

Saussure, Locke and Lacan:¹
Semiotics, Semiology and the Evolving Linguistic Community

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Youtube Playlist Link:

http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=B25754175BE95AF0

§ 1: **Anthroposemiotics**: The Capacity for Humans to Understand Signs

- *CGL* was not written by Ferdinand de Saussure but his students, Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye.
- **The Three Phases of Linguistics**: [As objects of study]

1. **Grammar**

- Based on logic
- provides rules that govern form and structure
- *prescriptive* discipline

2. **Philology**

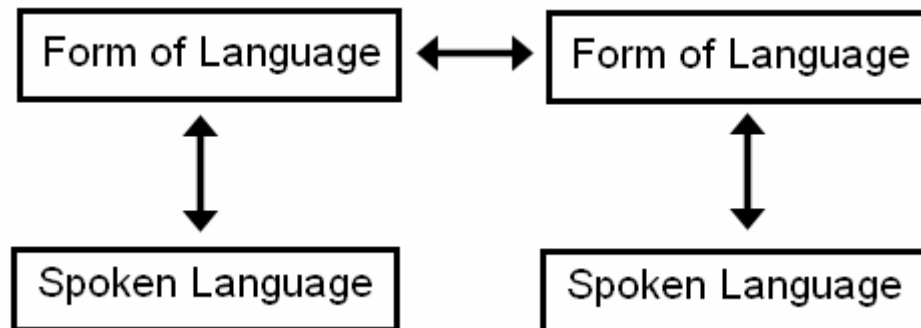
- “seeks to establish, interpret and comment upon text”²
- Best used as a form of methodological criticism.

- **Weakness**:

- “it is too slavishly subservient to the written language”³

3. **Comparative Philology/ Comparative Grammar**

- Familial relation of languages
- “the elucidation of one language by reference to a related language”⁴



¹ I have knowingly omitted Charles Sanders Peirce

² *CGL*, 1986, p. 1

³ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

- Primitive elements are vital for reconstruction (p.3).
- Comparative philology allowed philologist to recognize that there was a possibility to systematize linguistic analysis, **BUT** “they did not manage to found a new science of linguistics”⁵

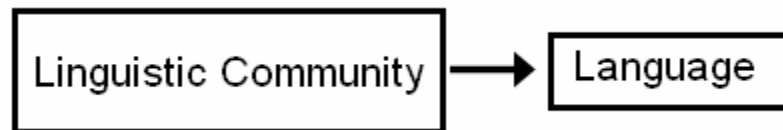
Saussure wanted to know what was the object of their⁶ study?

Critique of Comparative Philology

- Limited to Indo-European Languages
- Failure to extrapolate on comparative connections
- “fail to reflect the conditions which do obtain in language everywhere”⁷
- “comparison is **only** a tool”⁸

Neogrammarians

- Contextualized comparative philology **within** an historical context
 - [Q: “what is the connection between language and reality?”]
- Described language as “a collective mind of a linguistic community”⁹



- A linguistic community is an **antecedent condition** [both necessary and sufficient condition] for language.
 - [Wittgenstein on private language]
 - **John Locke**: language is “the great instrument and common tie of society”¹⁰
 - not enough for language though: [**E.g., parrot and red ball**] ([minute 4:43 in the video](#))
 - “for parrots, and several other birds will be taught to make articulate sounds...”¹¹
 - Neogrammarians ultimately failed to elucidate the object of study.

⁵ Ibid., p. 3.

⁶ The comparativists

⁷ Ibid., p. 4

⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁰ *Essay concerning human understanding*, Book III, Chap. I Section 1 (III, I, 1.)

¹¹ Locke, (III, I, 1.)

§ 1.2:

Data and Aims of Linguistics:

- Language is the *data* of linguistics.
 - i.e., language is that which is being analyzed

3 Aims of the Linguist:

1. A record of all languages and their familial associations
2. Identify operational laws governing the structure of language
3. “delimit and define linguistics itself”¹²

****“The essence of a language...has nothing to do with the phonic nature of a linguistic sign”**¹³ [explain the significance]**

- Phonic representation are arbitrary
- There is a relationship between the phonic nature and the sign
- ∴ The relationship between the phonic nature and the sign is necessarily arbitrary.
 - **Locke**: (III, II, 7.) “But so far as words are of use and signification, so far is there a constant connection between the **sound and the idea**; and a designation, that the one stands for the other: without which application of them, **they are nothing but so much insignificant noise.**”

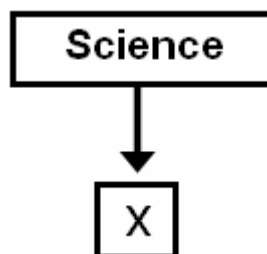
Language is the concern of everyone

Saussure is attempting to make linguistic analysis more accessible.

§ 1.2.2:

The Object of Study

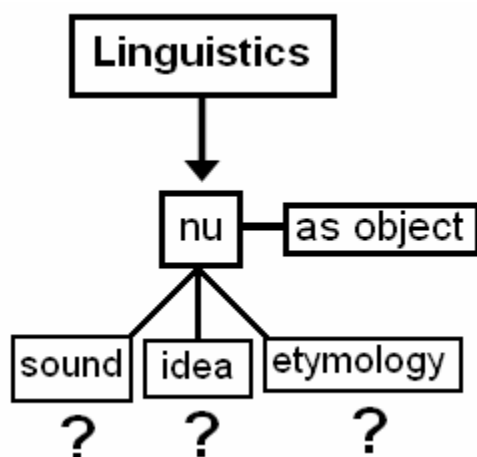
- It may be stated that a function of science is to analyze a given object.



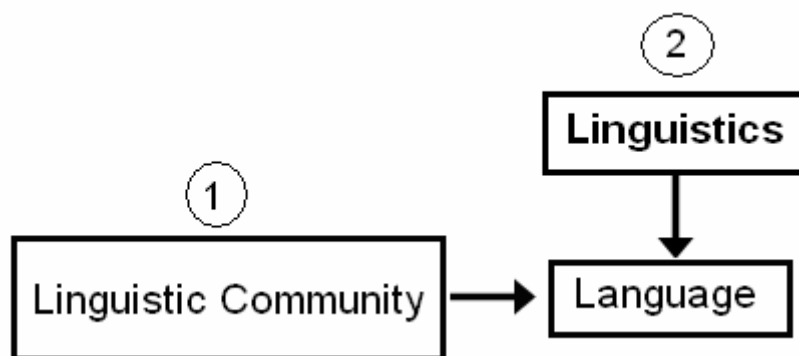
- The object *lends-itself* to scientific analysis
- The “linguistic object” of analysis is harder to identify

¹² *CGL.*, p. 6.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.



- “it is the viewpoint **adopted** which creates the object” (p. 8)
 - [significance of the term **adopted**]



Tagmemic Analysis

- Generally understood as the basic unit of linguistic analysis
 - **Potential Tagmemes** (Analysis by Reduction)
 1. “auditory impressions” (p. 8)
 2. “oral articulation” (p. 8)
 3. **Both fail** because “speech sounds are only the instruments of thought and have no independent existence” (p. 8)

Meaning:

1. [Sound = “complex auditory articulation”]
(+)
2. [historical system of relational ideas] i.e., sound to idea (historically)
=
3. Meaning: **both** *individually* and *socially* cognizable

§ 1.3:

1. [Sound = “complex auditory articulation”]
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Analysis of Meaning

- We must recognize that since (2) is an antecedent condition for (3) [meaning] and since (2) is subject to social construction (*prima facie*), then (3) is inherently subject to social construction.

Analysis of Object

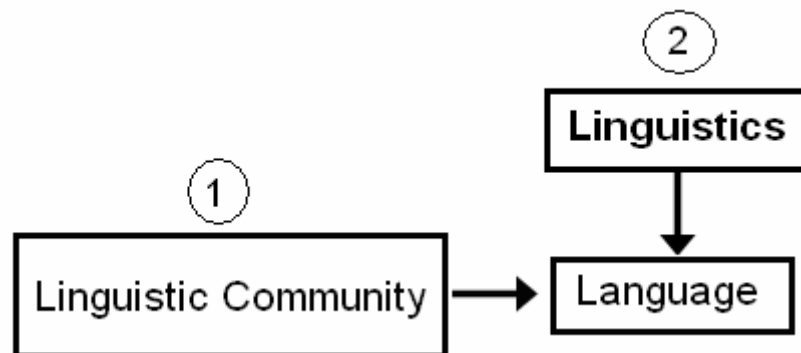
Catch22

1. If linguist isolate an individual facet of language, they lose the systemic understanding.
2. If linguists study language as a system, they are confounded by the simultaneous relations between component parts.

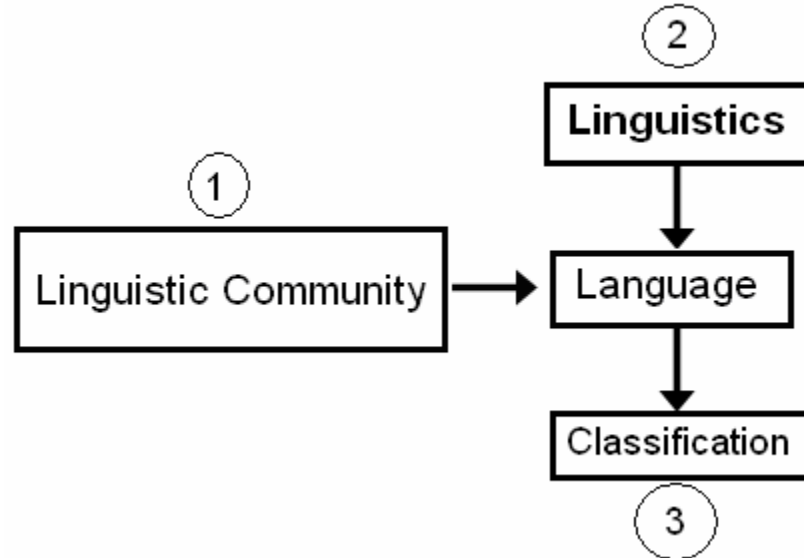
The objective in the linguistic analysis of the object:

“The linguist must take the study of linguistic structure as his primary concern, and relate all other manifestations of language to it.” (p. 9).

- Language belongs to the individual and society
- There is no discernable unit for measuring language
 - [as a consequence of its inherent historical social situatedness]
- “Self Contained Whole” (p. 10)



- “Principle of Classification” (p. 10)



- It is NOT begging the question or circular reasoning to be both a “self contained whole” and a “principle of classification”
 - **Aristotle**
 - *ta legomena*: the “things that are said”
 - establishes a necessary correspondence between the “things that are said” and their referents.
- **Referents**
 - **Conceptual Referents**: relationship between the “things that are said” and ideas/concepts
 - **Objectual Referents**: relationship between the “things that are said” and objective reality
- **George Berkeley’s Subjective Idealism** (conceptual referent only)
 - Berkeley’s subjective idealism challenges the notion of “objective reality”
- **Any Rand’s Objectivist Epistemology** (objectual referent only)
 - Rand’s objectivist epistemology challenges the notion of subjective idealism. Argues that perceptual existences are “the only primary existence”¹⁴
- **Hybridized Account**: both conceptual and objectual referents

¹⁴ *Introduction to objectivist epistemology*. 1990. New American Library, p. 15.

§ 1.3.2:

Elements of the Linguistic Faculty *par excellence*

- Language is manifested in speech acts
- Language is conventional [very important]
- The “faculty for constructing language” is **natural** to human beings (p. 10).
- Linguistic social structures give **meaning** to “complex auditory articulations”

Analysis of the Speech Circuit




- Concepts are associated with signs
- C: Concepts; S: Signs
- C → S, “executive”, active
- S → C, “receptive”, passive

“It is therefore possible to conceive of a science which studies the role of signs as part of social life.” (p. 15), which will be defined as semiology.

“Linguistics will thus be assigned to a clearly defined place in the field of human knowledge” [general psychology/epistemology] (p. 16).

The Nature of the Linguistic Signs:

- Some (falsely) view language as reducible to a nomenclature:

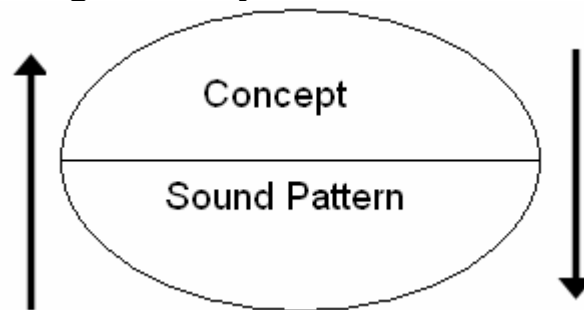
-  : Tree
-  : Man
-  : Car

Problems

- “Assumes that ideas already exist *independently* of words.” (p. 65).
- Fails to differentiate the sign from the sound or the concept, e.g. the differentiation of ‘man’ as an utterance of speech and “man” as a concept of being.
- Assumes that the connection between the name and the object is simple

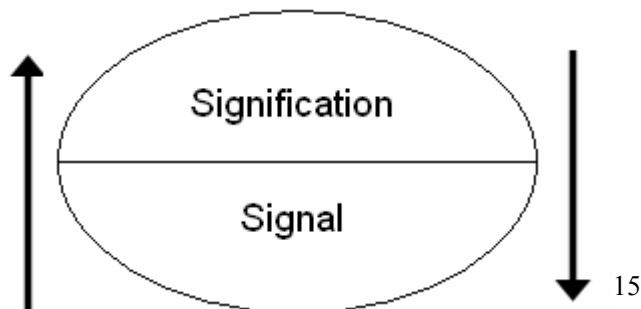
Nature of a Sign

- “A linguistic sign is **not** a link between a thing and a name, but between a **concept** and a **sound pattern**” (p. 66).
- Sound patterns are not physical: (not words)
- Sound patterns are impressions (psychological)
 - E.g., silent recitation as representative of sound patterns
- A Linguistic **Sign may be represented as:**
 - A psychological entity:



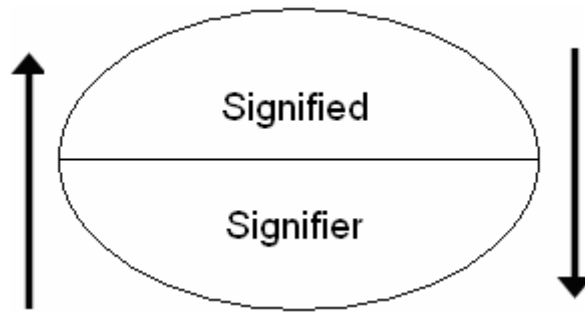
[Concept = Signification]

[Sound Pattern = Signal] which is a ***token*** of the ***Signification***. [160]



¹⁵ “replace concept and sound pattern respectively by signification and signal.” (p. 67). *CGL*

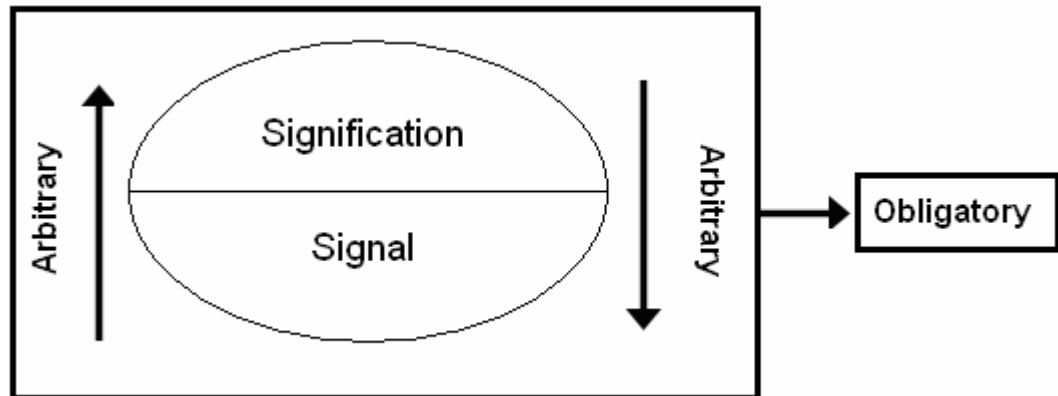
Locke: Book III, II, §1: “The use then of words, is to be sensible marks of **ideas**; and the ideas they stand for, are their proper and immediate **signification**.” Locke, Book III, Chp. II, §7: “the proper and immediate signification of words are **ideas in the mind of the speaker**”



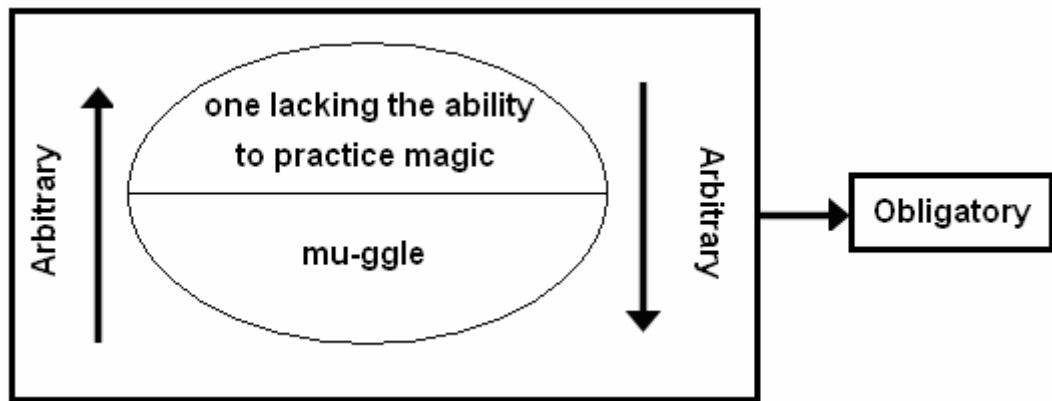
§ 1.4:

The Organizing Linguistic Principle:

- The connection between the signal and the signification is an *arbitrary* connection. “The link between **signal** and **signification** is arbitrary.” (p. 67, *CGL*)
 - “The linguistic sign is arbitrary” (p. 67, *CGL*)
 - The idea and the sound pattern are arbitrarily connected
 - Differences in signals [sound patterns] give meaning to the difference in languages
 - “the main object of study in semiology will be the class of systems based on the arbitrary nature of the sign.” (p. 68 *CGL*).



- Once the **linguistic community** accepts the association between the signal and signification it is obligatory.
- The relationship between the signal and the signification is wholly arbitrary, *that* this relationship serves as the foundation for our socialization is not.
- The acquisition of language reinforces the arbitrary association of signal and signification *as law*.
 - [Note: this arbitrary association is the condition for the possibility for our socialization]. E.g., the feral child.



§ 2.0:

Linguistic Value:

- “The value of a word is mainly or primarily represented in terms of its capacity for representing a certain idea.”¹⁶
- “Value, in its conceptual aspect, is doubtless **part of meaning**.”¹⁷

Conceptions of Linguistic Meaning:

- **Primary Source of Meaning:** Relationship between *Signal* and *Signification* (as an instantiation of meaning).
 - “the counterpart of the sound pattern.” (CGL, p. 113).
- **Secondary Source of Meaning:** Relationship between *Sign* and *Sign*.

“A language is a system in which all the elements fit together, and in which the value of any one element depends on the **simultaneous coexistence** of all the others.”¹⁸



Goal:

We need to “assimilate the relations represented here by **horizontal arrows** to those other relations represented in the previous diagram by **vertical arrows**.” (CGL. p. [159]).



¹⁶ CGL p. 112, Chap. IV, Sec. 2.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 112.

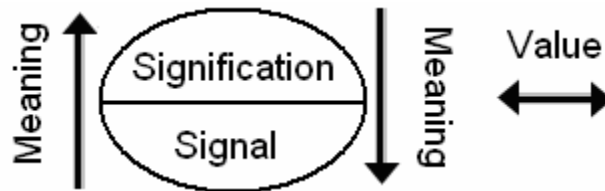
¹⁸ bid., p. 113.

Difference between Meaning and Value:

“the concept [signification/signified]...is linked to the sound pattern [signal/signifier]. **So the diagram represents what the word means.**”¹⁹



“The particular concept is simply a value which emerges **from relations with other values of a similar kind.**”



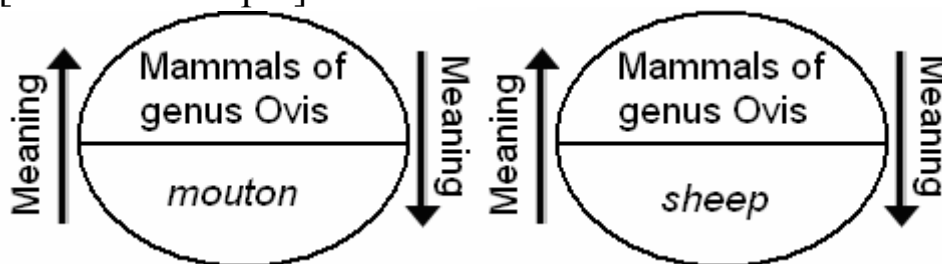
With respect to the arrows:

Vertical arrows: represent **meaning**

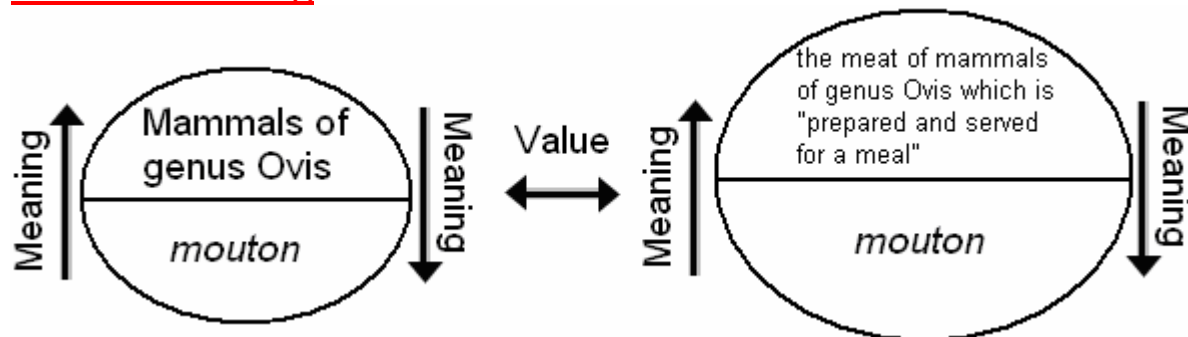
Horizontal arrows: represent **value**

“In a sign, what matters more than any idea or sound associated with it is **what other signs surround it.** The proof of this lies in the fact that the value of a sign may change without affecting either meaning or sound simply because some neighboring sign has undergone a change.” [166].

[Mutton example]



Shared Meaning

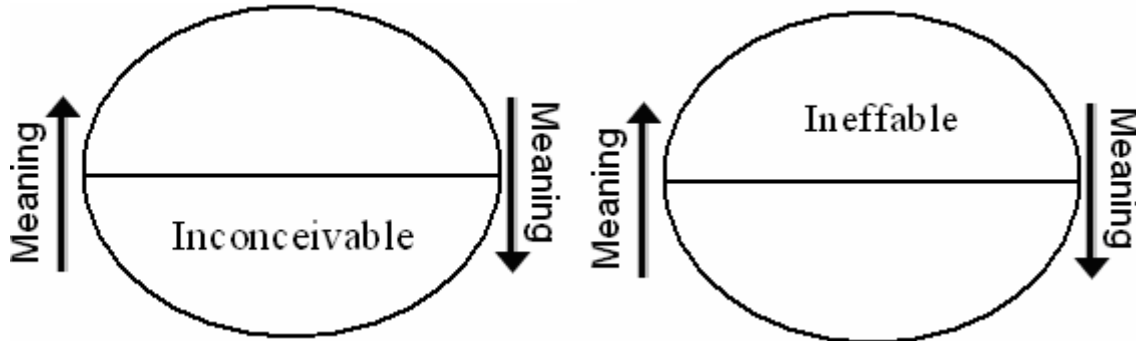


Difference in Value

¹⁹ CGL., p. [162], p. 115.

Implications/Complications for Meaning/Value Relationship

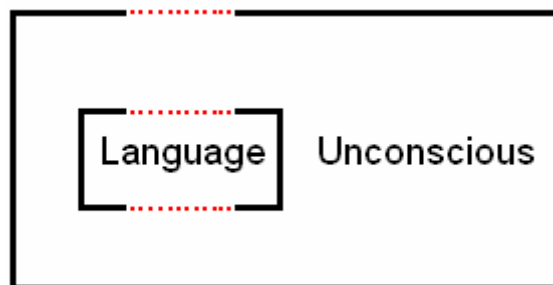
- The value of language is understood in terms of relationships between signs
- One cannot transform the meaning of a sign [signification] without transforming the value that meaning has in relation to other signs.



- What is the semiological status of the *Signal, inconceivable*?
 - There is a sound pattern [signal/signifier] but there can be no, by definition, signification [concept/signified] for this sound pattern.
 - Thus, it **cannot** be said to have meaning.
- What is the semiological status of the *Signification, ineffable*?
 - There is the concept of ineffability, but there can be no, by definition, word or sound pattern [signal/signifier] associated with this signification.

§ 3.0: Lacan's "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious" Reason since Freud / *Écrits*

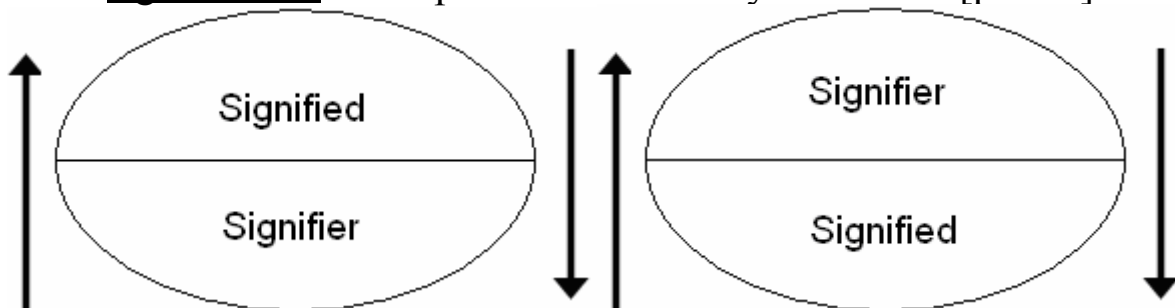
- The structure of language is discovered in the unconscious [p. 495]



The Meaning of "the Letter" in Lacan:

- "By "letter" I designate the material medium [*support*] that concrete discourse borrows **from** language." [p. 495]. It is the "essential localized structure of the signifier" [p. 501].

- “The major theme of this science [linguistics] is thus, based in effect, on the primordial position of the signifier and the signified as distinct orders initially separated by a **barrier resisting signification.**” [p. 497].
- Lacan, argues against the **traditional interpretation** of the **function** of the signifier. “**And we will fail to sustain this question as long as we have not jettisoned the illusion that the signifier serves the function of representing the signified.**” [p. 498.].
 - **Saussure:** The value of the [signifier] “is therefore not determined merely by that concept or meaning **for which it is a token.**” [p. 160]
- “Now the function of the **signifier** is, as is commonly said of language, **that it is articulated.**” [p. 501].
- “it is easy to see that only signifier-to-signifier correlations provide the standard for any and every search for signification.” [p. 502].
 - **Rephrase:** it is only in how we use our words [i.e., usage] that we come to understand meaning [signification] in the world.
- “Whence we can say that it is in the chain of the signifier that meaning *insists*, but that none of the chain’s elements *consists* in the signification it can provide at that very moment.” [p. 502].

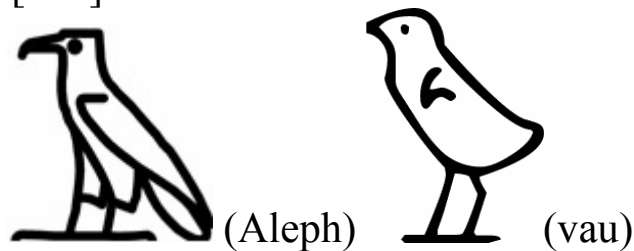


“The notion of the incessant **sliding** of the signified **under** the signifier thus comes to fore.” [p.502].

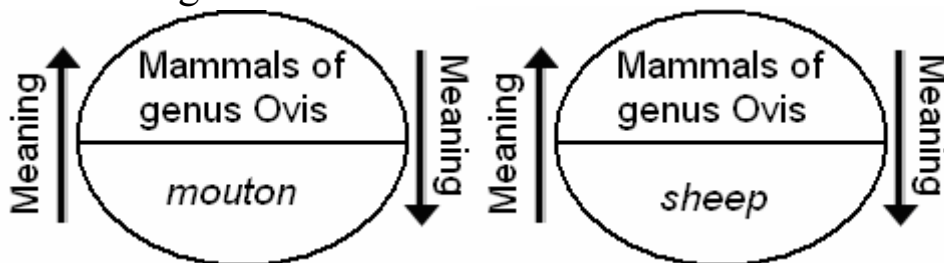
§ 3.1:

The Oneiric Rebus:

- “The dream is a rebus” [510].
- **Dream images are signifiers**
- Dreams are ciphered
- “...the images value as a signifier has nothing to do with its signification” [510].

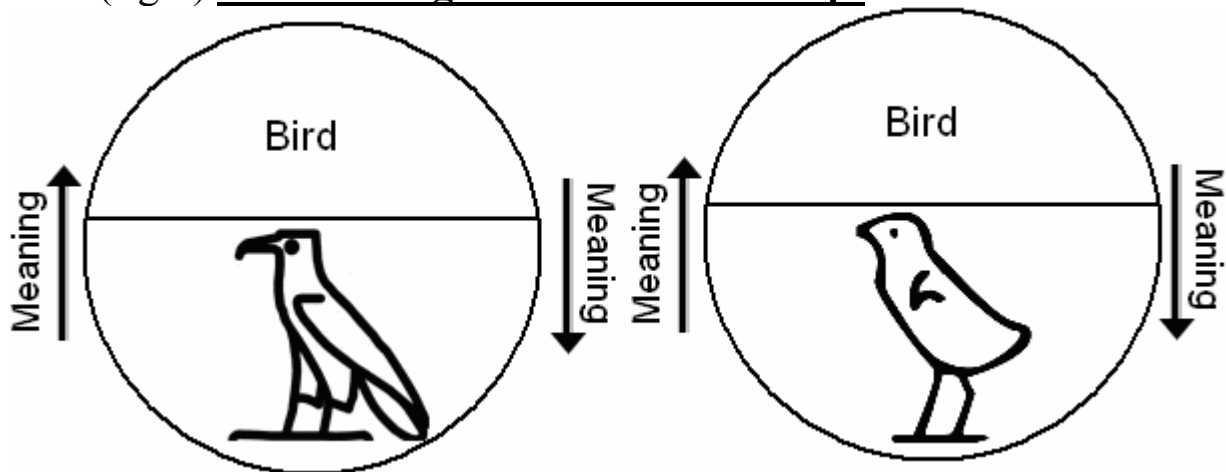


RIGHT: According to Saussure



WRONG: According to Lacan, via Freud.

- The images below of hieroglyphic aviaries²⁰ represented as signifiers, featured by the images of a vulture (left) and a chick (right) **have nothing to do with the concept** “bird”.



²⁰ [513] *Ecrits*.

SIMILARILY:

Images that we “see” during dreams have nothing to do with the signification they would have if observed while awake. Dream images are signifiers.

The Signifier': The Signifier (**Prime**)

- *Entstellung* “transposition / disfigurement” is the “general precondition for the function of the dream:

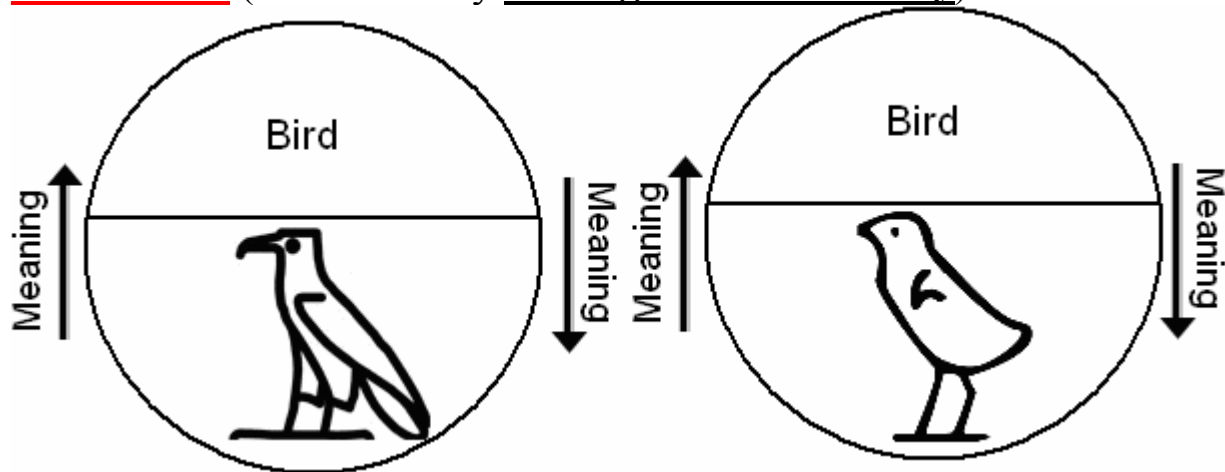
○ *Entstellung* → Dream



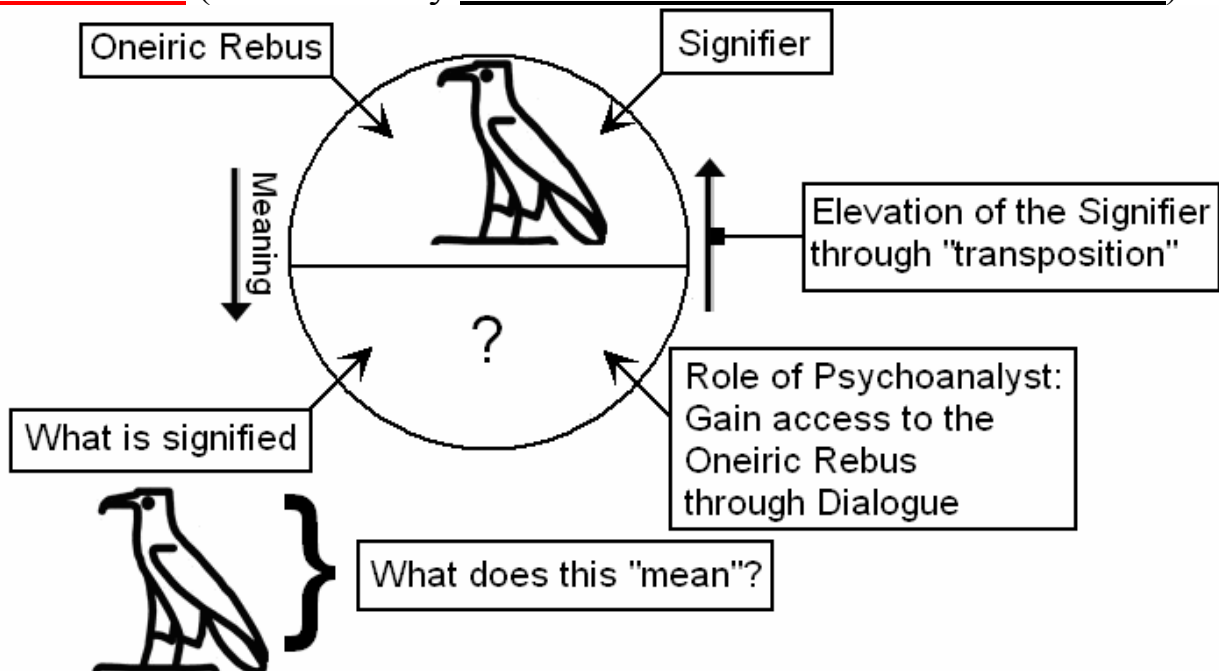
- “[*Entstellung* was] designated earlier...as the sliding of the *signified* under the *signifier*” [511].
- “The dream-work proceeds in accordance with the laws of the signifier” [512].
- “Right from the outset, people failed to recognize the constitutive role the signifier in the status Freud immediately assigned to the unconscious...” [512].
 - **Question:** What does “constitutive” mean here?
 - **Answer:** The signifier has the power to construct meaning that would otherwise evade our conscious abilities because after passing “through” *Entstellung*, it is elevated to meaning giving functionality.
 - The meaning is NOT immediately apparent
 - *Entstellung* facilitates the transposition of “the object-relation” established within a linguistic community.

§ 3.2:

Communal: (As defined by the linguistic community)



Individual: (As defined by the constructs of the unconscious mind)



“S and s of the Saussurian algorithm **are not on the same plane**... man was deluding himself in believing he was situated in their common axis, which is nowhere.” [518].

- **Question:** What does “not on the same plane mean?”
- **Answer:** this statement proceeded Lacan’s discourse on the *cogito* and the structures of metonymy and metaphor. The plane is an epistemological gulf which arises as a consequence of the transposition of the signifier.