Siouffi, Gilles, ed. 2021. *Le sentiment linguistique chez Saussure*

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tout comme l’on regrette la disparition d’autres ouvrages de Varron à contenu spécifique-ment grammatical. Varron a en effet beaucoup à nous apprendre : il occupe une place stratégique et originale dans l’histoire de la réflexion grammaticale latine ; il hérite de cadres méthodologiques et terminologiques et il témoigne d’une tradition grecque multiforme que se sont appropriée les Romains (au livre VII, Varron rend hommage, entre autres, à Aelius Stilo et à Aurelius Claudius, cf. P. Flobert, Introduction, p. XIX, sur les sources grammaticales de Varron) et qu’ils vont repenser grâce à une vision contrastive entre les langues grecque et latine, mais aussi, accessoirement, à une confrontation avec les langues « barbares » parlées dans un Empire romain multietnique et multilingue, en train de se mondialiser, comme en témoigne, en VIII,65, l’opposition entre les langues à déclinaisons, tels le grec, le latin et le gaulois, et les langues sémitiques, non flexionnelles, telles que le punique et l’égyptien ; ou, en VIII,6, la facilité avec laquelle les esclaves d’origine étrangère apprennent à décliner les noms de leurs camarades. Varron témoigne – malheureusement sans toujours citer, et précisément, ses sources – de la richesse des approches linguistiques existantes et de l’effervescence des débats linguistiques qui, comme celui de l’analogie et de l’anomalie, animent ses contemporains. Varron constitue un chaînon fondamental dans la transmission des théories linguistiques, il a abondamment nourri la réflexion linguistique ultérieure, comme en témoignent ses nombreuses mentions chez les Grammatici Latini impériaux. On attend avec impatience, même si l’on est bien conscient du travail et des difficultés que représente cette édition, la parution des volumes ultérieurs, qui permettront de répondre à certaines interrogations restées ouvertes, et l’achèvement de ce « grand œuvre » initié par Jean Collart et transmis par Pierre Flobert (dont on a plaisir à retrouver, dans le volume VII, l’érudition philologique et le style si personnel) à Guillaume Bonnet, sur qui repose désormais l’avenir du « Varron français » et de la vision globale, dépassant l’approche morcelée, au fil des différents livres, de cette œuvre majeure dans l’histoire de la tradition grammaticale gréco-latine et de ses apports à l’histoire générale des théories linguistiques.

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A volume edited by Gilles Siouffi, Le sentiment linguistique chez Saussure, indisputably ranks among the 2021 publications in language sciences that matter within the French-speaking realm. As the title suggests, the book aims to discuss Ferdinand de Saussure’s long-neglected ideas on linguistic feeling, that is, as Vincent Nyckees, one of the contributors, emphasizes, “the acquired capacity, inherent to every speaker of a definite language and which manifests itself through his or her linguistic practice, to spontaneously analyze the forms of such a language” and that “result[s] from his or her long-lasting immersion in the corresponding linguistic community [...]” (p. 48). Here Siouffi and five other authors (Vincent Nyckees, Bruno Courbon, Emanuele Fadda, Loïc Depecker, and Philippe Monneret) strive to revisit the centrality of “meta-” or “epilingualistic” concerns in Saussure’s thought by providing substantial conceptual, terminological, genealogical, and contextual clarifications about the issue
of *sentiment linguistique* and reassessing the place and significance of this issue in his oeuvre. The outcome of such a joint effort is clearly successful, not only because of the quality of individual contributions, but also because, taken together, they form a consistent whole that provides, for the first time, an encompassing overview of the issue at stake. Depending on the case, the authors discuss the Saussurean concept of linguistic feeling from a comparative, contextual, or genealogical perspective, although the exegetic approach remains, in most chapters, instrumental. Notably, as Siouffi highlights in the introductory part (p. 12), his intention, as an editor, was not simply to revisit Saussure’s developments on linguistic feeling from a philological and historical point of view, but also to envision their theoretical and methodological implications for current research in language science. The book largely meets these two objectives.

The herein reviewed book marks, so to speak, the end point of the deep renewal of the Saussure scholarship that has led, since the early 1990s (Reichler-Béguelin 1990 and 1995) and, more systematically, since the 2000s (e.g. Laplantine 2005; Nyckeens 2008; Chidichimo 2009; Courbon 2012; Siouffi 2012 and 2014; Fadda 2017; Testenoire 2018), to the “rediscovery” of *sentiment linguistique* and of its place in Saussurean thought. In addition to constituting the achievement of one of the major current tendencies of Saussure studies, Siouffi’s volume is also emblematic of the recent renewed interest in the question of linguistic feeling in general³. Besides the Saussure scholarship, three lines of investigation have helped reassessing, in the last few years, this pivotal but sometimes underrated issue of language sciences: (a) the historical-theoretical research on the old German concept of Sprachgefühl (Unterberg 2020), (b) the reappraisal of Sapir’s notion of “form-feeling” and of its historical context (Fortis 2015), and (c) the post-Chomskyan theoretical and empirical research programme on “linguistic intuitions” (Schindler et al. 2020).

In the introduction, Siouffi nicely shows how, since its “rediscovery” in the 1990s, the Saussurean issue of *sentiment linguistique* has aroused growing interest among commentators, to the point of becoming a key topic of current Saussure exegesis. The driving force behind such a renewed interest, he insists, was (a) the abandonment of the strict structuralist interpretative framework that, for a long time, had prevailed in Saussure studies and (b) the considerable evolution of the Saussurean corpus, the new philological material available having led scholars to distance themselves from the canonical and reductive view of Saussure’s ideas conveyed by the *princeps* edition of the *Cours*. Another crucial point discussed in the introduction is the question of the variety of the expressions used, in the Saussurean corpus, in relation to what Siouffi, in his book, generically refers to as “*sentiment linguistique***”, and the question of the possible semantic implications of such terminological variability. The fact is that, besides “*sentiment linguistique***”, Saussure also speaks of “*sentiment de la langue***”, “conscience de la langue”, “*sentiment du sujet parlant***”, “*sentiment des

³ “Linguistic feeling” can generically be defined as one’s capacity to spontaneously decide on whether lexical, syntactic, morphological, phonological, etc. properties that one is currently experiencing are compliant or noncompliant with the rules that one, as a member of a definite linguistic community, is supposed to have about the language in question. Here we are dealing with an issue, referred to with floating terminology (“Sprachgefühl”, “sentiment de la langue”, “linguistic intuitions”, etc.), that had emerged as early as the late 18th century and that was widely popularized among linguistics in Saussure’s time. Cf. Romand in press.
sucrets parlants”, “sentiment de l’unité du signe”, etc. As Siouffi highlights, in line with Testenoire (2018), one would look in vain for a particular meaning behind this or that expression, insofar as nowhere in his oeuvre does Saussure strive to make one of them explicit. More generally speaking, he insists on the fact that at no time does Saussure specify what he means by “sentiment linguistique” (or cognate expressions) and wonders about whether the corresponding notion is actually thematized in his writings.

Also written by Siouffi, the book’s first chapter aims to contextually reappraise Saussure’s reflection on sentiment linguistique in light of the late-19th- and early-20th-century language sciences (and psychology), and to specify its theoretical significance within the global framework of Saussurean thought. Siouffi begins by discussing the French research tradition on sentiment de la langue, as exemplified in particular by Émile Littré and Michel Bréal, and the German research tradition on Sprachgefühl by focusing on the figure of Hermann Paul. His analysis strongly suggests that Saussure’s reflection on sentiment linguistique is in keeping with such investigations, whose basic common concern was the issue of how the subject is able to intuitively apprehend language normativity. In this remarkably erudite chapter, Siouffi also successively addresses the questions of whether, for Saussure, linguistic feeling: (a) has to do with synchrony or diachrony, (b) is a phenomenon of a conscious or an unconscious nature, and (c) should be considered at the level of the individual or of the community. Regarding the first question, he remarks that, insofar as Saussure identifies it as a “feeling of unity”, linguistic feeling has to do, par excellence, with synchrony. Answering the second question, he admits, is not an easy thing, considering the intertwining of consciousness and unconsciousness in Saussurean thought, although Saussure’s insistence on the speaking subject’s “intuitive order” suggests that his notion of linguistic feeling is in reality more closely related to the unconscious. Finally, Siouffi answers the third question by emphasizing that, insofar as Saussure denies the existence of something like a supra-individual mind, linguistic feeling should be regarded as the expression, on the scale of the individual, of language-related collective properties.

Vincent Nyckees is the author of the second chapter, a theoretically ambitious contribution in which he discusses the nature, properties, and status of Saussure’s notion of linguistic feeling. One of his great merits is to succeed in providing a clear operational definition of sentiment linguistique, an expression that, as stated earlier, Saussure at no time makes the effort to clarify in his writings. In the first section, Nyckees advocates the somewhat provocative view that Saussure’s linguistic feeling can be equated with langue and sujet parlant, the core of his demonstration being that langue —conceived here as what the speaking subject, as the individual bearer of a definite usage, is actually conscious of— is thoroughly “immanent” to linguistic feeling. In the second section, Nyckees reviews what he considers as the six chief characteristics of Saussurean linguistic feeling, namely the fact that, in addition to “manifest[ing] itself in a mechanical way”, it is “social rather than individual”, “thoroughly constrained and quasi-objective”, “objectifiable and clearly circumscribed”, “largely unconscious”, and is “first and foremost a consciousness of relationships”.

In the third and last section, he broadens the theoretical perspective by pointing out that Saussure’s conception of linguistic feeling is unable to correctly answer crucial linguistic issues, such as the problem of synchronic variation and that of the relation-

4 See the corresponding quotation at the beginning of this review.
ships between subjects and their *langue*. Interestingly, Nyckees’ assumption that, for Saussure, linguistic feeling is “the very object of linguistics” echoes the debate currently raging among theorists about whether and to what extent linguistic intuitions can be regarded as a reliable source of knowledge for linguists (Schindler *et al.* 2020).

No less theoretically ambitious than the previous chapter, chapter 3, written by Bruno Courbon, offers a different perspective on the issue of linguistic feeling, the general view taken here being that of the place of subjectivity in Saussurean thought and the way of interpreting it. In a preliminary section, Courbon wonders about how to conceive the involvement of the linguistic subject in the definition of the linguistic object and explains why such a question is of particular relevance in the case of Saussure, an author whose ideas have been, from the beginning, filtered through the exegetical screen. He suggests that the study of *sentiment linguistique* —in other words, “the consciousness of the speaking subject”— may be a privileged way of clarifying the problem. Courbon devotes the chapter’s second section to discussing linguistic feeling and, more generally speaking, “subjectivity in language” in light of the (psychological) concept of “feeling” (*sentiment*), conceived here as an “intuitive” and “affective” power. While insisting on the fact that both “feeling” and “linguistic feeling” may be relatively ill-defined expressions within the context of the time, he wonders about how Saussure’s *sentiment linguistique* may relate to both Kant’s concept of *Gefühl* and contemporary French and German literature on *sentiment de la langue* and *Sprachgefühl*. Finally, in the long third section, Courbon provides a rich reflection on the issue of “the linguist and his double”, by addressing, among other questions, the “objects” of *sentiment linguistique*, its dialectical relationship to the individual and the collective, and the existence of a “feeling of semireferential convenience”. Among its many qualities, Courbon’s essay has the merit of explicitly revisiting the link between *sentiment linguistique* and affectivity; in this respect, it resonates with the historical contextualization proposed by Siouffi in chapter 1, but also with the most recent theoretical advances regarding the psychoaffective nature of linguistic feeling (Romand in press).

Emanuele Fadda is the author of the book’s fourth chapter, devoted to the problem of intelligence and will (*volonté*) in Saussure’s linguistics, two issues that, as he aims to demonstrate, constitute the two basic complementary aspects of Saussurean linguistic feeling. First, Fadda insists, linguistic feeling corresponds to the joint manifestation of a cognitive and of a normative immediacy relating to “the operations of categorization of the speaking subject” (p. 100). As he explains, because language usage is socially constrained, the normative side of linguistic feeling—which is actually the core topic of his essay— has to do not so much with the question of will per se, as with the fact of going beyond it. Second, Fadda explores the cognitive side of Saussure’s linguistic feeling by highlighting that, for him, linguistic consciousness consists of the three levels of (a) “reflective consciousness”, which comes under the competency of the linguist and has to do with the scientific study of language; (b) “unreflective consciousness”; and (c) “(total) unconsciousness”, the latter two of which concern the speaking subject and are the domains, respectively, of “intelligent” and “mechanical”

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5 Courbon, in my view, largely overvalues Kant’s potential influence on Saussure’s ideas on *sentiment linguistique* (and, more generally speaking, on the interest in affectivity in contemporary language sciences), while completely disregarding the impact—which, in all likelihood, was much more direct and deeper— of 19th- and early-20th-century German-speaking affective psychology. Cf. Romand 2021.
changes. Third, in the few pages he devotes to “the forms of will in langue”, while recalling that will is, in Saussurean thought, “a necessary component of every linguistic act” (p. 105), he dwells on the centrality of experiencing “the failure of will” in semiology in general and linguistics in particular, the fate of grammatical rules being to be felt by the speaking subject as an obligation and the arbitrariness of the sign as something coercing. After having, fourth, addressed the question of the place of will in Saussure’s well-known research on Germanic legends and anagrams, Fadda discusses, fifth and last, what he calls the “moral” dimension of linguistic feeling, that is, the view that, from the Saussurean perspective, the linguist, while reflecting abstractly on language, ought to keep having access to his or her own speaking subject’s immediate experience. When all is said and done, the author proposes a remarkably innovative and convincing exegetical approach to Saussure’s concept of sentiment linguistique, but it is somewhat unfortunate that at no time does he place the issues at stake in the psychological and psycholinguistic context of the time.

The fifth chapter, by Loïc Depecker, is a multifaceted discussion of the status of the unconscious—and, more generally speaking, of the relationships between consciousness and unconsciousness—in Saussure. The author successively discusses the issue of (a) the role of will in linguistic evolution by highlighting Saussure’s approach to phonetic changes, which remain completely unconscious, and analogical changes, which are more directly related to consciousness; (b) the relationship between linguistic sign and the consciousness of the speaking subject, by showing that, for Saussure, linguistic sign, as long as it is synchronically contemplated, is always something immanent to the latter; (c) the relationship between the consciousness of the speaking subject and the “reality” and “concreteness” of linguistic facts, Saussure’s sentiment de la langue, Depecker insists, being nothing but what “accounts for the way in which speaking subjects perceive langue, but also for the way in which they create it” (p. 122); (d) “inner sorting” (classement intérieur), that is, the way in which the speaking subject spontaneously associates forms and ideas with each other, as a counterpoint to what the grammarian does consciously and intentionally; (e) the value (valeur) of signs, which, in Saussure’s view, has to do with the significance of the units of the linguistic system (considered in its social dimension) and which, Depecker emphasizes, is in reality nothing but “an effect of consciousness in langue” (p. 129); (f) the place of conscious and unconscious states in parole and langue, the “discursive” and the “intuitive” order, “the theory of syntagnmata”, and “the theory of associations”; and (g) the various kinds of relations (“ordres”, “ordonnances”, “groupements”, “associations”), which are so many “gateway[s] to the unconscious”, that underpin the speaking subject’s activity. In conclusion, Depecker points out that, although Saussure is well aware of the moving boundary between consciousness and unconsciousness in linguistic facts, he does not “cross the threshold” of the unconscious. Chapter 5 is not immune from criticism; in fact, two chief reproaches can be applied to it. On the one hand, one is forced to admit that, among the six herein reviewed essays, we are dealing with the one that is less directly in keeping with the volume’s topic, only a few pages of Depecker’s chapter being (partly) devoted to the issue of linguistic feeling (p. 122-123, 133-134, and 145). On the other hand, and more problematically, the author fails to correctly contextualize the psychological issue of the unconscious, which severely impairs his interpretation of Saussure. In fact, he claims that “the unconscious, at that time, h[ad] not the status that Freud w[ould]
give to it” and “[was] not considered as an issue that could play a particular role in linguistic facts” (p. 133), the unconscious being, for him, an “intrinsically Freudian concept” (p. 144) that was both “discover[ed]” and “theorize[d]” by Freud (p. 143). Such a claim is at odds with the now well admitted view that the unconscious had established itself as a major concern of psychology as early as the beginning of the 19th century, and perpetuates the myth, which has been swept away by historians of psychology, that Freud would be the “discoverer” of the unconscious (Romand 2012). Apparently, Depecker is also unaware of the fact that, since at least Franz Bopp (1833), the unconscious had been a common issue in German language sciences and that, in the late 19th century, the question of the place of unconscious processes in language came to be discussed in detail by “psycholinguists” such as Heymann Steinthal (1881 [1871]: 164-166) and H. Paul (1880: 29-30, 44-45, 70-71), the latter being known to have been one of Saussure’s major sources of inspiration.

In the sixth and last chapter, Philippe Monneret proposes, for the first time, an encompassing discussion of Gustave Guillaume’s (1883-1960) ideas on sentiment linguistique (and on his somewhat different notion of sentiment de la langue), providing a fruitful analysis of the reception and legacy of Saussure’s contribution to linguistic feeling in the 20th century. His essay begins with how, within the framework of his mentalist linguistics, Guillaume basically regards sentiment linguistique as a way of experiencing “système de la langue”. By dwelling on the case of the use of the article in French, he shows that, for Guillaume, “the linguistic feeling of speaking subjects” consists of “a set of mental operations that the linguist rebuilds from his or her own linguistic feeling, which is supposed to have a sharpness […] that is not shared by all speaking subjects” (p. 153). Then, Monneret, after having discussed the old issue of the link between linguistic feeling and analogy, insists on the fact that, unlike Saussure, Guillaume regards sentiment linguistique as having a “quality”, that is, degrees of magnitude and rightness, and identifies it with “an operational concept of linguistic description that helps articulate langue with speech (discours)” (p. 161). Finally, he comments on Guillaume’s distinction between “sentiment linguistique”, which manifests itself in speakers in general, and “sentiment de la langue”, which belongs to linguists only and which consists of “an intuition relating to scientific imagination and fueled by the linguist’s metacognitive cognizance […]” (p. 167). By revisiting a completely neglected aspect of the scholarship, Monneret nicely highlights the continuity and vibrancy of research on linguistic feeling in the French-speaking linguistic tradition between Saussure’s contribution and Culioli’s more recent investigations on “epilinguistic activity” (e.g. Culioli 1999).

When all is said and done, Le sentiment linguistique chez Saussure proves to be a remarkable scientific achievement, not only because it revisits, as no other writing has before, the ins and outs of Saussure’s ideas on sentiment linguistique, but also because it succeeds in shedding new light on the generic issue of linguistic feeling, from a historical, theoretical, and epistemological point of view. In this respect, the book can be said to rank among the outstanding publications that, for several years, have allowed this multifaceted and crucial concept of language sciences to be brought back to the forefront. The herein discussed contributions show the centrality, but also the limits, of Saussure exegesis regarding the study of a question such as linguistic feeling, the reader’s impression, when having finished the book, being that it is difficult to form an accurate idea of the nature, status, and function of sentiment linguistique as
expounded in Saussure’s writings. Whatever its intrinsic significance may be, the Saussurean notion of linguistic feeling appears *de facto* as a contextually overdetermined issue that cannot be fully investigated without being analysed in light of late-19th- and early-20th-century language sciences and psychology, as well highlighted by Siouffi in the volume’s opening contribution.

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References


La perception y est conçue comme originairement sémiotique et interprétative et elle s’accomplit au travers de sémiogenèses et de dynamiques orchestrant la constitution des formes et du sens, en leurs différentes phases.

Cette perspective s’inscrit dans le sillage de la pensée phénoménologique, tout particulièrement celle de Merleau-Ponty, où l’activité de langage, semblablement à celle du corps, se trouve fondamentalement conçue suivant des axes praxiques et expressivistes.

Le bas-marchois appartient aux parlers du Croissant, zone de transition entre les parlers d’oïl et les parlers d’oc. L’étendue géographique de cette langue correspond au nord de la Basse-Marche, c’est-à-dire à la partie du département de la Haute-Vienne au nord de la Gartempe. Le bas-marchois était, jusque dans les années 1950, la principale langue de communication des habitants. Cet ouvrage est une synthèse des connaissances actuelles sur le bas-marchois. Il se fixe pour objectif de proposer une