



Course in General Linguistics (Classic Reprint)

Ferdinand De Saussure

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Few other figures in the history of the science of language have commanded such lasting respect and inspired such varied accomplishments as Ferdinand de Saussure. Leonard Bloomfield justly credited the eminent Swiss professor with providing a theoretic foundation to the newer trend in Linguistics study, and European scholars have seldom failed to consider his views when dealing with any theoretical problem. But the full implications of his teachings, for both static and evolutionary studies, have still to be elaborated. Saussure succeeded in impressing his individual stamp on almost everything within his reach. At the age of twenty, while still a student at Leipzig, he published his monumental treatise on the Proto-Indo-European vocalic system. This treatise, though based on theories and facts that were common property in his day, is still recognized as the most inspired and exhaustive treatment of the Proto-Indo-European vocalism. He studied under the neogrammarians Osthoff and Leskien, yet refuted their atomistic approach to linguistics in his attempt to frame a coherent science of linguistics. Despite the paucity of his publications (some 600 pages during his lifetime), Saussure's influence has been far-reaching. At Paris, where he taught Sanskrit for ten years (1881- 1891) and served as secretary of the Linguistic Society of Paris, his influence on the development of linguistics was decisive. His first-hand studies of Phrygian inscriptions and Lithuanian dialects may have been responsible for some of the qualities that subsequently endeared him to his students at the University of Geneva (1906-1911). His unique insight into the phenomenon of language brought to fruition the best of contemporary thinking and long years of patient investigation and penetrating thought. The dominant philosophical system of each age makes its imprint on each step in the evolution.

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