

However, within a particular language, signs may be partially motivated in a different way. The machine on which I am writing is called a *typewriter*. There is no intrinsic reason why it should not be called a *grue* or a *blimmel*, but, within English, *typewriter* is motivated because the meanings of the two sound sequences which compose its signifier, *type* and *writer*, are related to its signified, to the notion of a "type-writer." We might call this "secondary motivation." Notice, for example, that only in English is the relation between this sound sequence and the concept motivated. If the French were to use the same form to speak of this machine, that would be a wholly arbitrary sign, since the primary constituent, *writer* is not a sign in the French language. Moreover, for Saussure, as we shall see, the process of combining *type* and *writer* to create a new motivated sign is fundamentally similar to the way in which we combine words to form a phrase (whose meaning is related to the combined meanings of individual words). We can say, therefore, that languages have as their basic elements arbitrary signs. They then have various processes for combining these signs, but that does not alter the essential nature of language and its elementary constituents.

The sign is arbitrary in that there is no intrinsic link between signifier and signified. This is how Saussure's principle is usually interpreted, but in this form it is a wholly traditional notion, a rather obvious fact about language. Interpreted in this limited way, it does not have the momentous consequences which, according to the students' notes, Saussure repeatedly claimed for it: "the hierarchical place of this truth is at the very summit. It is only little by little that one recognizes how many different facts are but ramifications, hidden consequences of this truth" (Engler, 153). There is more to the arbitrary nature of the sign than the arbitrary relation between signifier and signified. We must push further.

From what I have said so far about signifier and signified,

one might be tempted to think of language as a nomenclature: a series of names arbitrarily selected and attached to a set of objects or concepts. It is, Saussure says, all too easy to think of language as a set of names and to make the biblical story of Adam naming the beasts an account of the very nature of language. If one says that the concept "dog" is rendered or expressed by *dog* in English, *chien* in French, and *Hund* in German, one implies that each language has an arbitrary name for a concept that exists prior to and independently of any language.

If language were simply a nomenclature for a set of universal concepts, it would be easy to translate from one language to another. One would simply replace the French name for a concept with the English name. If language were like this, the task of learning a new language would also be much easier than it is. But anyone who has attempted either of these tasks has acquired, alas, a vast amount of direct proof that languages are not nomenclatures, that the concepts or signifieds of one language may differ radically from those of another. The French "aimer" does not go directly into English; one must choose between "to like" and "to love." "Démarrer" includes in a single idea the English signifieds of "starting" and "accelerating." English "to know" covers the area of two French signifieds, "connaître" and "savoir." The English concepts of a "wicked" man and of a "pet" have no real counterparts in French. Or again, what English calls "light blue" and "dark blue" and treats as two shades of a single color are in Russian two distinct primary colors. Each language articulates or organizes the world differently. Languages do not simply name existing categories; they articulate their own.

Moreover, if language were a set of names applied to independently existing concepts, then in the historical evolution of a language the concepts should remain stable. Signifiers could evolve; the particular sequence of sounds associated