

Remarks on the Sources of R. Jakobson's Linguistic Inspiration

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0. INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS

It is obvious from the contents of volumes III through VII of his *Selected Writings*, published between 1966 and 1985, Roman Jakobson's (1896–1982) *œuvre* comprises many fields other than general linguistics, notably Slavic literature and historical philology, comparative mythology, and poetics. Indeed, at least quantitatively, linguistics appears to have received less attention during much of his long scholarly career if compared to the rest of his scholarly production. As a result, it is to be expected that his intellectual inspiration will have come to a considerable extent from sources other than linguistic ones. Indeed, his exchanges with Krystyna Pomorska (1926–1984), published in English in 1983, illustrate the role which poetry and, to a lesser extent, visual art played in his formative years, though it is Jakobson's search for underlying structures in poetic texts, matters concerning rhythm, stress pattern, metrical form, and the role of sound, which early on captured his attention.

Jindřich Toman's recent publication of selections from Jakobson's correspondence during his inter-war years in Czechoslovakia, 1921–1939, with his Russian and other, mostly Czech, colleagues and friends (Toman 1994, p. 41-203 *passim*), illustrate vividly that Jakobson's real interest during this period was primarily in the area of traditional Slavic philology and literary studies, by no means in general linguistics, as one might have thought given Jakobson's long American career, 1942–1982 (cf. Falk 1995). But even during his four decades in the United States, it is interesting to note that, with rare exceptions (I could think of Michael Silverstein and Linda Waugh only), his students all made their careers in Slavic linguistics and Slavic philology, including literature. As a result, a more complete investigation of even Jakobson's linguistic sources would have to be undertaken by a *slavisant* and someone steeped the vast areas of his phi-

logical interests. My limited knowledge of Russian prevents me from reading what has already been published of Jakobson's correspondence with any rapidity and ease required to do a fair job. I'm thinking for instance of the 500-page volume of Nikolaj Sergevič Trubetzkoy's (1890–1938) letters to Jakobson published by Mouton some twenty years ago (Jakobson et al. 1975), which are almost exclusively in Russian, and thus not easily accessible to me. Furthermore, as a historian of linguistics I would probably have to consult the huge unpublished materials extant in the Jakobson *Nachlass* deposited at M.I.T. in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in order to obtain a much fuller picture. In short, the task to do justice to the subject of this paper is enormous and can be sketched only superficially in what follows.

Given the above limitations, my contribution must remain fairly restricted and based on my general familiarity with late 19th and early 20th century European linguistics. This Colloquium may not be the place to talk about Jakobson, the man, though I suppose it will remain difficult to separate the author from his work entirely. The impression I got from Toman's selection of correspondence was that Roman Jakobson was anything but a lovable character, and Goethe's apparent self-characterization, «Wo viel Licht ist, ist auch viel Schatten» [Where there is much light, there's much shade too], comes to mind. However, since I have nothing to say about Jakobson as a Slavist, I probably have a chance to stay away from having to say much about his complex personality. Yet I cannot help noting that his general tendency of overstating the facts, of exaggeration pure and simple, at least so obvious to me when confining myself to Jakobson as a general linguist and as someone dabbling in the history of linguistics, makes it difficult to separate the chaff from the wheat as more often than not one feels obliged to return *ad fontes* in order to verify whatever claim has been made. Happily, I need not dwell on the subject «Jakobson as an historian of linguistics» since Edward Stankiewicz (b. 1920), one of his favoured Harvard students of the earlier 1950s, has come out to criticize his *cher maître's* work in the field so dear to me (Stankiewicz 1977), a rare event among former Jakobson pupils. What Stankiewicz's paper however does not address is what I'd call, with Bourdieu, Jakobson's «diversion strategy», namely, to point to works of scholars not much read or hardly known as having anticipated ideas we regularly find laid out in the *Cours*. A frequent fixture in his often-retold tale are obvious overinterpretations of the phonetic work of Henry Sweet (1845–1912) and Jost Winteler (1846–1929);¹ it is doubtful that either truly contributed to

¹ In *Dialogues* he added another myth, suggesting that Winteler (who spoke of 'Relativität der Verhältnisse' in his dialectological work) could have suggested the «name of the principle of relativity» to Albert Einstein who, it is true,

phonological theory. Likewise, he credited the Czech philosopher and statesman Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850–1937) with having developed the synchronic/diachronic distinction usually associated with Saussure (*SW* II[1933], p. 542) during the mid-1880s, as if a descriptive in contradistinction to a historical approach could not be found earlier in Hermann Paul's (1846–1921) *Principien* of 1880, where Paul clearly distinguishes between «deskriptive» and «historische» approaches to language (cf. Koerner 1973, p. 108–110). Besides, Masaryk's static/dynamic distinction cannot properly be related to Saussure's dichotomy (cf. *ibid.*, 270–272, for details).

1. SOME METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING «INFLUENCE»

As will be evident to anyone working in the history of linguistics, much appears to hinge on the meaning and importance we attach to the term «influence». If we mean by it that certain ideas were part of the intellectual baggage, as it were, of a particular period, we could easily agree that Humboldt, for example, could not have escaped ideas put forward by Herder, even if we did not have any testimony by Humboldt himself to this effect. Something similar may be said in Saussure's case with regard to Durkheim. Until today, no one has adduced evidence that Saussure derived his understanding of «langue» from Durkheim's concept of «fait social», but it would be difficult to argue that Saussure was completely unfamiliar with ideas about sociology which were traded in newspapers, magazines, and books addressing the educated public of his time. However, such a broad interpretation of «influence» — I have used the term «climate of opinion» in my work to characterize such possible sources of someone's (linguistic) world view — cannot be very satisfactory and probably is not very meaningful either. We would therefore do well to establish a much clearer understanding of the over-used term and develop criteria for its more fruitful application in linguistic historiography. The following points may serve as a contribution to the discussion, as I don't think that the subject is closed.

1.1 FORMATIVE BACKGROUND

A particular author's background, family tradition, schooling, early studies and personal interests and pursuits during his/her formative years may be of significance in establishing connections that may lead to evidence of

was «his student and boarder» in Aarau, Switzerland, in his last years of high school (Jakobson & Pomorska, 1983, p. 47).

(frequently unconscious) borrowing, integration and assimilation of particular ideas, concepts, or theories. Family papers, correspondence, school curricula, and university courses taken by a given author or scientist may all serve as sources for the historian. Paul Diderichsen's (1905–1964) work on his illustrious compatriot Rasmus Kristian Rask (1787–1832) could be taken as something like a model of what I have in mind (Diderichsen 1976). In his research, Diderichsen went very far in this endeavour, even to the extent of studying the work of some of Rask's school teachers and relating it to his subsequent interests and ideas.

In Jakobson's case, an analysis of his background and engagements prior to his departure from Russia alone would be a major undertaking. Indeed, such a task may be so daunting that even fifteen years after his demise one cannot be surprised if no one appears to be working on an intellectual biography of the master. His family background, his schooling at the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages (1906–1914) and the University of Moscow (1914–1920) under such lights as the folklorist, ethnographer, and linguist Vsevolod Fedorovič Miller (1848–1913)² and the comparative philologist and general linguist Aleksej Aleksandrovič Šaxmatov (1864–1920),³ respectively, and his association with the Russian *avant-garde*, poets and painters of the early decades of the century, and probably other early interests and activities would have to be considered as well. Jakobson's long life and academic productivity, which covered more than sixty years, have given him ample opportunity to talk about various kinds of influences, real, imagined, and desired, making it difficult for the historiographer to distinguish between fantasies and facts.

1.2 TEXTUAL EVIDENCE

The evidence in favour of an argument of «influence» may be stronger if textual parallels between a particular theory or concept and their supposed sources can be established. For the discovery of a source or sources of inspiration, biographical information of the kind suggested under section 1.1 may prove useful. For instance, the fact that Schleicher's father was a medical doctor and that he grew up in a forested area with lots of plant life may help explain his lifetime interest in botany, but also his later approach to language and its study as a field based on observation, including his

² Miller was also very important in the development of Trubetzkoy as a linguist and fieldworker in the Caucasus region (cf. Toman 1994, p. 1-12, for details).

³ On Šaxmatov, see Toman (1995, p. 57-58) and elsewhere in the book (see Index, p. 353).

conscious introduction of terms taken from the natural sciences (e.g., «morphology») into linguistics. We should take note as well of Schleicher's affirmation that he, in matters concerning method and minute observation, had learned much from the work of Matthias Jacob Schleiden (1804–1881), who served as a professor of botany in Jena from 1839 until 1863, i.e., for much of Schleicher's own professorship there (1857–1868), notably his *Principien der Botanik* of 1849 ; but we still would have to show how such a claim works itself out in Schleicher's linguistics (cf. Koerner 1989, p. 325–375). Yet unlike the 20th century, citations from the works of others and direct acknowledgments of sources were much less common in the 19th century.

In the case of Jakobson, the references to the works of others, linguistic and extralinguistic, are legion, and a detailed textual analysis with a view to illustrating clear parallels between his sources and his actual writings has rarely been done, and certainly not on a larger scale. However, his quotations from and references to the works of others are frequent enough to allow for the establishment of direct influences. On some of Jakobson's linguistic sources see section 3 (below).

1.3 PUBLIC ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Probably the most important evidence in favour of a claim of influence may result from direct references by an author to the work of others. For instance, in his lectures on general linguistics, Saussure referred to the work of Whitney, Hermann Paul, Baudouin de Courtenay and Kruszewski, but not to Georg von der Gabelentz, Gabriel Tarde or Emile Durkheim, for example. Especially since there is no indication that Saussure needed to disguise his sources of inspiration — no pressures were exercised on him to lay claim to originality which might have motivated him to obscure them (as one may find in the case of Noam Chomsky) — the historian should follow up on the author's hints and not look for all sorts of hypothetical sources. In other words, while such direct references alone may not prove much, unless substantiated through textual comparison (1.2), it still appears more appropriate to investigate the works of the scholars mentioned by a given author before hyposthesizing an impact on his thought by those never referred to by him in his writings, whether published or not.

In Jakobson's case, we have many such testimonials. Where phonological work is concerned, Jan Baudouin de Courtenay (1845–1929) and his former St. Petersburg students, Evgenij Dmitrievič Polivanov (1891–1938) and Lev Vladimirovič Ščerba (1880–1944), «played a guiding role toward my [i.e., Jakobson's] study of the phonic means employed [...] by poetic language» (Jakobson & Pomorska, 1983, p. 21). Other phoneticians, such as the Czech Antonín Frinta (1884–1975) and Saussure's Paris

student Maurice Grammont (1866–1946), are mentioned too (*ibid.*, 30–31), although it is clear that in matters of phonological theory and insight Jakobson owed much more to his countryman and long-time associate Trubetzkoy than he usually discloses. In other words, even within the arena of linguistics caution is well placed when acknowledgments of intellectual indebtedness are made in public.

2. JAKOBSON'S EXTRALINGUISTIC SOURCES

There is comparatively little that I can say about the subject of the various extra-linguistic sources of Jakobson's inspiration; there are many other persons much more knowledgeable in matters of Slavic philology, literature, and «verbal art» than myself. In matters of philosophy, Edmund Husserl's (1859–1938) *Logische Untersuchungen* of 1901/02 (2nd ed., 1913) are often mentioned, but it seems to me that despite the evidence that Jakobson had the book in his personal library, it is doubtful that Husserl's phenomenology played a major role in his general scientific outlook (*pace* Holenstein 1975). More likely, Jakobson found affinities between his own anti-psychologism and Husserl's philosophy *post rem*;⁴ this would explain why references to Husserl are more frequent after Jakobson had worked out his ideas, both linguistic and literary, during the 1950s, and not during his Prague years.

2.1 SLAVIC LITERATURE AND POETICS

It is obvious, however, from both Jakobson's scholarly output and his retrospective assessments of his intellectual career that Slavic, notably Russian and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Czech philology, both literary and historical in outlook, played a central role in his Moscow and Prague years. That work in folklore and poetics was not void of ideas coming from Saussurean linguistics for instance may be seen in his 1928 collaboration with his fellow-Russian Petr Grigor'evič Bogatyrev (1893–1971). There are passing references to Saussure as early as 1921 in Jakobson's

⁴ It is interesting that Husserl's name does not appear in Toman (1994) which maps out much of the intellectual fervor at the time of the flourishing of the Moscow and Prague circles except for a mention (p. 197, n. 5) in relation with a 1931 work of an early follower of Husserl's, Henry Gustav Lanz (1886–1945). In his 1995 book, Husserl is referred to several times (cf. Index, p. 348) and Toman expatiates upon the possibility of an early influence of him on Jakobson in conjunction with Jakobson's 'anti-psychologism' of the period (1928–34), but it seems that Jakobson did not quote from Husserl before the later 1930s.

writings on poetry (SW V [1921], p. 299 ; SW V [1923], p. 30, 93), but within the Prague Linguistic Circle in the late 1920s it was the *langue/ parole* distinction that Jakobson most often discussed with approval for its applicability to the analysis of literature, folklore, and poetry. Significantly, in those parts of the famous *Thèses* of the Cercle Linguistique de Prague, prepared for the First Congress of Slavists in 1929, which are due to Jakobson, we read that «poetic speech has the form of poetic expression (*parole*), hence of an individual creative act evaluated [...] against the background of the immediate poetic tradition (poetic language – *langue*)» (Prague Linguistic Circle 1982 [1929], p. 15). Similar approvals can be found in Jakobson & Tynjanov (1980 [1928], p. 30) and Bogatyrev & Jakobson (1982 [1929], p. 35) written in the same year; indeed, Jakobson is a master of *recyclage* of his own pronouncements as may be gathered from the many volumes of his *Selected Writings*.⁵

Interestingly enough, although Jakobson challenged many Saussurean concepts throughout his lifetime, he seems to have regularly accepted those he could extend to the poetic domain. Still in his American years, he generously referred to «Saussure's discovery» and his «profound passion for the analysis of verse and for poetic anagrams» (SW-VIII [Jakobson & Waugh 1979], p. 225). But here Jakobson is mainly concerned with the Saussure as the searcher for anagrams in literary texts, not the linguistic theorist.

2.2 VISUAL ART AND THEORY CONSTRUCTION

Similarly, those more familiar with Jakobson's *oeuvre* than myself need not be told from reading his *Dialogues* with his last wife Krystyna Pomorska (1928–1986), a professor of Russian literature at M.I.T., how important a role early 20th-century visual art played in his conceptualization of language structure (cf. Jakobson & Pomorska 1983, p. 7-9; cf. also Toman [1995, p. 24-25], with regard to Futurism and Cubism). Again, what is interesting as regards Jakobson is that he was motivated early on in relating the visual arts to other fields, including folklore and language study, always with a view to synthesis and to detecting structures or patterns of some kind.

⁵ I, for one, doubt that all these materials would have been reprinted in their various forms if it had not become a bonanza for the publisher. At times, the same study appears in *Selected Writings*, as a separate monograph, both in paperback and hard copy, and finally in a translation, all with the same publishing house (see References under Jakobson & Waugh 1979, to which we should add the 1986 translation, *Die Lautgestalt der Sprache*).

2.3 POSSIBLE PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCES

Again, where possible sources of Jakobson's philosophical outlook on language is concerned, I shall be happy to leave this area of investigation to others. I'm satisfied by simply registering my doubts that Edmund Husserl's (1859–1938) *Logische Untersuchungen* really played an important role in Jakobson's intellectual life of the pre-1939 period (or any other for that matter) as it was made out in retrospective. It was only during the late 1940s, when he was in America, that he discovered the work of the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914); until then, his semiotic interests were sparked, it would seem to me, by his reading of Saussure whose concept of language as a system of signs and whose characterization of the linguistic sign received more than his critical attention during the Prague years.

3. JAKOBSON'S LINGUISTIC SOURCES

Following these preliminary observations on actual and possible extra-linguistic influences, let me offer a few ideas of what my investigations have produced with regard to linguistic ones. I hardly need to add that I found much less than I had anticipated. I guess with my focus on general linguistics I was far too optimistic with regard to Jakobson's pre-World War II activities which, apart from his strong interest in phonology and in historical linguistics — though, I dare say, in a much less innovative fashion —, were not all that evident during his Prague years as they have become in hindsight. Still, as Pomorska noted in her Afterword to *Dialogues*, Jakobson «never turns his back on the passions of his youth: there is no flight into another domain, only a consistent elaboration of the same fundamental premises [...]» (Jakobson & Pomorska 1983, p. 162). In other words, I believe that a fairly adequate and detached historical assessment would produce a much more nuanced picture than could be done with a few strokes of the brush in the present paper, but I think it's safe to say that Saussure's ideas played the most important backdrop for Jakobson's theoretical thinking in linguistic matters, both before 1939 and after, though not always in the same manner. Still, other sources of Jakobson's linguistic inspiration cannot be totally ignored.

3.1 THE «MOSCOW SCHOOL» OF F. F. FORTUNATOV, A. A. ŠAXMATOV, AND OTHERS

In his reminiscences late in life (Jakobson & Pomorska 1983) Jakobson gave credit to the important role played by the so-called «Moscow School» of Filipp Fedorovič Fortunatov (1848–1914), the already mentioned

Šaxmatov, and others in fostering his life-long diachronic interests. Its basically philological and largely Indo-Europeanist outlook with a strong historical bent made itself felt in Jakobson's earlier years; it can be traced in his 1929 monograph *Remarques sur l'évolution phonologique du russe comparée à celle des autres langues slaves*, for instance. However, we should not delude ourselves into believing that this «school» was in any way more innovative or advanced in outlook than those of the Neogrammarians in Leipzig and elsewhere in Germany. Most likely it was much more conservative. Although we find references to Fortunatov and others in Jakobson's earlier writings, they rarely are of a nature that evokes particular attention. Only, when Jakobson credits Fortunatov with «la notion de la 'forme négative'» (SW II [1939c], p. 211, n. 1) in matters of phonology — instead of Saussure's *Mémoire* — does he raise an eyebrow on the part of the informed reader.

3.2 THE 'KAZAN SCHOOL' OF BAUDOUIN DE COURTENAY AND KRUSZEWSKI

In the area of phonology, I believe there were two lines of influence on Jakobson, one coming from St. Petersburg, from Jan Baudouin de Courtenay (1845–1929) and his followers — I'm not so sure whether Kruszewski⁶ played an important role during Jakobson's Prague period — the other from Saussure's *Cours*. For example, in «Phoneme and Phonology» (1932), which Jakobson later referred to as the initial expression of his view of phonemes as composed of distinctive features (e.g., Jakobson 1962c, p. 636), he introduced the concept of the phoneme «first outlined in the works of Baudouin de Courtenay and F. de Saussure» (SW I [1932], p. 231) attributing «the first foundations of phonology» to «Baudouin de Courtenay, F. de Saussure, and their disciples» (p. 232). In his reminiscences (Jakobson & Pomorska 1983) acknowledged in particular the importance of Baudouin's (psychologically based) phoneme concept in the early

⁶ Interestingly, his name does not come up even once in either of Toman's (1994, 1995) books. Interestingly, Jakobson reports that when part of Fortunatov's library went on sale (probably early in 1915), he acquired a copy of Kruszewski's 40-page essay *Ueber die Lautabwechslung* (Kazan, 1881 ; cf. Kruszewski [1995, p. 5-34] for an English translation) and that this was how «the name of Kruszewski first entered [his] consciousness» (Jakobson & Pomorska 1983, p. 127) ; but we don't see his name mentioned just in passing until a review of a book on phonology in 1939 (SW I, p. 314), and then 'rediscovered' only in 1960 (see SW II, item 37) and finally appraised as late as 1967 (*ibid.*, item 38). Curiously, Kruszewski's name does not even come up once in his 1941 monograph *Kindersprache, Aphasie und allgemeine Lautgesetze*, where one might have expected it.

stages of his phonological theorizing. Following his departure from the Czech capital — apart from Baudouin himself, the phonetic-phonological writings of Ščerba and Polivanov (see 1.3 above) — there were of course other linguistic influences, notably work produced in the traditions established by Boas, Sapir, and Bloomfield, soon after his arrival in the United States in 1942 (and, where Sapir is concerned, somewhat earlier, given that Sapir had established contact with Trubetzkoy by the early 1930s,⁷ exchanging with him on matters of phonological theory).

Even in matters of phonology, it is clear from Jakobson's 1938 address to the International Congress of Phonetic Sciences held in Rome, Italy, on the phonological classification of consonants that Saussure's ideas served to establish a context for much of his own most salient proposals, when he begins with the affirmation :

On ne pourrait mieux définir la thèse fondamentale de la phonologie qu'en citant la formule classique de Ferd. de Saussure : «Les phonèmes sont avant tout des entités oppositives, relatives, et négatives».

(SW I [1939b], p. 272)

And, after developing his own system of consonantal oppositions in terms of the features acute/grave and posterior/anterior, Jakobson concludes (p.279) :

La théorie phonologique, fidèle aux suggestions de F. de Saussure, a toujours insisté sur le fait que ce n'est pas le phonème, mais *l'opposition*, et par conséquent la *qualité différentielle*, qui est l'élément primaire du système.

In other words, it appears that in actual fact the ideas of Baudouin and Kruszewski never played the seminal role in Jakobson's phonological theorizing as they were given credit to in retrospect.

3.3 THE «GENEVA SCHOOL» OF SAUSSURE, BALLY, AND SECHEHAYE

Arguably the most important, if not decisive, influence in matters of general linguistic theory — and not only in the area of phonology — came from the so-called «Geneva School», notably Ferdinand de Saussure's (1857–1913) lectures as published posthumously by Charles Bally (1865–1947) and Albert Sechehaye (1870–1946) in the *Cours de linguistique générale* of 1916. Jakobson might have received a first acquaintance with some of Saussure's tenets in 1917, when Sergej Iosifovič Karcevskij

⁷ In this connection, his letter of 18 March 1930 to Trubetzkoy, published in Toman (1994, p. 140-143) for the first time, makes for interesting reading.

(1884–1955), another student of Saussure's, is said to have taken a fresh copy of the *Cours* to Moscow to lecture on its contents, as Jakobson reports in his obituary of Karcevskij (Jakobson 1956, p. 10 = 1966, p. 494). But it is more likely that Jakobson began reading the *Cours* in earnest shortly after his arrival in Prague in the spring of 1920, when Sechehaye sent him a copy of the *Cours* (Jakobson & Pomorska 1983, p. 41). According to Josef Vachek (b.1909), a younger member of the Prague Circle, it was only the second edition, of 1922, of the *Cours* that was read by its members (Vachek 1966, p. 103, note 3).

It seems significant to me that when organizing the list of items to be included in first volume of his *Selected Writings*, Jakobson chose to give his paper read to the Prague Linguistic Circle on 13 January 1927 (SW I [1928], p. 1-2) pride of place. In it, we can see him expounding on major Saussurean themes that he broached repeatedly in his writings during the Prague years from the early 1920s onwards. Here (and in English garb) Jakobson acknowledged that «Saussure and his school broke a new trail in static linguistics, but as to the field of language history they remained in the neo-grammarians rut», and he went on to challenge «Saussure's teaching that sound changes are destructive forces, fortuitous and blind» (p. 2). In the same paper, Jakobson rejected Saussure's «antinomy between synchronic and diachronic linguistic studies» and called for «a transformation of historical phonetics into the history of the phonemic system» and a «comparison of phonemic systems (both from the diachronic and from the synchronic points of view)» that «enables us to lay down certain universally valid sound laws» (*ibid.*). These subjects reappear *in extenso* in his 1929 monograph on the evolution of the phonological system of Russian, though the discrepancy between what is called in German *theoretischer Anspruch* (roughly : theoretical claim) and actual practice will become evident to anybody studying this essay.

It is not the place to challenge here some of Jakobson's often misguided interpretations of the ideas of others, but it may be said that they do not become more true by Jakobson's repetitions of these over the years. In Saussure's case, it seems to me that Jakobson's views on and critiques of the *Cours de linguistique générale*, unlike those of Noam Chomsky (cf. Koerner 1994), have remained fairly stable, even after Godel's *Sources manuscrites* (1957) and Engler's «édition critique» of the *Cours* (1968) had been published which, in my view, ought to have led him to at least some revisions of his long-standing criticisms of Saussure, notably with regard to the synchrony/diachrony distinction. For instance, a careful reading of the sources would have made it clear that Jakobson's long-standing attack on Saussure's position regarding the relationship between these two «points de vue» was misguided: in all places where the «vulgata» text of the *Cours* suggested that Saussure had viewed them as totally separate — e.g., «L'opposition entre le diachronique et le synchronique éclate sur tous

les points» (*Cours*, p. 127) — Engler's *édition critique* (1967/68, p. 198) shows that Saussure had only insisted on this seeming dichotomy as an «important distinction». ⁸ The rest — like a series of other affirmatiuons or contradictions for which Saussure has traditionally been blamed — had been added by the editors whose personal focus of interest — Bally's main interest lay in stylistics and Sechehaye's in syntax, with both dabbling in theory-construction on various occasions — were solidly anchored in synchronic linguistics.

Thanks to original research and careful textual analysis conducted by John E. Joseph (1989) and, notably, Julia S. Falk (1995) in recent years, my task of tracing Saussure's influence on Jakobson has been made much easier. Much of what I say below is based on their findings.

In her 1995 paper on the presence of Saussure in American linguistics, both before and after Jakobson's arrival in New York in 1941, Falk has offered the following statistics in an attempt to demonstrate the frequency of references to Saussure (in comparison with two other major linguists of the early 20th century) throughout his career based on four volumes of his collected works :

	SW I	SW II	SW VII	SW VIII	Total
Saussure	42	65	26	44	177
Trubetzkoy	73	23	11	26	133
Sapir	16	37	17	37	107

Table 1: Index citations in *Selected Writings* (Jakobson 1971[1962]ff.)

While Falk's focus has been Jakobson's «four American decades» which she found «replete with citations of Saussure and discussion of Saussurean concepts», she also noted that well before 1941 «Saussure had been a major figure in his presentations and papers» (Falk 1995, p. 340). Indeed, had she indicated the actual places and contexts in which Saussure's name and/or references to the *Cours* appears, she could have shown that beyond the mere frequency of such references, Saussure's name appears not only prominently on page 1 of the first volume of *Selected Writings*, but, more importantly, in most of the salient discussions of points of general linguistic theory, whereas references to the work of his

⁸ Similarly, when we read in the 'vulgata' text (p. 129) of «l'antinomie radicale entre le fait évolutif et le fait statique», we gather from Engler's presentation of the notes taken down by Saussure's students that he simply pointed out the 'différence' and 'irréductibilité' of these two viewpoints (1967/68, p. 201).

friend and close collaborator Trubetzkoy are confined to matters of phonology and Slavic studies and rarely to any point of theory beyond the former area of interest.

Of course, quantification simply based on index citations does not offer a complete picture at all; it's just an easy way to count oranges and apples — as the Philadelphia-based Social Science Citation Index does. Falk is aware of these limitations and speaks of «some quantitative evidence of Saussure's presence in Jakobson's writing», conceding (p. 341):

An index count is a gross measure, of course, but it demonstrates that Jakobson discussed Saussure and Saussurean concepts from his earliest linguistic studies (included in *SW I* and *SW II*) through the final decade of his life (*SW VII* and *SW VIII*) and that only for the earliest volume, *Phonological Studies*, is there a linguist with more references than Saussure, Jakobson's personal friend and colleague from the 1920s and 1930s, the phonologist Nikolaj Sergeevic Trubetzkoy (1890–1938). Similarly, in a selected bibliography of Jakobson's writings on Saussure prepared by Linda Waugh (1984:159-160), the entries begin in 1928 and conclude in 1981, with an additional posthumously published collection of papers. (Waugh & Halle 1984).

Even there it is interesting to note that Saussure's ideas play an important role — as they did in Trubetzkoy's phonological theorizing (cf. Trubetzkoy 1933, for an instructive illustration of this fact). If we look more closely, we notice that Jakobson saw his interest in «dynamic synchronism», phonological universals and the relevance of acoustical analysis as antithetical to Saussurean concepts. Indeed, we can see Jakobson's frequent strategy of setting up something like a straw man and then knocking him down. Saussure is often referred to (as by Chomsky much later, one may add) as the «great Genevan linguist» only to argue against him right thereafter. Needless to say that even if Jakobson did not always present Saussure's position accurately, it is obvious that the *maître genevois* was very important for his own thinking and, one may add, in providing a useful launching pad for his own ideas.

Interestingly, given his later attacks on Saussure's (alleged) positions, it is noteworthy that in almost all of the writings from his European years, Jakobson usually expressed his utmost respect for Saussure in references like «[l]e grand révélateur des antinomies linguistiques» (*SW I* [1938], p. 237), «the great Genevan scholar» (1968 [1941], p. 16). Saussurean concepts were only sharply criticized when they fell into «the neogrammarian rut», but on synchronic matters, particularly in the area of phonology, Jakobson's approach seemed guided by the idea that one must improve on one's predecessors. In his lectures, however, his criticisms became sharper. For instance, in his paper at the University of Copenhagen

on «Zur Struktur des Phonems», basic ingredients of which he was soon to incorporate into the first course he taught in the United States, he asked :

Wie konnte es geschehen, dass man gerade die distinktiven Qualitäten und ihre Oppositionen beinahe verkannt hat, und das Phonem fortwährend als die einfachste phonologische Einheit gedeutet wurde? [How could it happen that we almost failed to recognize the distinctive qualities and their oppositions and that the phoneme continued to be viewed as the most basic phonological unit ?].

(SW I [1939] p. 304)

And proceeded that he saw the reasons for this near-failure in the fact that Saussure's second principle of linear character of the signifier had until very recently acted as a restraint [«der Saussure'sche «zweite Grundsatz» — *caractère linéaire du signifiant* — [hat] bis vor kurzem bremsend gewirkt»] (ibid.). In other words, Jakobson viewed Saussure's insistence on the linearity of the *signifiant* as an obstacle to the advancement of the phonological theory he then was working on. Indeed, continuing the discussion, he blamed «the obvious logical error» on this matter directly on Saussure (p.305). Such blunt, outright rejection of a fundamental Saussurean synchronic linguistic concept was until then largely unheard of in Jakobson's writings. While discrepancies between scholars' formal positions and their more casual oral expressions are not uncommon, in this instance the difference may have contributed to confusion over Jakobson's views of Saussure, as noted, e.g., by Joseph (1989, p. 418).

4. SOME CONCLUSIONS

I believe that, especially in the light of Jakobson's two series of lectures in general linguistics following his arrival in New York City in 1942 (both published only in 1976 for the first time), it is safe to assert that in matters of linguistic theory Saussure's ideas as transmitted in the *Cours* played the most important role in Jakobson's argument, both phonological and semiotic. Indeed, and this is particularly evident with regard to Jakobson's references to Saussure for the entire six decades of his scholarly career, from 1921 to his death in 1982 (as may also be seen in his posthumous publications), it is difficult to imagine how Roman Jakobson would have developed his theories in phonology, poetics, semiotics, and other fields without the stimulation he received from his close reading of the *Cours*.

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