

# FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE

26 November 1857 – 22 February 1913

Group 108

In our presentation we tried to take up these topics:

Where Ferdinand was studying?

What was the main purpose he wanted to realize?

What are the main ideas of his course in general linguistics?

What other people thought about Saussure's contribution?

What is semiology?



# PLAN OF THE PRESENTATION

**Biography**

**Works and influence:**

- a) Course in general linguistics
- b) Influence
- c) Laryngeal Theory
- d) Influence
- e) Semiology
- f) Influence outside linguistics

**Questions**

**Authors of the presentation**



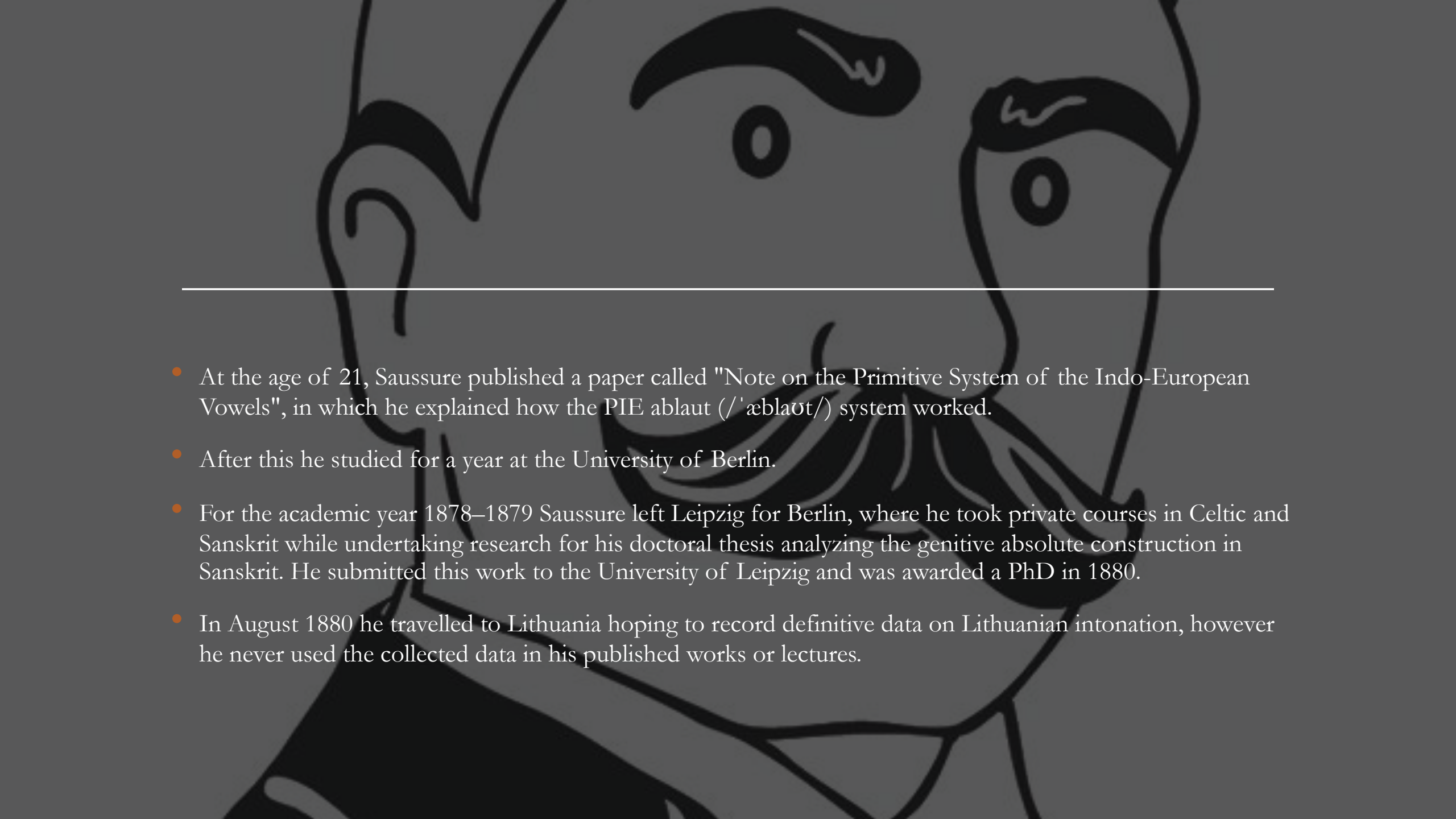
# BIOGRAPHY

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- Ferdinand de Saussure (/soʊˈsjʊər/) was born in Geneva in 1857 into a family of well-known scientists.
  - Saussure showed signs of considerable talent and intellectual ability as early as the age of fourteen. In the autumn of 1870, he began attending the Institution Martine (previously the Institution Lecoultrre until 1969), in Geneva.
  - Graduating at the top of his class, Saussure expected to continue his studies at Gymnase de Genève, but his father sent him to Collège de Genève instead.

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- At the age of 21, Saussure published a paper called "Note on the Primitive System of the Indo-European Vowels", in which he explained how the PIE ablaut (/ 'æblaʊt/) system worked.
  - After this he studied for a year at the University of Berlin.
  - For the academic year 1878–1879 Saussure left Leipzig for Berlin, where he took private courses in Celtic and Sanskrit while undertaking research for his doctoral thesis analyzing the genitive absolute construction in Sanskrit. He submitted this work to the University of Leipzig and was awarded a PhD in 1880.
  - In August 1880 he travelled to Lithuania hoping to record definitive data on Lithuanian intonation, however he never used the collected data in his published works or lectures.



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- When was offered a professorship in Geneva in 1892, Saussure returned to Switzerland.
  - Saussure lectured on Sanskrit and Indo-European at the University of Geneva for the remainder of his life.
  - It was not until 1907 that Saussure began teaching the Course of General Linguistics, which he would offer three times, ending in the summer of 1911.
    - He died in 1913.



University of Geneva

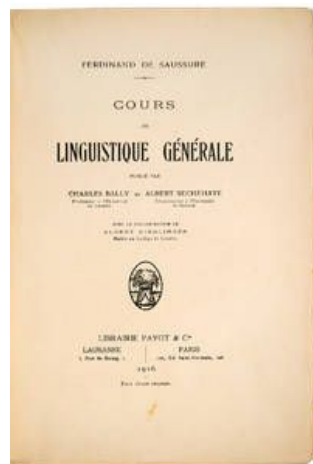
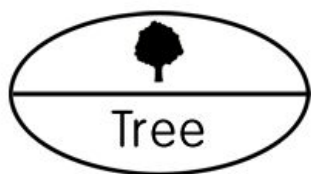
A glass inkwell filled with dark ink sits on the left. A quill pen with a dark red feather and a brass-colored handle lies diagonally across the right side. The background is solid black.

# WORKS AND INFLUENCE

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# *COURSE IN GENERAL LINGUISTICS* (published posthumously in 1916)



- The Course develops a theory of semiotics

- Main ideas:

a) Saussure distinguishes between "language (*langue* / *lāg* /)" and "speech (*langage* / *lāgaʒ* /)"

b) The focus of Saussure's investigation is the linguistic unit or sign

c) For Saussure, there is no essential or natural reason why a particular signifier should be attached to a particular signified. Saussure calls this the "arbitrariness of the sign"

a) Syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations

b) Synchronic and diachronic axes

# INFLUENCE

- One of Saussure's translators, Roy Harris, summarized Saussure's contribution to linguistics and the study of language in the following way:

"Language is no longer regarded as peripheral to our grasp of the world we live in, but as central to it. Words are not mere vocal labels or communicational adjuncts superimposed upon an already given order of things. They are collective products of social interaction, essential instruments through which human beings constitute and articulate their world. This typically twentieth-century view of language has profoundly influenced developments throughout the whole range of human sciences. It is particularly marked in linguistics, philosophy, psychology, sociology and anthropology"



# LARYNGEAL THEORY

- The **laryngeal theory** is a widely accepted hypothesis in the historical linguistics of the Indo-European languages positing that:
- Proto-Indo-European language (PIE) had a series of phonemes beyond those reconstructed with the comparative method.
- These phonemes, according to the most-accepted variant of the theory, were "laryngeal" consonants of an indeterminate place of articulation towards the back of the mouth.
- The theory aims to:
  - Produce greater regularity in the reconstruction of PIE phonology than from the reconstruction that is produced by the comparative method.
  - Extend the general occurrence of the Indo-European ablaut to syllables with reconstructed vowel phonemes other than e or o.



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- There are many variations of the laryngeal theory. Some scholars, such as **Oswald Szemerényi**, reconstruct just one laryngeal.
  - Some follow **Jaan Puhvel**'s reconstruction of eight or more (in his contribution to *Evidence for Laryngeals*, ed. Werner Winter).
  - **Basic Laryngeal Set**  
Most scholars work with a basic three:
    - **\*h<sub>1</sub>**, the "neutral" laryngeal.
    - **\*h<sub>2</sub>**, the "a-coloring" laryngeal.
    - **\*h<sub>3</sub>**, the "o-coloring" laryngeal



## Support for theory from daughter languages

PIE root	Meaning	Anatolian reflex	Cognates
*peh <sub>2</sub> -(s)-	'protect'	Hittite pah <sub>ḥ</sub> s-	Sanskrit pā <sup>́</sup> ti, Latin pascere (pastus), Greek patéomai

PIE root	Meaning	Anatolian reflex	Cognates
*welh <sub>3</sub> -	'to hit'	Hittite wal <sub>ḥ</sub> -	Latin vellō, Greek ealōn
*h <sub>3</sub> esth <sub>1</sub>	'bone'	Hittite ḥaštāi	Latin os, Greek ostéon, Sanskrit ásthi

# INFLUENCE

- For Indo-European studies, the emergence of laryngeal theory had the following consequences:
- It has been suggested that \*a was not a phoneme;
- the reconstruction of deaf aspirants (\*ph, \*th, \* kh) was abandoned, replacing them with a combination of deaf and laryngals (\*pH, \*tH, \*kH); in place of long vowels began to reconstruct the combination of a short vowel with laryngeal;
- roots beginning with a vowel began to be reconstructed as beginning with laryngeal, whereby the reconstruction of most of the proto-Indo-European roots took the form \* CeC



# SEMIOLOGY

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- Semiotics is the study of sign process
- Saussure concentrated on the patterns and functions of language itself.
- The relationship that exists between the signifier and the signified is purely arbitrary and analytical.
- Saussure did not do anything but reform an ancient theory in Europe, according to the modern conceptual exigencies

# QUESTIONS

01

What was the name of the first work that Saussure had published at the age of 21?

02

What is semiotics?

03

How did Roy Harris described Saussure's contribution to linguistics?

04

What is the focus of Saussure's investigation of general linguistics?

05

What is the arbitrariness of the sign?



# AUTHORS OF THE PRESENTATION

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