināmā naturally draws the eye as it not only contains the name of the well-known god Ganapati, but immediately after it is nāma ‘name’. (I don’t know how she has assembled this construction, but it is not necessarily done incorrectly). (S1)

In an attempt to track down any other sources for Müller’s imagination, Saussure, as we have seen, contacted a colleague in Liege, Charles Michel. Michel was an expert in the history of India and if Sivrouka had been mentioned anywhere in the literature Saussure believed that Michel would have surely known where. But Michel had not heard of Sivrouka. The names Simandini, Mitidja and Adél could have been made up or construed in some way from words Müller had sighted somewhere, Ganapati could have come from almost any text on India, but the search resulted in a single source for Sivrouka that Müller could well have had access to. In finding the De Marlès book, Flournoy contributed strong evidence to his argument for cryptomnesia.

Flournoy’s theory of cryptomnesia is the basis for another mode of comparison in Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia. Cryptomnesia relies on the assumption that individuals are capable of acquiring memories that are, “profoundly buried beneath the normal waking state” (FIPM: 276), but Flournoy gave no specifications about the limits of such memories, or the fidelity with which information is retained. To carry out his analyses Saussure appears to have assumed that someone could learn some scraps of Sanskrit without conscious attention, and that they would retain them with a high level of fidelity. He then considered whether Müller’s knowledge of Sanskrit was comparable to the knowledge of an unconscious learner who had sighted a Sanskrit grammar. Flournoy was never able to confirm which grammar book Müller had sighted, or the precise circumstances under which she had sighted it, but Saussure’s analyses contained strong evidence of the grammar book origin. The details she appeared to have retained
were few, and they were the kind of small details one might pick up at a glance. Saussure wrote:

[I]t is clear that she has not drawn her characters from the middle of a word, but from the simple groups given, with transliterations, as reading exercises at the beginning of any grammar, such as की kî, ती tî, पी pî, ली lî, etc. (S6)

The form smayamana at least provides a small grammatical contribution in the last category (very easy for a person who only takes that which passes under the eyes when opening a grammar) (S6)

Saussure could not identify the exact work Müller had sighted, but his comments suggest that Müller’s Sanskrit knowledge displays the general structure of a grammar book. This evidence was obtained by first offering some plausibility to Simandini. Saussure’s strategy was to show an element of Müller’s ‘Sanskrit’ that could not be explained by her description of Simandini. Any number of mistakes in her speech might be accounted for by the assertion that Simandini was not a native speaker of Sanskrit. But one thing she could not possibly have done, if it were true that she were a Sanskrit learner from five-hundred years ago, is speak and write like a modern Sanskrit grammar book.

In his comparisons Saussure found some challenges to the unconscious learner presupposed in Flournoy’s concept of cryptomnesia. The trouble was that cryptomnesia was still quite ill defined. Flournoy never said whether the unconscious records everything or only some things, and how much distortion is normal in their reproduction. Saussure’s evidence for Müller having sighted a textbook is suggested by the quite accurate absorption of a limited amount of information. Flournoy does not indicate that the unconscious has an analytical capacity. That is why the abundance of /al/ and absence of /f/ in Müller’s Sanskritoid is such a conundrum. For someone who denies any knowledge of Sanskrit, how could she have known the general sound figure of that language? This is indeed a very peculiar thing to do correctly as it requires a different type of attention to simply repeating particular forms. If the textbook explanation is to be followed here, it requires that Müller had the unconscious analytical capacity to
deduce from forms sighted in textbooks, the information that these forms contained a high frequency of a and none of them contained f. This kind of mental power seems to lie beyond the abilities of the unconscious learner who remembers and reproduces.

The cryptomnesiac or ‘unconscious learner’ is a powerful explanation for the small elements of Sanskrit that turned up in Müller’s utterances. Yet that does not seem to tell the whole story. At a certain point in Saussure’s analyses, there is a thin line between him pursuing a methodology, and getting carried away with a narrative. To pursue his method of comparison he would carefully suggest Sanskrit words which were similar enough to Müller’s words that they could plausibly be the word she was attempting to pronounce. Some aspects seemed like things that could easily be acquired unconsciously, but in a few cases Saussure observed something that gave rise to the question ‘how did she know that?’ Müller was “absolutely convinced that she never saw or heard the least fragment of Sanscrit or any other Oriental language” (FIPM: 206), and felt no reason to doubt that her tongues came from spirit sources and were correct. Saussure seems to have thought of Müller as he might think of a student who does not study or listen in class. He rated Müller’s utterances as having potential Sanskrit or no Sanskrit at all. On one occasion he even joked about giving her marks for her work (S6). Flournoy believed that “some one… may have shown her and allowed her to glance over a Sanscrit grammar or lexicon immediately after a séance, during that state of suggestibility in which the exterior suggestions are registered very strongly in her case” (FIPM: 205-206). Whether this scenario is correct we can’t know, but her insistence that she had not consciously studied Sanskrit was convincing to Flournoy and his theory of cryptomnesia allowed that the few fragments she did know could have been absorbed unconsciously and applied somewhat effectively in a trance state.

As Gasparov (2012) notes, Saussure “turned to analytical procedures that clearly overstepped the bounds of any orderly linguistic analysis” (166). At first it looks like the work of a grammarian setting out to show linguistic change between two states, but Saussure soon moved on to exploring other angles. Ultimately Saussure found himself dealing with a mental state more than a state of language. He compared Müller’s glossolalia to Sanskrit, then to general characteristics of language systems and found the
glossolalia lacking. By employing what Todorov called, a “logic of referential plausibility” (1982: 259), Saussure actually expanded the scope of his investigation because this would allow him another point of comparison. This way he could ask if the Sanskritoid speech matched Müller’s claims about Simandini. The elements that did not match her descriptions such as the fact that her utterances resembled Sanskrit rather than the language an historical Simandini would have spoken, Prakrit, along with the oddities of that Sanskrit-like speech allow Saussure to hypothesize more accurately where Müller’s knowledge of Sanskrit really came from. Taking on Flournoy’s notion of cryptomnesia he thought of what an unconscious learner of Sanskrit might acquire by sighting available texts such as Sanskrit grammars, and attempted to reconcile Müller’s knowledge with the idea of such an unconscious learner.

Saussure’s grammarian approach to Müller’s glossolalia is not quite the diachronic linguistic method of the Cours. It does however gesture towards general linguistics in its privileging of system over individualized elements such as words and syllables and its deep consideration of the concept of language user. Crucially, it lacks that psychological aspect of the sign which will allow Saussure’s concepts to be generalizable. Saussure gave consideration to the sounds that Müller produced and searched his knowledge of Sanskrit for correspondences. Saussure also compared the Sanskritoid written forms that Müller produced with their most similar figures in Devanagari. His grammarian approach shows him thinking not only as a comparativist but also as a teacher of Sanskrit. But systematicity was not visible in the Sanskritoid using this method alone. I will now address the systemic approach that brings it to light.

The systemic approach

As he looked at Müller’s utterances, Saussure sometimes stepped outside his various comparisons to consider what might be happening in her mind. In S1 Saussure responded to the phrase atiēyā...ganapatināmā with the words:

I don’t know how she has assembled this construction, but it is not necessarily done incorrectly (S1)
Saussure had begun to consider the question: ‘how did Müller form her utterances?’ Saussure approached this problem by recognising two limiting factors upon them: 1. Müller’s ability to use language was limited to that which was in her memory and, 2. the usage of language parts is limited by the system to which they belong. These two statements could be made of any speaker. We can be certain that the first limit is absolute, but it is not difficult to think of exceptions to the second. Saussure’s astonishing discovery was that both of these limits held despite Müller’s concerted (though unconscious) attempts to speak past the boundaries of her knowledge by selecting Sanskrit-like sounds in her speech. In this section I will show that Saussure’s answer to the question of how Müller formed her utterances agrees not only with Flournoy’s idea that Müller was reproducing information she had unconsciously memorized, but also with Müller’s belief that the words she uttered were formed by other speakers.

The systemic approach is the term I use to describe Saussure’s various attempts to understand how Müller assembled Sanskritoid utterances and writing in her mind. Like the grammarian approach, Saussure’s systemic approach takes a variety of different forms. In his consideration of Müller’s use of Devanagari in her writing, her spelling of Hindu names, her use of Sanskrit-like speech sounds, and the grammatical aspects of her utterances, Saussure had to consider what she potentially knew and how much the language system played a role. She used parts of language as though it didn’t matter which system they belonged to, other terms were “invented with the only rule not to let the audience suspect that it is French” (S2). Nonetheless she maintained some structure in her speech and writing apparently because she had an idea of what she was saying. The phrase Saussure subjects to an unusual style of analysis in S2, atiêyâ...ganapatinámâ, is not Sanskrit, but Saussure showed that the sounds it consists of are not random. Instead, he took the view that each sound she employed asserted its systemic function upon the structure of the sentence. I will therefore first discuss his analysis of some simpler written examples to show how Saussure was thinking about system and knowledge in Müller’s Sanskritoid productions.
Saussure found the simplest evidence of the systemic limitations of Müller’s knowledge in her attempts to write Sanskrit. She obviously knew of the Devanagari system of writing, and had a general idea of what the characters look like. Her writings showed Saussure that she was able to draw a few Devanagari characters more-or-less correctly. Sometimes she would write them backwards, or in an unusual way that was very hard to recognise, but in most cases Saussure was able to identify the character she was attempting to write. Saussure wrote of M7,

\[a, e \text{ and } d (आ, ए, द) \text{ are drawn correctly. (S6)}\]

So she had a strong enough memory of these three characters to write them in a recognisable form. But he pointed out that only the \(a\) and \(e\) are used correctly. This is because vowels can be represented simply, but consonants represented in their simple form imply a vowel; \(र\) stands not for \(d\) but for \(da\). Thus in her form ‘रंस’, were the \(र\) to be Romanised, the word would be rendered as ‘daans’, whereas Müller clearly intended ‘dans’ in her phrase “रंस ma chambre” (M7). In a more marginal case, Saussure recognised the first character of \(radyiva\) as “the initial letter of class 5: र turned in the wrong direction” (S4) which would give \(taadyiva\). Much later he came to the conclusion that both the direction and the shape were wrong and decided that Müller had instead wanted to draw र (r). The above quotation from S6 continues,

The \(r\) of \(radyiva\) is not as good, and is at the limit where it could doubted whether it is in fact \(r\). (S6)

Thus Saussure saw that she knew what she wanted to write but she could not draw the right form from memory. A similar case appears in her rendering of \(i\).

When there is the figure \(T\) for \(i\), it is possible, at a pinch, that Mlle Smith had believed she was again using Devanagari. (S6)

Of M13 चः he said it,
does not strictly contain Devanagari save the ष, but we can assume... that षै is for ए (l), and secondly that ट is intended to mark i. (S6)

This appears to be Müller’s only attempt at writing a whole word in Devanagari. From this summary we can gather that in her memory she possessed seven Devanagari characters that she could draw more or less correctly. She could not draw any more because she did not know any more and whether she knew even these is not clear. As we saw with ट, Müller naively thought that Devanagari characters could represent French sounds. But Sanskrit orthography has quite a different system.

In Saussure’s analysis of Müller’s use of the Devanagari system the systemic approach becomes complicated. Here Saussure was no longer dealing with units simply, but in the assemblages Müller produced. In most of her writings Müller would use one Devanagari character to stand for the initial character of a French word. In M7 for example, the Devanagari characters are obviously intended to be equivalent sounds to the French characters for which they have been substituted.

[T]here is the letter standing for i; yet this one, which for Mlle. X has the form ट, bears no relation to the Hindu letter ट. (S4)

But, Saussure continued, “i always comes at the end of a syllable, as in pi” (S6) and when i is written in combination with another character it does take a form like ट. In this case, Saussure wrote,

If it is brief, चिः (= pi), which is identical to that of Mlle. S. placed on the left of the consonant (and is connected to the consonant with a kind of embrace).

If it is long, ची (=pi, or pī), with the same drawn on the right of the consonant (connected by a slightly different embrace). (S6)

This is no doubt something quite difficult to know, and not something that someone could understand from glancing at a grammar book. But Saussure gives some
plausibility to the idea that Müller could have known the shape without grasping the usage:

it is clear that she has not drawn her characters from the middle of a word, but from the simple groups given, with transliterations, as reading exercises at the beginning of any grammar, such as की kī, ती tī, पी pī, ली lī, etc. (S6)

While Müller gave the appearance of knowing a little Devanagari, her lack of knowledge about the writing system she was trying to use is evident. This is particularly clear in Saussure’s analysis of Müller’s T for i. She never used it in a Sanskrit word and while i only comes at the end of a character she used it as an initial character in her forms ‘Tills’ (they) and ‘Instant’ (moment). In the case of Müller’s ढ़ (M13) Saussure could not decide whether this was intended to represent plis (folds) or palais (palace). If it was palais then she had correctly used the rule she had broken in ‘Tadyiva’ and ‘Tans’. In this respect, ‘plis’ is a more satisfactory solution but given the context of Tchandraguiri, it seems more likely that she was trying to write palais. The final piece in this puzzle is that the form in M13 ध = lame (blade). Here, Saussure observed, it appears that Müller did know the rule that consonants are followed by a unless indicated otherwise.

In sum, Müller correctly produced seven Devanagari characters, and was potentially able to apply one or two rules of the Devanagari system. The fact that most of the Sanskrit appears in French words and is intended to represent French sounds is a strong suggestion that she was only able to use writing systems that lay within the limitations of her knowledge. She might have known that the Devanagari character for l (ऌ) entails a but this is the only example in which Müller’s shows an awareness of sound representation in Devanagari that differs from French. This was for Saussure an obvious sign that Müller had acquired her knowledge of Sanskrit from a grammar book, just as it was some of the clearest evidence that she knew nothing about Sanskrit phonetics. The system that Müller relied on, even in the simplest Devanagari writings, was French.
Despite the imprecisions of Müller’s written characters, Saussure appears to have held the view that her unconscious memory was of very high fidelity. Flournoy accepted the Marlès text as source for the names Sivrouka Nayaka and Tchadraguiri but Saussure pointed out that Müller had at first spelt (using an alphabet board or by tapping on the table) the names differently to Marlès, thus questioning whether Flournoy had really found her source.

Isn’t it that Sivrouka nayaca is printed in Marlès as I write it, the first with k, the second with c? If this detail is found in the spelling of the ‘finger’ dictation, it could be safely presumed that we needn’t to look farther than Marlès for the origin of the dream. But, unless I am mistaken, didn’t the finger dictate Nayaka?

On the other hand, it is found that Tchadraguiri has been dictated with gu, rather than with a simple g. and Sivrouka with ou and not with a simple u? This last name, if I am not mistaken, had to be dictated twice, the first day when the name was expressed by the finger and then on the day when it translated the sentence ou mama priva ... Sivrouka. (S3)

An exact representation of the name from the Marlès text would have been more satisfactory. Flournoy attempted to pre-empt this criticism being waged following the publication of Des Indes:

This difficulty is only insurmountable by elevating the inerrancy of the subliminal memory to the plane of absolute infallibility, though the latter must be admitted to be ordinarily very much superior to that of the conscious memory. But the favorite comparison of the forgotten memories, reappearing in somnambulisms, to unchangeable, absolutely true photographic impressions, causes us readily to exaggerate the fidelity of the unconscious memory-images. (FIPM: 188)

Thus, Flournoy was willing to explain variation between Marlès and Müller with the normal mental function of forgetting. But Saussure was less willing to attribute differences to forgetting stuck rigidly to his comparison of forms.
Though he stuck solidly to the accuracy of forms, Saussure had somehow to account for phonetic elements that appeared to be distortions of words. One way would be to say that they were produced by analogy, which “involves transferring one particular form item from one member to other members of a grammatical paradigm” (Jankowsky 2006: 583). For example, when a child says ‘*sheeps’ or, ‘*I play running’. Müller’s case presented Saussure with many opportunities to be more accurate than simply stating that one form is distorted by analogy with another form. Saussure saw that the sounds that appeared in her speech were consistently limited in particular ways that showed she could only speak Sanskrit insofar as she was acquainted with Sanskrit. Her acquaintance pertained to a few specific forms and two principles. Thus when she did not use specific forms, she was limited to assembling utterances using general guidelines, such as ‘use a a lot’ and ‘don’t use f’. The sounds that she produced in combination with a were also sounds that she would have employed in her native French. Thus, in Saussure’s eyes Müller created nothing, she merely conformed to some inescapable component of language whether this be the phonetic forms of the language she attempted to speak, the phonetic restraints of her mother tongue, her own physiology (in so far as that physiology was attuned to a certain way of speaking), or some other such barrier that stood between her and fluent Sanskrit.

Again and again, Saussure found Müller to be incapable of language invention. Each time he was able to attribute Müller’s ability to use a given language system, he did so only in as far as Müller could have acquired knowledge of that language system. This is a theme in his systemic approach: if one does not know an aspect of language, then one cannot use it. Every element of language Müller employed must have stemmed from her experience of language. Foreign aspects were merely known sounds combined in unusual ways for the purpose of sounding exotic (S2). Müller only required knowledge of a few Sanskrit words – which she certainly possessed – to produce other similar sounding words. The most obvious example of this is undoubtedly the chant which Saussure transcribed himself. Müller probably knew “Gaya” (which appears here fourteen times with varying intonations) as a name of a deity, while many of the other words in the chant merely replace the consonants.
In this short passage there are fifty-six a’s out of a total of seventy six vowels. This is a lower proportion of as than Saussure’s estimation of the vowel ratio in genuine Sanskrit, but a substantially higher proportion than in French. Apparently she had learned the fact that a was common in Sanskrit from somewhere and was now making use of that knowledge. This allowed her to make Sanskrit even more simply. All she had to do was put different consonants between the a’s. Müller appears to have used this knowledge of the general sound figure of Sanskrit to freely create Sanskrit-like sounds. But this attempt to “remotely chance upon a Sanskrit word” (S5), as Saussure described it, met with very little success.

Saussure’s method for analysing Müller’s psychology via her utterances went beyond Flournoy’s cryptomnesia by revealing simple yet sophisticated principle of linguistic research. Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia show that Müller’s mind was incapable of creating linguistic values, whether Sanskrit, Martian or any type of speech that was not part of an established system. He saw that Müller wrote using Devanagari-like characters, she knew what she was trying to represent and, when she spoke Sanskritoid, despite the incomprehensible combination of sounds she selected, she ultimately had something in mind that she was trying to articulate to her audience. The only language she could speak fluently was French and Saussure took the position that her Sanskrit speech, just like her writing, was initially formed in French. Thus, by applying his method Saussure devised a support for a defining principle of langue, that “an individual acting alone is incapable of establishing a value” (CGL: 112). On occasions when there was no distinguishable systematic elements in Müller’s speech we cannot know whether that speech meant anything for Müller, but from Saussure’s perspective it appeared to be in compliance with the principle of not being found out by the sitters.

So Müller could write a few Devanagari characters as long as it didn’t mean connecting them to each other. She had a few names of deities and the name of a prince. She even appeared to know a couple of important aspects of the general sound character of
Sanskrit. But this was clearly not enough to write or speak in Sanskrit; if she really wanted to speak Sanskrit without learning it, she would have to find another way to say the right sounds. Saussure’s most important breakthrough in relation to the systemic approach appeared in S2 when he discovered how Müller was assembling her Sanskritoid:

Rightly or wrongly, I am now disposed to see in the Sivroukian phrases something analogous to the Martian interspersed only at intervals with Sanskrit shreds. (S2)

From here on there are two distinct limitations Saussure applied in his analyses of Müller’s mental process. On one hand he saw it as necessary to take Müller’s knowledge of language units as a limitation on her ability to speak, while on the other he saw that the demands of the system she employed were also a powerful limitation on what she was able to say.

Saussure perceived that none of the language units and none of the relations between the units in Müller’s glossolalia were entirely random or invented. His view was that Müller used only familiar language units and constructions, but with a few additional unconsciously imposed rules in an attempt to obscure the fact that she could not speak the language she was attempting to speak. Saussure only offered a single demonstration of how Müller created her Sanskritoid speech in his breakdown of the sequence atietô…ganapatinâmâ, which Saussure takes to mean ‘I bless you in the name of Ganapati.’ According to Saussure’s analysis, the first group of sounds represented as atietô are /a/ (for English ‘I’) which switches Müller’s syntax from French ‘vous bénis’ to English ‘bless you’:

Consequently we mark,

bless you

for: tyê yo.

The yo (you) may have been taken from the English you. The tyê = bless, could be taken from anywhere, as in Martian. (S2)
Interestingly, in this breakdown atietô loses a t, exchanges an i for a y and gains a circumflex above the e and an additional y. It also gains two word breaks. Finally, through Saussure’s analysis it becomes ‘a tyê yo’. The addition of the second y might offer some insight regarding the role of the circumflex when applied to o, however the e, which gains a circumflex and is now preceded by a y, makes Saussure’s changes in the transcription utterly confounding. Regardless, his point about the underlying formation of the utterance is clear.

According to Saussure, Müller only needed these sounds – in no particular order – to construct the phrase. This explanation of Müller’s language abilities revealed that nothing in that utterance except the name ‘Ganapati’ need be thought of as Sanskrit. The rules that Saussure saw as necessary to produce the utterance, ‘atietô... ganapatinâmâ’ can be summarised from S2 as follows: 1, not to pronounce anything with French words. It must firstly and above all not appear to be French in her own eyes. 2, French words are the theme or substratum of what she will say, [what Saussure meant by this is that the phrase was formed mentally in French before being spoken in Sanskritoid]. 3, familiar words are each rendered by a substitute with an exotic appearance. 4, new forms are inserted in the place marked in her mind for each word in French. 5, sometimes the substitution is completely arbitrary and sometimes it will be influenced or determined by the memory of a foreign word, whether it be English, Hungarian, German, Sanskrit. 6, if all else fails, an indistinct sound may be uttered. Therefore, in Saussure’s view, the only thing Müller could utter that was not reliant upon her knowledge of language was an indistinct sound. She could not say something she did not know, and she certainly could not establish a new value in langue on her own.

Instead of speaking Sanskrit based on the learning necessary to acquire that language, she spoke some foreign-sounding constructions, believing that they were genuine Sanskrit that she had spoken in a previous life. There are two psychological elements that we can separate out here. First, there is Müller’s spiritualist belief that Sanskrit words she had never learned could issue from her mouth. This phenomenon is not directly related to language, and Saussure leaves explanations of it up to Flournoy. Second, there were the sounds Müller used, and the process she used to assemble them.
Saussure worked on this second problem by looking for a process that assumes as little knowledge of foreign language as possible (see S2). When he did introduce elements of foreign language into the process he only used elements that Müller was very likely to know. In later documents (esp. S8) Saussure suggested that this process of construction was not altogether an abnormal process of language construction and might be applicable to more regular uses of language.

My efforts in this section and the section preceding it have been directed towards showing that Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia contain two methods, one straight comparison and another which interrogates the psychology behind Müller’s utterances. There are indeed some peculiarities about the way Saussure applied his method, which do not line up exactly with his later dual synchronic and diachronic methods. But these methods are both present and they are used in a complementary way. It is noteworthy that the synchronic method in which Saussure expresses more psychological ideas begins by comparing Müller’s utterance to the artificially stable form of Sanskrit used by scholars, but this is a very problematic approach partly because there are too many errors in Müller’s Sanskrit, and partly because a real Simandini would have spoken 15th century Sanskrit, whereas the artificially stable form dates from a thousand years earlier. The Neogrammarian tradition Saussure had been trained in held that “scientific observation [of linguistic phenomena is] only possible by a historical method” (Paul 1891 [1886]: xivi). We can see that Saussure’s experience with attempting to analyse glossolalia may have assisted his development of a theory which turned the Neogrammarian position on its head.

**Dual methodology as a general linguistic idea**

Chapter III of the *Cours* contains these two statements,

> Very few linguists realise that the need to take account of the passage of time gives rise to special problems in linguistics and forces us to choose between two radically different approaches. (*CGL*: 79)
The opposition between these two orders must be grasped in order to draw out all the consequences which it implies. (ibid: 83)

In this section I will argue that what I call the grammarian and systemic approaches Saussure used in his analyses of Müller’s glossolalia are earlier versions of the dual diachronic and synchronic methods that places at the heart of his thought in the Cours. In his application of a grammarian approach to glossolalia, Saussure showed the problem that the historical linguistics of his time left itself open to: If the linguist does not first establish the two language states their historical could be invalidated by the discovery that one (or both) of their chosen language ‘states’ was not a language state at all. Therefore a central tenet to Saussure’s general linguistics, the temporal priority of synchronic linguistics over diachronic linguistics, is supported by impass Saussure reached in the initial application of his grammarian approach. In his systemic approach he was interested in the underlying structure of Müller’s speech. Saussure observed that her will to speak drove her speech beyond the limitation of her knowledge of Sanskrit and incorporated all her knowledge of language to make speaking possible. Together these approaches bear strong resemblances to the later synchronic and diachronic dual methodology of the Cours.

With his initial comparisons of Müller’s utterances to Sanskrit, Saussure did not discover a recognisable language state. There was little continuous meaning, and the limited amount of data made it impossible to discover any consistency in grammatical or phonetic features. This foreshadows a defining methodological principle of the Cours that prior to historical comparison two language states must first be established. This is why study of language states precedes historical comparison. Further, a study of a language state can be conducted independently of a historical analysis.

The aim of general synchronic linguistics is to establish the fundamental principles of an idiosynchronic system, the constituents of any language-state. (CGL: 99)

But the idiosynchronic system of Müller’s utterances was elusive. With comparison alone Saussure could not grasp the state.
Rather than abandon comparison, Saussure expanded the potential of comparison in his analyses. In the following paragraphs I will explore the different types of questions Saussure asked in his analyses of glossolalia. Instead of simple comparison of one of Müller’s forms to a Sanskrit form, Saussure would take an utterance and essentially ask, ‘does this utterance hold properties comparable to those of language systems?’ He found he could also ask, whether Müller’s utterances were comparable to those a historical figure like Simandini would have used. Of an utterance that appeared to contain some Sanskrit, he could ask whether the apparent elements of Sanskrit were comparable with what an individual might remember unconsciously at a glance. Not all of these ways of comparing would find their way into the diachronic view expressed in the Cours, but issues relating to memory and language use in a given period would be well represented in the synchronic view.

Among the most important concepts of Saussure’s general linguistics is that of ‘linguistic value’. Values are established when they are sanctioned within a linguistic community. In S1 Saussure considered the individual language units, but he could not settle upon a value for any except those like Ganapati which could be identified as belonging to a system. S2 shows a complete reversal whereby it is first assumed that there is a system operating, and then the values are sought within the system. This kind of analysis is expressed very clearly in the Cours.

[T]he notion of value... shows us that it is a great mistake to consider a sign as nothing more than the combination of a certain sound and a certain concept. To think of a sign as nothing more would be to isolate it from the system to which it belongs. It would be to suppose that a start could be made with individual signs, and a system constructed by putting them together. On the contrary, the system as a united whole is the starting point, from which it becomes possible, by a process of analysis, to identify its constituent elements. (CGL: 112)

Here again the language state is the issue for Saussure. In a sense that is what all of Saussure’s diversions in the grammarian method, as he applied it to Müller’s glossolalia, were about; he was searching for a language state from which to begin his analysis.
When he looked into the way Müller assembled her utterances, he was able to find the language state, or states that had eluded him in his comparisons. He describe that state as follows: “the gibberish takes its components from where it can, and half the time is invented with the only rule not to let the audience suspect that it is French” (S2). In the *Cours* we can find Saussure’s theorisation of memory as a collective of imprints,

> A language, as a collective phenomenon, takes the form of a totality of imprints in everyone’s brain, rather like a dictionary of which everyone has an identical copy. Thus it is something which is in each individual, but is none the less common to all. At the same time it is out of the reach of any deliberate interference by individuals. (*CGL*: 19)

In his systemic approach Saussure was much more capable of viewing Müller’s glossolalia as ‘gibberish’ and as a kind of system that ‘takes its components *from where it can*. While the comparisons he made only looked at the surface of her utterances and found some similarities with Sanskrit, the systemic approach allowed Saussure to discover that Müller’s constructions comprised much more familiar units of language systems such as modern German and English.

It is the systemic view that allows speech into the analysis, and we can see in Müller’s utterances reasons why Saussure would later locate the linguistics of speech (*linguistique de la parole*) as a sub-field of linguistics on the grounds that speech is not always an exact representation of language state, or even a representation appropriate to linguistic analysis.

> Speech… is an individual act of the will and the intelligence, in which one must distinguish: (1) the combinations through which the speaker uses the code provided by the language in order to express his own thought, and (2) the psycho-physical mechanism which enables him to externalise these combinations. (*CGL*: 14)

Müller’s utterances were limited by her knowledge and extended by her will to speak as Simandini. But her expression was limited by a ‘psycho-physical mechanism’ which
caused her to pronounce Sanskrit in a French way. In this we see why Saussure considered speech so problematic as a representation of a language state.

The arbitrariness of the sign also finds form in Saussure’s consideration of the role of will in Müller’s utterances. Flournoy’s theory of cryptomnesia influenced Saussure, but he believed more rigidly than Flournoy that Müller, as an individual speaker, created nothing, rather he took the position that she arbitrarily linked the sounds already within the bounds of her personal knowledge to ideas she wanted to express. Saussure maintained this view through to the end of his life:

> The word arbitrary … must not be taken to imply that a signal depends on the free choice of the speaker. (We shall see later than [sic] the individual has no power to alter a sign in any respect once it has become established in a linguistic community.) (CGL: 68)

Even in the cases where Müller’s speech appeared to be nonsense, Saussure’s analysis of a sample of Müller’s Sanskrit strongly suggested that almost every unit can be accounted for as already belonging to one or other language system. This translates readily to the more general view expressed in the Cours. Speakers are certainly capable of speaking in ways limited to their experience of language and their experience of techniques of combining language units of vocabulary, grammar, syntax and pronunciation. For Saussure, these are universal limitations upon all speech, even what appears to be gibberish.

In Saussure’s linguistic thought there are several core aspects that share the feature of dualism. These include the dual nature of the linguistic sign with its oppositions of sign and signal, the dual operation of the language mechanism, through association and syntagma, and the dual synchronic and diachronic method. Dualism was no stranger to linguistics in Saussure’s time. Indeed the Neogrammarians who were his teachers recognised the existence of two types of linguistics – historical and descriptive – but were thoroughly convinced that historical linguistics was the only scientific approach to language (see Paul 1891: xlvii-xlxvii), because it could be investigated through strict application of linguistic laws (Jankowsky 2006: 583).
The dual nature of Saussure’s method is an important aspect in which it resembles Saussure’s general linguistics. Each of the grammarian and systemic approaches alone is specific. On one hand there is comparison of specific forms carried out in various ways, on the other hand there are considerations of the psychology of one individual. If they are to be applied together, however, the grammarian view demands of the systemic view a *language state*, not just a word or a form. It is this systemic view that draws the speaker into the analysis of the speech. By incorporating the means of production into the analysis, Saussure was able to make important statements about why Müller’s glossolalia was assembled in the way that it was. Because she wanted to speak and not simply to make noise, she had to rely on language systems each of which left their phonetic and grammatical signature in her utterances. By crossing boundaries between language systems to assemble her utterances Müller displayed a unique will to bend language to her desired form of expression. Even so, she had no impact on the systems she recruited.

**The development of a dual methodology**

In this section I will argue that by applying grammarian and systemic methods to human speech, Saussure came to a more sophisticated theoretical formulation of the relationship between the study of a language state and the study of the historical changes in a given language system. In particular I will look at the forms of Saussure’s dual method suggested in his various writings prior to the Flournoy Affair, and discuss what Saussure added to his method during his analyses of glossolalia. I surmise that some of the changes in Saussure’s thought are a result of Saussure’s collaboration with Flournoy and therefore might not have happened otherwise. I will identify several elements of Saussure’s dual methodology that were not present in Saussure’s various writings prior to the Flournoy Affair and show why they were likely to have been introduced during the analyses of glossolalia.

There are many difficulties in finding all of Saussure’s texts (even those that have been published) and arranging them in order. Much of the difficulty lies in the fact that
Saussure himself published so little; leaving wide gaps with no publications and therefore no publication dates to tie his many notes to. Further difficulties arise from the reordering of documents in the archive by previous researchers (see for example Joseph 2007a and Amacker 2008). Saussure’s writings that were either published by Saussure himself or have been dated to the period before the analyses of glossolalia (~1896) are his Essai (1874), Mémoire (1878), his doctoral thesis on the Sanskrit genitive (1881), notes on ‘inner speech’ dated to 1881-1885 (see Joseph 2010), various etymologies published in the Bulletin of the Linguistic Society of Paris (1876-1889), his inaugural lectures at Geneva (1891) and the ‘notes for a book on general linguistics’ (dated to 1893-4 by Bouquet and Engler, WGL: 136). The dating for documents which appear to have been written either during or after the Flournoy Affair is in most cases – save the papers on Lithuanian accentuation (1894, 1896) – have been given only very tentative dates. These include the lectures on the theory of the syllable (presented in 1897 but possibly composed years earlier), and ‘Miscellany and Aphorisms’ (possibly 1897 or after [Engler 1975: 839-840 n. 19]).

A particularly contentious issue of some importance to us here is the dating of the ‘Dual Essance’ manuscripts. Joseph (2012) notes that only one page of these manuscripts is dated, and places all of the manuscripts accordingly. That date is 6 December 1891 (381). But it is important to remember that this manuscript is made up of notes scrawled on loose paper. Sometimes the paper Saussure used was blank, sometimes it was lined and sometimes (as is the case with the sheet of paper on which the date appears) he wrote his notes on the back of a scrap of paper he found lying around. Chidichimo and Gambarara (2008) express the opinion that the document containing this date is autonomous to the ‘Dual Essance’ manuscripts. Amacker (2008), who submits these texts notes to rigorous reappraisal, painstakingly describes each sheet of paper in the archive and categorizes them into 108 groups according to the qualities of the paper and the ink on which the notes are written. The documents are now stored in 12 envelopes which were numbered by Rudolf Engler. Amacker writes, “[i]t is now impossible to know precisely how the sheets were distributed among these envelopes and how they were [arranged] in each” (Amacker 2008: 18, my trans.), and adds that chronological confusion is inevitable (ibid). The variations in style as well as the length of the 274
pages that comprise the manuscripts suggest that they took considerable time to compose. Additionally, The more confident and mature tone than the ‘Notes for a book on general linguistics’ dated to 1893-1894 suggest that some sections may well have been composed in the late 1890s or even later. Although her opinion is comparatively ill informed, Sanders’ (2006) statement that the ‘Dual Essence’ manuscripts date to somewhere between 1891 and 1911 (WGL: xxii) appears to be all that can be said about their overall dating with full confidence.

We will first be interested in the origin of Saussure’s dual method and how he understood this method immediately before the Flournoy Affair. Joseph (2010) argues that synchrony and diachrony were fully articulated in Saussure’s notes very early on, and locates its emergence in December 1884 notes for his course on Gothic phonology:

> In sum, as soon as we are dealing with phonological transformation we are considering a movement, and by extension a space of time bounded between 2 terms & 2 more or less distant linguistic states. The description of a language is on the contrary concerns on the contrary, at least ideally, an ensemble of simultaneous facts a given point in time and an immobile ensemble of facts. […] Consequently the phonology of a language either should not be spoken of, or else it should be made to consist the phonology of a language purely and simply of the inventory of the sounds of the language, and another name and another place should be sought for the history of phonological transformations. The latter will only figure as the Introduction to the grammar of the different idioms. (qtd. In Joseph 2010: 113)

The terms synchrony and diachrony do not appear but the idea of both static and historical observation of linguistic facts is present. But here a language state is no more than an “immobile ensemble of facts”, of “the inventory of sounds of the language”. There is no mention of the speech community who use these facts, or how they exist in practice, whether mentally, physiologically, or socially.
Later there are two texts – or rather groups of texts – with which we can attempt to locate Saussure’s thought on linguistic method in the years leading up to the Flournoy Affair. Curiously, there is no explicit mention of duality of any sort in either Saussure’s inaugural lectures at the University of Geneva (1891), or his ‘notes for a book on general linguistics 1893-1894’. In 1891 Saussure made very conservative statements emphasising the study of language as a historical science, and was careful to mention his forebears in Geneva and France. In 1893-1894 ‘notes’ he found himself in a quandary over basic principles, unable to move past the starting point of linguistics. But there is one other piece of evidence that shows Saussure thinking about language in a very different way. This is Flournoy’s 1893 text on synaesthesia which contains a section by Saussure (credited as the ‘eminent linguist Mr. X’) where he wrote about the colours he associates with vowels. In this period Saussure presented himself publicly as a historical linguist, but was privately rethinking his basic principles.

The inaugural lectures Saussure presented at the University of Geneva in 1891 are a far cry from the general linguistic theory that appears in the Cours. Indeed, they are heavily focussed on historical linguistics, with no clear reference to synchronic linguistics at all. This may have been because during his years in Paris between teaching courses in Old High German, Gothic and Anglo-Saxon and his work as secretary to the Société de Linguistique de Paris, he encountered many difficulties in finding the time and will to focus on producing his next great work. Although he did compose and publish some reviews, etymological and theoretical pieces (Joseph 2012: 314-315). On the other hand it may be that he was just being conservative until he discovered how much freedom he would have in his new role in Geneva. Either way, in these three inaugural lectures he presented himself essentially as a historical linguist:

[T]he more one studies language, the more thoroughly one appreciates the fact that everything in language is history, in other words, that it is an object for historical analysis, and not abstract analysis. (WGL: 98)

He focussed on the two types of language change emphasised by the neogrammarians. Jankowsky writes, “[t]he Neogrammarians admit only sound changes attributable to the operation of a sound law or due to analogy” (2006: 584). In his second 1891 lecture at
Geneva, Saussure articulated this same view when he said that phenomena of language change are

traceable back to two naturally distinct, and independent, causes or groups of causes. On one side there is phonetic change, and on the other a type of change which bears various names, none of which is excellent, but the most widely used of which is analogical change. (ibid: 106)

He discussed the idea of language states, but seemed only to see them as a means to enable historical comparison, rather than an object that might be studied independently of historical considerations (ibid: 100-101). In these lectures, Saussure’s statements were all very general. He commented on language, languages and linguistics but gave no clear ideas on a synchronic methodology.

The ‘notes for a book on general linguistics 1893-1894’ are a collection of notes on several ideas that Saussure might have intended to include in a book on general linguistics. But they are far from publishable form and are written in a very timid and self-doubting tone. He often repeats the same idea several times in slightly differing formulations, as though he was still in the process of turning the ideas he had in mind into written language. In fact by the end of these notes Saussure is still in the middle of his considerations of what viewpoint to take and how to begin a linguistic analysis.

It would be legitimate if some aspect were given independently of the others, that is, independently of any abstracting or generalizing operations on our part; but a moment’s reflection will show that not a single aspect can fit into this category (WGL: 136)

This is an exact summary of the difficulty he had in applying his method to Müller’s utterances. Most terms were given independently, but they were only independent in appearance because it was not immediately clear what state they belonged to. In his abstract consideration of general linguistic problems Saussure could not see how to begin, but Müller’s utterances forced him to try out and apply some different points of view and this may be where he was able to advance his ideas.
The development of a dual methodology may have come about when Saussure put his own theory into practice. Prior to the Flournoy Affair Saussure had had little opportunity or cause to apply his introspective ideas about the mental operations associated with language to real data. Broca’s 1861 discovery of the speech centre of the human brain had provided an interesting insight for him (see WGL: 185), but without the means to look inside the brain at the moment a subject was using language, the use of this insight was limited. Müller’s glossolalia provided an interesting opportunity, as it allowed Saussure to think of ways in which speech data could be searched for information about what the mind was doing to produce that speech. Saussure’s insight here was that what he perceived of as self-imposed rules, caused a limitation which caused certain mental operations to be revealed, such as how Müller drew upon memory, and how she combined speech sounds. Thus Saussure was able to think differently and apply his ideas about the psychology of language use.

Saussure deviated from the grammarian approach so that he could approach Müller’s case in a way that was more appropriate for discovering the productive process of her glossolalia. With the grammarian approach all he had found was a few poorly pronounced Sanskrit words. If he had pursued comparison exclusively it seems likely that his analyses would not have progressed beyond that point. But Saussure found a clue in the transcriptions of the Martian utterances. The Martian utterances followed the structure of their French translations almost word-for-word. This was a very strong indication that the Martian forms were being manufactured entirely in Müller’s Francophone mind. If that was the case for the Martian, it would likely be the case for the Sanskritoid too. The question that Saussure then wished to answer was, ‘how were these utterances being assembled?’ We shall see in chapter four that he had struggled against applying a mechanical metaphor to language use for years, but that this may well have been the point at which he finally conceded that it was a useful metaphor. If that is the case, then it is a moment in which his definition of the sign took on a new dimension, and his methodology grew to include a sophisticated understanding of how members of speech communities put signs together with the efficiency required for speech. In working on Müller’s case, Saussure might have advanced his framework for understanding living speech using the synchronic method.
Faced with the problem of no system, and therefore no starting point for linguistic analysis, Saussure essentially set about reducing the transcriptions of Müller’s utterances to their constituent parts. The units could be of any length, provided they were units of an identifiable language system. With this consideration in mind Saussure discovered units as small as a single vowel, consonant or phoneme, or as large as a word or a phrase. Once the utterances were broken down they began to reveal to him their systems; here there was English, there German, a Sanskrit word, and underneath it all, was a French phrase. Saussure saw that Müller was drawing on all of her knowledge of languages, making associations between them and expressing them together. Once he realised this, Müller’s assemblages were opened up to a different kind of linguistic analysis.

Saussure began to think about the process that was bringing the various units together. Obviously, no two units could be expressed simultaneously, therefore there must have been some mechanism by which units were being placed in a linear utterance. Saussure appears to have found an important key to Müller’s ordering of units in S2 when he observed two systems in conflict. His idea was that Müller had got herself into a tricky position whereby French and English were competing to control the syntax of her speech:

1. **Je.** “Je” is forced to change. Does her memory provide her with an exotic word for *je*? No. Then one is chosen at random *a* = “*je*”. [Perhaps it has in fact been inspired by the English *I*, pronounced *aï*, but this is not necessary.]

2. *vous bénis* [lit: you bless]; or *bénis vous* [lit: bless you] because if, for example, the word *I* was suggested by the English it may follow that the English construction occurs involuntarily in the words placed immediately afterwards. (S2)

But whatever was happening in Müller’s mind, her speech apparatus was only capable of saying one sound at a time, and therefore of speaking one language at a time. Saussure maintained this notion of linearity as an important principle:

The elements of [language] signals are presented one after another…
For example, if I stress a certain syllable, it may seem that I am presenting a number of significant features simultaneously. But that is an illusion. The syllable and its accentuation constitute a single act of phonation. There is no duality within this act, although there are various contrasts with what precedes and follows. (CGL: 70)

Saussure never discussed the delimitation of units in Müller’s glossolalia, but whether difficulty was in defining what a unit was. Even in his final courses, Saussure never strictly specified unit length or constituents. But he insisted that units must be delimited despite doubts regarding their existence:

[L]anguage has the character of a system based entirely on contrasts between its concrete units. One cannot dispense with identifying them, nor move a step without having recourse to them. And yet delimiting them is such a tricky problem that one is led to ask whether they are really there. (CGL: 105)

In his analyses of glossolalia Saussure held that only accuracy of production was necessary for the verification of a unit. The reason for this methodological choice is that correctness of production indicated that the unit was known by the speaker. If the unit was incorrect, then Saussure deemed it to be a combination of sounds, probably from different systems. Ganapati, for example was deemed to be a unit of knowledge, as was mama priya, on the other hand aityeyo was very inaccurate and therefore needed to be broken down further. Ultimately the correctness of the form could be located in its correspondence to a unit of existing language. The verification of the unit followed exactly Flournoy’s theory of cryptomnesia, and consisted of matching it with a unit that Müller was likely to have been exposed to at some point during her lifetime.

In this section I have argued that there is development of Saussure’s general linguistic idea of a dual method. I showed that Saussure did not give any elaborated description of his method of his synchronic and diachronic analyses in his writings prior to the Flournoy Affair. I also showed that his analyses of glossolalia contain two elements that appear to have been new in his thought. Firstly, this was the only instance in which Saussure addressed glossolalia. In his comparisons he found he was unable to carry out
traditional analyses and began to consider new and different ways to compare. In doing so he found that Müller’s glossolalia conformed to a range of systematic and phonetic elements of language. Secondly, in his application of a synchronic method in Müller’s case Saussure began to work out principles which guide the psychological operation of the sign. The simplicity of Müller’s utterances and the key provided in the form of Flournoy’s theory of cryptomnesia might well have helped Saussure to unlock this area of research.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I recognised two approaches in Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia, the grammatical view and the systemic view. In each of these approaches Saussure chose to analyse Müller’s utterances in a variety of ways. In my discussion of the grammatical approach I identified four types of comparison in Saussure’s analyses of Sanskritoid: to Sanskrit, to a general notion of language system, to a hypothetical user of Sanskrit like Simandini (the method Todorov calls referential plausibility), and to a hypothetical unconscious learner. In the section on the systemic approach I discussed the way Saussure interrogated the systemic elements of Müller’s utterances namely her knowledge of language and her ability to represent that knowledge in speech. I have called the combination of these approaches a general linguistic idea for their resemblance to Saussure’s later dual synchronic and diachronic methods. I have also argued that his application of ideas to glossolalia helped him to think past the Neogrammarians position that historical linguistics is the only scientific linguistics, towards his later assertion that language must first be defined synchronically with reference to the psychology of the language users.
Chapter 4: Evolution of a Mechanism

Introduction

Early in the *Cours*, reasons why it is so difficult to define language are enumerated. Language is vocal, but it is not simply the sounds produced (*CGL*: 8); it is auditory, but “one cannot simply divorce what is heard from oral articulation” (ibid.); it is physiological, but one cannot “specify the relevant movements of the vocal organs without reference to the corresponding auditory impression” (ibid: 8-9); speech sounds do not exist independently of thought, they combine with ideas to become physiological and psychological objects (ibid: 9); “language has an individual aspect and a social aspect” (ibid.); language “involves an established system and an evolution” (ibid.). If language is all of these things together, it may be no surprise that Saussure found almost all descriptive terms that had been applied to language problematic. A passage from one of his anagram notebooks reads, “there is not one term in this particular science which has ever been based on a simple idea” (in Starobinski 1979: 3).

For Saussure, the adoption of a term which refers to something tangible always involves a risk that those using the term would forget it was a metaphor. In the *Cours* there is an impassioned statement that “all our mistakes of terminology, all our incorrect ways of designating things belonging to the language originate in our unwittingly supposing that
we are dealing with a substance when we deal with linguistic phenomena” (CGL: 120). In a passage from the ‘Miscellany and Aphorisms’ dating to about ten years earlier (Engler 1975: 839-840 n. 19), Saussure wrote:

We had the ridiculous doctrine of Max Müller, claiming that linguistics was a natural science, and asserting the existence of a sort of ‘linguistic realm’, alongside the ‘plant realm’ studied by botanists. (WGL: 80)

Amongst some early considerations of alternative metaphors, the following comment appears,

Of course a machine, a mechanism, is no better comparison than an organism. In these cases too there is anatomy and physiology. (ibid: 78)

Metaphorical descriptors like machine, mechanism, and automaton had a long tradition in the study of faculties displayed by humans and other animals. In particular, proponents of the ‘science of work’ had taken to viewing humans as working machines that could be made more efficient and produce greater output (see Rabinbach 1990). But at the risk of giving rise to a linguistics that saw humans as talking machines, or brains as language machines, Saussure continued to use the metaphor ‘mechanism’, as we see in the title of chapter VI of Part Two of the CGL, ‘The Language Mechanism’. There is reason to be glad that he did, as it continues to be regarded as a highly useful metaphor in various areas of linguistics (e.g. Harris 1987; Croker et al. 2000; Moro 2008).

Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia offer a valuable perspective on how the mechanical metaphor was expanded to occupy a crucial place in his linguistic theory. In this chapter I will argue that the process described by Saussure in his analysis of the utterance ‘atiéyā...ganapatināmā’ (S2), is an early consideration of language as machine-like. This process is something that Saussure observed in only one individual but he came to see this as a more general faculty before he completed his analyses of glossolalia. Saussure’s initial description of a psychological process (S2) is a case of individual linguistics. By comparison, the Latinoid document (S8) shows the generalized application of the mechanism observed in Müller’s glossolalia-producing process. In the model Saussure used to construct the Latinoid, almost all features of the language
mechanism are present under different terminology, and clear examples of their operation are given. We will see that in S2 and S8 Saussure even described mental operations that are responsible for producing speech in greater detail than is portrayed in the *Cours*.

**The Origin of Mechanisms**

Saussure began describing his idea of a speech production process very early on in his analyses of glossolalia. As we saw in the previous chapter, there is a switch in Saussure’s analysis which occurs between S1 and S2. In S1, right up until the final comment that Simandini did not speak the correct language for someone of her position – the wife of a naïk would have spoken Prakrit – he regards the transcriptions of Müller’s glossolalia as a group of texts, totally divorced from any speaker. There he compared Müller’s words with the Sanskrit of the Brahmins and noted any similarities he found. During the following eighteen days, Saussure began to think about the transcriptions of Müller’s utterances in a dramatically different way. His initial comparison of the Sanskritoid texts to Sanskrit had revealed no more than a few highly questionable concordances, and he realised that the Sanskritoid might in fact share a much greater similarity with Müller’s Martian speech. After all, despite her claims to the contrary, these ways of speaking both sprang from the same mind. By referring to attributes of the speaker in the analysis of speech, Saussure took an unusual step for a linguist in his time. He began to theorise a mental operation behind language, and thus produced probably his earliest notes how the human mind composes the syntagma of speech. In other words, it is the origin of the language mechanism.

In S2 the glossolalia was no longer just speech, it was Müller's speech, and she was doing something to make it the way it was. Factors that were entirely excluded from S1 such as memory, word and sound selection by the speaker, the continuous meaning in the text, and the intention of the speaker to express that meaning, appeared in Saussure’s notes of S2. It seems that he very suddenly saw all of these psychological factors as part of the key to understanding the existence of the Sanskritoid forms. As we
have seen, Saussure held the view, consistent with Flournoy’s theory of cryptomnesia, that the parts of language Müller employed could only have been those that had entered her memory at some point during her life. But from a linguistic perspective, this does not just mean that Müller could only reproduce sounds, words, or phrases she had read or heard, it also entails that – given sufficient exposure – certain grammatical information about the use of those sounds, words and phrases would be recorded in her memory. The glossolalia utterances were assembled in accordance with semantic, phonetic and systematic elements of language systems, and Müller was playing a role in that assemblage.

Saussure observed that in Müller’s speech there appeared to be two conflicting forces. One force worked on assembling utterances, while another placed restrictions on the units that could be used. Interestingly, this is not quite what we see expressed in the initial definition of the language mechanism in the *Cours*:

> The whole set of phonetic and conceptual differences which constitute a language are thus the product of two kinds of comparison, associative and syntagmatic. Groups of both kinds are in large measure established by the language. This set of habitual relations is what constitutes linguistic structure and determines how the language functions.

> The first thing that strikes us in this organisation is the *syntagmatic interdependences*. Almost all linguistic units depend either on what precedes or follows in the spoken sequence, or else on the successive parts of which they are themselves composed. (*CGL*: 126)

The phrase, “established by the language”, is Saussure’s suggestion that speakers are actually quite passive when selecting the words they use. Speakers do not themselves have control over the language they use, including the aspects of the language that exist in their own minds. The associations that individuals make between like words already exist in the language. Equally, the combinations of words that speakers recruit in speech already exist in the language. Certainly, in his analyses of glossolalia Saussure struggled
much more with the individual speaker’s agency. Nonetheless, “syntagmatic interdependencies” are within the scope of Saussure’s consideration.

The idea that speech is guided by the habitual relations of the speech community was already at the centre of the view Saussure took in his analyses of glossolalia. He argued that because the utterances Müller produced were largely a result of mixing together elements of language that she knew, what she said was never completely random. She wanted her speech to be Sanskrit, or, at least, to be not unlike Sanskrit. Her utterances were not mere vocalisations, but vocalisations that she constructed using pieces of language available to her memory, intended to sound exotic. This was all she could do to avoid saying things that were obviously not Sanskrit. Because her mnemonic resources were so limited, her constructions were much simpler than those of the regular language user. Yet because Müller’s utterances were made up of language, the psychological processes that a regular speaker would draw on to produce speech, must have been active in the production of Müller’s speech. Therefore in Saussure’s view, Müller had very little control over how she spoke; even in her unusual way of speaking, syntagmatic dependencies between existing language units dictated how she assembled her utterances.

Many aspects of Müller’s utterances suggested a process of assemblage to Saussure. Though she seemed to have a rule not to let anyone suspect that her speech was French (S2), relations between familiar sounds came through her speech automatically. Rather than creator of her speech, her role was more like that of a quality control officer who stands before a machine to pull out and discard units of speech that do not meet certain requirements. The system took care of the construction; she only intervened to disrupt the process when it became too familiar. In Flournoy’s theory of teleological automatism an individual unconsciously produces phenomena for a given purpose. Müller’s purpose was ostensibly to supply evidence for her previous lives and spirit communications. These phenomena were assembled from some elements of knowledge within her experience. But teleological automatism has little to say about how phenomena are assembled. In Saussure’s view of Müller’s language phenomena, it mattered little whether or not the speech appeared for a purpose; her phenomena could
be explained in another way by showing her speech was composed largely by following rules of established language systems in her memory (S2).

The reliance of Müller’s glossolalia upon systems fits well with Flournoy’s idea of automatism, but if Müller imposed restrictions upon the systems she employed, this would appear to an expression of Müller’s individual will. Müller’s way of speaking was unlike the speech of those around her, but at the same time she was trying to say something. In Saussure’s mature view that language is a “social institution” (CGL: 15), and there is no room for the linguist to consider speech that has no relation to a language system employed by a speech community. But even though there was no possibility of Müller engaging in a regular conversation with an interlocutor (including an inhabitant of Tchandraguiri in the early 15th century), Saussure saw that she could not destroy her own speech completely. Müller imposed rules to make her speech sound different, but these rules did nothing to alter the underlying state of any aspect of language system stored in her memory. Just as her induced trance state did not allow her to act without physiological constraints, nor did it allow her to speak without the systemic constraints of the language units employed. From Saussure’s perspective, any individual aspect of Müller’s speech, such as the set of rules which made her speech incomprehensible, ultimately did nothing to disrupt the underlying system of the language units she recruited in her speech.

If the rules Saussure saw in Müller’s specific case were to be subtracted from the equation, then all that is left is a process that is in operation in every speaker. In S2, the example Saussure chose to analyse was based on a French sentence and contained elements of German, English and Sanskrit. As Müller spoke she attempted to exchange French units for more exotic units. But because the units she chose belonged to other systems, she could not maintain the French order of units. In the process Saussure devised, when Müller exchanged French je for English I, the structure of the utterance also changed from the SOV structure of French, ‘je vous bénis’ to the SVO structure of English, ‘I bless you’. The average speaker would not, for example, speak by exclusively using words from a language they are almost entirely unfamiliar with. Nor would they prevent themselves from speaking in a language that their interlocutor
would understand, or – except perhaps for external reasons such as comedy or vanity - choose to favour or exclude particular sounds in an attempt to make their speech sound exotic. But just as Müller unwittingly conformed to the structures of the systems she employed, average speakers constantly reproduce the habits of their speech communities.

Saussure began to simplify and generalize his formulation of the Sanskritoid ‘process’ in 1899 when he composed a short text in Latinoid (S8). The stated purpose of this document was to better communicate his position on Müller’s glossolalia. He had begun to view the process as an unusual iteration of a general phenomenon. Saussure said his Latinoid,

is calculated such that all remarks apply to the ‘Sanskrit’ productions of Mlle. Smith [= Müller] with a simple change of the name. (S8)

But there is one rather large difference between Müller’s Sanskritoid process and Saussure’s Latinoid process. In making his observations of the Sanskritoid phrase he wrote:

sometimes the substitution is completely arbitrary and sometimes it will be influenced or determined by the memory of a foreign word, whether it be English, Hungarian, German, Sanskrit – with a natural preference for the idiom that best accords with the location of the scene. (S8)

Whereas the Latinoid,

does not mingle ‘two languages’. There are so few Latin words in the text, but it does not mix in a third language such as Greek, Russian or English, and therefore in a primary and negative sense, the text offers a precise value. (S8)

The Sanskritoid involved five (including the French of the underlying phrase) languages but the Latinoid only uses Latin-sounding units. Yet mal-formed sounds, incorrect verb endings, and completely mistaken words occur throughout. Saussure had simplified the process by excluding the problems created by conflicting systems and also generalised
the process with errors that are closer to those that might be made by, say, a student of Latin.\footnote{Incidently, Saussure’s analysis of Müller’s utterences resembles his correction of student exercises in his Sanskrit classes during the following years (See Joseph 2012: 446-447).}

In his composition of the Latinoid text and its explanation, Saussure stripped back the abnormality in Müller’s Sanskritoid utterances and therefore showed their relation to general speech phenomena (S8). He no longer described the language process as specifically Müller’s, but as something that might be manifested by a speaker under certain conditions. Saussure’s attempt to construct Latin using the rules of Müller’s process and a knowledge base equivalent to Müller’s knowledge of Sanskrit offers a picture of a normal speaker who is attempting to establish language values. What it shows is that this speaker is hopelessly restricted to language systems. Thus the Latinoid is a rearticulation of the same impossibility encapsulated by Müller’s Sanskritoid.

The ‘language process’ is not the fully formed language mechanism, even in its Latinoid iteration. Not only the term mechanism, but the entire terminological apparatus of associative and syntagmatic relations is yet to arrive in Saussure’s formulation. Nonetheless, there are some strong beginnings for this concept in Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia. There are clear ideas about what memory is, and how memory groups language units together. There are also very precise expressions of how the mind places units together in a line. In Saussure’s theory of language process there are also systematic and automatic connections that allow us to see a mechanical aspect. This mechanical aspect of the process indicates a change in Saussure’s thinking that seems to have occurred between S1 and S2. In the later Latinoid document we can also see the process used in abstract application; Saussure used the observed language process to suggest another language process. Müller’s language process contained a number of attributes that were specific to her case, but as these were removed Saussure came closer to a general language mechanism.

Saussure put his efforts into discovering the process of speech production in Müller’s utterances but instead discovered forces that were not in any way particular to her case.
He first viewed Müller's speech as a peculiarity of one individual, but in seeking a general aspect he soon moved towards seeing beneath the deceptive facade produced in the mind of the medium a psychological phenomenon involved in the production of any instance of language. Saussure observed a phenomenon he called a language ‘process’, which, in its psychological content resembles the language mechanism. This mechanism is Saussure’s view of how the speaker puts the linguistic sign into practice. Saussure's analyses of glossolalia may contain the crystallization of Saussure’s idea of the language mechanism, and the inception of one of the most important and enduring concepts of his general linguistics.

**Saussure’s sign in Müller’s mind**

This section will discuss Müller’s mental process as a sign-producing process. While it was a process that consistently failed to produce signification, I will argue that it is nonetheless in principle the same process that Saussure came to see all speakers using in regular speech. The difference was merely the set of rules that Müller mentally imposed to prevent her audience from suspecting that what she spoke was French. The short theoretical jump from Müller’s process to the language mechanism presented in the *Cours* involves stripping away the individual aspects of the process and seeing what’s left.

According to Saussure’s idea, Müller unconsciously introduced a series of rules which frequently denied signification. These rules made her case seem particular, and so we can say that the process Saussure described in his analyses of glossolalia is at first a case of individual linguistics. The rules Saussure saw in her process are:

- Do not say anything in French: “it must firstly and above all not appear to be French in her own eyes” and she must not “let the audience suspect that it is French” (adapted from S2).

- Speak in a language that fits the scene of the séance, or at least use exotic tones which resemble that language: “sometimes the substitution is completely
arbitrary and sometimes it will be influenced or determined by the memory of a foreign word, whether it be English, Hungarian, German, Sanskrit – with a natural preference for the idiom that best accords with the location of the scene.” (adapted from S2).

Of course the easiest way for Müller to comply with these rules would be to remain silent, but the imperative for speech is dictated by the fact that she was surrounded by an expectant audience. According to Saussure, Müller responded to her audience by speaking French while trying not to speak French. If a speaker does the mental work of language in French then speaks using sounds that do not belong to the French forms they are attempting to express, is that mental work alone sufficient for ‘French’? Saussure’s answer was ‘yes’.

French words are the theme or substratum of what she will say, and the law that governs her mind is that familiar words are each rendered by a substitute with an exotic appearance. (S2)

Therefore, Saussure may have learned from Müller’s disruptions to the sounds of her utterances, that it is possible to maintain the substructure of meaning without using the sounds recognised by a given speech community. Of course, thought of in this way we cannot claim that Müller’s glossolalia counts as a well-designed experiment. But we can say that Saussure was able to find support for his conception of language system as a general phenomenon, uninfluenced by individual speakers.

In S2 Saussure theorised a process by which Müller was expressing an underlying French phrase. The process is disrupted by rules, and the process tries to self-correct using other available language resources. It seems mechanical, or computational, with the only obvious input from Müller herself being the desire to speak. The following schema shows how Saussure perceived the transformation of each part of ‘je vous bénis au nom de Ganapati’ into Sanskritoid.
Each element of Müller’s Sanskritoid is linked to aspects of language likely to be stored in her memory. As she was mostly calling upon information that did not exist in her memory her mind often had to default to sub-optimal information just to allow her to continue to speak. In S2 the language units that Saussure suggests Müller had in her memory are: English ‘I’ (ai) (in place of ‘je’); ‘Ganapati’ is pure Sanskrit. (As it is the name of a well-known deity she could have learned this from a great many possible sources.); and, ‘nama’ (in place of nom), from German ‘name’. But she had another way of making Sanskrit when her knowledge failed her. Saussure discovered a general rule in Müller’s process which commanded her to rely heavily on ‘a’:

[T]he medium never launches into complicated forms of syllables and strongly affects the vowel a. Sanskrit is a language wherein the proportion of a compared to other vowels is about 4/1, so it is likely that in pronouncing three or four syllables with a one would remotely chance upon a Sanskrit word. (S5)

In many of Müller’s ‘words’ such as attamana, maccanna, mama, gaya, smayamana, Ganapatinama etc. the consonants are pronounced using the vowel /a/. A Sanskrit consonant is pronounced with /a/ by default but it is evident that Müller did not know this fact from her attempts to write in Devanagari.
[A]ll consonantal signs are naturally followed by a provided it does not have diacritical marks indicating either silence (पू लू = p l) or a vowel other than a…

It is true that she did not know it in दans, and even more clearly in रadyiva. (S6)

In her speech she may have been to some extent mimicking Sanskrit by producing consonants in combination with /a/. This observation echoes Saussure’s earlier parenthetical comment, “[s]he does not know how she has assembled this construction, but it is not necessarily done incorrectly” (S1). Thus Müller’s knowledge of Sanskrit consisted of a very few words, but her glossolalia also incorporated a method for chancing upon Sanskrit words.

In Saussure’s view, Müller hit upon the idea to emphasise /a/ by mimicking the few words of Sanskrit she did know. For example one of the words which rely heavily on /a/ was smayamana. Saussure claimed that this had to be copied from a grammar book because of its particular grammatical form. Additionally the use of the unusual double consonant ‘sm’ suggested that she did not know the rule of following a consonant with /a/.

smayamana (apparently copied from Sanskrit smayamâna “smiling”); primarily stands out because it is a form of four syllables it naturally deserves to be more accurate than the words of 2 or 3 syllables which, we must content ourselves to say, are nothing special and are also the most inexact. And, secondarily, due to the consonant cluster sm, because it is also very rare that Mlle S. attempts a Sanskrit word with two consonants in a row, whatever they are. Finally it is even rarer that smayamâna should take on a grammatical and lexical character such as the Greek lego-men-o-s, rather than simply being a participle. At no point has the ‘Sanskrit’ of Mlle S. given so many disappointments in its grammatical nullity. Invalidity extends not only to flexions (dominus, dominican) but also to all kind of formations (eg. carus, carissimus; fero, ferendus and the like). The form smayamana at least provides a small grammatical contribution in the last
category (very easy for a person who only takes that which passes under the eyes when opening a grammar). (S6)

Saussure believed that the word smayamana was copied from a grammar book because of the rarity of the double consonant, and the rarity of the particular grammatical form. He makes his point by comparing Müller’s use of smayamana to using the Greek form, ‘λεγομενος’ (legomenos) meaning ‘[the (masc. noun) one] being called’, a complex present passive participle in the maculine singular of the nominative case. It would have been ridiculous to suggest that Müller could spontaneously (i.e. without having learned it somewhere) produce an equally complex Sanskrit form. Müller must have glanced further down the list of declensions in a Sanskrit grammar and remembered this exotic form as a whole. The abundance of /a/ in Saussure’s view arose not because Müller knew something about the role of /a/ in Sanskrit, but because she was attempting to say words she knew were Sanskrit, like smayamàna.

Now that we have considered the mechanical properties of Müller’s glossolalia we can consider how those properties relate to Saussure’s language mechanism of the Cours. At the beginning of part two, chapter VI of the Cours, ‘Mécanisme de la langue’, the notion of syntagmatic interdependency is explained as follows: “[a]lmost all linguistic units depend either on what precedes or follows in the spoken sequence, or else on the successive parts of which they are themselves composed” (CGL: 126). This explanation is followed by the assertion that some units have no interconnections with other units of speech, but that this point does not undermine the general rule (CGL: 126-127). In Saussure’s breakdown of S2 ‘atyêyâ ganapatinâmâ’, ‘ganapati’ is a unit without syntagmatic interconnections to the units which surround it because it is word that Müller produced simply because it belongs to the context she uttered it in. The other units, however, do depend on each other. Saussure also asserts in the Cours, that “the syntagmatic relation between part and whole is just as important as the syntagmatic relation between one part and another” (CGL: 126). In Saussure’s view, the remaining elements of ‘atyêyâ ganapatinâmâ’ are brought together by the grammatical force of the units around them.
The consideration of such interrelations also proved a fruitful point for analyses; for example, he made three observations which show how the ear might be fooled when listening to Müller’s Sanskritoid:

1. there are indisputably some sequences of eight to ten syllables giving a sentence fragment with a meaning (especially in the case of exclamatory sentences e.g. *mama priya* my beloved! *mama soukha* my delight!).

2. we can also say that the other syllables, though unintelligible in appearance, are never anti-Sanskrit in character. That is to say, they do not appear in groups that are materially in conflict with the general figure of the Sanskrit words.

Finally,

3. the value of this latter observation is moreover diminished considerably by the fact that the medium never launches into complicated strings of syllables and strongly affects the vowel *a*. Sanskrit is a language wherein the proportion of *a* compared to other vowels is about 4/1, so it is likely that in pronouncing three or four syllables with *a* one would remotely chance upon a Sanskrit word. (S5)

Here, Saussure at first thought that he had observed an instance of fluent Sanskrit speech, but further consideration shows that the syllables may not be interdependent at all. They could be randomly selected, and posed in many different combinations. Some combinations were in a sense programmed to share similarities with Sanskrit words by the common trait of */a/*. While the */a/* is meaningless in itself, consonants could be combined with */a/* to form syllables, and those syllables could be combined to form Sanskrit-sounding words.

Saussure’s idea that Müller assembled much of her Sanskritoid from */a/* and a few consonants may be thought of as the simplest possible formulation of his language mechanism. Conceived in this way, to produce her ‘song’ (M9), Müller might have had an associative group consisting of */a/* and the consonant sounds */d/, */g/, */k/, */m/, */n/, */p/, */r/, */t/, */v/, and */y/*. Syntagmatic relations might be produced simply by virtue of the fact that consonants tend to need a vowel to be voiced, and so they employed in combination
with /a/. In these simple elements it is possible to recognise the simultaneous functioning of both associative and syntagmatic groups in the *Cours*: “Linear ordering in space helps to create associative connexions, and these in turn play an essential part in syntagmatic analysis” (*CGL*: 127). This statement summarises the difficulties Saussure encountered in Müller’s attempts to speak Sanskrit. It was as if her language mechanism was broken. In fact, she simply did not possess the knowledge to carry out the speech task she was attempting. According to the *Cours*, ordinarily, the speaker’s knowledge of the language they are trying to speak will be organised in “associative series each based on a common element [of the spoken syntagma]” (*CGL*: 127).

Saussure’s statements about the language mechanism in the *Cours* mirror those in his analyses of glossolalia. The statement regarding one early transcription of Sanskritoid, “[s]he does not know how she has assembled this construction, but it is not necessarily done incorrectly” (S1), is reflected in the following statement about an ordinary speaker from the *Cours*:

> It is … an oversimplification to say, looking at the matter positively that *marchons!* is selected because it means what the speaker intends to express. In reality, the idea evokes not just one form but a whole latent system, through which the oppositions involved in the constitution of that sign are made available. The sign by itself would have no meaning of its own. (*CGL*: 128)

According to this formulation the meaning of a sign is determined not only by what is said, but also by what is not said. In other words, the power of a language user to effectively use units of a language system, depends on their ability to select the right term. That ability is dependent upon the size of the associative group they are able to select from. Müller’s associative group comprised almost nothing, and so she relied almost entirely on luck and intuition to speak Sanskrit. But in his analysis of the sounds Müller produced, Saussure judged that the mental operation which produced it was systematic.

The opposition of absolute arbitrariness and relative arbitrariness (*CGL*: 130-132) – discussed in terms of unmotivated and motivated words – is also recognisable in
Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia. The trouble we run into in trying to discover this opposition here, as with all of Saussure’s general ideas in the Flournoy affair, is that Saussure was dealing with a speech community of one. Nonetheless, Saussure’s observation regarding the abundance of /a/ in Müller’s Sanskritoid shows that /a/ may have motivated longer and more fluent series of syllables such as her chant (M9). Saussure assumed that /a/ had become established (in Müller’s mind) as a meaningful element of Sanskrit, and terms like ‘gaya’, ‘maya’, ‘naya’ and ‘mama’ are produced relative to the /a/. The /a/ itself is meaningless, but it is a springboard for ‘making’ Sanskrit. It may seem like a cheap trick, but in a sense Müller had struck upon an important aspect of language assemblage that Saussure comments on in the Cours as follows:

What, for instance, is the meaning, if any, of the suffix -ot in cachot (‘lock-up, nick’)? Is there in a series of words like coutelas (‘cutlas’), fatras (‘jumble’), plâtras (‘debris’), canevas (‘canvas’), an ending -as that one can vaguely discern, but without being able to say what it means? Not only are the elements of a motivated sign themselves arbitrary (as are dix ‘ten’, and neuf ‘nine’, in dix-neuf ‘nineteen’), but the value of the term as a whole is never equal to the sum of the values of its parts. (CGL: 130-131)

In Müller’s utterances /a/ operates like a motivated sign. Müller achieved a Sankritoid aesthetic by repeating /a/ in combination with a variety of consonants.

Not only did Saussure see motivation in certain sounds but he also saw it in grammar, much along the lines of what he later called “syntagmatic interdependencies” (CGL: 126). In addition to the motivating element /a/, Saussure hypothesised that the appearance of a given language unit was heavily reliant on the system to which the preceding unit belonged:

[If, for example, the word I was suggested by the English it may follow that the English construction occurs involuntarily in the words placed immediately afterwards. (S2)
The French construction Müller was working from required a pronoun in the place of the second word, the system she recruited (English) from her limited knowledge did not allow for a pronoun in that place, and so, rather than saying something in the form ‘*I you bless’, her speech conformed to the structure of the system she had begun to use. In notes probably written around the time of his courses in general linguistics (Engler 1975: 841), Saussure wrote:

[T]he trend towards system will never wear out: even if the best parts of a system’s organization are excised, the next day the remaining matter will have formed a logical arrangement, and this arrangement… will be functional even if sometimes it may be laid out quite differently. (WGL: 191)

Following Saussure, even though Müller imposed the rule “not to let the audience suspect that it is French” (S2) – arguably the fact that French can be understood by French speakers is one of the “best parts” of French – the trend towards system persisted. Even though Müller either did not know how to, or did not want to say ‘I bless you’, she uttered the sequence a (I) tiê (bless) yâ (you), wherein ‘I’ and ‘you’ have been disfigured to avoid discovery and tiê is a place holder for ‘bless’. Each element is explained in terms of system.

For Saussure’s ideas to come together he needed a conception of unconscious operations. Flournoy’s theory of cryptomnesia offered Saussure a useful framework, but from the outset he was trying to escape a limitation it imposed. Cryptomnesia accounts for the automatic use of signs, but gives little heed to their systemic combination. Flournoy found signs like ‘Sivrouka’ and ‘Ganapati’ to be powerful evidence that Müller had been exposed to and forgotten these signs, and produced them automatically when a situation called for them. But in these examples the sign was only regarded in terms of individual memory and individual use. There was no of their combination as a language system, beyond what could be translated word-for-word into Müller’s native French. This difference between Saussure’s view and Flournoy’s view as a psychologist was carried through to the Cours.
Then there is the viewpoint of the psychologist, who studies the mechanism of the sign in the individual. This is the most straightforward approach, but it takes us no further than individual execution. It does not even take us as far as the linguistic sign itself, which is social by nature. (CGL: 16)

In Saussure’s view, the teleological automatism in Flournoy’s explanations of Müller’s spiritualist phenomena offers Müller too much unconscious free will. Because language is a system that belongs to a speech community, it would be too simplistic to say that speech phenomena arise when there is a purpose. Speech phenomena are also motivated by the requirements of a complex social system. The above quotation is later followed with,

[T]he sign always to some extent eludes control by the will, whether of the individual or of society: that is its essential nature, even though it may be by no means obvious at first sight. (ibid.)

Müller willed her speech to be Sanskrit, but if the will of an individual is does not find expression in corresponding units of langue the result is merely parole a study of which, as Saussure says, could not take an investigator beyond individual execution. When Müller spoke her Sanskritoid she aimed far beyond the language units that composed her linguistic abilities and therefore could not produce the Sanskrit units which could effectively represent her will.

In sum, the first general aspect Saussure found in Müller’s language process is that she used her knowledge of language systems. The second is that system operates regardless of the form of the representation. This is where the language mechanism comes into play. It is possible to recognise not only the obvious hallmarks of the language mechanism, namely the operation of associative and syntagmatic relations, but also some of the finer aspects of Saussure’s theory of general linguistics which contribute to the operation of the mechanism. These include the distinction between arbitrariness and relative arbitrariness of the sign, the speech community and the speech circuit. It is my contention that he was better equipped to think through the roles of such aspects in his analyses of glossolalia because in this case they were severely diminished. The fact that
they did not work properly, revealed to Saussure reasons why they do work, which are much less apparent in a functioning language mechanism in a functioning speech community. In order to participate in the speech circuit, a speaker must make the language they hear their own. In Müller’s over-regulated process Saussure showed that the sign is more structured than simple knowledge; each sound is added according to strict rules Müller abided by.

**Development of the language mechanism**

At the beginning of this chapter I showed Saussure’s struggle with metaphors in linguistics. Here I will test the evidence that the metaphor he did hang on to, ‘mechanism’ saw development during the analyses of glossolalia. First, I will discuss reasons why the language mechanism may have originated with Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia. Like Saussure himself, many Saussureans have taken the view that Saussure added nothing new, or almost nothing new to his general linguistics after his return to Geneva from Paris in 1891 (e.g. Koerner 1973; Aarsleff 1982; Sanders 2004b). But prior to the Flournoy affair it is very difficult to distinguish anything like a language mechanism in Saussure’s writings. Second, I will discuss the development of Saussure’s thought from Müller’s glossolalia process as an individual phenomenon, to considerations of more generalizable elements of the mental operations behind speech. Saussure first grappled with Müller’s glossolalia as though it contained some forms similar to Sanskrit forms, and the rest was meaningless. But he soon changed that view and came to see the forces that composed the glossolalia as forces that belong to language systems. Saussure maintained this view that speech forms are essentially decided by the language system(s) employed by the speaker, and that the will of the individual has no impact on that system except diachronically when acts of parole become sanctioned in langue. It may be that Saussure’s observation of Müller’s glossolalia and his consideration of Flournoy’s psychological theory, played an important role in leading Saussure to the language mechanism he would present in his courses in general linguistics. Saussure claimed that he had all his ideas on static linguistics together by about 1894 (SM: 29). If his statement to that effect was accurate
the origin of the language mechanism is earlier. A number of historians – notably Koerner (1973; 2008) and Aarsleff (1982) – have argued forcefully that Saussure’s statement is correct and that he changed nothing after the early 1890s. Koerner and Aarsleff both wished to heighten the importance of Saussure’s early influences and to disregard later influences that have been proposed. They may be right to do so, but the fact that their arguments are mutually opposed in all other respects (Aarsleff argues that Saussure’s main influence were French, not German, Koerner argues that they were German, not French), makes the whole debate appear irresolvable. As for the timing Saussure indicated himself, it seems to be more-or-less correct. But I will posit that there is little in Saussure’s writings prior to 1894 to support a claim that he had already introduced the idea of language mechanism into his theory of language.

The earliest indication that Saussure was moving towards a more static consideration of psychology (rather than just thinking of it as a force of language change over time) appears in this quote from Saussure’s 1885 notes published by Joseph (2010):

In general the minds of speakers go from the idea to the sign, and if the sign is not present, they create a new one from <by combining> elements furnished by memory.

But in a large number of cases, the opposite takes place: a sign is present to the mind, but the idea that it represents is forgotten and one creates an **analogical signification**, or interprets the sign, from **this fact does not** seems extraordinary at first, because the work of language is done only in speaking. Now in order to speak it is necessary for the idea to pre-exist **the sign** <the expression>. One does not normally pronounce a word the meaning of which one does not know. But the phenomenon is not accomplished on isolated words: it is accomplished first on the word incorporated in the sentence; **the entire formula** one knows the **meaning** of the sentence, but misanalyses the relations which exist between its different terms. (115-116)

The first two paragraphs give two types of sound creation which Saussure sees as opposites. On one hand memorized elements are combined to create a sign, on the other
hand signs are used analogically with misanalysed relations between terms. However, this does not at all mean that the speaker has failed to communicate. Sounds – or combinations of sounds – produced by speakers always have the potential to coincide with *langue*. Though, as Saussure notes, one does not usually speak words one does not know the meaning of, Müller relied heavily on such acts of *parole* in her Sanskritoid speech.

The term ‘mechanism’ itself does not appear in Saussure’s published writings until after 1894. If we look down the list of Saussure’s early notes and publications from his *Essai* to the writings he published in the *Bulletin*, we see a scholar who looked for system in language and found it everywhere. But these documents contain no mention of language mechanism or psychological operation. This is also true of the inaugural lectures at Geneva (dated to 1891), and of the notes for a book on general linguistics (dated to 1893-1894). As we saw in chapter three, in 1891 Saussure clearly presented himself to the University of Geneva as a historical linguist, and phonetic change and analogy were his main methodological apparatuses. Like the language mechanism, many of the crucial ideas about synchronic linguistics that he would later express clearly had by this time received only vague appraisals. As Bouquet and Engler comment, “in the 1891 lectures, the *langage-langue* distinction, and thus the concept of *langue* itself, were far from established in Saussure’s mind” (*WGL*: 95 n. 5).

In 1893-1894 Saussure appears to have privately held quite a different position, but he seems to have been stuck in a loop; over and over he reformulated the starting point of his new linguistics (*WGL*: 136-140). There was still too much uncertainty and too many concepts missing to draft even a chapter of this work (ibid.). Since we do not find a mechanism in the 1891 lectures or the 1893-1894 Notes, we must refer to later documents to see when it arises. The ‘Miscellany and Aphorisms’, mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, contain the following:

The one *a priori* truth whose validity rests on simple common sense is that while there may be psychological facts, and while there may be phonological facts, neither of the two series alone would ever be capable of giving rise to any linguistic fact whatsoever.
For there to be a linguistic fact, the two series must exist in union, but in a union of a special kind – any cursory explanation of its characteristics, however, would be totally in vain, as would any prediction as to what it will be. (WGL: 68)

It is clear that here too Saussure was looking for a link between the psychological and the phonological. But, as seen earlier, he could not commit to a mechanical metaphor which he saw as “no better a comparison than an organism” (WGL: 78). As we can see in a note-to-self he wrote down a direction for his thought to continue:

[T]he *chemical* comparison, though in some respects correct, leaves the mind blank.

Work out the appropriateness of a *tactical* comparison, the position taken by a line of soldiers. (WGL: 78)

The fact that Saussure was still thinking through the appropriateness of a mechanical metaphor to describe the sign, and to connect thought with psychological facts, is significant because it implies that the idea of a language mechanism arose as a serious consideration in Saussure’s general linguistics after 1894, probably in the same period that Saussure was analysing Müller’s glossolalia.

Certainly, the talk of psychological facts, and search for metaphors signal a vastly different point of view from his confidant Neogrammarian stance as we see here in his third inaugural lecture of 1891:

All considerations of this kind for us come down to the *absolute continuity* of language in time. This first principle was joined by the second, of the *continual transformation* of language in time, itself dependant, let us remember, on two distinct agents, one psychological and centred on ‘the workings of analogy’, the other *mechanical, physiological*, and manifesting itself in phonetic changes. (WGL: 111)
Mechanism is framed as a psychological and synchronic process for the first time in the ‘Dual Essence’ manuscripts, the date of which is uncertain, but may well have been composed over several years during Saussure’s time at Geneva16:

Should we see language as a mechanism for allowing the expression of thought? In this case...the historical approach to forms is of no consequence whatever to us, and all the work done in linguistics over the past century, concentrating exclusively on the historical sequence of certain identities which have been put into countless different purposes through time, is in principle of no importance. (WGL: 27)

In the earlier quote, Saussure conceives of analogical change over time as mechanical, but we can see that in the ‘Dual Essence’ manuscripts the mechanical metaphor has been completely transplanted onto a new concept of linguistics which has the potential to discard analogy and phonetic change altogether. In the ‘Dual Essence’ manuscripts Saussure made notes on new ideas such as ‘Synchronic phonetic rules’ and syntagma. These are ideas that echo his analyses of glossolalia.

Müller’s glossolalia compelled Saussure to expand his thought on the role of mental process in speech in a direction that had until then been considered a feature of child language. A few years prior to Saussure’s first lectures at Geneva, Wheeler offered this concise description of what happens in children’s speech: “Children are generous ‘Analognisten,’ not only because the traditional variety of form is less forcibly impressed upon their memories by use, but also because the meagreness of their vocabulary admits of less complexity of grouping” (Wheeler 1887: 6). At that time, Saussure may well have agreed. In his 1891 lectures he only refers to this novel idea as a segue to the topic of what linguists really study: historical change. This stance had to change when Saussure was presented with an adult speaker who constructed neologisms that were more flamboyant than those of children, but which were created with only a slightly modified process. Just as children (or an adult learner for that matter) might, lacking ‘am’ and ‘are’ produce I is, you is, we is (ibid.), or the plural ‘*fishes’ by analogy to the

16 For my discussion on issues surrounding the dating of the ‘Duel Essence’ manuscripts see pp. 119-120 above.
plural ‘dishes’, Müller assembled her Sanskritoid according to her knowledge of Sanskrit. Because that knowledge was extremely limited Müller had to stretch that knowledge further. In his observation of this process of stretching a little knowledge a long way Saussure was able to study how what was perceived by linguists as a species of analogy functioned under more extreme circumstances. Analogy was not necessary for the order Saussure found. Müller selected sounds not just because they sounded like another form in the right category, rather she assembled them in ways that the rules of language systems (and the rules she had imposed herself) allowed.

Saussure’s mature conception of mental operations behind language, the language mechanism, is described in the *Cours* in terms of two axes: associative and syntagmatic (*CGL*: 121). This duality is an implicit feature of the glossolalia ‘process’. Saussure believed that Müller drew on memorised units – which essentially constitute an associative group – and she put them into a linear utterance – which is what a syntagma is. One way to see how these two axes describe Müller’s utterances better than the kind of analogies that children make is to note that children require a working knowledge of the language in which the analogy is made. Yet when Müller tried to speak Sanskrit, she had very few forms to draw from memory and so in most cases she did not even have enough knowledge to construct an analogy. Saussure thought that a vocabulary insufficiency could have been supplemented by *any* knowledge of language forms, except French which she intentionally excluded. Therefore, when no Sanskrit term was available, her mind offered her a way out of the tight spot she found herself in by making an association with a word or sound from another language, perhaps in the way someone speaking a tortured second language might default to a word from their own language when they do not know or can’t remember the word they are looking for. But this introduced an additional burden to the process of sequencing terms in linear speech. When her mind offered a term which would be placed in sequence that term would bring with it the rules of the system to which it belonged. Thus despite the disruptions in her speech, she could only select and connect words according to systems she was familiar with.
Lineaments of what will become the concept of syntagma can also be detected, in a markedly developed state. Even when Müller cut the end off a word, the linearity of the chosen system would not conform to her will. In Saussure’s view, when her French SOV structure came into conflict with the necessity that English ‘I’ be followed by a verb, it was the structure of the uttered sound, rather than the underlying structure, which most influenced the selection of the proceeding sound. The subject of the sentence belongs to a particular language system, and the introduction of an alteration at the phonetic level may not bring with it the appropriate alteration at the structural level. In Saussure’s example the syntagma (underlying form) is *je vous bénis au nom de Ganapati*. Therefore Müller led with the subject *je* represented by the English ‘I’. While this satisfies the criteria of not being French, the sound she did select demands to be followed by a verb and not the object of the sentence as she had anticipated. For fear of this English usage being discovered by her listeners, the ‘I’ (pronounced *ai*) was stopped halfway leaving only ‘a’. Despite this destruction of signification, the underlying form insists upon being followed with the verb, not the object.

A final point of interest regarding the development of the language mechanism lies in Saussure’s reaction to Victor Henry’s 1901 analyses of Müller’s Martian language. Saussure appears to have been confident that everything could comfortably be explained in terms of system, yet in S11, he refers to an idea in Henry’s work that caught his attention.

"[O]ne of the main characteristics of the Martian – the limitation to a small range of vocalic timbres (a phenomenon known as ‘vowel harmony’) – has its only analogy in the group of languages to which Magyar belongs. (S11)"

Saussure’s definition of vowel harmony in the *Cours* reads, “the assimilation of all the vowels in the suffix of a word to the last vowel in the stem” (*CGL*). For Saussure the potential value of Henry’s observation was overshadowed by the loose way in which Henry adopted the ‘process’ he had proposed. Instead of attempting to analyse phrases so that grammar may be taken into consideration, Henry focused on individual words and looked only for potential origins of sounds. Saussure was particularly repelled when he found the following passage about half-way through the text:
The consonance of the final two syllables of Alexis is reminiscent of Magyar csasi, especially if delivered at the French. Csasi means 'donkey': not the generic term, to be sure, but a kind of diminutive, of the sort that are taught to children. This word could well have been on the lips of Mr. Smith the first time he showed Hélène a donkey when she was barely weaned. Now if we translate this into German, we get Esel, that is to say almost exactly the first two syllables of the name Esenale. And the final sound? Well, this is the initial sound of the actual name Alexis, because, of course, the final e is silent to the total operation. This can be expressed by a rigorous mathematical formula, namely al + csacsi = esel + al. The two names are identical. (Henry 1901: 58 my trans.)

Unfortunately, the clincher to Henry’s argument – the rigorous mathematical formula – is not at all rigorous. (Henry admits in the next line that the form should be Eselale, but says that he does not think it important [ibid.]) Henry produced a plausible situation in which Müller might have known csaci but not why she would have known German Esel. There is no consideration of why a translation from Magyar to German should occur, what motivated these units to appear in the construction Esenale, or how they came to be combined in that order. Even though Saussure had forgotten who Alexis was his vexed comment “[u]nder these conditions, twenty thousand hypotheses would be as easy as one.” (S11) does not seem entirely inappropriate.

Despite her preference for Henry’s general outlook over that of Saussure, even Yaguello concedes that, “[a] linguist looking at Victor Henry’s work today could not help but vindicate Saussure” (1991: 96). Indeed, Henry’s other break-downs of Müller’s Martian vocabulary show that Henry did not take on Saussure’s considerations of motivation in the composition of Müller’s speech. In many of Henry’s other formulations it appears that almost any combination would do, provided Müller knew (most of) the units involved. If no source came to mind for a particular unit, Henry saw no problem in calling it arbitrary.

Carimi “window” one appearance: French carreau ‘tile/pane’, with an arbitrary suffix. (Henry 1901: 78, my trans.)
Mazete “pain/grief” two appearances: the word gives an idea of a “masse” that is difficult to move; arbitrary suffix. (ibid: 85, my trans.)

Henry did make some suggestions for motivating aspects of speech, such as rhyme and assonance, but he makes no assertions about how particular units found their way into Müller’s Martian utterances. Here lies a clear distinction between Henry’s view and Saussure’s. Henry accepted that some parts of speech may have no relation at all to a language system, Saussure did not.

This distinction between Henry’s view and Saussure’s view leads us back to the notion of a general linguistic idea. If, as in Henry’s view, speakers produce here and there utterances that are so completely arbitrary that they have no relation to language system, then they are entirely individual phenomena and there is no more a linguist can say about them. If, as Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia imply, the utterances of the speaker are invariably composed of units belonging to one or other language system then a general framework for understanding speech and its composition is possible. Saussure began to see that the language system’s capacity to insist upon itself is a general phenomenon. While the concept of analogy recognises the absolute limitation of an individual’s knowledge of the system they speak, it assumes that forms will be assembled in accordance with prescriptive rules. Saussure analysed sounds produced by a speaker in a speech community of one and found that despite her attempts to speak something other than the systems she knew, those systems persisted in her speech. Even if some of the words resembled Sanskrit words, the underlying structures belonged to language systems Müller was in some capacity familiar with.

**Conclusion**

Saussure argued that Müller produced utterances in a more or less structured way, even though she aimed at speaking in a way that coincided with languages she did not know how to speak. This argument is very much in line with Saussure’s career-long position that language is a system, but in observing Müller, Saussure seems to have been able to think through psychological aspects of language in new ways. Müller’s speech
structures formed out of extremely limited language resources stand as an important support for viewing language as a mechanism. The associative and syntagmatic axes, along which Saussure believed the mental process of language operated, are visible in Saussure’s considerations of Müller’s language resources and word or sound ordering. Thus we may view these analyses as an important step in the development of Saussure’s concept of the ‘language mechanism’.

As we have seen, Saussure employed early conceptions of some parts of the language mechanism. In the second post-Des Indes letter to Flournoy of May 16, 1901 (S12), Saussure indicated that he now felt uncomfortable about the process he had proposed. Müller’s glossolalia was never fluent enough to study how she linked words together in any great detail, a fact which Saussure noted in S5: “the medium never launches into complicated strings of syllables” (S5). Nonetheless, he had convincingly argued that her utterances depended upon language systems; nothing came from thin air, everything was a sign established in a system, and every sign was produced from memory. The Flournoy Affair shows us that Saussure was at last cognisant of the syntagma. There he showed the systemic forces driving speech sounds together. He may not have seen value in Henry’s connection between Müller’s avoidance of français and the absence of f in her Sanskritoid, but he did see value in understanding the mental operations that assemble speech. In his analyses of glossolalia he advanced his thought in this area in the direction of what he would call ‘the language mechanism’. In connection with that advancement, we have seen Saussure’s addressing areas such as motivation, distinctiveness and vowel harmony. As we shall see in the next chapter these are parts of language that have prompted a large sector of linguistics since Saussure’s time, notably poetics.
Chapter 5: Symbolism and Saussure’s analyses of Glossolalia

Introduction

In chapters three and four, I have aimed to show that Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia fill a gap in the narrative of the development of ideas central to his general linguistic theory. In this chapter, I will discuss further reasons why his analyses of glossolalia are valuable. So far we have seen that the documents presented in chapter one have great historical value, as they show Saussure’s first application of synchronic and diachronic methods to utterances of a living speaker. We have also seen that they show workings out of his idea of the language mechanism. As we saw in chapter two, Todorov (1982) was the first to detect strangeness in Saussure’s thought. Todorov promoted the idea that because Saussure did not acknowledge symbolic operations in Müller’s glossolalia he failed to interpret it correctly. In Todorov’s view, Müller’s glossolalia is explained by symbolism, but Saussure did not recognize its symbolic content. Todorov’s linking of those Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia to symbolism is not only unfounded, but also draws attention away from important aspects of Saussure’s thought. By reintroducing Todorov’s analysis I will show that it brings little to light regarding Müller’s glossolalia. By comparison, I argue, Saussure’s discussion of Müller’s mental process has much greater explanatory power. This will in turn be compared with what Saussure actually did have to say about the role of the symbol many years later when researching Germanic myths. Each of these threads of discussion contributes to a more
general aim: to explain the minimal way in which symbolism figures in Saussure’s thought.

The view I have identified as following Todorov (1982), obtained its common sense currency as part of a wider effort to make Saussure’s theory of the linguistic sign engage with the theory of language in Freudian psychoanalysis. Examples of this effort that immediately come to mind are Lacan (2006 [1966]), Derrida (1998; 1982b [1972]) and Kristeva (1973 [1969]). However, links between sign and symbol are often navigated with tangential or implicit readings (Daylight 2011: 2), or, in Harris’s less forgiving view, a dishonest use of terminology (2007 [2001]: 173). Those who are most convinced of a connection between the sign and the (psychoanalytic) symbol are often the first to point out that these two concepts are difficult to combine. Case in point: Todorov (1982) writes, “Saussure’s work appears remarkably homogeneous today in its refusal to accept symbolic phenomena” (269). Another seeker of a Saussureo-Freudian theory of language, Michel Arrivé (1992 [1986]) writes, “as a general rule linguists speak from a position of almost complete ignorance of the unconscious. This is most notably the case with Saussure” (4). But are these really deficiencies in Saussure’s theory? It apparently never occurred to Todorov that symbolic phenomena might not play an important role in Müller’s glossolalia; he ignores an entirely possible scenario in which Saussure might have been right not to deal with symbols. In opposition to Todorov’s position, I propose that Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia are valuable for the clarity with which they show the disjuncture between Saussure’s thought on the sign, and Freud’s theory of language.

Despite Todorov’s repeated accusation that Saussure was rigid in his thought, unable to accept “a logic of symbolism” (1982: 259, 260, 262), Müller’s glossolalia offered Saussure an opportunity to think differently about language. Saussure did not think of symbols as part of Müller’s language process. But, as he says clearly in the Cours, “it is characteristic of symbols that they are not entirely arbitrary” (CGL: 68). In other words, symbols rely upon their resemblance to a referent, rather than their locations in relation to a language system, for signification, but that is not the only way that symbols are defined. In the psychoanalytic conception of dream-logic, “dreams make use of … symbolism for the disguised representation of their latent thought” (Freud 1998 [1900]:
From this point we can see that Saussurean linguistics and Freudian psychoanalysis, which favours a causal symbolism (e.g. ibid: 55, 155-166), have quite different theories of language. Freudian psychoanalysis may offer explanation of some aspects of glossolalia, but the causality it attributes to symbolic function is an ill fit for the way in which Saussure discusses the operation of language system in Müller’s glossolalia. The idea that Saussure refused to think about language in new ways falls flat. For it was the variation in his approach that allowed him to advance his thought on several important aspects of his general linguistics.

**F in symbol, f in sound**

Todorov criticised Saussure for how he dealt with Müller’s avoidance of f. He seems to have been disappointed with Saussure’s position that “f is effectively a foreigner to Sanskrit” (S8) and that, “in the free invention of Sanskrit, we would have one hundred chances to one against creating Sanskrit words using f, since this consonant appears as legitimate as any other if fact is not known.” (S8) For Todorov this implied that Saussure was tempted to believe Müller’s fantastic story that she had learned her Sanskrit some four hundred years earlier, when she was a princess in India named Simandini. Saussure did not say that he accepted Müller’s story, or even suggest that Müller knew the very particular fact that /f/ is absent from Sanskrit speech. Todorov’s disappointment comes out of the fact that Saussure did not explain this absence of f as a symbolic function of Müller’s avoidance of her mother tongue français. In Todorov’s view, this symbol where the absence of f symbolises her attempts to avoid speaking français was plainly obvious, and that Saussure did not discover it is very strange. For Todorov, Saussure was infuriatingly close to making the connection but he didn’t and as a result linguistics lost decades, floundering about in research that did not give consideration to symbolic operations.

As we have seen, Henry suggested that Müller avoided f because she was avoiding français. Todorov grossly overestimated the value of Henry’s solution to the riddle left open by Saussure, as the only worthwhile thing to come out of the episode. On the basis that Saussure did not acknowledge this ‘symbol’ he accuses Saussure of obsession
(1982: 256), belief in past-lives (ibid: 260), impaired analytical faculties (ibid: 260), outright failure (ibid: 265) and a lack of imagination (ibid: 270). Yet when Todorov upgraded Henry’s simple connection between \(f\) and \(français\) to the status of ‘symbol’ he offered no additional evidence that it functions ‘symbolically’. This ‘symbol’ can explain only one thing: why a single sound is absent from Müller’s Sanskritoid. By comparison, Saussure’s theory has broad explanatory power regarding Müller’s glossolalia. Todorov’s position becomes even more tenuous if we accept the historical significance of Saussure’s theory of Müller’s glossolalia process as a precursor to his later ‘language mechanism’ of the \(Cours\). In other words, Saussure’s thought on glossolalia evolved into a concept of how all human speech is produced. This is a concept which, as mentioned in chapter four, remains critical to linguistics today. But Henry’s addition to Saussure’s notes had, as Todorov admitted, “no effect whatever on the evolution of science” (Todorov 1982: 264). Perhaps, Henry (1901) is useful in terms of pointing out an interesting oversight of Saussurean linguistics, but Todorov is generous when he sees in it the potential have a lasting impact on the evolution of linguistic science.

If Todorov had shown that there may be other symbols present in Müller’s glossolalia, he might have established a theory to rival the explanation of glossolalia assemblage espoused by Saussure. For argument’s sake, let me propose another symbol like that proposed by Todorov: Saussure also commented on the preponderance of \(a\) (S8). If the absence of \(f\) was a symbol of Müller’s avoidance of \(français\), then the preponderance of \(a\) might be a symbol of Müller’s desire to say a word beginning with \(a\) sound. The first vowel of the French word ‘\(Indes\)’ sounds like the \(a\) Müller may have used in Sanskritoid assemblages like ‘\(ganapatinâmâ\)’, ‘\(damasa\)’, ‘\(attamana\)’ etc. 17 Since Müller’s Sanskrit-speaking past-life personality lived in India, the preponderance of \(a\) might be a symbol of her wish to say ‘\(Indes\)’ a lot. Of course, not having been present at Müller’s séances I am not privy to the precise pronunciation of her \(a\), and I do not insist upon this example. No doubt many such symbols could be discovered in Müller’s glossolalia, and if carefully explained then a symbolic interpretation would at least rival

---

17 The initial vowel of \(Indes\) is /\(ɛ̃\)/, but the pronunciation of \(Indes\) is very similar to English ‘\(and\)’, the initial vowel of which is /\(æ\)/. Thus both of these vowels might be characterised as ‘\(a\) sounds’. In French such non-initial \(a\) sounds are typically written as \(a\) rather than \(i\).
Saussure’s explanation, perhaps not in cogency, but at least in explanatory power. As it stands, however, the symbolic interpretation explains only the absence of a single consonant from Müller’s glossolalia.

There is a better way to explain the absence of /f/ in Müller’s Sanskritoid which can also explain the preponderance of /a/. The first clue is that, like her Sanskritoid, Müller’s Martian is riddled with /a/ and low on /f/. Henry notes only ‘six or seven occurrences of f in 300 words’ (Henry 1901: 22 my trans.). In a review of Henry’s text, Fred Corybeare (1903) suggested a partly physiological solution to the f problem, “I should rather ascribe it to a peculiar paralysis of certain muscles of the lips which may beset her in her abnormal states of consciousness” (833). The simplicity of this explanation makes it more likely, but is there any need for this “peculiar paralysis”? In Henry and Saussure’s time there was very little data available to make useful comparisons between glossolalias, however, if such comparisons had been possible Saussure might have noticed that the preponderance of a and exclusion of f were not particular to Müller’s ways of speaking. Goodman (1969) analyses glossolalia in four cultural settings. The data presented in Goodman’s paper records a high frequency of a and not a single instance of f. Jakobson (1985; also 1966 for greater detail) widens the definition of glossolalia to include mystical chants and cites a short verse chanted by Russian sailors for protection against mermaids. In this case one (double) f appears in the transcription, but even this apparently more conscious glossolalia “displays a tenacity with its 18 A’s” (Jakobson 1985: 217). I am aware of one glossolalia corpus project headed by Paul de Lacy. This project has accumulated a corpus of phonetically transcribed glossolalia from a native English speaker with some Spanish ability. Lacy’s research group reports, “certain fricatives like ‘F’ and (voiced) ‘TH’, never appear in the transcription” (Lacy et al. 2009). From these examples we might make a preliminary conclusion that the reason for the exclusion of /f/ may simply have been that it is somewhat difficult to pronounce, and the preponderance of /a/ can be explained by the fact that it is very easy to pronounce. The need for symbols is obviated by the principle of least effort.

Todorov’s argument also contains an appeal to authority that should be mentioned. He locates his studies on symbolism in “the history of Western semiotics” (1982: 10) a
field “so vast that… it cannot be known in a single lifetime” (ibid.). Thus the surprise he expresses at Saussure is an appeal to the canon of semiotics. From the Stoics to the present the philosophy of language is so heavy with discussions of symbols that Todorov believed Saussure should have known a symbol when he saw one; even if it was not intentional (see ibid: 267). Saussure was by no means ignorant of that history. But would his knowledge of theories of the symbol make a particular symbol obvious to him? The circumstances reveal that even a thorough knowledge of symbols may not have helped. Saussure surmised that Müller was carefully avoiding French in 1896 (S2). He saw the absence of f in both Müller’s Sanskritoid and Sanskrit as a surprising coincidence in 1899 (S8). Saussure’s surprise at the absence of f is based on the coincidence with Sanskrit, but it is also based on his perception – since at that time there was no other research on glossolalia available for him to familiarize himself with – that f seemed to him just as likely as any other sound. He did not see a connection between these two thoughts, but given that he had these thoughts three years apart it does not seem like an association he would have readily made at the time. For Henry, who read Saussure’s commentaries in Des Indes, these observations were just ten pages apart. He might well have read both in a single sitting. Therefore the connection could have formed in Henry’s mind out of sheer proximity. But even if Saussure did remember that Müller was avoiding French, could he not have just been unsure as to why there was no f in Müller’s Sanskritoid?

Something else that would have helped Henry to discover the f-français connection, is that his theory of language had a greater level of attunement to symbolic relations. Saussure believed the use of the term symbol in linguistic theory was ambiguous. Joseph (1996) has pointed out that Henry had already developed a theory of unconscious mental functioning of language in chapter three of his 1896 text Antinomies Linguistiques (Joseph 1996: 119). The symbolic operation of the f-français connection was a kind of connection that Henry had thought much about and therefore could have been easily thought of Müller’s absent f as connected to her ‘no français’ rule. Saussure on the other hand was developing quite a different way of thinking about unconscious processes, and in order to hypothesise the f-français connection, he would have had to change his logic. That would have entailed changes to his theory of the
linguistic sign on the basis of a single and very tenuous piece of evidence. This does not seem like an obvious or rational thing for Saussure to do. Therefore it seems likely that Henry’s thought had an affinity for diagnosing such relations as the \textit{f-français} symbol.

\textbf{F for Freud}

Todorov remarked that “an (analytic) eavesdropper would have usefully replaced the practiced ear of the Sanskrit expert [i.e. Saussure]” (1982: 260). In other words, an analytic observer would have discovered the \textit{f-français} symbolic connection. Because he wasn’t usefully replaced by such an observer, we must also assume that Todorov did not think anyone present at Müller’s séances was a competent analytic observer. Yet, Saussure was not the only observer of Müller’s glossolalia with highly developed analytical skills. In fact Certeau thought these analytic observers numerous enough to call them Müller’s “areopagus of examiners” (1996: 38). Also in attendance were Flournoy who was competent in five languages and trained as a doctor and a Kantian philosopher before he became a psychologist, August Lemaitre, professor at the College of Geneva, and Paul Oltramare, an Indo-Europeanist and expert in Hindustani at the University of Geneva. All had analytical skills, and all listened critically to Müller’s glossolalia.

This leads us to the discovery that Todorov means something else. ‘Analytic’ is sometimes used as an abbreviation of ‘psychoanalytic’. His expectation of Saussure to take symbols into account may therefore be an expectation that he think in a psychoanalytic way. Saussure was a linguist so this seems like a very strange thing for Todorov to expect of Saussure. But if this is the way that Todorov intended the term then we have two things to consider. First, the similarities between Flournoy’s text \textit{Des Indes} and Freud’s \textit{Die Traumdeutung}, and Flournoy’s approving citations of Freud and Breuer (1896) (\textit{FIPM}: 7, n. p. 96) suggest that Flournoy was possibly quite a good (psycho) analytic observer. The similarities between Flournoy and Freud’s thought have been pointed out by Ellenberger (1970: 318), Taylor (1996: 241) and O. Flournoy (1986: 10), while some authors also note the important contrast that Flournoy did not offer a therapeutic practice or attribute psychological phenomena to psycho-sexual
origins (Shamdasani 1994: xlii; O. Flournoy 1986: 18). Todorov accounted for Flournoy’s failure to be the analytic eavesdropper he was looking for by suggesting that he was also weak of mind at the time (1982: 260). He did not, however, explain why he thought it irrational that Saussure did not think like a psychoanalytic observer. Arguably, at the time Saussure was writing his observations of Müller’s glossolalia, psychoanalysis did not yet have a theory of language. Arrivé asks a pertinent question, “if [Saussure] hasn’t read Freud why should one expect him to recognize the unconscious at the same time as him?” (1992: 5). But that is precisely what Todorov expected. In his view Saussure should have seen – as, he is sure, any psychoanalyst would have – that symbolism operated in Müller’s glossolalia.

Todorov gives no evidence to confirm or even support his hypothesis that $f$ operated symbolically in Müller’s mind, nor does he give a reason why it should stand for *français*. During the late 1890s in Geneva there were several other $f$s about that seem just as worthy as *français* of symbolic representation in Müller’s glossolalia. Firstly Flournoy, who showered a great deal of attention upon Müller over the six years he observed her séances. Given the fact that in Müller’s Hindu story Flournoy is the reincarnation of her beloved prince suggests a psycho-sexual interpretation, Müller may have phantasised that Flournoy was her domineering husband. This would no doubt have been a desire that she would have tried very hard to keep secret. One way to make sure that she did not have a slip of the tongue and say Flournoy in place of Sivrouka when uttering a Sanskritoid phrase such as “*mama priva – mama radisivou – mama sadiou sivrouka*” (T 3) – containing ‘my beloved… my excellent Sivrouka’ – would be for her to ban herself from saying the sound $f$. Another $f$ is Ferdinand, a charming intellectual who she included in her story as a mysterious close friend named Miousa. This seems equally as plausible as the $f$-*français* symbol of the standard view, but it need not necessarily be the case.

In the minds of Todorov and his followers, $f$ stands for Freud. This is where we will find a rationale behind the reasoning in Todorov (1982) that the other authors follow. When a circular argument like Todorov’s is presented ($f$ is a symbol of *français* because $f$ is a symbol of *français*), the author already has what they see as a good reason for the conclusion to be true. For him, the ‘good reason’ for claiming that $f$ is a symbol of
français is that Freudian theory supports this kind of symbolic operation. Todorov expresses his view that linguistics would benefit greatly from Freudian theory. And the only way to show the existence of such symbolic operations or repression is to psychoanalyse the individual. At this point, Todorov’s discussion turns into a psychoanalysis of Saussure, which claims that a case of repression prevented him from introducing a new logic. Thus, in Todorov’s view, if Saussure’s repression had been cured he would have recognised the $f$-français symbol, and introduced a logic of symbolism into his theory of language.

A lament that Saussure and Freud did not make direct associations between their respective theories of general linguistics and psychoanalysis resonates throughout the literature. Todorov writes:

Saussure thus finds himself very close to the solution, but it escapes him. Like so many who come after him, he has an inkling of the right path, but he is unable to transcend the limits of his own premises, and so he stops short on the threshold of discovery. (1982: 260-261)

Yaguello writes:

Twin sisters by their date of birth, linguistics and psychoanalysis might well have met in embryonic state as early as 1885 in Paris, where Freud and Saussure happened to be at the same time. But the meeting didn’t take place. (Yaguello 1991: 83)

Later, with regard to the direction Saussure took in his analyses of Müller’s glossolalia Yaguello writes:

[I]n his commitment to scientific rigour, he thus fails to come to terms with the dream dimension: this first encounter between linguistics and psychoanalysis is pretty much of a flop. (ibid: 96)

For Yaguello the stakes are high. She claims that where Saussure failed, Henry’s success was to find in Müller’s glossolalia,
[P]lay on sound and meaning which not only makes language evolve, but also opens the way for puns, word-play, poetry and the creativity of language. (ibid: 97)

Even Fehr, who otherwise distances himself from Todorov’s position, writes:

If we are looking for a conceptual framework by which to understand Saussure’s work, I notice that Freud was working on his word association technique in the same years. (1995: 102, my trans.)

The connection between Saussure and Freud is strongly desired, but this desire does not translate into reality.

Todorov saw Saussure’s and Henry’s missed opportunity to link linguistics with psychoanalysis as quite damaging to linguistics. Todorov articulates his concern in the following terms,

Henry’s pages remain merely haunted by a Freudian spirit that never truly inhabits them. The new linguistics misses its first opportunity to embark upon the road of the symbolic (and thus its opportunity to open itself to psychoanalysis at its inception). The opportunity will not arise again for decades. *Le Langage Martien* has no effect whatever on the evolution of science. (1982: 264)

And on the following page:

[Saussure’s] impasses have exemplary value: they anticipate those of a large sector of modern linguistics. (ibid: 265)

These statements may seem contradictory: Saussure – and the scientific community who were unreceptive to Henry’s work – could be guilty of setting back the advancement of linguistic science for decades, yet the failure is valuable because it anticipates something which many linguists are failing to do today (i.e. in 1977 when Todorov first published his work on symbols). We must read between the lines here to discover what Todorov is claiming: Saussure came very close to making a discovery that would have pre-empted stagnation in his field over the matter of the symbol, which persists today in
many areas of linguistics. Todorov does not reveal his hand by naming the linguists who he sees as incorporating the logic of the symbol or those who do not, but we can guess that philosophers of language (and Todorov’s colleagues) Barthes, Derrida and Kristeva are being held in higher regard than linguists such as Chomsky, Labov or Greenberg.

The manoeuvre Todorov makes in favouring one idea of linguistics over all others exposes more clearly his psychoanalytical convictions. Todorov offers no discussion of evidence to support his claim for the existence of the symbol he claims Saussure failed to recognise. Instead that failure is taken immediately as a symptom from which he proceeds to seek out a diagnosis. Todorov no longer distinguishes between text and author. Instead a new distinction is imposed between the ‘real’ Saussure (author of the *Cours*) and the obsessive author of the analyses of glossolalia. Todorov directs his criticism at Saussure, and not his analyses of glossolalia. Flournoy is guilty by association:

[Saussure and Flournoy] have implicitly accepted the supernatural version of these events, professors though they are and at Geneva no less: all for want of admitting the existence of a logic of symbolism other than that of language (confused with that of reason). (ibid: 260)

This ad hominem turn quickly takes a condescending line.

Like so many who come after him, he has an inkling to the right path, but he is unable to transcend the limits of his own premises. (ibid: 261)

The criticism that Todorov wages ultimately comes out in a form which shows that Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia are faulty in their logic, but given his obsessive state of mind at the time he can hardly be held responsible. Yaguello’s argument holds the same structure, but she calls what Todorov interprets as obsession, ‘scientific rigor’. We must forgive Saussure, for he knew not what he did. But it seems that we’re not entirely sure either.
Psychoanalytic symbolism, sound symbolism and system

Todorov expressed a view that Saussure’s failure to engage with symbolic operations had a resounding impact on the history of linguistics: “The new linguistics misses its first opportunity to embark upon the road of the symbolic” (1982: 264). He further claimed that decades passed before such an opportunity would arise again. But, as Arrivé aptly points out, “[d]espite being warned off the subject by certain psychoanalysts, linguists do continue, somehow or other, to speak about language” (1992: 4).

As we saw in chapter 2, Saussure did indeed attend to the role of symbols in language during his study of Germanic myths in 1909-1910. There he saw symbols as simplifications that occur in retellings: a leader stands for the army in a previous telling; a single conflict for an entire battle. In the Cours he clearly distinguished the symbol from the sign (101). His notion of the symbol was distinctly not psychoanalytic. There is, however another way that symbols enter Saussure’s thought on glossolalia which is not at odds with his general linguistics. In a comprehensive survey of sound-symbolism, Jakobson and Waugh (1987) showed that symbolism has been a matter of constant debate in linguistics from Saussure’s time (starting with Georg von der Gabelentz18) onwards. Saussure was familiar with at least one of the types of sound symbolism discussed by Jakobson and Waugh – synaesthesia – from his contribution to Flournoy’s 1893 book on just that topic, but his wider attitude towards this theme of linguistic research is a complicated matter. It will be worth distinguishing sound symbolism from the psychoanalytic symbolism that Todorov refers to, and discussing why Saussure preferred to talk about language systems.

At the heart of the problem of the difference between symbolism and semiology is the issue of what is meant by the term ‘unconscious’. Both symbolism and semiology rely on operations that are not conscious. For Freudian symbolism, the (initially) social referents that unconscious symbols stand for are mental objects that have taken on a specific – sometimes pathological – significance for the individual (Freud 1998: 651). Saussure did, occasionally use the term ‘inconscient’ to distinguish operations that lie outside the scope of individual will (e.g. langue). Joseph (2000b) writes,

18 For the debate regarding Gabelentz’s influence on Saussure’s general linguistic theory see Coseriu (1967) for the affirmative and Koerner (1973; 1988a [1972]; 1988b [1974]; 2008) for the negative.
Saussure’s concept of mind... shares a point of convergence with Freudian theory in holding that some aspects of the mind are socially determined and controlled, although with an important difference: whereas for Freud it is those mental modules least deeply rooted in the unconscious, the super-ego and ego, that are socially shaped, for Saussure it is langue, devoid of will or intention and thus fundamentally unconscious, that is the social fact. (314)

According to Arrivé (1992), Freudian psychoanalysis operates on a theory of language that was most fully elaborated by Hans Sperber in his article, ‘On the Influence of Sexual Factors on the Origin and Development of Language’ (1912). Sperber theorized that language originated with symbols that expressed sexual desires. “In my opinion,” wrote Sperber, “all available proof shows that it is in the field of sexuality that we must identify one of the roots, or, better, the essential root of language” (qtd. in Arrivé 1992: 105). Sperber deals with the problem of how people are able to speak on topics other than sex by advancing a thesis of “sexually-based metaphorisation” (Arrivé 1992: 106). Work is suggested as the first metaphor where “work with tools was perceived as the image of the sexual process” (qtd. in Arrivé: 106), “the cutting tool is the male member, the object which is worked upon is the female object” (ibid.). Freud found this argument about the origin of language to be very strongly supported by his many observations of symbols with sexual referents in his psychoanalytic practice (see Freud 1998: 387 n. 1). If language is derived from primitive symbols used to communicate sexual meanings, then it makes sense that so much of what people think, say and dream has a sexual interpretation.

Sound symbolism, on the other hand, is not a theory of the origin of language¹⁹, nor do the symbols in this theory have any particular association with sexuality. Since Saussure’s time linguists (and psychologists) have studied the potential for simple sounds to naturally signify particular meanings. From a psychological perspective this might be seen as a mental association between sounds and colours, but from a linguistic perspective is seen as the potential for certain sounds to symbolically evoke tones of

¹⁹ Some famous arguments about the origin of language such as the essays by Herder (1772) and Rousseau (1781) might be interpreted as sound symbolism arguments, but sound symbolism had not been established as a field of study at that time.
even specific colours. Jakobson and Waugh note the many studies that have shown that back vowels are seen to be “darker” and front vowels “lighter” (1987: 192-185), and in other studies the “prevalent redness of /a/, yellowness and whitishness of /e/ and /i/, and darkness of /o/ and /u/ (197). However such statements are far from universal. Saussure himself provided an exception to the red a hypothesis when he responded to a questionnaire on synaesthesia distributed by Flournoy’s cousin Edouard Claparède. For Saussure the colour or feel of a vowel could be impacted by how it was written; the French words *plein*, *matin*, *chien* contain the same vowel but Saussure saw *ein* as a network of purple veins, where as he felt uncertain about *in* and *ien* he saw as “a tangle of still fresh hemp ropes that have not yet taken on the whitish tint of worn rope” (Flournoy 1893: 50 my trans.). He went on to describe the vowel *a* (as it is written and sounded in French) as:

off-white, approaching yellow; in its consistency, it is something solid, but thin, that cracks easily if struck, for example a sheet of paper (yellowed with age) drawn tight in a frame, a flimsy door (in unvarnished wood left white) that you feel would shatter at the slightest blow, an already broken eggshell that you can keep cracking by pressing on it with your fingers. Better still: the shell of a raw egg is *a* (whether in colour or in the consistency of the object), but the shell of a hard-boiled egg is not *a*, because of the feeling you have that the object is compact and resistant. A yellowed pane of glass is *a*; a pane of ordinary colour, offering blueish reflections, is the very opposite of *a*, because of its colour, and despite its consistency being just right. (trans. Joseph 2007b)

It is worth noting that these deeply individual descriptions by Saussure reveal an inadequacy in data that leads to a general finding that there is a prevalence of redness in /a/. A sound might bring to mind red for subjects A and B, but if subject A experiences /a/ as the red of blood that spills from a plump rare-cooked sirloin which, when sliced open with expensive silverware, lightly stains the neighbouring mashed potato, and subject B experiences /a/ as the red of the Chinese flag during the cultural revolution, is it still meaningful to say that /a/ has ‘redness’? Probably not. However the linguistic finding that certain sounds indicate something less specific such as redness, sharpness, lightness, quickness, smallness etc. is a clear symbolic relation to which, as his
involvement in Flournoy’s 1893 study shows, Saussure had given focussed consideration.

The question of how different instances of the same sound can have distinct signification is indirectly addressed in Saussure’s discussion of in absentia mnemonic groups and in præsentia spoken sequences. Individual units depend on the units that appear before and after them for to signify a distinct and intended meaning (see CGL: 122). Jakobson & Waugh express the crucial role of consonants in this process as follows: “[v]owels function in languages as the only or at least the most usual carriers of the syllabic nuclei, whereas the margins of syllables are occupied chiefly or solely by consonants” (1985: 87). Saussure had advanced a theory of the syllable in 1897. Here he advanced an argument for a new classification of sounds according to their aperture (see Appendix I, CGL: 39-49), but there is no indication that either individual sounds or composites express meaning symbolically or otherwise. Henry’s idea that “f must appear to [Müller] as the ‘‘French’ letter par excellence” (1901: 23), is an observation of a type that has not been borne out in the literature. Indeed, it is a peculiar idea that f should stand for French[language]ness. It may also be an idea highly dependent upon individual experience. In a way it is like how ien struck Saussure as like a new hemp rope: something an objective observer – without having give-away hints at hand – would surely never guess.

As a final note about the difficulty of saying anything certain about sound symbols – a problem that Saussure struggled intensely with for three years towards the end of his life (see Starobinski 1979; Jakobson & Waugh 1987: 224-225; Wunderli 2004) – there is an odd and potentially symbolic moment in the Flournoy Affair, the significance of which no one has ever broached. When Müller announced the name of her Hindu princess personality it was done via graphic hallucination and she wrote it ‘Simadini’. Much later she corrected this in a letter to Flournoy “in the very moment that I trace these words, I hear a voice speaking to me in my right ear: Not Simadini, but Simandini!” (qtd. in FIPM: 180). Not knowing what to make of this, Flournoy wrote, “We must confine ourselves to registering a fact, inexplicable hitherto, this correction of a graphic automatism by an auditive automatism at the end of several months” (ibid.). The very first observation Saussure committed to paper was, “Simaṉdini reminds me of Sanskrit
sîmantînî which may have been a proper name here and there, but usually it was nothing more than a (poetic) word for ‘women’, *femina* (S1). But this does not explain why she wrote it ‘Simadini’ and heard it pronounced ‘Simandini’.

According to some studies (see Jakobson & Waugh 1987), the group *nd* may have a symbolic value related to foreignness, or a poetic value. Foreignness is of course one of main features Saussure found in Müller’s glossolalia. Jakobson & Waugh note that the glossolalia of Russian mystics displays, “alien traits such as the consonant *f* and the clusters of *ndr* and *ntr*” (1987: 216). Goodman (1969) has also reported many *nd* and *nt* groups. Foreignness, of course, is relevant to the speaker. Whether Müller derived some foreignness by using it is hard to say, and we cannot know if that was her intention. But the *nd* group in Simandîni might have been employed for poetic agreement with thematic words like ‘Indes’ and ‘Hindoo’. We may note that *nd* groups in Müller’s Sanskritoid appear in ‘gandaryô’ (T 9) and ‘vindamini’ (T 15); *nt* groups appear in *vasanta* (T 9) *santas* (twice in T 10) and possibly in *kin’r’che* (T 6). Jakobson & Waugh sight three examples of heavy use of the group *nd* in children’s poetic art:

Kunda, munda, karamunda
Dunda, bunda, paramun –

**Indijanda, Indijanda, Indija!**
**Indijadi, Indijadi, Indija! –**

Èndendîne, betetô!  
Èndendîne, betetôn! (examples qtd. in Jakobson & Waugh 1987: 220-221)

It would seem that the group *nd* (or its cousin *nt*) is a noteworthy feature of glossolalia in some parts of the world, but what does it mean? Sound-symbolism does not take sounds to give very specific meanings, but it does find that some sounds seem to indicate things like tone, colour, texture or foreignness, while other sounds produce a particular rhythm with evocative power. As far as symbolism goes, Saussure was only willing to say that its sounds are chosen for “exotic aspect” (S2). From a linguistic point of view, this was probably sufficient given the data he had to work with, but examples
like the lack of \( f \), the abundance of \( a \) and the \( nd \) group in Simandini, might have yielded further results. Jakobson & Waugh noted that sounds can have “the distinctive features, sense-\textit{discriminative} and sense-\textit{determinative}” (1987: 236, also 8). They may evoke a sense of other than A, just as much as they may evoke a sense of A. Saussure’s interest in Henry’s idea of vowel harmony (in S11) – along with his earlier comments on synaesthesia – indicates that Saussure may have found sound symbolism relevant to his theory of general linguistics.

One of Saussure’s most resounding contributions to linguistics was to conceive of language as a system of signs. Language conceived as a system of signs is not resistant to symbols, but it does have greater explanatory potential:

> When semiology is established one of the questions that must be asked is whether modes of expression which rely upon signs that are entirely natural (mime, for example) fall within the province of semiology. If they do, the main object of study in semiology will none the less be the class of systems based upon the arbitrary nature of the sign. For any means of expression accepted in a society rests in principle upon a collective habit… It is this rule which renders them obligatory, not their intrinsic value. We may therefore say that signs which are entirely arbitrary convey better than others the ideal semiological process. \((\text{CGL}: 68)\)

An expression of speech might symbolically refer to something that the speaker is trying to avoid, such as some sexual meaning. A speech sound might intrinsically refer to a colour or some other sensation, even another sound. But in Saussure’s view symbols were not the best example of the semiological process. The semiological process consists of forming speech from elements that are collectively accepted by a speech community. Any part of speech may be defined in this way, whereas intrinsic value in sounds is more of a rarefied phenomenon. The superior explanatory power of language conceived as a system of signs is shown in Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia without reference to any intrinsic values of the forms Müller produced. The symbolic \( f \), on the other hand, only offers an explanation of one sound.
**Overstepping the bounds**

Saussure’s exclusion of comments on symbolic aspects of language prompted Todorov to directly and repeatedly criticise Saussure for being too rigid in his thinking:

To make this discovery [of the presence of a symbol], one has only to recognise the logic of symbolism *is not* necessarily the same as the logic of language; or even, more simply, that alongside language there exist other modes of symbolism that we must first learn to perceive. (1982: 259)

He is more prepared, confronted as he is with an insoluble problem, to acknowledge the supernatural…than to modify his own method of investigation… (ibid.).

[Saussure has] implicitly accepted the supernatural version of events… all for want of admitting the existence of a logic of symbolism other than that of language… (ibid: 260)

He is unable to transcend the limits of his own premises (ibid: 261)

We witness the dawning of that other logic whose existence Saussure was unwilling to recognise (ibid: 262) etc.

But as we have seen over the last two chapters, Saussure was actually quite flexible in how he thought through the problems of Müller’s glossolalia. In chapter three, I showed that Saussure frequently changed tack without sticking to any clearly defined mode of analysis. I thereafter viewed Saussure’s loose yet principled approach as a fruitful exercise. By taking on the more speculative territory of mental operations, Saussure gave a powerful example of how language is composed of conventional signs. For this reason it is possible to appreciate Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia for the fluidity of thought, and for the completeness of ideas they display. In chapter two, we saw that Gasparov writes that “in addressing the phenomenon of Hélène’s discourse, which apparently transcended rational explanation, [Saussure] turned to analytical procedures that clearly overstepped the bounds of any orderly linguistic analysis” (Gasparov 2012: 166); a statement that contradicts Todorov’s claims of rigidity. As Todorov shows,
Saussure gave considerable thought to symbols at several points in his career, but he did not agree that they worked in the way Henry (1901) suggested.

Of course, following new ideas and modifying of his method was how Saussure founded the new linguistics. In a study of Saussure’s notebooks dated to 1881-1885, Joseph (2010) finds:

[T]he key Saussurean conception of synchrony and diachrony, without those labels but otherwise fully articulated, more than twenty years before its appearance in Saussure’s courses in general linguistics at Geneva. The separation of the two is already implicit in the Mémoire, which is his attempt to reconstruct the successive états linguistiques of Indo-European vowels. The same can be said of the phonology notebooks of circa 1883 (Saussure 1995), where again, without expressly saying so, he discusses the phonemes of a particular state of Indo-European, while wondering occasionally whether it is possible to consider them “outside of time”. (Joseph 2010: 114)

In his analyses of glossolalia, Saussure was not ‘wondering occasionally’ whether it was possible to consider phonemes outside of time, he was actually doing it. Given the circumstances – for how does one consider speech diachronically when there is no possible historical precedent with which it may be compared20 – he had to consider Müller’s Sanskritoid speech synchronically. Rather than stick rigidly to a well-defined linguistic method, he used the opportunity to explore the psychological dimension of a language state at operation in a living subject. One might well say that the Flournoy Affair was the only time Saussure applied his ideas to living speech.

Saussure considered aspects of Müller’s glossolalia with two general approaches. He made various types of comparisons, and he theorised a language process. At times he considered whether memory was a perfect or an imperfect record, and the consequences of each theory for the production of speech. He sought out structure underneath otherwise incomprehensible speech. One aspect of his analyses that might not have

---

20 As Saussure established with his Memoire, where there is no available historical text, one can in theory be reconstructed. However, in the case of glossolalia an attempt to apply the reconstructive method would only produce further non-linguistic forms.
occurred to him at all under other circumstances, was to think of the different ways that Müller was ‘making Sanskrit’, and attempted to ‘make Latin’ himself, according to a simpler process. Another very original angle was to seek out elements of Müller’s speech that did not fit the character of a supposed historical Simandini. These were unorthodox directions for linguistics, but there was no orthodoxy at the time about linguistic analyses of glossolalia. Perhaps not all of these directions were fruitful, but even if there are failures, those failures have the value of having been tried. It is not true that Saussure was too narrow-minded to modify his method. He used the opportunity supplied by the Flournoy Affair to push ideas further than he was able to when simply writing in his notebooks.

Despite his willingness to follow his ideas to their conclusions, Saussure did not give up his scepticism. He never asserted that the process he had devised was in fact the process that had taken place in Müller’s mind. At the end of his discussion on the language process he added the words, “Naturally, it is, I repeat, my impression, such as it is, that I give you” (S2). Of course, he had no evidence for the mental operations he deduced from Müller’s glossolalia, but he gave his reasons for thinking the way he did. In his final letter to Flournoy, after reading Henry’s free elaboration of that process, he distanced himself from the concept:

I do not know if I should not blame myself for being the indirect inspiration for the frivolities that Henry wrote to you, with my lucubration on – tyé – yâ ‘I bless you’, which featured the same quasi-rambling guess at its character, and was thus able to give this excellent colleague an appetite for seeing something in what you were doing that is largely fantasy. It is true that I gave an illustration of what, in my opinion, could happen here and there, but that I did so without insisting on the example. (S12)

The freedom with which Saussure pursued ideas like this one is something that we cannot find in his other notes. In his more serious linguistic considerations he was eternally correcting himself or stopping halfway through an idea as though he had thought of a contradicting example before he could even commit it to paper once. Joseph (2010) writes that though Saussure’s teaching always included his general
linguistics, “[a]ll his attempts at writing on general issues ended up aborted — but even in this he was perfectly consistent from his early twenties until his death” (105). Saussure hedged his conjecture about the process he saw in Müller’s glossolalia by specifying that it was his impression, but it is a rare moment in which he followed a thought to its conclusion in writing.

Conclusion

In this chapter I argued that the symbol proposed by Todorov, after Henry’s *f-francais* observation is an unlikely case of symbolism. Todorov believed that the obviousness of this symbol (that *f* stands for *francais*) is sufficient evidence to support its operation in Müller’s Sanskritoid. I claimed instead that this is very weak evidence, and that the absence of *f* from Müller’s Sanskrit can be explained more simply. Just as the supposed obviousness of this symbol is no grounds for its existence, neither is it grounds to criticise Saussure for not discovering it. I have explained that Henry’s ability to make the *f-francais* connection was greatly assisted by the close proximity of the ideas, as the appeared to him in *Des Indes*, and his attunement to making the kind of connection he saw between Müller’s aversion to *francais* and her avoidance of *f*.

It is clear from Todorov’s argument that he wants Saussure to have thought about symbols more like Freud thought about symbols. Many commentators have sought out historical or theoretical links between Saussure’s work and that of Freud, (e.g. Culler 1976; Todorov 1982; Yaguello 1991; Arrivé 1992; Gadet 1994 etc.). Some of these are done with more care than others. Todorov’s critique is strange because he expects Saussure to have acknowledged, and to have found deep importance in, something that he simultaneously recognises did not align with Saussure’s theory of language. It is also anachronistic in expecting Saussure to be cognisant of a theory of the unconscious which Freud had not yet developed.

The reason Todorov wished that Saussure had introduced Freudian symbols into his linguistic thought is that he saw them as something that would benefit linguistics. But even though the theory of language evolving from symbols that expressed sexual
desires came from Hans Sperber, a linguist, it is not clear that anything can be gained from the linguistic study of the symbols proposed by this theory. When he claimed that Saussure missed an opportunity to introduce symbolism into linguistics, Todorov overlooked the fact that since Saussure’s time linguists such as Gabelentz (1891), Jespersen (1933 [1922]), Sapir (1921), Whorf (1956), Jakobson (1968 [1941]) and many others contributed to the study of symbols in language. Saussure was able to explain an entire phrase and suggest that this process could explain all of Müller’s glossolalia whereas Henry’s f-français ‘symbol’ (Todorov’s term, not Henry’s) potentially explains the absence of one sound. Symbols are part of semiology, but the Flournoy Affair demonstrates that semiology has more to offer.

Todorov was also critical of Saussure for not thinking differently, but this is also a strange criticism because Saussure had to think differently in order to discuss Müller’s glossolalia in a meaningful way. The Flournoy Affair reminds us of the importance of exploring new directions and collaboration. Todorov’s position diminishes the importance of some serious theoretical writings belonging to an often overlooked period of Saussure’s career to mere curiosities, interesting only for their oddball novelty. Here we have seen that Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia, in addition to the historical value discussed in chapters three and four are valuable for their explanatory power and openness of thought. In the concluding chapter I shall look at the implications of the findings of this study, and suggest further directions for research.
Conclusion

Introduction

The Flournoy Affair has received relatively little attention in Saussurean scholarship. Given its unusual nature, Saussure may not have thought it part of the development of his ideas. On January 19, 1909, Albert Riedlinger asked him when he had developed his ideas on static linguistics. According to the record they kept of that conversation, Saussure replied that he had been “very much concerned with these ideas fifteen years ago” (SM: 29, my trans.). Yet two years later, on May 6, 1911, when Léopold Gautier asked him whether he had devised the topics covered in his course on general linguistics after the death of his predecessor Joseph Wertheimer (on April 17, 1908), he replied: “To the contrary, I don’t believe I have added anything since then. These are subjects that occupied me mainly before 1900” (SM: 30, my trans.). The Flournoy Affair fits squarely between the date he gave for the end of the period of consideration of static linguistics, and the date he gave for the end of his preoccupation with general linguistics. Though Saussure may have had most of his general linguistic ideas together early on, the fin de siècle period was when Saussure incorporated psychological ideas from his friend Flournoy into his work. It is when he most intensively considered the role of mental operations in language use, and formulated a version of his ‘language mechanism’. In the Course in General Linguistics Saussure linked linguistics with psychology via semiology (CGL: 15-16) but defined the relation with the criticism that
“the psychologist [only] studies the mechanism of the sign in the individual” (ibid: 16).

In the Flournoy Affair we can witness Saussure working that mechanism into a social entity, a powerful explanation of language use, and a link between language viewed as a state and language viewed as a general phenomenon.

The purpose of the present study is to evaluate the hypothesis that Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia are essential to understanding his thought on method and psychological aspects of language. Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia help us see what ideas he borrowed from psychology, as well as his thought on mental operations. On those grounds I claim that they are documents of major importance not only for the history of ideas, but also for theories of the sign. They create a bridge between Saussure’s 1893-1894 attempts at writing a book on general linguistics and the end of the 19th century. We can see in Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia that he continued to advance his general linguistic ideas by working directly with the psychologist Flournoy, and putting his own ideas about language into practice in that psychological context. He even employed Flournoy’s theory of cryptomnesia as the basis for how he viewed the mental operation behind Müller’s glossolalic utterances. Saussure rarely commented on psychology, and so this study corresponds to a significant gap in the discussion of Saussure’s ideas and in the history of linguistics more generally.

To approach the texts of Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia with the minimum of theoretical baggage, it was necessary to present those texts in full and discuss them as directly as possible. Following Shapin and Schaffer (2011), I said I would “play the stranger” (6). In other words, I would approach the Flournoy Affair as an observer who knows that conclusions other than those already postulated are possible (ibid.). Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia represent a crucial step in the development of the psychological ideas that underlie his general linguistic theory. They greatly clarify his position on the mental operations of language. In this chapter I will synthesise the findings of the preceding study and outline the implications of the present research. I will also identify future directions with attention to the gaps that have not been filled by this research. Finally I will conclude that Saussure’s collaboration with Flournoy is an important moment in the development of general linguistics, and that Saussure’s
analyses of glossolalia contain some of the clearest articulations of Saussure’s thought on how the human mind processes language.

Summary

At the outset of this discussion I identified an issue of strangeness in the historical details of a thinker’s life. When we encounter strangeness we might be intrigued or repelled. Yet, if our goal is to understand their ideas, it is necessary to limit our reaction such that the facts can be objectively analysed. The Flournoy Affair has the makings of a wonderful story about the implacable problems of language and psychology. It raises fundamental questions such as, ‘what is language?’, ‘what is the relationship between language and thought?’, even, ‘what are the boundaries of the scientific pursuit?’. Like many great narratives it includes an element of mystery. There is strangeness in the facts that Saussure attended séances, analysed glossolalia, and at certain points even gave Müller’s claims credence. But it is up to us to decide how we shall interpret that strangeness, and to find ways to benefit from his conclusions.

Because the Flournoy Affair is so interesting, I first wanted to tell that story. Given the widely varying opinions about the origins of psychological aspects of Saussure’s theory of language, I am sure that story will be of interest to many Saussure scholars. I tabled three questions which correspond to the main themes of chapters three four and five: ‘How did Saussure apply his diachronic and synchronic methods?’, ‘How did Saussure conceptualise mental operations in language use?’ and, ‘What is the difference between Saussure’s semiology and symbolism?’ The archive that these questions engage with is located over a small number of (mostly) hard-to-find texts. The primary texts were presented in chapter one and the secondary texts were reviewed in chapter two.

I felt it was necessary to make the available primary documents for the Flournoy Affair accessible to Anglophone scholarship. Therefore I undertook a translation of the letters and other notes that Saussure passed on to Flournoy as contributions to Des Indes. This is the best way to make them available to an English speaking audience, and to allow Anglophone readers to grasp the nature of Saussure’s thought on glossolalia. An
obvious shortcoming of this work is the absence of Flournoy’s letters to Saussure. These letters would contain the full extent of Martian and Sanskritoid transcriptions that Saussure had before him as he worked through the similarities between the Sanskritoid and Sanskrit, and discovered a link between Müller’s idiolects. I hope that one day a volume will appear with both Saussure and Flournoy’s correspondence. Difficulties of these translations especially relate to linguistic detail, not only of the Sanskrit details Saussure discusses, but also in the presentation of the details of the Sanskritoid. Translation is always a controversial issue, but I believe the translations in chapter one are very functional, and I hope that other researchers will find them useful.

The secondary literature presented an unexpected challenge by focusing on what appears to be a relatively insignificant detail of Saussure’s findings in relation to Müller’s glossolalia, and using that detail as the basis for a serious criticism about Saussure’s linguistics generally. The readiness of Todorov’s (1982) acceptance of Henry’s proposition that the absence of $f$ in Müller’s Sanskritoid was caused by her rule to avoid saying anything in French seems to me too confident. Nonetheless, his position that Saussure overlooked an important symbol took on the status of common sense, and became a standard in the literature. But even if there had been evidence of an injudicious turn in Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia, given the extent of the documents he produced on the matter, it was clear that there was more to say about them. More recent works commenting on Saussure’s role in Flournoy’s study – notably Joseph (2012) and Gasparov (2012) – give no heed to Todorov’s position at all. But the necessity of giving a full and fair account of Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia was apparent. Two ideas central to the *Cours* that Saussure appeared to make use of during the Flournoy Affair are his synchronic and diachronic methods, and his ‘language mechanism’. A discussion of Saussure’s application of these ideas in relation to glossolalia gives a stronger account of the position of his work on glossolalia, in relation to the development of his theory of language.

The questions posed in chapter one were addressed in the following ways:
How did Saussure apply his diachronic and synchronic methods?

The idea that there were two ways to analyse language, one historical, the other static was well known to linguists in Saussure’s time. Joseph (2010) has convincingly argued that Saussure had his own thoughts on the matter fairly well established by 1885. Therefore, the importance of synchrony and diachrony in the Flournoy Affair relates to Saussure’s practice. I aimed to show two things in my discussion of the method Saussure used in his analyses of glossolalia. Firstly, I argued that Saussure’s approach had a loose basis in a dual approach, which on one side was grammarian – or historical – and on the other, systemic – or static. Secondly, I argued some development of these ideas occurred in relation to the opportunity Saussure had to put them into practice.

The grammarian approach, as I have called it, involved a variety of comparisons. These included a comparison between Müller’s Sanskritoid and an artificially stable Sanskrit of 2500 years ago. This was likely to be somewhat different to the 15th century Sanskrit a real Simandini would have spoken which allowed him to discover “that, many words without connections like tava, nāma, and the name Gaṇapati etc.... are … pure Sanskrit.” (S1). Saussure also made use of Flournoy’s concept of cryptomnesia, by comparing the words that Müller produced, to what she could have potentially learned unconsciously. In other words, he compared the words she produced to the language resources she was likely to have available to her.

In his systemic approach Saussure considered the language state of Müller’s utterances. It was evident from his initial analysis that her speech was not Sanskrit, and it didn’t appear to be another language, such as Prakrit. It occurred to him that the Sanskritoid might be “analogous to the Martian interspersed only at intervals with Sanskrit shreds” (S2). In this statement we can see Saussure’s move to view Müller’s ‘languages’ as springing from the same source: Müller’s mind. But he never thought that Müller was creating her ways of speaking. He found that some utterances were composed from elements of existing language systems. The operations that placed particular units into linear utterances were not, in Saussure’s view, of Müller’s making. Rather he found that he was able to analyse the relations between units as the relations that already existed in certain language systems. The systemic approach arises again in S8 when Saussure used...
the same rules he saw in Müller’s Sanskritoid process to compose a hypothetical Latinoid text.

*How did Saussure conceptualise mental operations in language use?*

In S2 Saussure conceptualised a language producing process which operated on a few rules that Müller had imposed on her own capacity to speak, and a few unconscious memories. Here he saw each sound unit of a particular utterance, “atiēyā... ganapatinâmâ” (M2) as belonging to a given language system such as English, German, or Sanskrit. In Saussure’s formulation her rule was “not to let the audience suspect that it is French” (S2). The remainder of this process was the result of normal language systems, because each unit she employed limited the field of potential units that could follow it. The clearest example of such a limitation is the initial *a* which Saussure identifies as the first sound of English ‘I’ /æ/. ‘I’ cannot be followed by ‘you’ as in the word order of the underlying French phrase, “*je vous bénis au nom de Ganapati*” which Saussure believed Müller was trying to spontaneously translate into Sanskrit. Müller was prevented from pursuing a word-for-word translation, and introduced a foreign sound, in place of ‘bless’, before uttering a distorted ‘you’. Therefore, Saussure’s idea was that Müller could not just speak in random sounds. The speech sounds she used were recruited from language systems, and therefore her usage of a given sound was limited the ways it could be used in the language system from which it was sourced. This operation of limiting the arbitrariness of signs is essentially what he would later call the language mechanism.

The clearest similarity between Müller’s ‘process’ and the language mechanism of the *Cours* is that both are centered on the problem of how simple units of language are formed into complex linear utterances. The terms Saussure uses to describe the language mechanism can be easily transferred to Müller’s process. The units of language that she took from her unconscious memory are in “mnemonic groups” (*CGL*: 122), each successive unit was selected by way of “associative and syntagmatic relations” (ibid.). In other words, Saussure perceived that Müller sought alternative units to the French words she had in mind, by making associations with similar terms. As she combined those units in speech, her field of selection was limited by the
imperative that units must follow a systematic order in a linear spoken sequence. Saussure did not use the term ‘mécanisme’ either before or during his analyses of Müller’s glossolalia. As I have shown, Saussure railed against using such metaphors in his work, but the Flournoy Affair gave rise to important development in how he conceived of the mental operations behind language use, and a major step towards his mécanisme de la langue.

What is the difference between Saussure’s semiology and symbolism?

Henry (1901) wrote, “f must appear to [Müller] as the “French” letter par excellence, and thus she avoids it as much as she can,” and Todorov (1982) understood this relation as a symbolic relation. He saw it as a causal ‘stand-for relation’ between a symbol and its referent. In other words, Müller’s avoidance of français caused the absence of /f/ in her Sanskritoid utterances. I have answered Todorov’s argument by revealing that the ‘symbolic’ connection he proposed between f and français is by no means obvious. I showed this by arguing that proximity and attunement are conditions of obviousness and showing that Henry, who did see a connection, saw the parts of this symbol in closer proximity, and that he had a greater level of attunement towards making the connection than did Saussure. I contended that if the symbolic function was really a central operation in Müller’s glossolalia then there should be equivalent ‘symbolic’ explanations for other parts of the glossolalia, but Todorov did not add any further symbols to the one that Henry initially proposed. I reasoned that if f was absent because Müller was avoiding français, then the prevalence of a should be contingent on a word that she was trying to say. Because the scene in which Müller spoke her Sanskritoid was set in India, I suggested Indes the first vowel of which is equivalent to the a’s of ‘Ganapati’ or ‘gaya’. This is the kind of operation that Todorov placed so much importance on. The fact that Todorov did not discover this himself demonstrates that it is not obvious. Additionally, there is no apparent reason to suppose that this kind of symbol did in fact operate in the production of Müller’s glossolalia.

I sought to clarify that there are other ways of conceiving of the symbol that are more consistent with Saussure’s theory of the sign. Research into sound symbolism has been carried out since Saussure’s time, but it does not depend on a theory of the unconscious.
Rather sound-symbols operate according to systemic elements of language, much like those Saussure discovered in Müller’s speech. In sound-symbols units of language relate to each other in ways that are not causal, but directed towards limiting the arbitrary. Saussure worked with Flournoy’s idea of cryptomnesia in as far as it served as a cogent explanation of how she had obtained her knowledge, but there was never any major theorization of unconscious operations in his work. That which was unconscious to the language user was social. This is why the operation that Henry (1901) saw in Müller’s Sanskritoid does not fit within Saussure’s semiology.

**Synthesis**

The Flournoy Affair shows Saussure thinking through and applying general linguistic ideas during a period in his career which has not traditionally been associated with his general linguistic theory. The various parts of my discussion respond to the thesis statement by showing that Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia contain theorisation of psychological elements of language, and that Saussure’s concept of human psychology developed during the Flournoy Affair. The documents presented in chapter one contain a series of discussions which, as they progress, incorporate a psychological conception of language. I have sought to identify both how Saussure thought mental operations should be approached in analysis of glossolalia, and how he thought about those mental operations themselves. It is evident that the methodological decisions Saussure made, although sometimes they varied in direction, followed clear and reasoned thought which was aimed at seeking similarities between Müller’s Sanskritoid and the sources claimed for that idiolect – whether by Müller or Flournoy. That seeking of similarities evolved into a discussion of mental operations that combined certain sounds together. When theorising a mental process behind Müller’s glossolalia, Saussure was careful not to introduce any elements of language from outside what he knew of her personal experience of language. At the same time, for the process that Saussure conceived of to operate, Müller had to draw on deep memories of words and details that were either reluctantly or accidentally acquired. Thus it seems very likely that Flournoy’s concept
of *cryptomnesia* played an important role in how Saussure conceived of the mental operations that produced her Sanskritoid speech.

Saussure’s distinction between synchrony and diachrony is evident in his approach to Müller’s Sanskritoid, though in a relatively unstructured form. At first he approached the glossolalia as an object in itself, perhaps as he would have approached the analysis of a newly discovered Sanskrit text by an ancient author. Yet he quickly turned to considering Müller herself as part of the object of his analyses. Saussure took the position of considering Müller’s utterances as the result of some minimal process in her mind, which assembled utterances out of memories of various language units. In S1 Saussure’s comparative statements are followed by a suggestion that he believed Müller possessed some knowledge of Sanskrit (such as the word *simantini*), and that by some process in her mind sounds were being altered (as in the name Simandini). This is a relatively small psychological manoeuvre, possibly attributable to forgetting, or as I have suggested myself it may be the expression of a natural consonant cluster (*nd*) common in glossolalia. Saussure did not know why *simantini* was pronounced ‘Simandini’. Nonetheless this moment marks the beginning of his thought into the psychological operations behind Müller’s glossolalia.

It is important to recall that, as Saussure saw it, the cognition behind the glossolalia was not complicated. In his view, the complexity of Müller’s glossolalia lies with the language systems employed. That is why S2 shows a much more synchronic consideration of Müller’s Sanskritoid. In order to consider the language state of the Sanskritoid, Saussure showed, insofar as the available data allowed him, that Müller’s utterances were assembled according to the grammatical logic of the language systems to which the sounds she employed belonged. Thus in Saussure’s view, sounds are organised according their relations in *langue* and this can potentially occur even when the speaker seems to be speaking randomly.

Flournoy’s theory of cryptomnesia played a significant role in how Saussure thought about the assemblage of Müller’s Sanskritoid. This can be seen in the fact that, as Saussure conceives of them, the coincidences between apparently random speech and *langue* must rely on at least some knowledge. Clearly Müller did not know Sanskrit
well enough to speak with even the most basic level of fluency, but she seemed to have unconsciously absorbed a few scraps. Furthermore, she seemed to know how to use some of them. But, provided we assume that she is honest, she did not know that she knew these words. Saussure found Flournoy’s theory of cryptomnesia unproblematic to the extent that he assumed that this was how Müller was able to speak some Sanskrit words while claiming to be completely ignorant of Sanskrit. Cryptomnesia was therefore part of the development of the language mechanism.

Saussure did not take the view that Müller created any element of her glossolalia herself. As we have seen, Saussure took a very minimalist view of Müller’s personal role in the assemblage of her glossolalia. Saussure was careful not to introduce any unnecessary speculation into his writings. But there is also little or no room for creativity in the process he devised. He saw any knowledge of language evident in Müller’s Sanskritoid as acquired knowledge, and any connections between sounds as connections that were already established in language systems. For Saussure, nothing of linguistic value in the glossolalia belonged to Müller, and nothing was of her own creation. She was like a machine assembling some object from scraps of memory, and forming them with her mouth. This view, that language is a mechanical process and individuals acting alone are incapable of creating anything new in *langue*.

Saussure came to consider — reluctantly, I think — that Müller produced her own Sanskritoid sounds according to a rule of analogy to other sounds. The vowel /a/ has prominence in Sanskrit, and Müller used it a lot. This correlation between Müller’s Sanskritoid and genuine Sanskrit led Saussure to think that Müller had struck upon a way of assembling her own Sanskritoid words. She may have distilled the information that Sanskrit contains a lot of /a/ by observing that the few words of Sanskrit to which she had been exposed contained many /a/’s. But this is a concession to Saussure’s minimalist view of mental operations. As I have shown, /a/ is a very easy sound to pronounce, and it is noted as a predominant feature of glossolalia in many studies (e.g. Goodman 1966; Jakobson 1966; Jakobson & Waugh 1985; Lacy et al. 2009). Therefore the predominance of /a/ in glossolalic speech may merely be a result of the principle of least effort. This explanation does away with an unnecessary burdensome cognition in
the mental process Saussure devised. Had Saussure had the benefit of more diverse data, he may well have favoured such a minimalist explanation of Müller’s *a*.

While Saussure saw the mental operation behind Müller’s glossolalia as minimal, there had to be a reason why she spoke in her babble instead of her native French. The rule that Saussure believed Müller imposed upon herself – not to allow her audience to suspect that she was speaking French – perhaps required greater cognition than the mechanical assemblage of scraps of language. To comply with that rule Müller also had to actively discard French sounding units offered by her memory. Thus Müller provided Saussure with the opportunity to observe a speaker who produced speech from extremely inhibited language resources. The only sounds that she allowed to pass from memory into speech were those that she knew but did not belong to her native tongue, which were very few. Where sounds entailed grammar, that grammar influenced the ordering of the sounds. In some cases the grammar of sounds from different systems would come into conflict, but ultimately they were restricted to appearing in a linear utterance. Therefore we can see that Saussure’s two axes of the language mechanism, the associative axis and the syntagmatic axis, both find expression in his analyses of glossolalia.

**Implications**

The Flournoy Affair should be given a higher profile in Saussure studies, the history of ideas, and in semiotics. Saussure was always careful not to speculate unnecessarily on psychological matters, but this has led to some unnecessary speculation regarding his theoretical allies in psychology. Saussure’s clear and obvious connection with Flournoy, whose ideas have occasionally been given the credit they deserve (e.g. Ellenberger 1970: 423), should be considered a point for serious discussion. I have argued that Saussure used Flournoy’s idea of cryptomnesia to speculate on the process by which Müller assembled her glossolalic utterances, and that process was an important step in the development of his concept of the language mechanism. Beyond Müller’s desire to say something, Saussure gives little room for a mental role in her production of
glossolalia. There is no substantive unconscious influencing the way her speech is put together. This is the site of Todorov’s criticism. Saussure did not recognise the operation of unconscious symbols in the production of Müller’s glossolalia. But while that might be meaningful in some circles it is irrelevant to Saussure’s thought. As Daylight points out, “the imperative of the Saussurean investigator is to affirm the point of view of the language user as the only reality which has any linguistic legitimacy” (2011: 123). Concepts such as repression and symbolic representations of desires are of no concern to his analysis. If we take Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia seriously, comparisons with Freudian thought become all the more awkward.

One implication of my findings is that the Flourney Affair (1896-1899) is that Saussure developed important general linguistic ideas during his Geneva years. As I have mentioned, some influential commentators (Aarsleff 1982; Koerner 1973; 1988a; 1988b; 2008) agree that Saussure had developed his general linguistic theory by the early 1890s. As we saw above, even Saussure made a comment to that effect himself (SM: 29). Since Joseph (2007a) has found some of Saussure’s comments regarding other autobiographical matters to be less than accurate, we might not be surprised. The developments I see as happening during the Flourney Affair in the years 1896-1899 might well be connected with Engler’s (1975) dating of notes that take on a new level of sophistication regarding the linguistic sign to 1897. If the data presented here is persuasive, Saussure’s collaboration with Flourney must be addressed as point of importance in discussions of the development of his ideas.

A second implication that arises here is the need for the status of the symbol in semiotics to be clarified. Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia reconfirm his position on symbols. In those analyses, just as in the Cours, Saussure saw symbols at the periphery of linguistic concerns. Many semioticians (e.g. Thibault 1997; Bouissac 2004; Chandler 2007 [2002]; Galantucci et al. 2012) have repeated Saussure’s statement that semiology is “a science which studies the role of signs as part of social life” (CGL: 15), yet such studies frequently incorporate symbolic modes of communication to a greater extent than Saussurean signs. While this may not present an immediate concern for the results of many studies in semiotics, we have seen an example in Todorov (1982) where the
confusion of Saussure’s sign with an incompatible conception of symbols has led to an 
unfortunately influential misinterpretation. In another view, as we have seen in chapter 
five, not all symbolism is inconsistent with Saussure’s general linguistic theory. How 
should semioticians who ground their work in Saussurean thought respond to Saussure’s 
limited acceptance of the symbol? Daylight (2012) notes, “contemporary theorists such 
as John Deely, Jesper Hoffmeyer and Winfried Nöth have largely abandoned Saussure” 
(37). But, as Bouissac (2004) has pointed out, this move has sometimes been used 
“opportunistically to downgrade the Saussurean semiotic stream to the status of a so-
called ‘minor tradition’” (241). Semiotics does not profit from opportunism, nor does it 
profit, as I have shown in this study, from forcing on Saussure ideas that do not belong 
to his thought.

Questions and Areas for Further research

What if the glossolalia data set was larger?

Saussure did not comment on every Sanskritoid word that was transcribed, and he did 
not directly comment on the more numerous and longer Martian transcriptions. 
However, if he had had a much larger and more faithfully transcribed data set to work 
with, such as a phonetically transcribed corpus of glossolalia, he would no doubt have 
been more confident in his conclusions. Of course the technology required to create 
such a corpus did not exist in Saussure’s era, and is only very new to us today. Because 
the technology is now available it is worth considering whether more data would have 
altered Saussure’s conclusions in any way. I know only of Lacy’s (ongoing) glossolalia 
project in this area. In addition to the absence of /l/ and voiced /th/, (mentioned in 
chapter five) this group has reported that the glossolalia of a native English speaker with 
some knowledge of Spanish displayed:

- [M]ultiple segments of 10 phones were repeated more than chance.
- Compared to English, syllables are simpler and shorter in glossolalia.
- [M]any possible English consonant clusters are not found in [the 
  subject’s] glossolalia.
- Certain [consonant] clusters that are not found in [English] are produced in [the subject’s] glossolalia.
- [C]ertain sounds that do not exist in English, like retroflex “D” and “breathy” “H” were identified in [the subject’s] glossolalia. (Drawn from Lacy et al. 2009)

In chapter five I found that many instances of glossolalia present similar phonetic features to those that Saussure observed in Müller’s glossolalia. As it progresses, Lacy’s study may well explain much of glossolalia (including Müller’s glossolalia) on a purely phonetic basis. Whether a purely phonetic basis will offer a theory to rival the syntagmatic relations implied in Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia remains to be seen.

*How do we resolve the disjuncture between Saussure’s sign and the symbolism favoured by semioticians like Todorov?*

Some recent studies have the potential to resolve some of the ambiguity surrounding the concept of the symbol. I believe there is a way forward here which is signalled by a difference between Lacy’s corpus study of glossolalia and Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia. Lacy et al. explicitly define glossolalia as “spontaneous, sustainable production of speech with no complex meaning” (2009). Müller’s glossolalia was neither spontaneous nor sustainable. The production of speech which was later converted into French with different languages performed by different personalities must have been a task which commanded too greater proportion of Müller’s cognitive capacity to be performed with any real fluency. A corpus study on symbolism in glossolalia might be possible if Lacy were to include in his corpus the glossolalia of a subject who also offered translations. It would be very interesting to see if any sounds correlated symbolically with meanings or grammatical matter, or (as in Saussure’s theory) if the glossolalia was guided by the speakers knowledge of language systems.

Research into the relationship between signs and symbols may also be advanced, by inhibiting individuals’ ability to use language to communicate and observing the result. There is a burgeoning field called experimental semiotics (ES) which uses games that restrict communication in groups of adults to see how they get around various communication barriers. Müller’s ‘experiment’ is a fascinating precursor to these games.
Just as Müller imposed upon herself the rule not to speak French, in ES games, participants are prevented from using regular communicative techniques (e.g. Galantucci et al. 2012). The benefit of such research lies with the potential to inject clarity into the study of symbolism, and to advance semiotics in the direction of science.

I have sought to establish a position from which the value of the Flournoy Affair may be realised. No doubt gaps in knowledge remain. My intervention has focused on the psychological aspects of language that were under Saussure’s consideration, the collaboration between Flournoy and Saussure, and the analyses Saussure produced on Müller’s glossolalia. In my opinion the ideas in S2 offer a fascinating framework for the study of glossolalia and of language which may benefit from more recent developments in the study of glossolalia. In Des Indes Flournoy complained bitterly of the failure of psychologists to transcribe glossolalia when it was encountered:

I have many times regretted that those who have witnessed analogous phenomena—as, for example, Kerner, with the Seeress of Prevost—have not gathered together and published in their entirety all the products of this singular method of performing their functions on the part of the verbal faculties. Undoubtedly each case taken by itself seems a simple anomaly, a pure arbitrary curiosity, and without any bearing; but who knows whether the collection of a large number of these psychological bibelots, as yet few enough in their total, would not end in some unexpected light? Exceptional facts are often the most instructive. (*FIPM*: 197)

Today transcriptions of glossolalia are much more common. I have mentioned several studies that advance our understanding of glossolalia and its relation to language. As far as I am aware there is yet to be a decisive study on glossolalia like Müller’s where the speaker has a meaning in mind as they pronounce their glossolalia utterances. Overall, debate about the role of the Flournoy Affair is largely absent from works in the history of linguistics. I hope the present study provokes some further in-depth responses.

Since Saussure’s time there has been much collaboration between psychologists and linguists in studies of glossolalia, and a historiographical account of these would be of
considerable value. Yaguello (1991[1984]) has made an important advance in this direction, but this text is now thirty years old, and therefore has nothing to say about the advent of computer-based corpora and the associated software used to analyse these corpora. If a wide definition of glossolalia is applied, studies using learner corpora may be considered in such a study. On some level the transcriptions of Müller’s Sanskritoid are like a learner corpora. When Saussure wrote to Flournoy that he gave Müller “one good point” (S6), he recognised in Müller a naïve learner of a foreign language who thinks she can skip her study and just imitate whatever sounds she hears. Though glossolalia is not language, Saussure showed that it holds information about the speaker’s linguistic capacities. Comparisons with other historical accounts of glossolalia may yield new knowledge about the relationship between a speaker’s cultural background and their potential to speak foreign languages.

**Conclusion**

This study has forged a very different path to that taken by the existing major theoretical evaluation of Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia. Todorov and those who followed him have seen Saussure’s collaboration with Flournoy as an event of little importance. The role of Flournoy has been downplayed by those who had already decided that Freudian psychoanalysis is the best compliment to the Saussurean sign. Regardless of whether that is the case or not, the criticism that Saussure did not give sufficient heed to concepts from psychoanalysis is anachronistic. At the time Saussure was writing out his thoughts on Müller’s glossolalia, psychoanalysis, arguably, did not yet exist. Yet it is on the basis of Saussure’s un-psychoanalytic stance that Todorov holds Saussure’s analyses of Müller’s glossolalia to be documents of little importance. My own position is that the contrary is true. I have argued that the Flournoy Affair was an interesting and active moment in the development of Saussure’s general linguistic ideas. Whereas one view has emphasised the importance of a symbol of an absent f which apparently refers to Müller’s exclusion of her mother tongue, français, I have shown that this symbol has very little explanatory power and probably only exists in the minds of Henry, Todorov and those who have repeated that argument. I have shown that Saussure’s position in
relation to symbols is not an oversight. Instead, the sign, as Saussure employed it in his analyses of glossolalia to produce the concept of a speech-producing process, has excellent explanatory power. Fehr (1995) first suggested that Saussure’s concept of a speech producing process is related to the language mechanism. In following up on his suggestion, I have argued that Saussure’s concept of that language mechanism may never have formed as fully as it did, had he not lent his expertise to a case study of somnambulism with glossolalia, led by his friend Theodore Flournoy.

Every field has its founding moments in history; the moment that tips the scales from ‘interesting’ to ‘profound’. These moments inspire people to toil for years with little more than the belief that they will discover something new. Some linguists (including, to some extent, Saussure himself) find such profundity in the moment Paul Broca cut out the brain of his deceased patient, Tan, to discover a lesion on the third left circumvolution of the frontal cortex, and reasoned that this is what limited Tan’s spoken vocabulary to one word, “tan”. This meant that language (or at least the faculty of speech) might be located in that area of the brain. While Broca’s discovery provides an answer to the question of location, it does not answer the question of operation. I think Saussure’s analyses of glossolalia might also be referred to with such deference, because they offer another part of an answer to the question of language operation. They mark the first scientific considerations of the role of the mind in language use, the first applications of modern linguistic method, and the birth of the ‘language mechanism’. In his analyses of glossolalia Saussure followed a new approach and discovered something startling: Even when a speaker’s language resources are extremely limited, the mind strives to process their desire for their speech to be meaningful in terms of language systems.
References


Buchanan 1807, A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar, London.


______________, 2011, What if Derrida was Wrong about Saussure, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.


Dow, 1803, History of Hindustan, Translated from the Persian of Férishta, London.


Fehr, Johannes, 1995, “‘Le mécanisme de la langue’ entre linguistique et psychologie: Saussure et Flournoy’, Langages, no. 120, pp. 91-105.


______________, 1908, ‘Nouvelles observations sur un cas de somnambulisme avec glossolalie’ in Archives de Psychologie, Tome 1, No. 2.


______________, 1900, Des Indes à la planète Mars: étude sur un cas de somnambulisme avec glossolalie, Eggimann: Genève. (=Des Indes).


Godel, Robert, 1957, Les sources manuscrites du Cours de linguistique générale de F. de Saussure, Droz: Genève. (=SM)


Harris, Roy, 2007 [2001], Saussure and his Interpreters, Motilal Banarsidass, Dehli.


__________, 1984 [1967], *Cours de linguistique générale*. Publié par Charles Bally et Albert Schehaye avec la collaboration de Alfred Reilinger, édition critique préparée par Tullio de Mauro, Payot: Paris (=Cours).


__________, 1922, *Recueil des publications scientifiques de Ferdinand de Saussure*, Winter: Hiedelberg (=Recueil)


Wundt, Wilhelm, 1912 [1911], *An Introduction to Psychology*, trans. Rudolf Pinter, Macmillan, New York.