



# Saussure's *Cours* and the Monosyllabic Myth: the perception of Chinese in early linguistic theory

Raúl Aranovich & Alan Wong

To cite this article: Raúl Aranovich & Alan Wong (2022): Saussure's *Cours* and the Monosyllabic Myth: the perception of Chinese in early linguistic theory, *Language & History*, DOI: [10.1080/17597536.2022.2088002](https://doi.org/10.1080/17597536.2022.2088002)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17597536.2022.2088002>



© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 21 Jul 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 191



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

## Saussure's *Cours* and the Monosyllabic Myth: the perception of Chinese in early linguistic theory

Raúl Aranovich and Alan Wong

Department of Linguistics, University of California Davis, Davis, CA, USA

### ABSTRACT

Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* reproduced a misconception of Chinese as a monosyllabic language without complex words. In this paper, we investigate the sources of this misconception in Western thought. We also show that the misconception about Chinese was already known to be inaccurate in Saussure's time, and that he had many missed opportunities to find out. While Saussure reproduced the empirical errors of Comparatists and Neogrammarians with respect to Chinese, he moved away from the cultural prejudices and attitudes that were behind their claims. This turn, we argue, illustrates an important aspect of the Saussurean scientific revolution, which was fuelled more by fundamental conceptual changes than by empirical discoveries.

### KEYWORDS

Saussure; Chinese; Monosyllabic Myth; morphology; ideogram; arbitrariness; logocentrism; typology; isolating language

## Introduction

Ferdinand De Saussure is regarded as the originator of our modern conception of linguistics as a science.<sup>1</sup> His new conception of the study of language took the form of a number of dichotomies: *Langue* vs. *Parole*, the duality of the linguistic sign (signifier vs. signified) and the principle of arbitrariness, synchrony vs. diachrony, syntagmatic vs. associative relations among signs. These ideas are well-known to any student of Saussure (and to linguistics scholars in general), so we will not elaborate on them here. In general, Saussure believed that language should be studied as an object in itself, rather than as the manifestation of historical, physiological, or psychological forces and processes. In this sense, he was reacting against the historicism and physiologism of previous generations of scholars (e.g. the Comparatists and the Neogrammarians).

---

**CONTACT** Raúl Aranovich  [raaranovich@ucdavis.edu](mailto:raaranovich@ucdavis.edu)

<sup>1</sup>Earlier versions of this work were presented at the 2017 and 2020 meetings of the North American Association for the History of the Language Sciences, and the *Colloque Le Cours de Linguistique Générale, 1916-2016: L'émergence*, held in Geneva in 2017. The authors wish to thank the audiences at those conferences for valuable suggestions and discussions. This paper benefited greatly from detailed comments from John Joseph, whom the authors thank warmly, and from an anonymous reviewer. All errors and omissions are the authors' sole responsibility.

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.  
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

Ferdinand de Saussure's ideas never took published form during his lifetime. His *Cours de linguistique générale* (henceforth the *Cours*) was pieced together in 1916 by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, after Saussure's death, from Saussure's lecture notes and notes taken by his students between 1907 and 1911 (Saussure taught his course three times, on alternate years). The *Cours* contains mostly examples from the Indo-European language family, but as a course on *general* linguistics, it discusses other language families too.<sup>2</sup> Of interest to us are the references to Chinese, which is often presented in extreme opposition to the Indo-European languages. Saussure's discussion of Chinese is never backed by concrete examples, and it seems to replicate common misconceptions about the language. In this paper, we consider the consequences of the fact that the foundational text of modern linguistics starts from a misconceived view of Chinese when arguing for some of its theoretical innovations.

The common misconceptions about Chinese that we find in the *Cours* are known as the **Monosyllabic Myth** in modern Chinese scholarship. This is the view that all words in Chinese are monosyllabic, and that therefore Chinese has no *complex* word formation processes (and no morphology to speak of, whether inflectional or derivational).<sup>3</sup> The Monosyllabic Myth may be decomposed into three claims:

- (1) Every Chinese morpheme is a single syllable.
- (2) Every Chinese morpheme is a free morpheme.
- (3) In written Chinese, each word corresponds to a single Chinese character.

Kennedy (1951), who first named the myth, attributed this error mainly to 'the concept of a fabulous and mysterious East' which motivated Westerners to look for the strange and different in Asian civilisations rather than the

<sup>2</sup>The *Cours* has references to Hebrew and the Semitic family (Saussure 1958[1916]: 187, 227), and sporadic mentions of other language families such as Finno-Ugric and Bantu (Saussure 1958[1916]: 192). Page numbers refer to Baskin's (Saussure 1959 [1916]) translation of the *Cours*.

<sup>3</sup>As a reviewer points out, the logical connection between monosyllabism and lack of word formation processes is not as direct as this statement suggests. There are many word formation processes that do not involve an extension of a root or base by segmental material (i.e. conversion, apophony), and even when affixes are involved they do not always increase the syllabic count (e.g. *cow-cows*). Moreover, it is possible to imagine a language without inflection or derivation which nevertheless includes polysyllabic roots in its vocabulary, an alternative that did not go unnoticed past Saussure, as we discuss later in the paper. However, if one assumes a model of morphology in which affixation of syllabic elements is the principal method of word formation, as in the Classical languages of Europe, then the connection between monosyllabism and analyticity is clear (this is why we emphasise that the claim applies to the formation of *complex* words). We are not arguing that this is a true statement, only that it is one more misconception at the core of the Monosyllabic Myth. A conception of morphology that is limited to the concatenation of roots and affixes may have led to an oversight of non-concatenative morphological processes in Chinese, an idea we will return to through this paper. In fact, one of the authors of this paper has shown that Saussure's conception of morphology was closer to the Word and Paradigm model than to the Item and Arrangement model, which had a tendency to reduce all word formation processes to the concatenation of morphemes (Aranovich 2016). Saussure's model was finely tuned to account for cases of apophony, which are discussed at length during the *Cours*.

familiar. In the case of the Monosyllabic Myth, Chinese is cast as an ‘otherly’ language, even at odds with another language of Asia like Sanskrit which, by virtue of being an Indo-European language, received a more familiar treatment.

We suggest that references to Chinese in the *Cours* must be evaluated for their conceptual place in Saussure’s emerging theory of language as a social object, disregarding their empirical inaccuracy. After summarising the references to Chinese in the *Cours*, we show that they reproduce a common Western misconception (the Monosyllabic Myth), but that they fit well into Saussure’s theoretical approach to linguistics, including the relationship between speech and writing, degrees of arbitrariness in the linguistic sign, and language typology and universals. Next, we summarise the Monosyllabic Myth’s content and genesis, and the reasons for its inaccuracy. Finally, we investigate what may have caused the *Cours* to misrepresent the grammar of Chinese, even though accurate evidence was available to Saussure.

Saussure, we conclude, repeats many of the same tropes about the structure of Chinese that previous generations of linguists believed in. But he does so without any of the ideological preconceptions that the West held about the relationship between culture and language in the Orient and the evolution of languages generally. Saussure’s approach to Chinese in the *Cours* shows that his reasons for breaking with the Comparatists and the Neogrammarians were not based on analytical or descriptive breakthroughs (as is often the case in modern linguistics), but on a new conceptualisation of the existing data. This important aspect of Saussure’s method helps us better understand the nature of the conceptual revolution he would usher in the humanities and social sciences of the 20th century.

### Chinese and Saussure’s conception of writing in the *Cours*

One of the first lessons of the *Cours* is that linguistics deals with language as it is spoken and does not limit itself with the written word. However, the written word is so ‘intimately bound’ to the spoken word that it ‘usurps’ its role as the main object of study (CGL 23–24):

... language does have a definite and stable oral tradition that is independent of writing, but the influence of the written form prevents our seeing this. The first linguists confused language and writing, just as the humanists had done before them. Even Bopp failed to distinguish clearly between letters and sounds. (Saussure 1959 [1916]: 24)

Writing is an imperfect representation of speech, and by confusing letters and sounds the linguist misses its true object of study. To better explain the relationship between the written and the spoken word, Saussure compares

the phonetic system to the ideographic system. The independence of speech from writing may be obscured in the former, but this fact becomes apparent in the latter:

In an ideographic system each word is represented by a single sign that is unrelated to the sounds of the word itself. Each written sign stands for a whole word and, consequently, for the idea expressed by the word. The classic example of an ideographic system of writing is Chinese. (Saussure 1959 [1916]: 25-26)

For Saussure, the Chinese writing system is important in that it highlights the independence of writing and the sounds of language: an ideogram ‘stands for a whole word’. The sources for this passage are from course III (Engler 1967: 74; sources are from D41, S1.21, J37, III C 76),<sup>4</sup> and they make it clear that the ideographic sign does not pay attention to the sounds that constitute the acoustic image but, nevertheless, it represents a word and not a concept. The *Cours* does not have any graphical images of Chinese writing, but one of the sources (III C 76 (494)) includes two images of the sign for ‘house’, one of which is a pictorial representation and the other one an ideogram. This example reinforces the lesson that an ideogram does not need to be a pictorial representation of an idea or concept, but rather of a whole sign.<sup>5</sup>

The passages that follow, however, present a rather different (even contradictory) explanation. Saussure asserts that an ideogram is not a representation of a word (e.g. a sign within a linguistic system), but a separate sign of a distinct language, which may have the same meaning as different words across the Chinese languages:

The statement that the written word tends to replace the spoken one in our minds is true of both systems of writing, but the tendency is stronger in the ideographic system. To a Chinese, an ideogram and a spoken word are both symbols of an idea, to him writing is a second language, and if two words that have the same sound are used in conversation, he may resort to writing in order to express his thought. (Saussure 1959 [1916]: 26)

If these two passages seem contradictory it is because they were taken from different courses, and woven together by the editors. The latter one was not from course III, but from course II. In fact, the first sentence of the

---

<sup>4</sup>When citing from Engler’s (1967) critical edition of the *Cours*, we indicate the page, and also the sources. Columns 2–5 in Engler (1967) reproduce notes from the following students (codes in parentheses): Albert Riedlinger (R), Louis Caille (Ca), Léopold Gautier (G), François Bouchardy (B), Émile Constantin (C), George Dégallier (D), Mme A. Sechehayé (S), and Francis Joseph (F). The codes are followed by page numbers, and, when notes were taken for more than one year, the codes are preceded by a Roman numeral indicating the year (I to III). In addition, Engler includes extracts from three other courses: Morphology (R Morph.), Phonetics (R Phon.), and Greek and Latin Etymology (Br). In addition, some of the notes were taken from the works of Robert Godel, in which case they are indicated as SM. For more detailed explanation of the rendering of the sources cf. Engler (1967: XI–XII).

<sup>5</sup>The presence of this example in the notes is important, as it reveals that Saussure was acquainted with Chinese writing, and also because it shows the attention to linguistic detail that is so characteristic of Saussure’s pedagogical style.

paragraph above, which seems to summarise the contents of the previous quote, is still from course III (Engler 1967: 75; sources are from D42/SM III 103, J37, and III C 76), but the statements that writing is a ‘second language’, and that ideograms can be used to disambiguate spoken words, are from course II (Engler 1967: 76; sources are from II R 10/SM II 51, G 1.2a, B 6, and II C 9).

After this, the *Cours* continues about the importance of Chinese writing as a vehicle for transcending the mutual unintelligibility of various spoken Chinese dialects:

... in Chinese the mental substitution of the written word for the spoken word does not have the annoying consequences that it has in a phonetic system, for the substitution is absolute, the same graphic symbol can stand for words from different Chinese dialects. (Saussure 1959 [1916]: 26)

But, again, we find here that the editors of the *Cours* blended notes from two different courses. The ‘annoying consequences’ of the alphabetic system with respect to the ideographic one are discussed in the second course (same place in the sources as above). There, Saussure remarked that the alphabetic system found in Latin had *effets déplorables*, making it more difficult to separate the written word from the spoken word than in Chinese writing. But then, the editors of the *Cours* illustrate this concept with the example of the mutual intelligibility of ideograms across the Chinese dialects, which is taken from the third course (Engler 1967: 77; D42/SM III 103, J37, and III C 77) and is offered to reinforce the idea that ideograms are not written signifiers associated with a meaning, but representations of whole words.

The sources, then, show that Saussure had different goals when explaining Chinese writing in the third course, compared to the previous two. In the 3rd course, ideograms are analysed as a representation of a whole word (i.e. a sign), and this is illustrated with the example of the same ideogram being used for different words across the Chinese dialects. In the first and second courses, on the other hand, an ideogram is seen as a sign in its own right, with a written signifier in place of the acoustic image. References to Chinese were brought up to reinforce the autonomy of the written and spoken words, but ideograms are still treated as if they were on par with spoken words, as the following notes from the first course make clear:

Il n’y a pas deux sortes de mots (au moins dans toute écriture phonétique et non purement idéologique comme le chinois); le mot écrit n’est pas coordonné au mot parlé, mais lui est subordonné. (Engler 1967: 75; I R 1.9)

In the 3rd course, Saussure's emphasis is more on the two systems of writing, less on the theoretical aspects of the relationship between the written and the spoken signifiers. This relation is the focus of the 2nd course, which goes deeper into the subordinate nature of the written word (in phonetic systems), and how their pronunciation cannot be taken as the starting point of linguistic research,<sup>6</sup> since written words are supposed to *represent* the spoken word. But in Chinese, the character takes on a life of its own, separate from a word's pronunciation, becoming an *alternative signifier*. This is why the illustrative example in the 2nd course is of different characters used to disambiguate homophonous words within the same language.

If Saussure's ideas about Chinese writing seem contradictory, it is because of the attempt made by the editors of the *Cours* to weave together two different views in Saussure's lectures. Saussure's goal had always been to disassociate linguistics from philology, by showing that linguistics was based on the analysis of spoken forms, not written forms. He offered plenty of examples to show that important acoustic clues were obfuscated by written forms in languages with phonetic writing systems. Saussure's thinking about ideographic writing, however, seems to have evolved in the third course. There, Chinese characters are no longer presented as independent signs, but as representations of whole words, and therefore subordinate to the spoken word as well. The seemingly contradictory analysis of Chinese writing in the *Cours* was already observed by Harris (1987), who, nevertheless, failed to recognise that it originated in a botched attempt on the part of the editors to harmonise differing views from successive elaborations of the topic in the lectures.

Harris (1987) remarks that Saussure's criticism of the philological tradition, and the study of language based solely on the written word, put him at odds with his own research into Sanskrit and other ancient languages without any living speakers. To study these languages, one must do so through their written monuments. Saussure, then, needs to develop a theory of writing that allows him to get to *la langue*, as a system of signs that associate an acoustic image and a concept, through their written forms. The thesis that writing is a *representation* of the spoken word achieves this result.

For Harris, there is a 'tension in the *Cours* between the specific thesis of "alphabetic idealization" and the more general thesis that writing represents *la langue*' (Harris 1987). If an ideogram can point to a meaning without representing the acoustic image of a word, then writing cannot represent *la langue*. This would be true even of alphabetic writing. Now, this is the

---

<sup>6</sup>The subordinate nature of the written word with respect to the spoken word is also briefly mentioned in the first course, in a note about Chinese as well (Engler 1976: 75; I R 1.9).



position Saussure defended in the first and second courses: the ideogram as an alternative signifier. He amended this view in the third course, presenting the ideogram as a representation of a whole word. For Harris, however, this is an indication that Saussure was trying to defend himself from the dangers implicit in the first view. But, as we have seen, this contradiction is built into the *Cours* by the editors. It may be fair to say that, between the second and third courses, Saussure understood the problem and tried to fix it.

Whatever the case may be, Saussure's use of Chinese writing as an extreme example of the ancillary nature of writing is based on a common misconception that no longer holds: the view that each character is a distinct monosyllabic word. Hannas (1997) attributes this misconception to confusion about the relationship of speech and writing in Chinese, listing three main sources: (1) Literary Chinese wherein the one-syllable-one-word paradigm is really approximated, (2) the arrangement of Chinese dictionaries by character (an orthographic unit, rather than word, a linguistic unit), (3) the lay misconception that if characters are more than letters and have meaning, then they must represent words, and that these 'words' are all one syllable long. According to Hannas, then, by taking the character as the fundamental unit of analysis, the philological tradition of Chinese contributed to mistakenly taking facts about written Chinese as linguistic facts concerning spoken Chinese.

Our current knowledge about the Chinese writing system does not support Saussure's analysis of the relationship between speech and writing. The Western idea that Chinese is a language in its own category by virtue of its writing system is in large part consistent with traditional Chinese accounts of language, a philologically oriented tradition that has eschewed grammar, focusing instead on the meanings of characters and their pronunciation (Peverelli 1986). For Saussure to assert that phonetic writing was more of an obstacle than ideographic writing to getting through to the real nature of language was to accept, without question, the idea that the Chinese language was just as the writing system presented it: a monosyllabic language rife with ambiguity and devoid of any word-formation processes.

That is, the alphabetic system has 'more annoying' consequences than the ideographic system because the confusion between sounds and letters obscures the true nature of the acoustic image of the sign. But there is a stronger tendency in the ideographic system to replace the spoken word for the written one (P.26), precisely because there is no correspondence between ideographic characters and the units that make up the acoustic image of the sign. Paradoxically, we think, this results in ideographic systems having an even more annoying consequence, since now it is the structure of the spoken language in its entirety (not just the acoustic image) that is obscured by the written forms. This is what



results in the Monosyllabic Myth: so, it is only by embracing the myth, as Saussure does, that the example of Chinese ideographic writing can be used as evidence against the negative effects of alphabetic systems.

### Chinese and Saussure's conception of word formation in the *Cours*

One of the founding principles of the *Cours* was the subordinate nature of the spoken word, as we discussed in the previous section. Another one was the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign. A sign is composed of two parts, the signifier and the signified, and their relationship is arbitrary. This is a well-known conception in Saussurean linguistics, but his discussion of the problem does not end there: he makes a distinction between relative (motivated) and absolute (unmotivated) arbitrariness. Saussure is concerned with the fact that many productive and transparent word-formation processes are in opposition to opaque and non-productive lexical relations. He compares the completely unmotivated *berger* 'shepherd' to *vacher* 'cowherd', which is relatively motivated because it derives from *vache* 'cow' (Saussure 1958[1916]: 131). Saussure then opposes the preponderance of the motivated in the Indo-European languages to its absence in Chinese:

Languages in which there is least motivation are more lexicological, and those in which it is greatest are more grammatical ... We would see, for example, that motivation plays a much larger role in German than in English. But the ultra-lexicological type is Chinese while Proto-Indo-European and Sanskrit are specimens of the ultra-grammatical type. (Saussure 1959 [1916]: 133-134)

Contrasting first German and English and then Chinese and Proto-Indo-European, the *Cours* establishes a spectrum of motivated to unmotivated arbitrariness. A language in which every word is a root, which is the conception of Chinese that emanates from the Monosyllabic Myth, may be a perfect example of what Saussure calls a lexicological language, where the relationship between forms and meanings are absolutely arbitrary. In this sort of language, productive and transparent word-formations are absent.

This classification of languages along a spectrum of motivation of arbitrariness appears again in the *Cours*, including a repetition of the view that Chinese word formation processes are relatively poor when compared to other languages.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup>The comparison to Esperanto, an 'artificial' language with top-down designed morphological processes, is interesting given that Ferdinand de Saussure's younger brother René, whom Ferdinand corresponded with throughout his life, was an active Esperantist (Joseph 2012). Another brother, Léopold, was an accomplished Sinologist and a scholar of Chinese astronomy. Ferdinand became especially close to Léopold in his later years (Joseph 2012: 104), but we do not know if Ferdinand learned any facts about Chinese from Léopold, whose views about the relationship between language and culture were closer to those of W. von Humboldt (Joseph 2012: 443).

Words can be rated for capacity to engender other words to the extent to which they themselves are decomposable . . . Each language then has both productive and sterile words, in varying proportions. This takes us back to the distinction between “lexicological” and “grammatical” languages (see p. 133). In Chinese, most words are not decomposable; in an artificial language, however, almost all words are. An Esperantist has unlimited freedom to build new words on a given root. (Saussure 1959 [1916]: 166)

The issue of relative arbitrariness is related to that of productivity in word formation and the creative nature of analogical change, so central in Saussure’s re-evaluation of the Neogrammarians.<sup>8</sup> As a creative force at the syntagmatic level, analogy operates on elements that must be synchronically pre-existent to engender a new form. Thus, English *cows* replaces *kine* by analogy to other plural nouns ending in -s, therefore replacing a form with absolute arbitrariness (*kine*) with one in which arbitrariness is relative (*cows*). In an ultra-lexicological language like Chinese, Saussure argues, the role of analogy is curtailed by the scarcity of the raw material it needs to operate on: forms where arbitrariness is already relative. In Esperanto, on the other hand, relative arbitrariness is maximal.<sup>9</sup>

These two paragraphs, placed next to each other, give the impression that Saussure had developed a theory relating analogy to arbitrariness after analysing the structure of Chinese words. But an examination of the sources paints another picture. The discussion of analogy and its relationship to decomposability which gives the context for the latter quote is from the first course (Engler 1967: 380, I R 2.80/SM I 35), while the earlier quote, discussing the ultralexicological and the ultragrammatical types, and the differences in arbitrariness, come from the third course (Engler 1967: 302; D 204/SM III 121, S 2.16, III C 305, and then D 205/SM III 121, S 2.16, III C 306). The mention of the earlier paragraph, referring the reader back to ‘the distinction between “lexicological” and “grammatical” languages’, comes fully from the pen of the editors of the *Cours* who, in so doing, have established a conceptual link between arbitrariness and analogy that was never developed in the lectures.

What these two passages have in common is a mention of Chinese as a language that consists of words without internal structure. If every morpheme in Chinese is a free morpheme, then Chinese lacks morphology. As we discussed already, this is a gross misconception, which

<sup>8</sup>The Neogrammarians attributed any exceptions to their strict sound laws to analogy. According to Joseph (2012: 513), Saussure subverted the Neogrammarian view of language change by giving analogy a more important role with respect to sound change laws. Saussure viewed sound change as transformation (one element replaced by another), but analogical change as creation (one form brought into the system, often in addition to a pre-existent form).

<sup>9</sup>According to Zhang and Zhang (2014), Saussure’s postulate of the arbitrariness of the sign generated intense debate within Chinese linguistic circles, with a faction arguing for the primacy of iconicity in linguistic systems.

constitutes part of the Monosyllabic Myth. Given the limits of the syllabic inventory of Chinese, it may be concluded that Chinese words must be massively ambiguous, a hypothesis that is not supported by the facts.<sup>10</sup> Modern linguistic research into Chinese structure has therefore scrutinised the Monosyllabic Myth closely, amassing evidence against it. It is safe to say that the conception of Chinese as a monosyllabic language has no place in contemporary Chinese scholarship.

Recent work on the phonology of Chinese suggests that its basic lexical unit is not a syllable, but a prosodic word which may be larger than a single syllable, projecting a bimoraic foot (Duanmu 2007, 2017).<sup>11</sup> A heavy syllable has two morae, it projects a foot, and therefore it may be a phonological word by itself, but a light syllable must associate with another syllable to form a foot. Many monosyllabic morphemes, then, cannot form a (phonological) word by themselves, against the claim that the word and the syllable are coextensive in Chinese. Likewise, we find that many Chinese words are composed of more than one morpheme, and that there are morphemes that cannot occur in isolation: a monosyllabic root like *yǐ* ‘chair’ must be followed by a nominal suffix, as in *yǐzi* ‘chair’, or it must occur in a compound, as in *lúnyǐ* ‘wheelchair’ (Packard 2016).<sup>12</sup> These monosyllabic morphemes, then, can never be words by themselves.<sup>13</sup> This runs contrary to one of the claims made in the Monosyllabic Myth, according to which there are no bound morphemes in Chinese.

<sup>10</sup>Duanmu (2017) analyses the structure and distribution of syllables in Standard Chinese. He shows that out of 1900 possible distinct syllables (assuming a CGVC template, where G is a glide, and excluding tone), only 404 are attested. Duanmu addresses the claim that the impoverished syllabic inventory would lead to massive ambiguity, trying to fill a void in quantitative analyses of the problem. He shows that about 43% of morphemes (which he identifies with a monosyllabic character, or *zì*), are unambiguous, and that another 23% are ambiguous between two meanings, often two different Parts of Speech related by conversion (e.g. *chǎn* 鏟 ‘shovel-N’ and ‘to shovel-V’). Other ambiguous forms may be disambiguated by forming ‘elastic’ compounds, combining with another syllable to specify the intended meaning.

<sup>11</sup>The number of morae projected from a syllable depends on its weight: light or heavy. A heavy syllable may be open (i.e. a long V but no coda), like *kwa*: ‘melon’, or closed (with a consonant in the coda) like *thjan* ‘day’. Light syllables are open syllables with a short vowel, like the aspectual marker *la* or the possessive marker *ta*.

<sup>12</sup>Compounding is a very productive word formation process in Chinese. According to Packard, most Chinese words are of this category. Packard further distinguishes ‘composition’ from true ‘compounding’. In the latter, only free roots are involved (e.g. *fěnbǐ* ‘powder + pen = chalk’). Composition is a kind of compounding involving at least one bound root (e.g. *hézuò* ‘together (bound) + do = cooperate’ or *huānyíng* ‘happy (bound) + greet (bound) = welcome’). Derived words have a bound morpheme that is functional, and is therefore considered an affix. A reviewer points out, however, that isolation by itself may not be a sufficient criterion to distinguish free from bound morphemes, since there are some free morphemes, like the functional English morpheme *the*, which are dependent on others (e.g. a noun). Unlike the Chinese examples provided by Packard, however, the English determiner may be separated from the head noun inside of a noun phrase by an unspecified number of words or even phrases. A thorough discussion of the criteria to distinguish free from bound morphemes is beyond the scope of this paper, so we limit ourselves to following Packard’s analysis here.

<sup>13</sup>Additional evidence against the Monosyllabic Myth comes from the existence of polysyllabic borrowings like *kāfēi* ‘coffee’, *mótuō* ‘motor’, and *niépán* ‘nirvana’ (Chen 2000), and from derivations through internal sound changes (rather than by segmental additions). For instance, in Taiwanese (Cheng 1985), a lexeme (usually a verb) can be derived from another one (not necessarily of the same category) by tone substitution. Thus, from *khang* ‘empty’, *teng* ‘nail’, and *láu* ‘to flow’, the words *khàng* ‘make room for’, *tèng* ‘to nail’, and *làu* ‘to drain’ are derived by changing the original tone to a low-falling one.

## Chinese and the distinction between synchronic and diachronic linguistics

A discussion of Chinese also finds its way into another dichotomy introduced in the *Cours*: the distinction between diachronic and synchronic linguistics. The extreme characteristics and genetic isolation of Chinese seem to make it an ideal candidate for a new kind of comparatism that Saussure presented in his third course. One of the goals of earlier linguistics was to compare languages to discover their affiliations and then reconstruct the historical changes that resulted in the observed linguistic diversity. But Saussure contrasts this ‘relative’ diversity to the ‘absolute’ diversity that exists among languages without a common ancestor. For Saussure, then, it was equally valid to compare unrelated languages in order to discover the possible range of structural variation, without reducing this diversity to historical facts:

... Countless languages and families of languages are not related. A good example is Chinese with respect to the Indo-European languages. The fact that they differ does not mean that they cannot be compared, for comparison is always possible and useful [...] The possibilities of comparison, though incalculable, are limited by certain constant phonic and psychological data that determine the make-up of any language; reciprocally, the discovery of these constant data is always the main aim of any comparison of related languages.” (Saussure 1959 [1916]: 193)

Saussure could have probably picked up any number of languages to illustrate his point. In fact, the reference to Chinese is only found in one of the sources: D 11/SM III 97 (Engler 1967: 442). The editors of the *Cours* could have chosen to omit this mention as well, but more interesting is what they chose to exclude. In D 11/ SM III 97, Saussure’s novel definition of the aims and goals of comparative linguistics is elaborated further, going back to the familiar three-way typological classification of languages into flexive, isolating, and agglutinative/polysynthetic, based on their structural properties:

“C’est en comparant (au point de vue de la structure) la différence d’expression de la pensée humaine qu’on arrive à établir différents types de langues. Il y a: - le type des langues à flexion (indoeuropéen). - le type des langues monosyllabiques (qu’on ferait mieux d’appeler: à vocables indivisibles, car le monosyllabisme n’a point de relation avec la structure!) - le type des langues agglutinantes et polysynthétiques.” (Engler 1967: 442; D 11)

Even though Chinese is not mentioned directly here, we find an insightful revision of the assumptions behind the Monosyllabic Myth: Saussure makes an explicit dissociation of the element of morphological simplicity from the claim that all words are monosyllabic.

Saussure’s views about the relationship between the individual languages and the study of langue are both intriguing and innovative for its time. When comparatists like W. von Humboldt studied unrelated languages,

they did so under the assumption that each language had an essential unchangeable type that reflected the cultural character of the people that spoke it. The goal of a comparison of unrelated languages was to discover the different possible expressions of the cultural character through language. Saussure held a different view. For him, unrelated languages could be compared based on the different internal arrangements of their constitutive parts. If the goal (and validation) of comparison is to see how two languages evolved from a common parent language through time, then two unrelated languages could not be compared (except in the sense discussed before). But if we change the goal of linguistics to understanding the synchronic relations internal to a language, then it is equally valid to compare unrelated or related languages, since the goal is to find the general principles that regulate the internal relationships among linguistic elements. Through the historical development of a language, too, time could have the effect of rearranging the elements that constituted the system of a language in such a way that two different synchronic states could be of very different types. Chinese is offered by Saussure as a case in point:

We have seen that a trait of the prototype may not appear in some of the derived languages . . . We also know that Chinese has not always been monosyllabic. (Saussure 1959[1916]: 230)

Here, a mention of the Chinese example is found in all the sources (Engler 1967: 511; D73/SM III 105, S 1.38, J 64, III C 115), but one of the sources in particular includes a reference to ‘current sinologues’, which may suggest that Saussure was in fact keeping up with contemporary linguistic research on Chinese:

. . . le monosyllabisme chinois est mis en doute dans l’idiome primitif par les sinologues actuels. (Engler 1967: 511; J64)

Be as it may, we find that Saussure made systematic references to Chinese as he elaborated his idea that the history of a language could be seen as a succession of states, each of which was characterised by a set of structural relations among the elements of the grammar. This view of linguistics, which makes synchronic linguistics independent from diachronic linguistics, makes it possible to understand language comparison in two ways. Unrelated languages can be compared by looking at their current synchronic states, and analysing the possible arrangements of their structural elements without making claims of cultural determinism. Related languages, on the other hand, can be analysed by comparing them to their common earlier stages but without assuming a unidirectional trajectory in their development. The conception of Chinese that Saussure offered as evidence in his explanations is still rooted in the Monosyllabic Myth to a certain extent, since it still assumes that Chinese is a language with little or no

productive processes of word formation. But we also start to see a subtler recognition that monosyllabism in itself is not absolute, and that it is not an essential structural factor of the linguistic type. But most importantly, Saussure breaks away from the idea that Chinese monosyllabism represents a primitive stage in the evolution of human languages, and that it has remained fixed in this simplest of forms. In the next sections, we will explore what were the possible sources of Saussure's knowledge about Chinese.

### The scholarship of Chinese at the time of Saussure

We find in the *Cours* many references to Chinese, then, characterised as a monosyllabic language in which absolute arbitrariness is most evident, in which the written word can be a substitute for the spoken word. Chinese represents one of the limits of what Saussure's theories allow in a human language, in diametrical opposition to Sanskrit or Esperanto. But Chinese receives a very different treatment from the Indo-European languages in the *Cours*: while mentions of the former are accompanied by elegant and detailed analyses of actual examples, those are missing from references to the latter.

In his discussions of Chinese, Saussure repeats some of the general views about the language that were commonplace in the typological investigations of German comparatists like Wilhelm von Humboldt, Friedrich Schlegel and August Schleicher. Schlegel's work fuelled interest and support for the study of Sanskrit and Persian in Europe, placing the study of grammatical structure (instead of lexical or phonological similarities) at the centre of comparative language studies (Koerner 1987). He introduced a two-way typological distinction between 'organic' languages, which express grammatical categories by means of inflexion (e.g. Sanskrit), and 'mechanical' languages, which employ 'affixes' (including particles and auxiliary words) for the same purpose. He identified Chinese as the most extreme member of this class.

Unlike Schlegel, Schleicher places ideas about language evolution at the centre of his work, linking them to the results of typological research advanced by Schlegel and Humboldt (Andersen & Bache 1976). In *Zur vergleichenden Sprachengeschichte* (1848), Schleicher builds on the three-way classification of languages into isolating, agglutinative, and inflexional types, proposing that they form a hierarchy, with inflexional languages at the top and isolating ones at the bottom. Languages go through those stages – from isolating, to agglutinative, and finally to inflexional – as they evolve (in prehistoric times). What follows the 'perfection' of language by these stages, however, is a reversal of this evolutionary path as languages decay (in historic times). This explains why known Indo-European languages may change to become more isolating once again. There are some

languages, however, that never achieve ‘perfection’ (i.e. the inflexional stage). For Schleicher, Chinese is one of those languages, having never had, in his view, any kind of productive morphology.

We can see, then, how the monosyllabic myth became a recurrent theme in some of the most influential works in 19<sup>th</sup>-century linguistics. According to Tong (2008), the sources for this idea were not direct observations of linguistic facts by the comparatists, but remarks made centuries earlier by Western missionaries in their grammars of the Chinese vernaculars. The essential elements of the Monosyllabic Myth, observes Tong, are already present in Matteo Ricci’s diary, published posthumously in Europe in 1615. Ricci’s views on Chinese were repeated and recirculated to the point that they came to ‘substitute the original object of study, i.e. the Chinese language’ (Tong 2008: 508). And even when new original work was carried out, it had to match a closed system of beliefs and an accepted discursive framework about the Chinese language that originated in Ricci’s opinions.

The Monosyllabic Myth, then, was part of the general system of knowledge about linguistics in the German-speaking centres of research on language and comparative grammar. It could have been transmitted to Saussure when he arrived at the University of Leipzig in 1876 to begin his graduate work under August Leskien, who had been trained by Schleicher in Jena.

The foremost expert in Germany on Oriental languages at that time was Georg von der Gabelentz, for whom a chair in Chinese linguistics was created in 1878 at Leipzig (The Athenaeum 1893). Gabelentz seems to have been still under the spell of the Monosyllabic Myth. In several passages of his *Chinesische Grammatik* (1881), he points out that Chinese is an isolating language whose words are monosyllabic, that there are no word formation processes, and no formal means of distinguishing parts of speech.

Monosyllabisch nennt man diese Sprachen mit Rücksicht auf die Form ihrer Stammwörter, welche — abgesehen von mehr oder minder losen Anfügungen — in der Regel je aus einer Sylbe bestehen. (Gabelentz 1881, §5)

‘These languages are called monosyllabic by virtue of the form of their root words, which - apart from more or less loose attachments - usually consist of one syllable.’

But, interestingly enough, Gabelentz broke away from many of the corollaries of this fundamental idea about Chinese. For instance, he acknowledged the polysyllabic nature of modern, spoken Chinese words. Gabelentz was also critical of the belief in the original simplicity of Chinese. His view was that, even if all human languages were originally monosyllabic, Chinese did not remain in that original state, but rather it returned to it after a period of agglutination or synthesis:



Allerdings kann das Chinesische sich der ältesten Urkunden rühmen, und diese bezeugen meiner Meinung nach unbestreitbar, dass die Sprache vor viertausend Jahren einsylbig und isolierend, wenschon mit Spuren eines älteren agglutinativen, vielleicht flexivischen Zustandes behaftet war. (Gabelentz 1891: 257)

‘The Chinese can boast of the oldest documents, and these, in my opinion, indisputably testify that the language was monosyllabic and isolating four thousand years ago, albeit with traces of an older agglutinative state, perhaps a flexive one.’

He also dismissed the hypothesis that agglutinative/synthetic languages are more perfect than the isolating ones (McElvenny 2017: 13). Gabelentz argued that languages achieve the goal of putting thoughts into sounds by different means, some with morphology, others with syntax. If Chinese went from an isolating to an agglutinative to an isolating state again, and none of these states is closer to perfection than the other, then language change does not involve a linear progression from growth to decay, but simply a rearrangement of the means and ways a language avails itself of to put meaning into sound.

Like Saussure, then, Gabelentz did not question the fundamental assumption behind the Monosyllabic Myth: that Chinese is an extreme case of an isolating language, in which words are mostly monosyllabic and non-decomposable into smaller components. For Gabelentz, Chinese is a language without morphology or any word-formation processes worth noticing. But it is worth noting that some of the refinements of the Monosyllabic Myth that we find in Gabelentz’s treatment of Chinese are echoed in Saussure’s *Cours*. Both Saussure and Gabelentz conceive of Chinese as an analytic language, sitting at one end of a typological spectrum. Like Gabelentz, Saussure holds the opinion that the real issue is not monosyllabicity but non-decompositionality, which could also be true of isolating languages with polysyllabic words. Moreover, Gabelentz’s view of the historical development of languages as a succession of equally functional but structurally different states, is very close to the Saussurean view of diachronic vs. synchronic linguistics, and it may be no coincidence that the history of Chinese is brought up when the matter is discussed in the *Cours* (Saussure 1958[1916]: 230), as we already saw.

Saussure, then, could not have been dissuaded from his views about Chinese while he was a student in Germany. If anything, this is when he might have become acquainted with these ideas. Nevertheless, he had opportunities later in his life to correct them. Even though the Monosyllabic Myth was widely accepted in mid to late 19th century Europe, evidence against it was known before Saussure started lecturing on general linguistics. Particularly, those that had experience with both spoken and written Chinese knew that these were clearly different systems, though they often mixed with one another. In 1822, for

instance, the pioneering sinologist Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat wrote *Éléments de la grammaire Chinoise, ou principe généraux du KOU-WEN ou style antique, et du KOUAN-HOA, c'est-à-dire, de la langue commune généralement usitée dans l'empire Chinois* (Elements of Chinese grammar, or general principles of *Gǔwén* or classical style, and of *Guānhuà*, that is the common language used generally in the Chinese Empire), making a clear two-way distinction between Literary Chinese and *Guānhuà* 'Mandarin', the de facto lingua franca of imperial China. Missionary grammars like Varo's *Arte de la Lengua Mandarin* (Varo [1703] 2000), often describing spoken Chinese vernaculars rather than written literary language, also stated plainly how written literary Chinese and spoken languages differed.

Moreover, evidence showing that Chinese was not a purely monosyllabic language was also circulating. For instance, Abel-Rémusat (1822) describes how the morpheme *-le* acts as a marker of preterite tense (combining the past tense with a perfective aspect). Additionally, dictionaries, while organised by character, contained lists of words (often compounds) using those characters showing that Chinese must use some morphological processes to arrive at compositional meanings. Morrison's (1815–1823) *A Dictionary of the Chinese Language*, for example, contains compounds such as *xiǎobiàn-dào* 'urinary passage' and *dàbiàn-dào* 'the rectum intestinum' under the entry for *dào* 'a way; a path'. So, while dictionaries, grammars, and other resources on Chinese for Westerners often did pay homage to the character, closer inspection of these resources included enough information to arrive at the conclusion that Chinese was not a purely monosyllabic language, in which single characters invariably corresponded to words. Sinologists, missionaries, and other scholars had long pointed out differences between spoken and written varieties of Chinese as well as the existence and productivity of morphological processes such as compounding.

Moreover, as a member of the Orientalist Society, Ferdinand de Saussure was connected in an environment where advanced ideas about Chinese were discussed.<sup>14</sup> For instance, the Belgian Sinologist Charles de Harlez presented a paper on monosyllabism at the Congress of Orientalists held in Geneva in 1894. He argues explicitly against the Monosyllabic Myth, and the idea of the original monosyllabic status of all languages:

<sup>14</sup>According to Joseph (2012: 398–400), however, Saussure kept his distance from Orientalist circles, even though his most admired linguists saw themselves as such. Saussure saw the Geneva 10<sup>th</sup> congress of Orientalists, of which he was named secretary, as a chance to make public his research into Lithuanian stress. He also had hopes that the Geneva congress would have a better representation of linguists working on Indo-European languages, but these did not materialise. Saussure continued to experience the tension between linguists and Orientalists during the meetings of the Transcription Commission to standardise Asiatic writing systems into Roman script (Joseph 2012: 403–406).

... Plusieurs linguistes, en vertu du principe du progrès continu et de la marche ordinaire de la nature allant du simple au composé, ont pensé que le monosyllabisme pur et isolant a été l'état primitif du langage humain qui s'est élevé de là successivement, à l'agglutination puis à la flexion. (Harlez 1897: 67).

Harlez's paper provides several examples of affixation and compounding in contemporary spoken Chinese, such as *-ti* in *twan-ti* 'originating', *-men* 'plural' in *ta-men* 'those ones', etc., and also compounding: *heu-lai* 'later (lit. coming-after)'. Saussure was present at the Geneva congress, which is where he presented his analysis of Lithuanian (Joseph 2009, 2012: 407–409). As a co-organiser of the meeting and co-editor of the proceedings, Saussure should have been familiar with Harlez's paper. But Saussure's responsibilities as a co-organiser of the meeting, and his deep involvement in efforts to standardise the transcription of Oriental languages, may have also distracted him from absorbing the views about Chinese monosyllabism that Harlez was so clearly attempting to disseminate. Thus, even though a deeper understanding of Chinese was within Saussure's reach, it may have very well been the case that it was outside his sphere of interests.<sup>15</sup>

### Conclusions: The Monosyllabic Myth and the Saussurean revolution

In this paper, we suggested that, even though Chinese gets sporadic references in the *Cours*, and it is not mentioned nearly as often as the Indo-European languages, it serves as their counterpoint to illustrate three distinct aspects of Saussure's doctrine: (a) the need to recognise a distance between the written and spoken forms of language, (b) his conception of the arbitrariness of the sign (and the related notion of relative arbitrariness), (c) the distinction between synchronic and diachronic linguistics, and an underlying new perspective on the purpose of comparing unrelated languages. In all of these cases, the text of the *Cours* embraces the idea that in Chinese there is a preponderance of mono-morphemic words, and that the vast majority of morphemes in Chinese are monosyllabic.

Saussure, then, was repeating to his students a conception of Chinese that we now know is inaccurate: the Monosyllabic Myth. This misconception has deep roots in the linguistic traditions of the West. It was a common view in the German linguistic academic environment in which Saussure spent his formative years. Even though Saussure's knowledge of Chinese was at best second-hand, when we examine the work of a pre-eminent Sinologue like Gabelentz we see that Saussure was not completely out of step with the

<sup>15</sup> A personal communication from L. Gautier to Godel that Saussure had become interested in Chinese when illness was taking over (Godel 1957). However, according to Joseph (2012), Gautier may have confused Saussure's interest in Chinese for his interest in Manchu. In fact, references in the *Cours* and a notebook on Manchu show that Saussure was interested in Manchu vowel harmony.

state of knowledge of the language at the time he was lecturing, even though the validity of the Monosyllabic Myth was already being put into question by Saussure's contemporaries.

In our view, Saussure's references to Chinese in his own lectures were superficial and anecdotal. If he did not question the Monosyllabic Myth, it was because the matter was not central to his thinking about language. Comparing the text of the *Cours* with the content of the manuscript notes, we observe that Saussure was less interested in the Chinese evidence than it appears. Bally and Sechehaye, confronted with the task of collating notes from three different courses, ended up drawing unwarranted conclusions and introducing contradictions that were not the reflection of a finished thought about the nature of Chinese on the part of Saussure, but of an evolving marginal curiosity. Had he been really interested in the nature of Chinese, and how it fit into his comparative approach to understand *langue*, Saussure could have had access to sources showing the monosyllabism of Chinese to be an artefact of a philological tradition that he radically opposed. Evidence against the Monosyllabic Myth was already being discussed by Western sinologists like Abel-Rémusat (1822) or Harlez (1897). But Saussure, rather than bringing in newer and more empirically sound Chinese data, engaged the old myths in a new way. He reproduced the claims of the Monosyllabic Myth, but he did so in the context of a new framework for the study language.

In a Letter to Meillet written in 1894, Saussure complains about the inadequacy of the linguistic terminology of his time 'to show what kind of object a language is in general' (cited in Joseph 2012: 400), and speaks of the need to 'reform' it before returning to his true passion: the study of historic and ethnographic facts about peoples and their language. In his letter, Saussure promises a book that would 'explain why not a single term used in linguistics has any meaning whatever'. We can see that the intentions he expressed in the letter to Meillet are a driving principle behind the *Cours*. Saussure, then, saw the work of previous generations of linguists, mainly the Comparatists and the Neogrammarians, as inadequate to characterise the general features of language. He objects to the Neogrammarian characterisation of sound change as the result of phonetic laws, and the physiologism on which this conception is based. He also objects to the many evolutionary views of language change that were developed by the Comparatists, culminating in Schleicher's work:

We now realize that Schleicher was wrong in looking upon language as an organic thing with its own law of evolution. (Saussure 1959 [1916]: 231)

The real puzzle regarding the role of Chinese in the *Cours* is that Saussure simultaneously argues against the concepts of the Comparativists and the Neogrammarians while not questioning their data, blindly accepting their

mischaracterisation of Chinese. This is curious considering that Saussure, in other work, had been careful about how the data he used was presented, and was very capable of re-interpreting and presenting old data anew (as he did in his analysis of the Indo-European vowels and Lithuanian stress).

This paradox serves to illuminate one important aspect of Saussure's scientific revolution in linguistics. The new paradigm sketched in his lectures (and in the book based on them) did not emerge from an empirical breakthrough, or a new analysis that explained otherwise recalcitrant data. To the contrary, Saussure takes on the same examples that previous generations had carefully studied and documented, but presents them from an entirely new conceptual vantage point. Saussure considered the physiologism of the Neogrammarians and the Eurocentric ideas about language evolution of the Comparatists to be nothing more than 'nonsense', as he expressed to Meillet, and tried to redefine linguistics as the study of a social object.

To understand the true nature of the scientific revolution ushered by Saussure in the language sciences, it may be useful to put it in the light of the neo-Kantian approach to the philosophy of science developed by Michael Friedman (2001, 2010). Friedman argues that paradigm changes are not the results of sharp breaks in rationality caused only by external historical forces, but rather the result of gradual adjustments made possible by an intersubjective transcendental rationality that develops in a historical context. Within this epistemological model, we can understand the fact that Saussure could have a clean break with the ideas of the Comparatists and Neogrammarians while retaining some of the old empirical misconceptions as remnants of the older subjective rationality that get translated into the newer one, just as Newtonian physics could be built on the assumption of circular planetary orbits (which were not replaced by the elliptical model until Kepler).

The most important aspect of Saussure's re-evaluation of Chinese, then, is that he did away with all the ideological claims about Chinese being simpler, inferior, or less developed than the Indo-European languages. Therefore, it did not matter whether the analyses he based his explanations on were right or wrong. From this perspective, then, the re-emergence of the Monosyllabic Myth about Chinese in the foundational text of modern linguistics is more than an anecdote or a curiosity in the history of the discipline: it is a fact that illuminates a very unusual feature of the way in which the modern science of language emerged.

### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributors

**Raúl Aranovich** is professor of linguistics at the University of California Davis. He earned his PhD in linguistics in 1996 from the University of California San Diego. His areas of specialisation include theoretical syntax and morphology, quantitative and corpus linguistics, and the history of linguistics (with particular attention to Ferdinand de Saussure).

**Alan Wong** has an MA in linguistics from the University of California Davis. His areas of specialisation include the history of writing systems and their relation to linguistic theory, linguistics of Chinese and the Sinosphere, language contact, and computational linguistics.

## References

- Abel-Rémusat, J.-P. 1822. *Éléments de la Grammaire Chinoise*. Paris: Imprimerie Royale.
- Andersen, F., & C. Bache. 1976. "August Schleicher: Towards a Better Understanding of His Concept of Language." *Anthropological Linguistics* 18 (9): 428–37.
- Aranovich, Raúl. 2016. "Language as a Complex Algebra: Post-structuralism and Inflectional Morphology in Saussure's *Cours*." *Semiotica* 2016 (208): 133–54. doi:10.1515/sem-2015-0118.
- The Athenaeum*. 1893. "GEORG VON DER GABELENTZ." December 23, 3452, p. 883.
- Chen, S.-F. 2000. "A Study of Sanskrit Loanwords in Chinese." *Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies* 30 (3): 375–426.
- Cheng, R. L. 1985. "Sub-syllabic Morphemes in Taiwanese." *Journal of Chinese Linguistics* 13 (1): 12–43.
- Duanmu, San. 2007. *The Phonology of Standard Chinese*. 2nd ed. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.
- Duanmu, San. 2017. "Syllable Structure." In *Encyclopedia of Chinese Language and Linguistics*, edited by Rint Sybesma, 230–36. Vol. 4. Leiden: Brill.
- Friedman, Michael. 2001. *Dynamics of Reason*. Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- Friedman, Michael. 2010. "A Post-Kuhnian Approach to the History and Philosophy of Science." *The Monist* 93 (4): 497–517. doi:10.5840/monist201093430.
- Gabelentz, George von der. 1881. *Chinesische Grammatik; mit Ausschluss des niederen Stiles und der heutigen Umgangssprache*. Leipzig: T.O. Weigel.
- Gabelentz, Georg, & von der. 1891. *Die Sprachwissenschaft*. Leipzig, C. H. Tauchnitz.
- Godel, R. 1957. *Les sources manuscrites du Cours de linguistique générale de F. de Saussure*. Genève: E. Droz.
- Hannas, W. C. 1997. *Asia's Orthographic Dilemma*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Harlez, C. de. 1897. "Les langues monosyllabiques." In *Actes du dixième congrès international des orientalistes*, Congrès des orientalistes, 67–88. Genève: E. J. Brill.
- Harris, Roy. 1987. *Reading Saussure*. London: Duckworth.
- Joseph, J. E. 2009. "Why Lithuanian Accentuation Mattered to Saussure." *Language and History* 52 (2): 182–98. doi:10.1179/175975309X452067.
- Joseph, J. E. 2012. *Saussure*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kennedy, G. A. 1951. "The Monosyllabic Myth." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 71: 161–66. doi:10.2307/595185.
- Koerner, K. 1987. "Friedrich Schlegel and the Emergence of Historical-Comparative Grammar." *Lingua e stile* 22 (3): 341–65.
- McElvenny, James. 2017. "Grammar, Typology and the Humboldtian Tradition in the Work of Georg von der Gabelentz." *Language & History* 60 (1): 1–20. doi:10.1080/17597536.2016.1212580.

- Packard, J. 2016. "Lexical Word Formation." In *A Reference Grammar of Chinese*, edited by C. Huang & D. Shi, 67–80. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Peverelli, P. J. 1986. "*The History of Modern Chinese Grammar Studies*." PhD diss., Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden.
- Saussure, F. de. 1959 [1916]. *Course in General Linguistics*. New York: Philosophical Library.
- Tong, Q. S. 2008. "Between Knowledge and 'Plagiarism', Or, How the Chinese Language Was Studied in the West." *Language Sciences* 30: 499–511. doi:[10.1016/j.langsci.2007.07.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langsci.2007.07.003).
- Varo, F. [1703] 2000. *Francisco Varo's Grammar of the Mandarin Language, 1703: An English Translation of "Arte de la Lengua Mandarina"*, eds. W. South Coblin & J. A. Levi. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.
- Zhang, Y., & S. Zhang. 2014. "How and Why Saussure Is Misread in China: A Historical Study." *Language & History* 57 (2): 149–67. doi:[10.1179/1759753614Z.00000000034](https://doi.org/10.1179/1759753614Z.00000000034).