

# An Analysis Of Proper Names From Saussure Perspective

**Mercia Cristina Cardoso de Oliveira Luz<sup>1</sup>,  
Ovídio da Conceição Batista Júnior<sup>2</sup>, Edgar da Silva Ramos<sup>3</sup>  
and Marlon Leal Rodrigues<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Universidade Estadual do Mato Grosso do Sul  
Masters Degree in Letras. Area of Concentration, Discourse Analysis, Av. Dom Antônio Barbosa,  
4155 - Vila Santo Amaro, Campo Grande - MS, Brasil  
E-mail: psicologamercialuz@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup>Universidade Estadual do Mato Grosso do Sul  
Masters Degree in Letras. Area of Concentration, Discourse Analysis  
Av. Dom Antônio Barbosa, 4155 -Vila Santo Amaro, Campo Grande -MS, Brasil  
E-mail: ovidiobatistajr@gmail.com

<sup>3</sup>Universidade Estadual do Mato Grosso do Sul  
Masters Degree in Letras. Area of Concentration, Discourse Analysis  
Av. Dom Antônio Barbosa, 4155 -Vila Santo Amaro, Campo Grande -MS, Brasil  
E-mail: ramos.edgarsilva@gmail.com

<sup>4</sup>Universidade Estadual do Mato Grosso do Sul  
Postdoc in Linguistics and a professor of The Masters Program in Letters  
Av. Dom Antônio Barbosa, 4155 - Vila Santo Amaro, Campo Grande - MS, Brasil  
E-mail: marlon@uems.br

**Published:** 18 July 2019

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## **Abstract**

This article approaches a discussion of the proper name within the linguistic category using Saussure General Language Course. The author states that proper names constitute themselves as "isolated words". As we know, language has the function of representing the world in which the subjects are inserted. In this article, we propose to investigate the concept of first name which, in our view is a linguistic category that has the possibility of making a relation between language and culture. In this way, we return to the concept of arbitrariness, signs, value, and still use other authors to compose the ideas presented here.

**Keywords:** First name, Saussure, Arbitrariness, Sign, and language.

## **1. Introduction**

The writings of Ferdinand de Saussure and several student annotations resulted in the writing, in 1916, in France of a work entitled the Course of General Linguistics. This work is considered until today as the founder of linguistics, since it was that the language became object of study. Thus, all knowledge about language originated in this work that gave scholars the definition of what is language.

Taking as reference the writings of the mentioned work, the objective is to carry out an analysis of proper names once verified that they always fulfill a significant function that is a semantic function in which the subject not only receives its name but also the entire connotative charge of it. These have the function of marking all the attitudes, beliefs, social and cultural values, professionals and the place of origin of this subject, as well as differentiate people between values, social positions and professions, in short, to differentiate people among themselves.

From the point of view of Saussurian thought, the conceptions he undertook will be revisited to demonstrate the importance of the conception of language and other objects of language. The research carried out was totally historiographical and was placed as object of study the Course of General Linguistics that will be frequently cited as well as the thought of other contemporary authors.

The present article is therefore able to analyze proper names under various prisms, allowing the reader to understand their origin, motivation for their choice and the meanings they carry with them, thus providing a clear view of their role in the identification of subjects.

## **2. The Different Looks On The Signs**

From ancient times, the different scholars whether from Philosophy, Logic or Linguistics try to find the best definition that can characterize the linguistic sign with respect to its denomination, classification, and definition. In the Middle Ages, the signs had as concept to be in the place of something and had like similarity to put itself in scene. The origin of the concept of sign was constituted from two subjects: Aurelio Agostinho (354-430) and Aristotle (GAMBARATO, 2005).

"Stare pro" (to be in the place of) \_ signs are in place of the things that cause them and of those to which they refer; supponere pro (suppose) - within 206 N4 | 2005.1 Sign, meaning, representation N4 | 2005.1 a proposition, the terms are in place of the things to which they refer; similitudo, species, imago (being a resemblance, an image) - the sensitive species, the phantom, the concept represents the object to which it resembles; supplere vicem (play the role of) - abstract knowledge is in the place of the object "(GAMBARATO, 2005 apud BOULNOIS, 1999, p.09).

At that time, the term was of representation where the aspect was totally semantic because the image indicated the original sound. The sign represented being in the place of the things about which they refer; imago, species, (an image, a resemblance) as if it were a sensitive species that resembles (GAMBARATO, 2005).

Thus, for Augustine the sign is something that goes beyond form. For him, meaning is like a triadic: 1) Thing = the sensible species persuaded by the senses; 2) meaning, and 3) interpreter = mediator thinking. For him, things became known through signs because every sign is something and, if it were not, it would not have existed.

For Aristotle, signs are conventions of the thoughts that all men have in common. For him, the interpreter of the sign is the intellect and the interpretant is the thought or concept of that sign that is common to all men. Thus, the intellect which has the function of directly representing these concepts and verbal expressions, receives from it the function of representing. In this way, the sign allows induction between two propositions so that in the relation between A and B, if A implies B, A acts as a sign of B. Thus, we see that the sign wants to be a necessary proposition or that leads to a conclusion (GAMBARATO, 2005).

This definition implies the following relation: if A implies B, A acts as a sign of B. After all, the sign wants to be a necessary or probable proposition that leads to a conclusion.

The system of signs ceases to be ternary during Rationalism: signifier + meaning + referred object and becomes binary: signifier + meaning. From the school of semiotics of Port Royal, the sign begins to represent the idea of a thing and not the thing itself. The world, which before was of similarities, becomes a representation in which language begins to organize thought.

For Saussure, the language is a system formed by several linguistic signs that are composed by signifiers and meanings. The relation that is established between is a reciprocal association, since one does not exist without the other. The author uses the term acoustic image to designate the linguistic sign, citing that "the linguistic sign unites a thing and a word but a concept and an acoustic image" (SAUSSURE, 1916/1973, p.80).

For some people, the language, reduced to its essential principle, is a nomenclature that is to say a list of terms corresponding to so many things (...).Such a view is open to criticism in many respects. It supposes ideas completely made pre-existent to words (...); it does not tell us whether the word is of a vocal or psychic nature, for arbor can be considered under one or another aspect; and finally, it supposes that the bond that unites a name to a thing constitutes a very simple operation, which is far from the truth. However, this simplistic view can bring us closer to the truth, showing us that linguistic unity is a double thing, consisting of the union of two terms (SAUSSURE, 1916/1973, 79).

Another important factor in the concept of linguistic sign is the concept of arbitrariness, in which Saussure says that the linguistic sign is arbitrary and the arbitrary resides because of the relation established between the signifier and the meaning, that is, the idea of the word as, for instance, Peter has no inner connection with the sequence of sounds of that word serves as a signifier (CUNHA, 2008).

This is not material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychic impression of that sound, the representation that gives us the testimony of our senses; such an image is sensory, and, if we come to call it "material" it is only in this sense, and in opposition to

the other term of association, the concept which is generally more abstract (SAUSSURE, 1916/1973, p.80).

In addition, arbitrary does not mean to be the simple choice of the speaker, that is, the signifier is unfounded, that is, arbitrary in relation to meaning. There is nothing from the beginning, in the association that constitutes the signs, besides two values that have existence because of the other. It is in this arbitrary relationship between signifier and meaning that the formation of value occurs, for if these two psychic instances had a motivated relationship, the signs could not be characterized as negative, opposing, and differential (SAUSSURE, 1973).

The only forms on which analogy has no power are naturally isolated words such as proper names, especially the names of places (Paris, Genève, Agen, etc.), which do not permit any analysis and therefore no interpretation of its elements; no competing creation emerged alongside them (Saussure 1916/1973, p.120).

Thus, in this context there is evidence of a departure from the Aristotelian model of sign that would consist of sound, object, and meaning. Consequently, we come to the following reflection: in what way is the proper name treated by Saussure since it only appears once in the part destined to diachronic linguistics, with regard to the analogy?

The proper name, in this sense, becomes a linguistic category that causes great reflection since its definition has a relation with the object that designates it. Were the proper names created by analogies as quarries by stone analogy? If all the signs establish relationship with each other, how to understand a sign that does not establish relation with the others? It seems that the proper names have a certain difference from the other linguistic signs whereas they are called by Saussure as "isolated words." Thus, in order to answer such questions in relation to proper names, it is convenient to dwell on Saussurian studies.

### **3. Who Was Saussure**

Saussure was born in Geneva, Switzerland, on November 26, 1857, into the cradle of the European nobility. He was the son of a prominent naturalist named Henri Louis Frédéric de Saussure and was sent to early studies in physics and chemistry at the local university. At the age fourteen he was already fluent in English, Greek, German, French, and Sanskrit. Because of this he devoted himself to Sanskrit, Celtic and Indian studies at the Berlin faculty. Later he went to Leipzig, Germany, to complete his studies in languages.

In the year 1877, he published the book *Mémoire sur le système primitif des voyelles dans les langues Indo-européennes*. This book consisted of a study in comparative linguistics of primitive vowel systems in Indo-European languages. Saussure carried out this publication and one more that was his doctoral thesis having as subject the use of the genitive in Sanskrit. He graduated in Leipzig in 1880. The other publications were all posthumous.

He died at the age of fifty-five on February 22, 1913, while still a professor at the University of Geneva leaving a great legacy for language scholars.

### **4. Brief History About The Proper Name**

According to Zamariano (2012), in Greece there was already a discussion on the question of the name although there was not, a concept of proper name as it has today in which distinguishes the difference between proper name and common name. Nowadays it is the practice of the parents to give names to the subjects, in addition it is important to remember that the subject establishes a

psychological bond with him and that this name will represent him within the community to which he belongs.

Parents have always sought, from the ancient peoples (Greek, Hebrew, among others), divine protection for their children, which can also be verified in the indigenous communities. Thus, from the arrival of Christianity with the arrival of the first Catholic missionaries after the arrival of Europeans to this land and more intensively from the beginning of the twentieth century with the massive influx of evangelical churches in the indigenous communities we can see the presence of biblical names and even the names of saints of the Catholic Church. Another factor was also the political influence on names at a given moment when one saw a relationship with power or professions (like Sebastian, protector of farmers).

The naming of indigenous children with the same name does not always have the same relation of meaning and significance for the parents, much less with the culture of a certain people.

The proper name which is a toponymic sign has always fulfilled a meaningful function, that is its semantic function in which the subject not only receives its name, but also the whole connotative charge of it because it has the function of marking all attitudes, beliefs, values, social attitudes, professions, region of origin of this subject. Finally, to differentiate the people among themselves, in the case of the indigenous people, one can observe an extreme connection with the traditional culture of the peoples and their worldview.

An example of this influence in the formation of the Indian name as it is observed in the traditions of some Apinayé and Krahó tribes of northern Goiás, in Brazil. Some similar characteristics of the naming of the Indians can be observed among the tribes as the division between big and small names, the formation of groups and the fact that children do not receive ceremonial names because it is believed that this would cause their death because they are seen that names as aggressive and dangerous.

Already the names of the tribes Apinayé are formed by sets of four words, each one with independent meaning. Many of these names can only be translated, but others have sociological or indicative senses of rights to participation in rituals, for example.

In the tribes of the Xavante Indians, in turn, there are differences in the imposition of names on men and women where the importance of the masculine figure of the father and paternal grandparents in the choice of the name of the boys is noted. This name, revealed in dream to one of the men, later is still exchanged for the one of the godfather.

Among the Kaiagáng, in the time of the ancients, the child received his name from his father or, failing that, from his maternal grandfather, when the newborn's navel began to dry three or four days after his birth. The proper name was of the masculine line (father or grandfathers paternal) and this one received only a name.

Already the Sanuma, of Roraima, have a peculiar system of nomination. Human beings are given two types of names, personal and patronymic, both necessary to the process of forming the binomial that requires their process of individualization. Patronymics are the names of lineage and both kinds of names are secret in respect to the others.

Individuals are given names at any age and it is possible to have three or four names. There are several ways to choose the child's name, but essentially this occurs giving its name to the animal hunted by the father at the time of his birth.

In this way, the child acquires the spirit of the animal which penetrates the newborn by the coccyx. However, if the name of the child is not given by this process, others are initiated which may

be based on physical characteristics and important events or circumstances. Of equal importance are the physical condition of the children as small, "brown eyes" or a temporary condition as "weak man".

Whenever the names given to the objects communicate any information, that is, whenever they have any meaning, that meaning does not reside in what they designate, but in what they know. The only names of objects that do not connote are the proper names; and these have, strictly speaking, no meaning. (CARVALINHOS 2007 p, 3 apud Mill).

For Carvalhinhos (2007), "the proper name of person assumes the role of a label", which means that from the moment that in a society the name becomes an empty identifier of meaning and loses its connotative function, there is a probability that new signs will not be elected on the paradigmatic axis of language for people to be named. He emphasizes that in calling people with names such as "Flower", "Yara", "Sun" is a choice from a linguistic point of view, if provided this generates a strangeness in people due to ignorance of culture or family history choice of this name. Language is not an immutable system just as culture both allow social forces to act upon it. In the same way they are the proper names that for one society can be accepted and at another moment it falls into disuse, disregarding the force of the ancestry that such names represent in the social and community life of the subject.

However, Saussure (2006) makes an approximation between the linguistic signs and the categories of names that are present in the Course of Applied Linguistics. For him, proper names would be subject to the same relationships as any other signs of the language. Thus, the names would have a certain value in proportion as they relate to the other signs of the system.

## **5. Analyzing Proper Names**

According to the dictionary of proper names Peter has the meaning of "stone", "rock", and has its origin in the Greek name Pétros, which is a translation of the Aramaic Cephas of the word *petra*, in Greek Koiné. This name exists today throughout the world and is also known through the Bible for being one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, formerly called by Simon, a very common name in indigenous communities representing strength and leadership.

Historically this name was used in the antiquity and many saints, emperors, and kings had it like D. Pedro I that governed Brazil, by Saint Peter or Peter Apostle. This name has several versions according to the country to which it belongs. In France, for example, it is Pierre, Peter in English among many other variables (DICTIONARY OF PROPER NAMES).

According to the dictionary Houaiss (2009) stone which is one of the meanings of Peter means solid, that is, when we remember this name we remember someone firm as a rock. Thus, the name has a unique performance within the language, it has "two orthogonal axes: one that goes from the singular individual to the general; another that goes from substance to quality. At its intersection lies the common name; at one end, the proper name; in the other, the adjective "(FOCULT, 2002, p. 137).

The word designates what it means in its nature to be a name. Proper name, because it points to such representation and nothing else. Thus, in the face of the uniformity of the verb - which is never more than the universal statement of attribution - the names swarm and into infinity. There should be as many names as there are things to name. But then each name would be so strongly linked to the only representation it appoints, that one could not even formulate the least attribution; and language would fall beneath

itself ... Names can function in the sentence and allow assignment only if one of the two (the attribute at least) assigns some element common to several representations. The generality of the name is as necessary to the parts of discourse as to the designation of being; to the form of the proposition. (FOUCAULT, 2002, p.136).

Therefore, we see that the word is what its nature means, and it has a strong representation as well as the name that carries in its utterance this representation of someone strong as a rock. However, proper names have a property of fixity, because the name is characteristic of that sign and the name of a person does not change constantly. However, it is noticed that in some indigenous Guarani communities in Mato Grosso do Sul, there is a certain predisposition to change the name for religious or social reasons.

And it is through the acoustic image that one can recognize the signs of language, first by hearing and then relating the name to the person. This acoustic image in which Saussure refers is related to a concept. This relationship is not only a name for beings or objects but a personal and social association as a concept that may refer to the subject.

Thus, we can cite here the concept of Saussurian arbitrariness which consists in the unmotivated connection between the signifier and the meaning. Thus, there is no significant property of Peter that motivates his connection to the Peter meaning, so that any other signifier could occupy the role of the acoustic image of that meaning that is what is in the speakers' memory.

In other words, we can say that the speaker forms in his mind an image of the sound of the sign. The image is associated with a concept that in this case is the proper name. Thus, the acoustic image or later called by it of signifier exerts a primordial function in the operation of the language.

However, when we speak of the proper name, this subject is identified by the image that already has of it. Saussure explains to be a connection with a certain acoustic image.

Not only are the two domains linked by the linguistic fact confused and amorphous, but the choice chosen by such an acoustic portion for such idea is perfectly arbitrary. If this were not the case, the notion of value would lose some of its character for it would contain an element imposed from without. But, in fact, the values remain entirely relative, and that is why the link between an idea and a sound was radically arbitrary (SAUSSURE, 2006: 132).

In this way, the proper name as well as the memory has lines and traces inscribed in the space in which it circulates, with values, ideologies and beliefs that surround that word. Hence, what memory refers to is "a complex preexisting and external to the organism, constituted by series of tissues of readable indices, constituting a socio-historical corpus of traits' (PÊCHEUX, 2015, p. 142)."

In this perspective, we can say that the name itself has reference only if its use is within a context of use such as "Peter", does not designate any particular object if we analyze who expressed it and who was the interlocutor, which the situation of discourse and what were the conventional rules. In this way, this subject is identified demonstratively that is it can be identified by a description that relates it in a univocal and particular way.

Even though there are several Peters, the subject is identified at the moment in which his characteristics are placed in the dialogue because the name assumes a label, a role in which the other identifies it at the moment of the speech. It has the meaningful function where the subject receives all the connotative charge that this name implies.

When we speak of Peter, the name comes from a perception that this subject will be a strong child, who will be a leader, will have a profession of command as the very meaning of the name.

We will now look at the name Joseph which has the Hebrew origin, Yosef, with the meaning "He will add," "he who adds," "addition of the Lord," or "God multiplies." This name was more common among the Jewish people in the Middle Ages and, by virtue of the veneration to San José in Spain and Italy, popularized itself at the end of the same time.

Saint Joseph or Joseph the carpenter was the husband of the Virgin Mary. According to the New Testament, he descends from the house of David and is worshiped by the Roman Catholic, Anglican and Orthodox Churches. It is celebrated on March 19 his day under the title of "Tutor of Our Lord". It is also considered Patron of Workers and Patron of Families (WIKIPEDIA).

When we think of this name, we see that it is someone who works, someone who adds it means that, according to the meaning of his name, this subject is expected to be someone who adds something to society, and the family.

And since every sign is ideological and ideology is a reflection of social structures, when we think of the name itself, we can say that they come to consciousness and become individual indices of value insofar as the individual consciousness absorbs them as their own.

However, since man is not born ready, his conscience and his actions are outlined by the society that surrounds him and, as language is in all subjects, it is a game of combinations and recombination that produces meaning (SAUSSURE, 2006).

In fact, any society knows or ever knew the language otherwise than as a product inherited from previous generations and that it must receive as such. That is why the question of the origin of language is of any importance, and is generally attributed to it. Nor is it an issue to be proposed; the only real object of linguistics is the normal and regular life of an already constituted language. A given state of language is always the product of historical factors and it is these factors that explain why the sign is immutable, that is, it resists any substitution (SAUSSURE, 2006, p.106).

In this sense, as the discourse is not neutral and aims to affirm or suggest this person takes possession of the meaning of the name. Thus, the name Joseph becomes identity of the subject from the conception of the Other.

Another name to be analyzed is Yara, which means for some indigenous peoples "lady of water", "owner of water" and still "mother of water" without the girl who received this name alive at least in communities where there is presence of springs or rivers. Hence, how to explain the meaning of the name? This female name even having its origin in the Tupi-Guarani language indicates that the said girl could become the water lady, even living in an arid community. Thus, we can observe that the sign does not always reflect the meaning, that is, to be "lady of waters" this subject does not necessarily have been born in a village where there is an abundance of water.

For Orlandi (2009), these subjects are affected by history and language in which it means and is signified, where the process of meaning production takes place and the relation of it with the ideology knowing that ideology and language articulate themselves between each other.

Thus, we can say that what ensures continuity of language is the time which has a contradictory effect of immutability and mutability. We can say that they are positive, negative, differential, and limited. As Saussure clarifies (2006, p. 136) "values correspond to concepts, they are understood to be purely differential, defined not positively by their content but negatively by their relations to the other terms of the system. His most accurate characteristic is to be what others are not."

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We can say that man does not have sovereign territory inside, he is always looking at himself but, in fact, he is looking into the eyes of others. In this way, the subject always has the illusion that he is the source of his discourse when he is nothing more than support and effect (PÊCHEUX, 1997).

The meaning of a word, an expression, a preposition, etc. (...) does not exist "in itself" (that is, in its transparent relationship with the literality of the signifier) but on the contrary, it is determined by the ideological positions that are at stake in the socio-historical process in which words, expressions, and propositions are produced. (...) We could summarize this thesis by saying the words, the expressions, propositions, etc. they change their meaning according to the positions held by those who employ them (Pêcheux 1997: 160).

According to Pêcheux (1990), the subject position represents an imaginary object within the discursive process. The subject has several positions according to the discursive and ideological formations in which it is inserted. Thus, for Discourse Analysis, the subject is the fruit of the relations between history and ideology for as we speak above it is constituted with the other.

Thus, when we see proper names and their meanings, we can clearly see the conception that discourse is crossed by the various voices and that it is not a homogeneous being isolated or external to language but rather a decentered, divided, cleaved, and barred.

## 6. Final Considerations

The analysis of all the existing questioning in relation to the proper name led us to verify that man, from his birth, has its existence delineated by the Other. His actions, worldview, his behavior, his ethnic-social values and beliefs are and can be determined by the influence he suffers from the external environment, the society in which he lives and the values practiced by it.

To the same extent is the definition of proper names to be attributed to people. What meanings do they have, what values do they carry, and what do they come from? These are questions that can directly influence that choice. The values of the society of which the individual belongs have a direct influence on this choice after an analysis of the answer to these questions.

Analyzing the customs practiced through different times and cultures we can observe that, since antiquity, the names were used not only to characterize the individual but also to honor religious or mystical entities and even leaderships. Such deferences are directly related to what these parents expected of their children such as those practiced by the natives who choose the names, in some cases, under the influence of their aspirations for admirable characteristics for their children.

It is concluded, therefore, that the subjects are affected by the language, being signified by it. In this influence, one can see that there is a relation with the culture in which these parents are inserted and how the subject represents an imaginary object, in this case, in the family imaginary. One has the idea that the subject will be what the name denotes that is it will have the characteristics of its name.

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