

On the early stages of the reception of the Saussurean concept of *semiology* in Russia

Ekaterina VELMEZOVA
University of Lausanne

Abstract:

The concept of *semiology* introduced in the *Course in General Linguistics* attracted attention in Russia very early on. This concept was perceived by the Russian linguists as a continuation of a long tradition of research and not as an innovation. The more politically and ideologically charged the texts were, the more critically the *Course in General Linguistics*, and to a larger extent Saussure and *semiology*, were perceived in Russia in the 1920s-1930s.

Key words: *Course in General Linguistics*, semiology, history of Russian linguistics, linguistics and ideology, M. Peterson, M. Kenigsberg, R. Šor, D. Vvedenskij, G. Danilov

Even if for contemporary semioticians Ferdinand de Saussure is undoubtedly an important author – in particular, because of his idea of *semiology*¹ (although the “science of signs” was understood in the *Course in General Linguistics*² in a narrower sense in comparison with today’s frequent understanding), this idea was not immediately recognized as it certainly deserved. In this article we shall analyze how the concept of *semiology*, presented in the *Course in General Linguistics*, was perceived in Russia in the 1920s-1930s. Since much has already been written about the reception of Saussurean ideas in Russia at this time, we shall limit our analysis to five sources, which could “claim” to be the “first” ones, in one sense or another. They are:

- 1) the first two reviews, which appeared in Russia during the same year (1923), of the *Course in General Linguistics* published in French in 1916. They were written by Mixail Peterson³ and Maxim Kenigsberg⁴;
- 2) three texts which accompanied the first published translation of the *Course* into Russian (in 1933)⁵: comments accompanying this book which were written by Rozalija Šor⁶, the introductory article to the Russian edition of the *Course* composed by Dmitrij Vvedenskij⁷ and the first

¹ Throughout the paper, *semiology* (italicised) refers to the corresponding concept.

² The fact that this book was composed and published by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye three years after Saussure’s death is well known. Nevertheless, for the Russian scholars of the 1920s-1930s, the *Course* was immediately associated with F. de Saussure (and vice versa). About the concept of *semiology* in the Saussurean texts as such see, for example, Chidichimo 2014 and Wunderli 2017.

³ Peterson 1923. Mixail Nikolaevič Peterson (1885-1962) was one of the most famous representatives of the F.F. Fortunatov’s School in Russia. He was a specialist in Indo-European linguistics and in a number of Indo-European languages (Lithuanian, French, Russian, etc.). About him, see, for example, Kočergina 1999. In 1923, Peterson published a review, entitled “General Linguistics”, of several books at once: along with the review of the *Course of General Linguistics*, in the same article Peterson reviewed the books written by Ernst Otto Zur *Grundlegung der Sprachwissenschaft* (1919) and by Aleksandr Potebnja *Thought and Language* [*Mysl’ i jazyk*] (1922), explaining it by saying that “all these three books are about the most general questions of linguistics” (Peterson 1923, p. 26).

⁴ Kenigsberg, in “Pervaja russkaja recenzija” [s.d.]. Maksim Maksimovič Kenigsberg (1900-1924) was a philologist, specializing in the studies of poetry, and a member of the Moscow Linguistic Circle. About him see, for example, Šapir 1994. Kenigsberg’s review was found relatively recently and preserved only partially. According to M.I. Šapir, Kenigsberg’s review “remained unpublished. Its initial pages (in a typewritten copy with traces of editorial editing by B.V. Gornung) were preserved among the papers of another member of the Moscow Linguistic Circle, N.I. Žinkin [...], but the final part of the review seems to have been lost forever” (Šapir, in *ibid.*).

⁵ Sossjur 1916 [1933]. It will be a question of precisely the first *published* translation of the *Course* into Russian: the first most famous attempt to translate the *Course in General Linguistics* into Russian was undertaken by A.I. Romm, but this version has not been published (see Toddes, Čudakova 1981).

⁶ Šor 1933. Rozalija Osipovna Šor (1893-1939) was a linguist and historian of linguistics and literature. About her see, in particular, Velmezova 2016 and Velmezova, Moret (éds.) 2016.

⁷ Vvedenskij 1933. Among other things, Dmitrij Nikolaevič Vvedenskij (1890-1968) was a specialist in the methodology of teaching Russian and a historian of literature.

review of the Russian-language edition of the *Course*, published in 1934 by Georgij Danilov⁸.

1. SEMIOLOGY ATTRACTING ATTENTION

The concept of *semiology* as it was presented in the *Course in General Linguistics* immediately attracted attention in Russia. Both authors of the first two Russian reviews of the 1916 edition of the *Course* wrote about Saussurean *semiology*. Here is what Peterson writes: “Linguistics, according to de Saussure, is a part of a more general science, which he calls semiology (sémiologie, from the Greek *semeion* ‘sign’) and its task is the study of the life of signs in social life. Semiology must constitute a part of social psychology; it must study rituals, customs, etc., as signs, and then these facts will appear in a different light. Linguistic problems are also primarily semiological ones”⁹. Kenigsberg’s review also drew attention to the concept of *semiology*, commenting on it in even more detail:

“Considering as the most fundamental question in linguistics the one about linguistic signs [...], de Saussure puts forward, as such a basis [of linguistics], a general doctrine of signs – semiology. The absence of references in the book deprives us of the possibility to find out whether the author had in mind here any idea of semiology or semiotics proposed before¹⁰; the idea of such a science as the basis of linguistics was constantly advanced in the 18th century (by Lambert, Vater, Meiner, Hofbauer and many others). De Saussure considers this science as a discipline studying the life of signs in the sphere of social life. In this sense, he considers it as a part of social and, therefore, general psychology. The naive psychologism of the author easily reveals itself in its incapacity to solve the problem raised. Of course, social psychology itself needs a general theory of signs for its justification, because [...] its material is signs to be deciphered [...]. But nevertheless, the idea of the semiotic nature of linguistics is extremely important and fruitful [...]. It should only be subject to further development and deepening: de Saussure, as in many other cases, correctly feels the question, but gives a negative answer to it, in such a way inspiring continuation [of the research] [...], leaving to himself only the obvious merit of asking a question obscured by the traditional science”¹¹.

The word *negative* in this quote obviously requires a comment: “de Saussure, as in many other cases, correctly feels the question, but gives a negative answer to it”. This fragment can be understood in several different ways: a) Saussure correctly feels the question, but believes that the answer to this question should be negative, that is, Saussure believes that the nature of linguistics is not semiotic – however, such an interpretation would

⁸ Danilov 1934. Georgij Konstantinovič Danilov (1896-1937) was an Africanist, engaged in the elaboration of “Marxist linguistics”. About him, see, for example, Ašnin, Alpatov 1994.

⁹ Peterson 1923, p. 26.

¹⁰ These words show that the word *semiotics* was already known in Russia in 1923. – E.V.

¹¹ Kenigsberg, in “Pervaja russkaja recenzija” [s.d.].

contradict one of the most obvious theses of the *Course in General Linguistics*, commented upon, in particular, by Kenigsberg in his review; b) Saussure correctly feels the question, but answers it incorrectly (from the point of view of the reviewer) – that is, Saussure himself believes that linguistics is semiotic by nature, but Kenigsberg does not agree with this statement – but once again this interpretation should be recognized as an incorrect one: in his review Kenigsberg insists that “the idea of the semiotic nature of linguistics is extremely important and fruitful”¹²; c) finally, it is possible that Kenigsberg is opposed here to the idea of (too directly?) linking semiology with psychology: he emphasizes the “naïve psychologism” of Saussure.

2. APPROACHING SEMIOLOGY FROM A HISTORICAL POINT OF VIEW

Ten years later, in 1933, Rozalija Šor in her comments on the Russian translation of the *Course in General Linguistics* writes about the following fragment from the *Course*, in which Saussure introduces the concept of *semiology* (the third chapter of the Introduction):

“Language is a system of signs that express ideas, and is therefore comparable to a system of writing, the alphabet of deaf-mutes, symbolic rites, polite formulas, military signals, etc. But it is the most important of all these systems.

A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable; it would be a part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology; I shall call it semiology [...] (from Greek *sēmeion* ‘sign’)”¹³.

Šor comments on this fragment, approaching *semiology* from a historical point of view *par excellence*. It is the history of ideas which dominates in her comments:

“‘Language is a system of signs...’ Materials on the history of sign and symbolic concept of language [*znakovaja i simvoličeskaja koncepcija jazyka*] are given by *Ogden* and *Richards* in [...] ‘The meaning of meaning’, 1923 and *Cassirer*, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, I. ‘Die Sprache’, 1923. [...] ‘... is therefore comparable to a system of writing, the alphabet of deaf-mutes, symbolic rites, polite formulas, military signals, etc.’. Comparison of language with writing as a system of signs [...] is already used by the medieval philosopher Occam (14th century). Comparison of spoken speech with gesture language, in particular – with the gesture language of deaf-mutes, is developed particularly in detail by Wundt [(‘Die Sprache’, Bd. I). Comparison of language with rituals is carried out in the theories of the majority of ethno-psychologists, despite significant differences in their understanding of what language is. Cf. *Steinthal* und *Lazarus*, Program article in the first volume of

¹² See also our comments on the French translation of this review: “Le premier compte rendu russe” 2016, p. 317.

¹³ Saussure 1916 [1959, p. 16].

‘Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie’ [...]; *Wundt*, Preface to the series *Die Völkerpsychologie*; *Malinowski*, The problem of meaning in primitive languages, in the volume ‘The meaning of meaning’; *Levi-Brühl*, La mentalité primitive [...]. Comparison of language with signal systems is developed in *Bühler*, (Vom Wesen der Syntax, in the volume ‘Idealische Neuphilologie’). Therefore de Saussure’s list encompasses a number of attempts in linguistics to establish an analogy between language and various systems of signs”¹⁴.

Therefore Šor emphasizes that Saussurean *semiology* is not an innovation as such, but by speaking about *semiology*, Saussure belongs to a long tradition of research. The same historically oriented tendency was also evident in a part of Kenigsberg’s review. Kenigsberg attributed particular importance to the fact that the idea of semiotics (semiology) goes back to the 18th century. According to Kenigsberg, on many important issues Saussure disagrees with the main currents of linguistics of his epoch, while at the same time “putting forward a number of theses, which are not so much new ones in general, but rather partly forgotten, partly expelled from linguistics, partly unknown to empirical knowledge, but widely spread in the philosophy of language”¹⁵. However, Šor is much more detailed in her comments of the historical order. She does not mention her beloved 18th century linguists, whom she held in particularly high regard¹⁶. With much more attention she comments on later works. She dates the possible sources of semiology as a science back to the 14th century, mentioning William of Ockham (Occam). In addition to the fact that Šor was one of the first professional historians of linguistics in the USSR, her comments on Saussurean *semiology* precisely through the prism of the history of ideas can also be explained by the goal she set for herself in writing comments for the Russian edition of the *Course in General Linguistics*:

“The task of [composing] comments to the text of de Saussure does not include a critical evaluation of his theses, which constitutes the main subject of the introductory article preceding the translation¹⁷. The task is much more modest – to reveal hints and polemical attacks which the text contains, to deploy in some places bibliographic instructions, to explain the etymologies and grammatical facts illustrating the text”¹⁸.

Commenting upon Saussurean *semiology*, Šor, fascinated by the history of ideas, obviously reveals “(historical) hints” even where the author(s) of the *Course in General Linguistics* has (have) not seemed to put them. As Šor writes on this aspect, “[in] some cases, we considered it useful to point out the existence of other directions in solving one or another linguistic problem, so that the reader could estimate the degree of originality of de

¹⁴ Šor 1933, p. 215.

¹⁵ Kenigsberg, in “Pervaja russkaja recenzija” [s.d.].

¹⁶ See, for example, Šor 1927.

¹⁷ Vvedenskij 1933. – E.V.

¹⁸ Šor 1933, p. 208.

Saussure's constructions"¹⁹. In case of *semiology*, "the degree of originality of de Saussure's constructions" obviously was not considered as very high.

3. (COMMUNIST) IDEOLOGY... DESTROYING *SEMIOLOGY*

If we add to the texts discussed above two other publications related to the *Course in General Linguistics* and having the status of being "first" in Russia – namely, Vvedenskij's preface to the Russian translation of the *Course* and Danilov's review of this book, – it would be interesting to compare the theses of those who wrote about Saussurean *semiology*, with the points of view of those for whom *semiology* was not particularly interesting or was even perceived negatively. In particular, the following regularity strikes the eye: the more ideologically neutral²⁰ the corresponding text was, the more attention it paid to *semiology*, and the more interesting this concept seemed to the author of the text – like Saussurean linguistic theories in general. And vice versa: the evident political and ideological orientation of the corresponding texts either went hand in hand with the absence of any interest of their authors in the Saussurean *semiology* or even triggered a very critical attitude toward this Saussurean concept. In a way, as the following subsections will show, (communist) ideology... destroyed *semiology*.

3.1. *SEMIOLOGY* WITHOUT IDEOLOGY

For instance, both Peterson and Kenigsberg²¹, with their sincere interest in *semiology*, wrote neutral (from the ideological point of view) texts. *Semiology* was perceived positively in these texts, like the Saussurean doctrine as such – despite several points which seemed disputable to the reviewers²². For example, Peterson emphasized that "the value and significance" of the second book he reviewed, Otto's *Zur Grundlegung der Sprachwissenschaft*, "cannot be compared with the great virtues of de Saussure's book"²³;

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ By ideology we mean in this article the communist ideology of the Soviet state.

²¹ In the article published in 1923, Peterson reviewed the three books (by Saussure, Otto and Potebnja) exclusively from a linguistic point of view. As to Kenigsberg's review, even if this text has not been completely preserved, the part of it that has reached us is ideologically neutral.

²² Once again we can refer, for instance, to Kenigsberg's already cited opinion about Saussure's "naive psychologism" in connection with what he wrote about *semiology*; Peterson did not consider the "distribution of material between [...] two linguistics" – "static (synchronic) and evolutionary (diachronic) ones" – to be "convincing enough" (Peterson 1923, p. 28), etc.

²³ The third book that Peterson reviewed in this article – *Thought and Language* by Potebnja – was simply considered by him as obsolete: "The book by Potebnja cannot be recommended to a broad readership: it is not at the height of modern science; for experts it is valuable as a historical document, the study of which can provoke many useful thoughts" (Peterson 1923, p. 32).

Kenigsberg stressed that the *Course* “deserved the warmest greetings, as the voice coming from the ranks of linguistics itself, requiring a report on the subject, principles and methods of its science”²⁴.

3.2. IDEOLOGY (ALMOST) WITHOUT SEMIOLOGY

On the contrary, the texts by Vvedenskij and Danilov are filled with ideology – especially the latter. In these texts, the *Course in General Linguistics* is already much less appreciated – once again, especially in Danilov’s review. In particular, Vvedenskij considers Saussure a representative of a “new stage of bourgeois linguistic thought”²⁵:

“In the West, the main reason for the success of de Saussure is the brilliant fulfillment of the bourgeois ‘social order’ by this scholar. Considering language as a ‘social product’, as ‘a sum of necessary agreements accepted in the society’, Saussurianism satisfies the needs of the European society, for which the social problems (under the influence of more and more developing revolutionary Marxism) are becoming especially relevant. They must be resolved ‘quite safely’, in a convincingly scientific way, in the class interests of the bourgeoisie. And Saussurianism fulfills this social order with honor. [Its] genuine social essence is removed by Saussure from the language; language is presented by him as a system of universally recognized signs and forms that socially dominate all individuals, a system which is static (synchronic), and not dynamic (diachronic) – it is a ‘quite safe’ solution to the social problems, setting before the linguists a calm task to study logical and psychological relations, connecting the existing speech phenomena in a system, such as they are perceived by the collective consciousness”²⁶, etc.

In Danilov’s review published one year later, in 1934, Saussure’s reputation as a “bourgeois scientist” is not only pronounced even more clearly, it obviously dominates the analysis of the *Course in General Linguistics* from a “neutral” linguistic point of view. Here is how Danilov comments on the *Course in General Linguistics*: “Despite a number of positive moments in the reviewed book (they mainly deal with specific facts), the Saussurean ‘Course’ is generally filled with vice. [...] A typical ideologist of the bourgeoisie of the era of its decline, this French²⁷ linguist rejects any possibility of conscious interference in the life of language, thus denying the possibility of linguistic policy. [...] Of course, the denial of language policy by Saussure constitutes a peculiar form of this same policy”²⁸, etc. In

²⁴ Kenigsberg, in “Pervaja russkaja recenzija” [s.d.].

²⁵ Vvedenskij 1933, p. 13.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

²⁷ *Sic – E.V.*

²⁸ Danilov 1934. Indeed, at that time Saussure was very often criticized in the Soviet Union for his presumed denial of the possibility to influence languages. In post-revolutionary Russia this position was hardly acceptable: all disciplines, including linguistics, had to become useful.

his review, Danilov criticizes even Vvedenskij who, in his opinion, when presenting the *Course in General Linguistics* to Russian readers, had not criticized Saussure enough for his “bourgeoisness”: “The introductory article by Vvedenskij is good, in general. However, it contains a vexing ideological shortcoming. Saussure’s detrimental class-based influence on some Soviet linguists is completely blurred. For example, the author writes the following: ‘The appearance of such a linguistic work could be understood as a way out of the impasse and moving forward’ [...]. Nothing to say, what a good way out of the impasse!”²⁹.

In connection with the very harsh criticism of Saussurean linguistics by Danilov, the following fact seems to be worth pointing out: if in Vvedenskij’s introductory article *semiology* is not spoken about at all, Danilov’s review considers *semiology* in a very negative way. At first glance, it may seem that the concept of *semiology* should attract Danilov’s attention because he considers among the strong points of the *Course in General Linguistics* Saussure’s attempt to put forward a new classification of linguistic disciplines:

“The attempt by Saussure to take a new approach to the classification of linguistic disciplines is worthy of attention. He includes lexicology in grammar, denies the fundamental difference between morphology and syntax and does not single out semasiology as a particular discipline. Of course, the question of lexicology cannot be solved in the way that, as Saussure thinks, one and the same grammatical phenomenon, for example, the verbal aspect in Russian, is expressed both lexically and morphologically. The essence of the question consists in the fact that, putting lexicology in grammar, we emphasize the unity of the internal structure of semantics contained in the word with the external structure of speech, the form of the word and the sentence. Saussure is also quite right to speak about the necessity of constructing a particular linguistic discipline studying the meanings of words and other elements. In fact, is it possible to imagine the study of any aspect of language outside [*vne*] its meaning [*značeniia*]?”³⁰.

However, the distinction of semiology as a particular discipline was obviously not considered by Danilov as a particular merit of the *Course in General Linguistics*, on the contrary. In particular, enumerating the “weak points” of Šor’s comments on the Russian edition of the *Course*, Danilov emphasizes that “unfortunately”, the commentator “does not find [...] words in order to resolutely do away with the sign theory”³¹.

Therefore, if Peterson and Kenigsberg positively appraised the introduction of the concept of *semiology* by Saussure (at the same time avoi-

²⁹ Danilov 1934.

³⁰ *Ibid.* Danilov’s appraisal of Saussure’s desire to “construct” a “particular linguistic discipline studying the meanings of words and other elements” could obviously be connected with the “New Theory of Language” which dominated in the USSR in the early 1930s: one of its central parts was semantics.

³¹ Danilov 1934.

ding any ideological statements concerning the *Course in General Linguistics*), Vvedenskij and Danilov, on the contrary, introduced the ideological component into their reviews of the *Course*; they either did not mention semiology at all (Vvedenskij) or criticized it (Danilov). Rozalija Šor's position was more complicated.

3.3. BETWEEN SEMIOLOGY AND IDEOLOGY

Even if the word *semiology* is not often present in her comments, Šor speaks about the science of signs, as we have seen before. Being a professional linguist, when commenting on the Russian translation of the *Course in General Linguistics*, Šor could not descend to the level of purely ideological statements, especially since it was thanks to her that the translation of the *Course in General Linguistics* into Russian was published in 1933.

It was Šor who founded in Russia the book series "Linguists of the West" [*Jazykovedy Zapada*], in which five books were published between 1933 and 1938; the *Course in General Linguistics* in Russian was the first book published in this series (after Šor's death in 1939, the series ceased to exist). However, the "ideological criticism" of Saussure penetrated Šor's comments too: although to an incomparably lesser extent than in the texts of Vvedenskij and Danilov, the "politico-ideological spirit of the epoch" is also reflected in Šor's comments on the *Course in General Linguistics*.

In particular, already the Saussurean linguistic conception as such is negatively considered by Šor as "formalistic": "De Saussure bases all fields of linguistics – phonetics, grammar, semantics – on his principal formalist position about language as a system of signs which are differentiated not by their content, but by their position relative to other elements of the same system"³²; Šor also mentions a "formalistic separation of the problem of language from the problem of thought" in the Saussurean *Course*³³, a "formalistic separation of language from its social base"³⁴ etc.³⁵

In some fragments of Šor's comments, the topics of politics and of the class struggle appear overtly: for instance, some theses of the *Course* are declared as "distorting the real state of things in favor of certain political attitudes"³⁶; later Šor argues that "de Saussure obviously deliberately ignores the huge material of lexical substitutions, puristic and anti-puristic, archaic and innovative, chauvinistic and international tendencies in the history of vocabulary that fairly clearly reflect the underlying struggle of classes and groups at various stages of their evolution"³⁷. In her

³² Šor 1933, p. 225.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 236, 250 etc.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

opinion, Saussure's "proofs" of the statement that "diachronic events are always accidental and particular"³⁸ are "possible only presupposing a complete separation of the history of language from the history of material culture and socio-political relations"³⁹.

In her comments Šor also mentions Saussure's connection with the "bourgeoisie". While commenting on Saussure's statement that "[p]recisely how a language differs from a dialect is hard to specify"⁴⁰, Šor writes the following: "The problem of distinguishing language and dialect, wholly related to the problem of nation, cannot be satisfactorily resolved on the basis of an idealistic understanding of the historical process. Hence the usual tendency of bourgeois linguistics to establish an exclusively quantitative criterion for distinguishing between language and dialect (the so-called criterion of mutual understanding), leading to the most serious distortions in the national question [...]"⁴¹. Also the Saussurean "bourgeois" notion of *value* was criticized by Šor: "The definition of value borrowed from bourgeois economists, which is the very foundation of his sign language theory, leads de Saussure to an absurd denial of the reality of language [...]. It would be instructive to compare his definition of value with the definition of value given by Marx, which reveals the basis of the Saussurean definition, which is filled with vice ('Capital', vol. I)"⁴². Šor also opposed *semiology* ... to "Marxist scientific thought" in general. In particular, commenting on Saussure's statement about the "characteristic role of language with respect to thought"⁴³, Šor writes the following: "The numerous facts referred to by de Saussure did not necessarily have to lead to the creation of a sign theory of language. Marxist scientific thought had already found an essentially different valid formula for the corresponding relations: 'Language is a practical consciousness that exists also for other men, and for that reason alone it really exists for me personally as well' (K. Marx and F. Engels, German Ideology, Collected Works, vol. IV, pp. 20-21)"⁴⁴. According to Šor, it is precisely the "theory of signs [*teorija znakovosti*], applied to language, that leads [...] de Saussure to the negation of the concrete character [*konkretnost*'] of language"⁴⁵. Therefore, the concept of *semiology*, according to Šor, contradicts "materialistic" science, and that is why it should be perceived negatively⁴⁶.

³⁸ Saussure 1916 [1959, p. 93].

³⁹ Šor 1933, p. 234.

⁴⁰ Saussure 1916 [1959, p. 203].

⁴¹ Šor 1933, p. 254.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 236.

⁴³ Saussure 1916 [1959, p. 112].

⁴⁴ Šor 1933, p. 236.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

⁴⁶ In this connection, it is worth noting that Šor criticizes the Saussurean conception of the sign for its "immaterial character": in her opinion, Saussure "polemicizes" "against any attempt to reconcile the study of language with the study of material culture [...], so that in his analysis of the structure of the sign there is lost the important point that is the correlation of the word with the corresponding object" (*ibid.*, p. 228). According to Šor, the thesis that "[t]he

It is difficult to find a clear pattern to link the ideologically colored perception of the Saussurean *Course in General Linguistics* with the negative vision of his concept of *semiology*, exclusively by pointing out the personal positions of the authors of the corresponding texts: after all, the analyzed texts were written at different epochs, the time interval between the first reviews of the French-language edition of the *Course*, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the texts relating to the first edition of the *Course* in Russian, is ten years. This is a fairly long interval, taking into account the significant changes in the socio-political life of the USSR that took place between 1923 and 1933. During this time, the perception of both Saussure and his *Course in General Linguistics* changed (for the worse) even among individual researchers – for example, it was the case for Šor⁴⁷.

CONCLUSION

Our analysis of the perception of the Saussurean concept of *semiology* in the first reviews, written in Russia, of both the French-language and the Russian-language editions of the *Course in General Linguistics*, as well as in the introduction and in the comments accompanying the translation of the *Course* into Russian, allows us to state the following facts. First of all, the Saussurean concept of *semiology* attracted the attention of the authors already in the very first Russian reviews of the *Course in General Linguistics*. On the one hand, the concept of *semiology* was perceived as a continuation, by Saussure, of a long tradition of research and not as an innovation. On the other hand, the more “politico-ideological” the corresponding text was and (hence) the more critically its author perceived both the *Course in General Linguistics*, and Saussure in general, the more negatively the concept of *semiology* was evaluated. The authors of linguistic texts which were manifestly free from communist ideology perceived both Saussure and his *Course in General Linguistics*, together with the Saussurean concept of *semiology*, in a much more positive way⁴⁸. Therefore, the atti-

linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image” (Saussure 1916 [1959, p. 66]), is “a considerably simplified understanding of the structure of the sign” (Šor 1933, p. 229). The ideological “spirit of the epoch” manifests itself in Šor’s comments also in her constant references to the work of N.Ja. Marr, whose doctrine dominated Soviet linguistics at that time (*ibid.*, pp. 217, 222, 233, 234) – she refers to Marr even in the cases where, for example, her own deep knowledge in the field of historical and comparative linguistics, in principle, should not allow her to accept Marrism (*ibid.*, p. 218). She considers Marr as a “brilliant” scholar (*ibid.*, p. 240), while Saussure is opposed to Marr (in this way, being evaluated very negatively) (*ibid.*, pp. 241, 259).

⁴⁷ See, for instance, Ivanova 2016.

⁴⁸ As has already been shown (in particular) for Šor’s comments, the interest in the Saussurean concept of *semiology* went hand in hand with the interest of our researchers in the interpretation of *signs* in the *Course in General Linguistics*. Here we should also point out the fact that it was precisely in Danilov’s text that the Saussurean concept of *semiology* was perceived very negatively and in general he commented upon *signs* in the *Course in General Linguistics* less than the authors of other texts.

tude towards the Saussurean concept of *semiology* became an indirect measure of the ideological freedom of Soviet researchers who wrote about it in the 1920s-1930s⁴⁹.

© Ekaterina Velmezova

⁴⁹ Regarding this, one cannot help but recall the further development of the humanities in the Soviet Union, in particular the history of the Moscow-Tartu Semiotic School, and *semiotics* as a kind of liberation from the dominant communist Soviet ideology among researchers who belonged to this movement.

REFERENCES

- AŠNIN F.D., ALPATOV V.M., 1994: “Georgij Konstantinovič Danilov – odin iz pervyx sovetskix afrikanistov”, in *Vostok*, 1994, № 2, pp. 115-121. [Georgij Konstantinovič Danilov, One of the First Soviet Africanists]
- CHIDICHIMO A., 2014: “L’*évolution du terme ‘sémiologie’ chez Saussure: 1881-1891*”, in Kasevich V., Kleiner Yu., Sériot P. (eds.), *History of Linguistics 2011. Selected Papers from the 12th International Conference on the History of the Language Sciences (ICHoLS XII), Saint-Petersburg, 28 August – 2 September 2011*. Amsterdam – Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 103-113.
- DANILOV G.K., 1934: “Jazykovedy Zapada”, in *Za kommunističeskoe prosvetšenie*, № 222, September 26, 1934, p. 3. [Linguists of the West]
- ERNST O., 1919: *Zur Grundlegung der Sprachwissenschaft*. Bielefeld – Leipzig: Velhagen & Klasing.
- IVANOVA I., 2016: «F. de Saussure lu par les linguistes soviétiques des années 1920-1930», in Velmezova, Moret (éds.), 2016, pp. 243-262.
- KOČERGINA V.A., 1999: *Professor M.N. Peterson*. Moskva: Izdatel'stvo MGU. [Professor M.N. Peterson]
- “LE PREMIER COMPTE RENDU RUSSE”, 2016: “Le premier compte rendu russe du *Cours de linguistique générale* de F. de Saussure [par Maksim Kenigsberg]”, translated into French by E. Velmezova, in Velmezova, Moret (éds.), 2016, pp. 313-318.
- “PERVAJA RUSSKAJA RECENZIIJA”, [s.d.]: “Pervaja russkaja recenzija na ‘Kurs obščej lingvistiki’ F. de Sossjura” (manuscript)⁵⁰. [The First Russian Review of the “Course in General Linguistics” by F. de Saussure]
- PETERSON M.N., 1923: “Obščaja lingvistika”, in *Pečat' i revoljucija*, 1923, № 6, pp. 26-32. [General Linguistics]
- POTEBNJA A.A., 1862 [1922]: *Mysl' i jazyk (Polnoe sobranie sočinenij, t. 1)*. Odessa: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo Ukrainy, 1922. [Thought and Language (Complete Set of Works, vol. 1)]
- SAUSSURE F. de, 1916 [1959]: *Course in General Linguistics*, translated into English by W. Baskin. New York: Philosophical Library, 1959.
- SOSSJUR [SAUSSURE] F. de, 1916 [1933]: *Kurs obščej lingvistiki*, translated into Russian by A.M. Suxotin. Moskva: OGIZ – SOČEK-GIZ, 1933. [Course in General Linguistics]
- ŠAPIR M.I., 1994: “M.M. Kenigsberg i ego fenomenologija stixa”, in *Russian Linguistics*, 1994, vol. 18, № 1, pp. 73-113. [M.M. Kenigsberg and his Phenomenology of Verse]

⁵⁰ In French translation, Kenigsberg's review (together with an accompanying text by M.I. Šapir) was published in 2016 (“Le premier compte rendu russe” 2016).

- ŠOR R.O., 1927: "Krizis sovremennoj lingvistiki", in *Jafetičeskij sbornik*, 1927, № 5, pp. 32-71. [Crisis of Modern Linguistics]
- , 1933: "Primečanija", in Sossjur 1916 [1933], pp. 208-260. [Notes]
- TODDES E.A., ČUDAKOVA M.O., 1981: "Pervyj russkij perevod 'Kursa obščej lingvistiki' F. de Sossjura i dejatel'nost' moskovskogo lingvističeskogo kružka", in Nemirovskij E.L. (ed.), *Fedorovskie čtenija – 1978*. Moskva: Nauka, pp. 229-249. [The First Russian Translation of the "Course in General Linguistics" by F. de Saussure and the Activity of the Moscow Linguistic Circle]
- VELMEZOVA E., 2016: "Touches historico-épistémologiques au portrait intellectuel de Rozalija Šor", in Velmezova, Moret (éds.), 2016, pp. 1-70.
- VELMEZOVA E., MORET S. (éds.), 2016: *Rozalija Šor (1894-1939) et son environnement académique et culturel* [Cahiers de l'ILSL, 2016, № 47].
- VVEDENSKIJ D.N., 1933: "Ferdinand de-Sossjur i ego mesto v lingvistike", in Sossjur 1916 [1933], pp. 5-21. [Ferdinand de-Saussure and his Place in Linguistics]
- WUNDERLI P., 2017: "Ferdinand de Saussure: La sémiologie et les sémiologies", in *Semiotica*, 2017, issue 217, pp. 135-146.