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Courses in general linguistics by Roman Jakobson at the École Libre des Hautes Études

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This paper focuses on Roman Jakobson's general linguistics lectures in New York during World War II. These courses, that Claude Lévi-Strauss attended, have played a major role in the spreading of post-war “generalized structuralism”. However, they only came to be known by the later testimonies of the two scholars and partial editions from the 1970s and 1980s. Therefore, this study aims at showing that taking into account unpublished sources can bring something new to our knowledge of these teachings.

After the description of the institutional context of the École Libre des Hautes Études that housed this teaching, the list of Roman Jakobson's general linguistics classes is retraced and put in perspective with the unpublished notes that have been kept in his archives. Taking into account the preparatory manuscripts of these classes sheds light on the logic that governs Jakobson's teaching at the École Libre, conceived as a critical reinterpretation of the *Course in General Linguistics*.

Keywords: Roman Jakobson, Claude Lévi-Strauss, structuralism, École Libre des Hautes Études, archives, Ferdinand de Saussure

1. Introduction

Scholars from different backgrounds, driven on the roads of exile, met at the École Libre des Hautes Études (lit. ‘Free School for Advanced Studies’) in New York from 1942 to 1945. This step marks a milestone in the constitution of the post-war generalized structuralism. The teachings of Roman Jakobson (1896–1982) and their reception by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009) play a crucial role in this moment of “crystallization of structuralism” (Loyer et Maniglier 2018). However, the content of these courses is only known through the testimony of the protago-

nists and through two texts that were later revised, namely “Six lectures on Sound and Meaning” (1942), whose revised version has been published in 1976, and the paper entitled “La théorie saussurienne en retrospection” (lit. “The Saussurean Theory in retrospection”) published posthumously in 1984. The objective of this paper is to further describe the content of these lectures relying on unpublished sources in addition to the selected and retrospectively reedited documents.

After focusing on the institutional context of the École Libre, the syllabus of the classes and seminars Roman Jakobson taught at the École Libre will be retraced from its archives as well as from the Roman Jakobson Papers kept at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Jakobson’s handwritten notes will shed light on the logic governing his teachings. In New York, they are characterized by a structured program based on the rereading of the *Course in General Linguistics* and a reinterpretation of three of its dualities.

2. The institutional context: L’École Libre des Hautes Études

The École Libre des Hautes Études is a unique institution in the academic landscape of the United States insofar as it is a French language advanced education institution managed by Belgian and French scholars on American soil. Its very existence from 1942 to 1946 is linked to the exceptional circumstances fostered by the war. Created during the Autumn of 1941, the École Libre opened on February 14th, 1942, in the premises of the New School for Social Research, thanks to the Rockefeller Foundation financial support.¹

In the 1930s, the Rockefeller Foundation had funded an exile and installation program for German scholars who were persecuted by Nazism. After the French debacle, a similar operation is repeated, the *Emergency Program for European Scholars*. It consists in the creation of about one hundred grants intended for threatened European scholars. The foundation relies on a New York progressive institution, the New School for Social Research. Its director, Alvin Johnson (1874–1971), is coordinating the rescue operation and is committed to creating chairs for the exiled. Between the Summer of 1940 and the winter of 1941, about 50 European scholars, among which 30 French ones, thus receive an invitation to teach at the New School and arrive in the United States. The idea of creating a French speaking institution emerges during the Autumn of 1941 among these

1. About the history of the École Libre des Hautes Études see Rutkoff & Scott (1983), Zolberg & Callamard (1998), Chaubet & Loyer (2000), Duranton-Crabol (2000), Loyer (2007 [2005]), as well as Testenoire (2022), a part of which has been reedited in this paper.

teachers assigned to the New School. Alvin Johnson is seduced by the idea and imposes it on the Rockefeller Foundation.²

The *École Libre* is really devised by its proponents as the importation of a Franco-Belgian university on American soil. Beside the fundings from the Rockefeller Foundation, it receives grants from the National French Committee and the Belgian government, which has found refuge in London. It is also supported by the Polish, Czechoslovakian, and Dutch governments in exile. The diplomas delivered by the *École Libre* are recognized by the French National Committee as “full French titles” (Decree of February 9th, 1942). Its teachings and its publications are done exclusively in French. Finally, the School benefits from a total independence even though it is housed in the New School premises. It is managed by French and Belgian scholars, who have a budget of their own and who determine the content of the teachings as well as the modalities of its pedagogical organization.

“First university of Free France”³ the *École Libre* is also an instrument of Gaullist policy. It plays the role of a soft power for the general public in New York but also for the American administration, hostile to de Gaulle. It is an integral part of the strategy developed by Free France to discredit Vichy, recognized by the State Department until November 1942, and to gain legitimacy with the Roosevelt administration. The politic dimension of the school can be noticed as soon as the day of inauguration since a message from de Gaulle is read out. It can also be perceived through the composition of the executive board as several members, among which Alexandre Koyré (1892–1964) and Raoul Aglion (1904–2004), have been sent from London to defend the interests of Free France. The publications of the school reflect this political orientation, especially its journal *Renaissance* with its pronounced Gaullist undertone.⁴

The hybrid nature of the institution – both scientific and political – generates internal tensions. The proponents of an academic neutrality, guaranteed by the director of the school, Jacques Maritain, face those who openly support Gaullism, foremost among them Koyré and Lévi-Strauss who take turns as Secretary-General. The tension aggravates from 1943 on along with the perspective of an end to the war. Some teachers wish to extend the school over time, sometimes applying for naturalization in the US, whereas Gaullists consider that the school mission is ending with the war. The French government fulfils the latter’s demand by

2. About the detailed circumstances of the creation of the *École Libre*, see Zolberg & Callamard (1998: 928–938).

3. *Renaissance* 2–3 (1944–1945: 2).

4. The *Renaissance* Journal has known two deliveries – a first in 1943 and a double issue for 1944 and 1945 published in 1945.

cutting subsidies in 1946. The École Libre thus loses its autonomy from the New School and survives but a few years as a French language school, far from its primary mission.

The École Libre is emulating the functioning of three French higher education institutions.

In accordance with the tradition of the Collège de France, the École des Hautes Études in Paris and the former European universities, so fortunately taken over by the universities of the New World, it [the École Libre] wanted to open its doors to everyone who wants to take part in an undertaking whose essential object is to help maintain, in the intellectual sphere, the values defended by the United Nations – from which Fighting France is inseparable. (“Avertissement”, *Renaissance* 1(1), January-March 1943: 7) [Translation]

The École Libre borrows a number of features which are distinctive of the three institutions. The link with the École Pratique des Hautes Études does not only rely on the institutional designation of the school.⁵ The École Libre borrows from its Parisian model several aspects concerning its pedagogical and administrative management, such as the organization of seminars or the fact that the teachers, just as in the EPHE, are not required to have the country citizenship. As the University of Paris, the École Libre is organized into three departments (Literature, Law, and Sciences), even though the Science department, less developed than the other ones will only become a full department from 1942–43 on. The school also takes up the distinction between non-public classes intended for enrolled students and open classes, free, open to all. Moreover, it creates academic institutions and associated study centres (such as the Institute of Oriental and Slavic Philology and History, the Institute for Comparative Law Studies, etc.) inspired, for example, by the Phonetics Institute associated with the Sorbonne. Finally, along with the Collège de France, the École Libre shares a mission of popularization of French science and culture. As few students have registered to pass diplomas recognized as “full French titles” by the French National Committee, this role in the diffusion of science to the general educated public becomes the school primary mission. The École Libre met a rapid success, proportional to the evolution of the student population. The number of students jumped from 300 at the opening of the school to a thousand after a few months.⁶

5. The designation as a “school” soon prevails as the title of “university” was rejected both by the American authorities and by the scholars of the École Libre. The adjective “libre” [free] presents the advantage linked to its polysemy, as Zolberg & Callamard (1998: 928–933) point out. Besides its affiliation to the “France Libre” [Free France], it refers to Catholic teaching for the French and to the “free inquiry” principle of the Free University of Brussels for the Belgians.

3. Jakobson's teachings at the École Libre

Roman Jakobson arrives in New York on June 4th, 1941. He and his wife left Sweden where they had fled Nazi invasions under the Emergency Program for European Scholars. Jakobson is offered to teach linguistics at the École Libre upon its creation. During the first year he is the only linguistics teacher. The following years, other linguistics classes from the college of literature aggregate to his own, namely Giuliano Bonfante (1904–2005) in comparative linguistics, Wolf Leslau (1906–2006) on semitic languages, Henri Muller (1879–1959) on the history of the French language and André Spire (1868–1966) on versification.⁷

In the 1943 edition of the Who's Who, Jakobson is mentioned as "Professor of General Linguistics and Czechoslovakian Philology" at the École Libre. His teachings correspond to the designation as the classes he is teaching can be grouped into three categories:

1. General linguistics classes in the College of Literature;
2. Slavic linguistics and philology classes in the Institute of Oriental and Slavic Philology and History;
3. Classes and seminars in collaboration.

The present paper focuses on general linguistics classes. Different sources kept either in the New School Institutional Collections or in Jakobson's private archives provide information on the linguist's activities at the École Libre. Among these sources, three kinds of documents can be identified.

1. The documents published by the New School (its semi-annual *Curricula* and the *New School Bulletin* which draws up the weekly list of conferences and events organized within the institution);
2. The official documents edited by the École Libre, such as the *Annual Booklets* and the monthly "courses lists" providing a detailed schedule of the lectures;
3. The grey literature kept in Jakobson's private archives (courses lists, curriculum vitae, reports, and research projects, etc.).

6. Regarding the number of students during the first year, the journal of the school provides the following figures: February 1942, 326; March 1942, 790; April 1942, 850; May 1942, 928; first term 1943, 851 ("Chronique de l'École Libre des Hautes Études" [Chronicle of the École libre des Hautes Études], *Renaissance* 1:1, January-March 1943:168).

7. For more details on these teachings and on the process of recognition of linguistics as an official discipline at the École Libre, see Testenoire (2022).

Relying on these sources, the list of Jakobson's general linguistics lectures in the Literature Department of the École Libre can be retraced. He gives two courses each semester, a public one, and a closed one:

- May-June 1942: On Sound and Meaning (Public lecture).
- May-June 1942: General Linguistics (Bachelor lecture. Non-public lecture).
- 1942–1943, 1st term: Phonology (Non-public lecture).
- 1942–1943, 1st term: Changes in Language (Public lecture).
- 1942–1943, 2nd term: Phonology (Non-public lecture).
- 1942–1943, 2nd term: The Affinity and the Kinship of Languages (Public lecture).
- 1943–1944, 1st term: General Linguistics (Non-public lecture).
- 1943–1944, 1st term: The Russian Language, Mirror, and Culture Vehicle (Public lecture).
- 1943–1944, 2nd term: General Linguistics (Bachelor lecture. Non-public lecture).
- 1944–1945, 1st term: Language disorders (Public lecture).
- 1944–1945, 1st term: Grammatical Structure of the Russian Language Compared with the French and the English Languages (Bachelor lecture).
- 1944–1945, 1st term: The Russian Revolution seen by a linguist (Public lecture).
- 1944–1945, 2nd term: Grammatical Structure of the Russian Language Compared with the French and the English Languages (Bachelor lecture).
- 1944–1945, 2nd term: Poetic Rhythm. Issues in General and comparative linguistics (Public lecture).
- 1945–1946, 1st term: Structure of the Verb in Russian, French and English: Contrastive Analysis (Public lecture).
- 1945–1946, 2nd term: Structure of the Verb in Russian, French and English: Contrastive Analysis (Public lecture).
- 1946–1947, 1st term: On Sound and Meaning. Introduction to General Linguistics (Public lecture).
- 1946–1947, 2nd term: The contribution of French linguistics to World Science (Public lecture).
- 1947–1948: Infant Language (Public lecture).
- 1947–1948: Language disorders (Public lecture). [Translation]

To these regular lectures, must be added several courses in general linguistics given with Lévi-Strauss, which both scholars evoked retrospectively with much emphasis.⁸

Lectures and seminars, sometimes bearing on interdisciplinary themes, are set up in associated research institutions, at an early stage of the school's existence, that is during its first years. For two years (1942–44), the Byzantinist Henri

8. See Jacob *et al.* (2018 [1968]); Lévi-Strauss (2018 [1971]), (1976), (1985); Lévi-Strauss & Eribon (1990 [1988]:61–65); Jakobson (1972:33 ff.), (1972–1974), (2018 [1985]); Georgin & Georgin (1978:17).

Grégoire (1881–1964) thus organizes an interdisciplinary seminar on the Russian Epic poem *The Tale of Igor's Campaign* at the Institute of Oriental and Slavic Philology and History. It gathers philologists (Henri Grégoire, Waclaw Lednicki 1891–1967), linguists (Roman Jakobson), philosophers (Alexandre Koyré) and historians (Marc Szeftel (1902–1985) and George Vernadsky (1887–1973)). This collaboration led to the publication of a critical edition of this poem (Grégoire, Jakobson & Szeftel 1948⁹). Classes, seminars, or lecture series involving Jakobson are organized every year at the Institute of Oriental and Slavic Philology and History. Jakobson and Lévi-Strauss base their common courses on this model. Their collaboration takes the form of teachings on three occasions only. In the Autumn of 1942, both scholars create “an ethnography and linguistics department” within the Institute of Sociology where a series of lectures is organized for only one year:

1942–43: “The Place of Primitive Peoples in the Post-War World” (R. Jakobson & C. Lévi-Strauss).¹⁰

Their collaboration resumes in 1945 at the College of Literature where they organize two seminars along with Raymond de Saussure, the linguist's son, Professor in psychology at the *École Libre*.¹¹

1945–46, 1st term: Structure of the Popular Institutions (Language, culture, folklore). (R. Jakobson & C. Lévi-Strauss)

1945–46, 2nd term: Principles of Structural Analysis. (R. Jakobson, C. Lévi-Strauss, & R. de Saussure)

These two common seminars are the only teachings Lévi-Strauss maintained for the last year he spent at the school. He resigns his functions as Secretary-General

9. *The Tale of Igor's Campaign* is a Russian epic poem, known through a manuscript discovered in the 18th century. Its authenticity was contested as soon as the 19th century and later again by André Mazon in an important study (Mazon 1940). This argument was refuted by the 1948 critical edition that was published in the proceedings of the *École Libre* seminar. On this discussion, see Bossuat (1948), Roudet (2011), as well as Jakobson and Benveniste's correspondence (Laplantine & Testenoire 2021: 146–149).

10. For the detailed syllabus of this class, see Testenoire (2022: 171). The addressed issues echo the political ones that worry Lévi-Strauss and that he develops in his work at that time, particularly in “The Theory of Power in a Primitive Society” and in “The Foreign Policy of a Primitive Society” (Lévi-Strauss 2019 [1944] and [1949]). See also Vincent Debaene's foreword to the edition of these texts, particularly Lévi-Strauss (2019: 36–43).

11. On the relationship between Jakobson and Raymond de Saussure, see the edition of their correspondence (Jakobson & Saussure 2018).

on December 3rd, 1945, in a general climate of hostility.¹² The introduction of the notion of “structure” coincides with its growing importance in the titles of Jakobson’s courses: “Grammatical Structure of the Russian Language Compared with the French and the English Languages” (1944–45), “Structure of the Verb in Russian, French and English: Contrastive Analysis” (1945–46). It also coincides with the publication of the first issue of the *Word Journal*, in which Lévi-Strauss’s papers “Structural Analysis in Linguistics and Anthropology” as well as Cassirer’s “Structuralism in Modern Linguistics” take the shape of a manifesto. The 1945–46 common seminars are the outcome of informal collaborations between Jakobson and Lévi-Strauss who used to attend each other’s classes from 1942 on and to extend the discussions in a “nearby bistro” after the sessions.¹³

4. The contribution of Roman Jakobson’s archives

Roman Jakobson’s archives are housed in the Department of Distinctive Collections of the Library of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge. The records are considerable as the four cubic metres of documents are currently distributed into 137 listed and monitored archive boxes. To these must be added about fifteen boxes, collected more recently, and not catalogued yet.¹⁴ The stored documents comprise a variety of items such as manuscripts, typescripts, prints, press clippings, passports, photographs, film reels, etc. They cover a timespan from the 1880s to the mid-1980s. They encompass the linguist’s whole life even though the American period of Jakobson’s life is better documented due to the destruction of part of his archives when he fled from Czechoslovakia.¹⁵

12. On Lévi-Strauss’s role in the closure of the École Libre and the circumstances surrounding his departure, see Mehlman (2005 [2000]: 223–229).

13. See Lévi-Strauss (2018 [1971]: 399), Jakobson (1972–1974), Sebeok (1977: 414). The correspondence between the two scholars (Jakobson & Lévi-Strauss 2018, completed by Testenoire 2019) is a testimony to the extension of this intellectual collaboration, even after Lévi-Strauss came back in France.

14. The catalogue of these holdings is available at: <https://archivesspace.mit.edu/repositories/2/resources/633>. For a general presentation of these archives, see D’Ottavi (2018).

15. In the foreword to the edition of Trubetzkoy’s letters, Jakobson explains the circumstances surrounding the large destruction of his pre-war archives: “When, warned by the urgent call of a well-informed friend, I abandoned Brno on the eve of March 15, 1939, my archives were hastily reduced to sixteen pailfuls of ashes, but the bundle of Trubetzkoyana, together with a slender part of my own drafts and notes, were squeezed into a capacious Czech briefcase and wandered with me.” (Trubetzkoy 1975: vi)

The New York years (1941–49) are represented by official documents, grey literature, correspondence, and manuscripts of sometimes unpublished works, among which can be identified several notes of courses given at the *École Libre*. Among the latter, can be recognized five preserved general linguistics classes which were taught at the Literature Faculty:

- *Le son et le sens des mots* [“On Sound and Meaning”] (May-June 1942)¹⁶
- *Linguistique générale* [“General Linguistics”] (May-June 1942)¹⁷
- *Phonologie* [“Phonology”] (October-December 1942)¹⁸
- *Les Changements de la langue* [“Changes in Language”] (January 1943)¹⁹
- *L’Affinité et la parenté des langues* [“The Affinity and the Kinship of Languages”] (May 1943)²⁰

It is no coincidence that the preserved notes match the classes Jakobson mentions in the 1976 edition of the “Six lectures on Sound and Meaning”:

L’*École Libre des Hautes Études* (the Free School of Advanced Studies) was founded in New York at the beginning of 1942 by French and Belgian scientists in exile. It immediately offered a Professorship in General Linguistics to Roman Jakobson, who inaugurated the first term with six lectures ‘On Sound and Meaning’, together with a course on the linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure. There followed, during the 1942–3 academic year, two courses devoted respectively to ‘Changes in Language’ and to ‘The Affinity and the Kinship of Languages’, not to mention fifteen lectures given each semester on ‘Phonology’.

These courses were followed by certain of the School’s Professors – Henri Gregoire, Jacques Hadamard and Claude Levi-Strauss – and by linguists such as J. Mattoso Camara, Paul L. Garvin, Charles F. Hockett, Henry M. Hoenigswald and Thomas A. Sebeok. Roman Jakobson gave at the same time, at the institute of Oriental and Slavic Philology and History, attached to the School, a course on ‘Czech Poetry of the 9th to the 15th Centuries’. (Jakobson 1978 [1976]: ix)

The foreword also explains the reason why only the notes from the first years of the *École Libre* have been preserved: “Because he was not then used to delivering lectures in French Jakobson prepared a draft of his ‘Six Lectures on Sound and Meaning’ and used this draft as the basis for a more informal oral presentation.” (*ibid.*) In an interview with *Le Monde*, Jakobson insists on the exceptional nature, “almost unique” for him of this practice:

16. Roman Jakobson Papers, MC 72, Box 24, Folders 27–30.

17. Roman Jakobson Papers, MC 72, Box 28, Folders 129–133.

18. Roman Jakobson Papers, MC 72, Box 11, Folders 35–36.

19. Roman Jakobson Papers, MC 72, Box 32, folder 10–12.

20. Roman Jakobson Papers, MC 72, Box 32, folder 13–14.

If this text is available, it is because I was quite embarrassed at that time that I was not used anymore to delivering lectures in French. Thus, something almost unique in my life happened. Instead of simply delivering my lecture, I have written down my speech for the first time. (Jakobson 1976a: 24)

Therefore, breaking away with his working habits, he prepared almost complete drafts for his two 1942 lectures. In 1943, the situation has already evolved. To the fully drafted first pages of the lecture on “Changes in Language” progressively succeed course notes made up of scattered comments. Finally, during the following term, Jakobson seems confident enough to deliver the whole lecture “The Affinity and the Kinship of Languages” (May 1943) in French, according to his habit, with but the support of a few brief notes from which he reconstructs his speech.

The exceptional circumstances and the necessity to teach in French explain that the 1942 lectures have been entirely drafted as well as preserved. Jakobson did not keep all his course notes. However, he made an exception for the 1942–43 notes precisely because the drafts could be used for a further publication. The idea to publish the École Libre’s classes arises quite soon. It can be traced back to the 1960s when Jakobson reworks several notes. The “Six lectures on Sound and Meaning” published by the Éditions de Minuit in 1976 is the only publication that comes to fruition during Jakobson’s lifetime. Jakobson also reworks his course notes on “General Linguistics” under the new title “The Saussurean theory in retrospection” but fails to publish it. After his death Linda Waugh publishes the first part of this lecture, which is entirely penned, leaving aside the “rather incomplete and sketchy notes” of the second part “about the linguistic sign” (Waugh in Jakobson 1984: 157).

To sum up, besides the course notes on “Sound and Meaning” whose publication was assured by Jakobson himself, his archives give an access to four more general linguistics lectures which have been preserved, namely “General Linguistics” (May–June 1942) from which only one part was published posthumously by Linda Waugh, as well as “Phonology” (October–December 1942), “Changes in Language” (January 1943) and “The Affinity and the Kinship of Languages” (May 1943), which constitute entirely new material. We are currently preparing a critical edition of these four lectures.

5. A *Course in general linguistics* critical reading programme

It seems Jakobson was totally free concerning his teaching syllabus at the *École Libre*. However, one is bound to remark, on the one hand, the retrospective logic that emanates from his general linguistics courses and, on the second hand, the central place devoted to Saussure and his *Course in General Linguistics*. The syllabus follows a coherent progression. Each lecture, far from repeating one another, relies on the previous one to tackle a different issue in general linguistics.

In this structured syllabus, Saussure is given a central position, so much so that the first classes at the *École Libre* can be considered as a series of classes devoted to the critical rereading of the *Course in General Linguistics*. Jakobson offers a critical examination of the three main Saussurean dualities tackled one after the other:

- “On Sound and Meaning” (1942) explores the *significant/signifié* relationship.
- “General Linguistics” (1942) is a detailed discussion of the *langue/parole* dichotomy.
- “Changes in Language” (1943) is devoted to the *synchronie/diachronie* distinction.

In each of these classes, Jakobson describes and more importantly criticizes these three main dualities in accordance with the ideas developed by the Prague Linguistic Circle. In the three classes, his discussion is conducted in three steps.

Jakobson starts by presenting the problematic of his class, or as he calls it the “positivist” or “atomist” doxa of the linguists of the end of the 19th century. He develops the sound/meaning relationship in the first class, the question of the freedom of the subject in the language in the second class, and the question of linguistic changes in the third one. In a second step, he presents the Saussurean dualities (*signifiant/signifié; langue/parole; synchronie/diachronie*) that he analyses as “oppositions” or “antinomies”. He introduces them as important dichotomies that have helped clarify the way problems are addressed but these are steps he describes as still borrowed from the “Neogrammarians’ positivism”. These judgments meet around the definition of the object of linguistics:

*Tout en combattant la prédominance de l'historicisme dans la linguistique orthodoxe du XIX^e siècle de Saussure succombe dans ce cas (comme dans certains autres) à la tradition combattue.*²¹

21. “While fighting the prevalence of historicism in the orthodox 19th century linguistics, Saussure yields in this case (as in some others) to the tradition he fights.” (“General Linguistics”: Roman Jakobson Papers, MC 72, Box 28, Folder 129, p.15).

They concern the definition of *parole*:

En définissant la parole de cette façon, Saussure se trouve dans l'impasse de la pensée rigoureusement individualiste dénotant la fin du siècle, mais d'autre part le maître lui-même s'écarte à maintes reprises de ce principe fondamental emprunté à la tradition néogrammairienne.²²

They also converge on the concept of synchrony:

Comme nous l'avons souligné tout à l'heure, le Cours de Saussure se trouve situé à la limite de deux époques. En parlant de la linguistique de son temps, il nous dit que depuis qu'elle existe, « elle s'est absorbée toute entière dans la diachronie ». Et c'est également la linguistique diachronique qui pendant des longues dizaines d'années a absorbé les recherches de Saussure. C'est bien caractéristique qu'en jetant au commencement de son cours un coup d'œil sur l'histoire de la linguistique, Saussure répète encore l'opinion traditionnelle.²³

Finally, a last step is devoted to the overcoming of these “antinomies” by a synthesis movement. Jakobson analyses the Saussurean dualities as the accumulation of improperly assimilated oppositions. The *langue*/*parole* pair would imply the social/individual and potential value/actual value oppositions. The synchronie/diachronie pair would cover the simultaneity/successivity and static/dynamic oppositions. Jakobson aims at subverting the pairing of these oppositions by asserting the social aspect of the *parole* and by defending the idea of a “dynamic synchrony”. The outcome he reaches is presented as a radical break with what he poses as the traditional approach. This is made evident by the last sentence taken from the notes of the “Changes in Language” lecture devoted to linguistic changes: “*Vous voyez que dans ce point essentiel comme dans tant d'autres l'attitude des recherches actuelles est carrément opposée à celle de la linguistique classique.*”²⁴

22. “In defining the *parole* in such a way, Saussure finds himself in the dead end of the rigorously individualist thought correlated with the practises of the end of the century. On the other hand, the master himself distances himself on several occasions from this fundamental principle borrowed from the neogrammarian tradition.” (“General Linguistics”: Roman Jakobson Papers, MC 72, Box 28, Folder 130, p. 49–50).

23. “As we have pointed out earlier, Saussure’s *Course* is situated at the limit of two eras. Talking about the linguistics of his time, he tells us that since it exists “it totally sank in the diachrony”. And it is also diachronical linguistics that has swallowed Saussure’s research for many long decades. And it is really typical that Saussure, starting his lecture, had a look at the history of linguistics, repeating again the traditional approach.” (“Changes in Language”: Roman Jakobson Papers, MC 72, Box 32, Folder 10, p. 10).

24. “You can see that on that essential point as on many others, the position of the current research is outright opposed to the classical linguistics one.” (“Changes in Language”: Roman Jakobson Papers, MC 72, Box 32, Folder 12, p. 120).

In Jakobson's demonstration, the *Course in General Linguistics* is clearly a step within a dialectical movement, a transitory moment of linguistic thought.

With the fourth lecture "The Affinity and the Kinship of Languages" (May 1943) Jakobson departs from the critical study of the *Course in General Linguistics* for a discussion of comparative grammar methods. Jakobson tackles questions linked to what he calls "the study of the kinship of languages" and makes a plea for the consideration of languages "affinities", in keeping with his work during the inter-war period dealing with the "Sprachbund" (lit. "language federation").²⁵

Whereas the first two lectures were partially known, the lectures entitled "Changes in Language" and "The Affinity and the Kinship of Languages" were never published. Yet, both these lectures entirely deal with the question of languages through time, which is one of the main topics studied by the Prague Linguistic Circle. They contradict the still circulating idea, that structural linguistics would be a negation of history or diachrony. Among the lectures Lévi-Strauss attended, at least two of them directly concern the questions of linguistic changes. The summary of the arguments of each lecture suffices to illustrate how careful Jakobson was when he developed this course, which was organized as a preparatory class to the major questions of general linguistics. The ideas presented in each class are not new, they take up elements developed in Jakobson's inter-war work. Joseph (1989) showed that the lectures on "On Sound and Meaning" refer to the content of the talk "Zur Struktur des Phonems" given at the Copenhagen Linguistic Circle on May 25th, 1939. The issues discussed in "Changes in Language" had already been addressed in former works (Jakobson 1928a, 1928b, 1929, and 1931a). The situation is similar for "The Affinity and the Kinship of Languages" which follows the structure of the paper "On the Theory of Phonological Affinities between Languages" presented during the Fourth International Congress of Linguists in Copenhagen (Jakobson 1938). It refers to even older works (Jakobson 1931b, 1931c, and 1931d). The course notes not only develop ideas that are handled more synthetically in scientific papers, but they shed a new light on them. The arguments are exemplified by more numerous illustrations, more straightforward formulation, and more striking metaphors than in the published texts. The course notes are especially richer with bibliographical references than Jakobson's publications. They are a privileged access to the sources of his work.

25. On Jakobson's perspective on this notion, see Schaller (1997), Sériot (1999) and Tchougounnikov (2006).

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, the question remains: why did Jakobson devote his early lectures at the Free School to a critical analysis of the *Course in General Linguistics*? If Saussure was obviously a very important reference for Jakobson since the beginning of the 1920s, the latter had never devoted a whole class or text to the analysis of the principles of the *Course in General Linguistics*. Why did he do so when he arrived in New York in 1942? Julia Falk (1995) claimed that Jakobson had decided to devote his class to Saussure because his treatment of infant language, then his current concern, was not well received in the United States. The idea that it would amount to a “more or less by default” choice (Falk 1995:348) is contradicted by the coherence of the syllabus of the classes at the École Libre.

A first factor that can account for this choice lies in the target audience of the lectures. At the École Libre, Jakobson is delivering his lectures in French, and they are intended for French speakers. This can explain his choice to present what he considered as the most important linguistic work published in French in the last 30 years. It was even more relevant if it was unknown to his audience.

Moreover, choosing the *Course in General Linguistics* is embedded into a legitimation strategy. In his writings and interviews, Jakobson insists a lot on the title of his chair at the École Libre, namely “General Linguistics”. The title is clearly rare. In all the universities where he had been teaching so far, the titles of his positions had been more specific such as “Russian Philology and Old Czech Literature” in Brno, Scandinavia or “Czechoslovak Studies” at Columbia University (New York City). There is obviously a desire from Jakobson to position his general linguistics teachings as a mirror to Saussure’s general linguistics classes. To analyse Saussure’s *Course* – and to throw some of it back in the past – allows Jakobson to rise to his level and to turn his own lectures in equally important inaugural classes. In a performative perspective, it is also a way to record the overcoming of the phase of transition embodied by the *Course*, position he tries to defend through his own lessons.

Within this strategy, the polemic dimension of the argumentation developed in his courses must also be highlighted. The whole interpretation of the *Course in General Linguistics* developed by Jakobson stands indeed in opposition with Charles Bally’s and Albert Sechehaye’s. In his teachings at the École Libre, Jakobson constantly criticizes Bally’s and Sechehaye’s Saussurism, in particular on the questions of the “sign”, the “parole”, and of the “affectivity”, themes on which the Genevans put a great emphasis. This criticism, generally implicit, is in line with Jakobson’s desire to enforce his own critical interpretation of the *Course* against what he calls the Genevans’ “orthodox” position. However, this polemic dimension has gone unnoticed by a listener like Lévi-Strauss who was not aware of the

debates and therefore minimized the Jakobsonian intermediary in the presentation of Saussure's ideas.

Jakobson's general linguistics classes at the *École Libre* eventually present twofold interests, concerning Roman Jakobson's own life as well as the history of 20th century Saussurism. First, these courses correspond to a pivotal moment in Jakobson's biography. They form a transition between the end of his European era and the beginning of the American one. The context of the *École Libre* brings together The Old and the New World. On a theoretical point of view, the classes at the *École Libre* correspond for Jakobson to "the totality of his work in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s" (Jakobson 1976b: 471) and they show his adaptation to a new, largely hostile, academic context. In Jakobson's life, teaching in New York closes a first stage of confrontation with the Saussurean legacy. The second phase will be inaugurated in the mid-1960s with the discovery of Saussure's autograph texts. Jakobson's unpublished course notes also shed light on new references – such as Boas, Sapir, Hoijer, and Bloomfield – that appear alongside more classical references dating back to the Prague era – such as Saussure, Trubetzkoy, and Bühler. These new references reflect the change of direction of Jakobson's research in contact with the American context. Furthermore, the general linguistics classes at the *École Libre* are consistent with a key moment in the transmission of structural linguistics' achievements. Its reception by Lévi-Strauss paves the way for post-war generalized structuralism. This moment of transmission has largely been mystified retrospectively by both linguists, in several texts and interviews, which have had a lasting influence on the historiography. The description of what really has been transmitted at the *École Libre des Hautes Études* can be accessed through the content of these lessons, through the preserved course notes.

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