Neither grammar (logic of syntax, parts of speech), nor philology (historical usage and interpretation of word) precisely Saussure’s goal
Instead, a *structural* linguistics
How is linguistic meaning produced through a system, a structure?
not just through the units of signification
particularly concerned with establishing a *synchronic* (as opposed to *diachronic*) model for signification
how does the sign work?
and how is semiology in language representative of complex processes of signification generally?
having established synchronic rules, S. can return to explain diachronic (historical) transformations in signs
separates language (*langue*) from speech (*parole*) to isolate this invariable signifying form, and to emphasize the social/communal inherited part of language outside speaker’s will
performance is always *parole* in a sense
intersection of given & willed meaning
“speaking is what causes language to evolve” (19)
Sign: Signifier/Signified

language not simply as a naming process

Genesis 2:19: “And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.”

Man’s mastery signaled by ability to name naming seems natural, hence authority seems natural and not arbitrary

Saussure denaturalizes linguistic relationships signifier:signified::sound-image:concept

onomatopoeia, interjections discounted

even gestural pantomime not seen as natural, but conventional “it is the rule and not the intrinsic value of the gestures that obliges one to use them” (68)

law, rule, convention, history still apply

tsidenote on Rousseau, nature, & gestures
Form of signification can start to explain & denaturalize process
cannot full explain linguistic value, however

Signs usually not alone, form complex chains
language = intersection of shapeless thought and shapeless sound
“Thought, chaotic by nature, has to become ordered in the
process of its decomposition” (112)
writing not as exact translation of mind, but decomposition &
recomposition
value becomes assigned through syntagmatic and associative
differences
linguistic value relative to situation, speaker, context, etc.
not absolute

How much is cognition a function of language, not vice versa?
Saussure’s well-known example of sheep and mouton
Swahili’s noun classes
Ausländer in German
In Wilson, signifiers clearer, but what constitutes signified?
context (of correspondences between speaker & context, for example) not always clear
hence, both associative & syntagmatic orderings of language are put into play
invites associative, as well as logical/syntagmatic, hearing?
Saussure suggests that hearing is a relatively passive psychophysical function
“everything that goes from the ear of the listener to his associative center is passive” (13)
but what about that moment of translation at the “center”? at level of syntagm, rather than sign, translation esp. thorny
how determine if parts of a gestural-visual syntagm are connected? Autism
“Queering” of signification?

Models of “complex seeing” (Brecht)
differential quality of value in language complicated in performance
phonic articulation combines with gesture, as well as other sign-systems
communication systems, software/hardware
genes expressing themselves in proteins