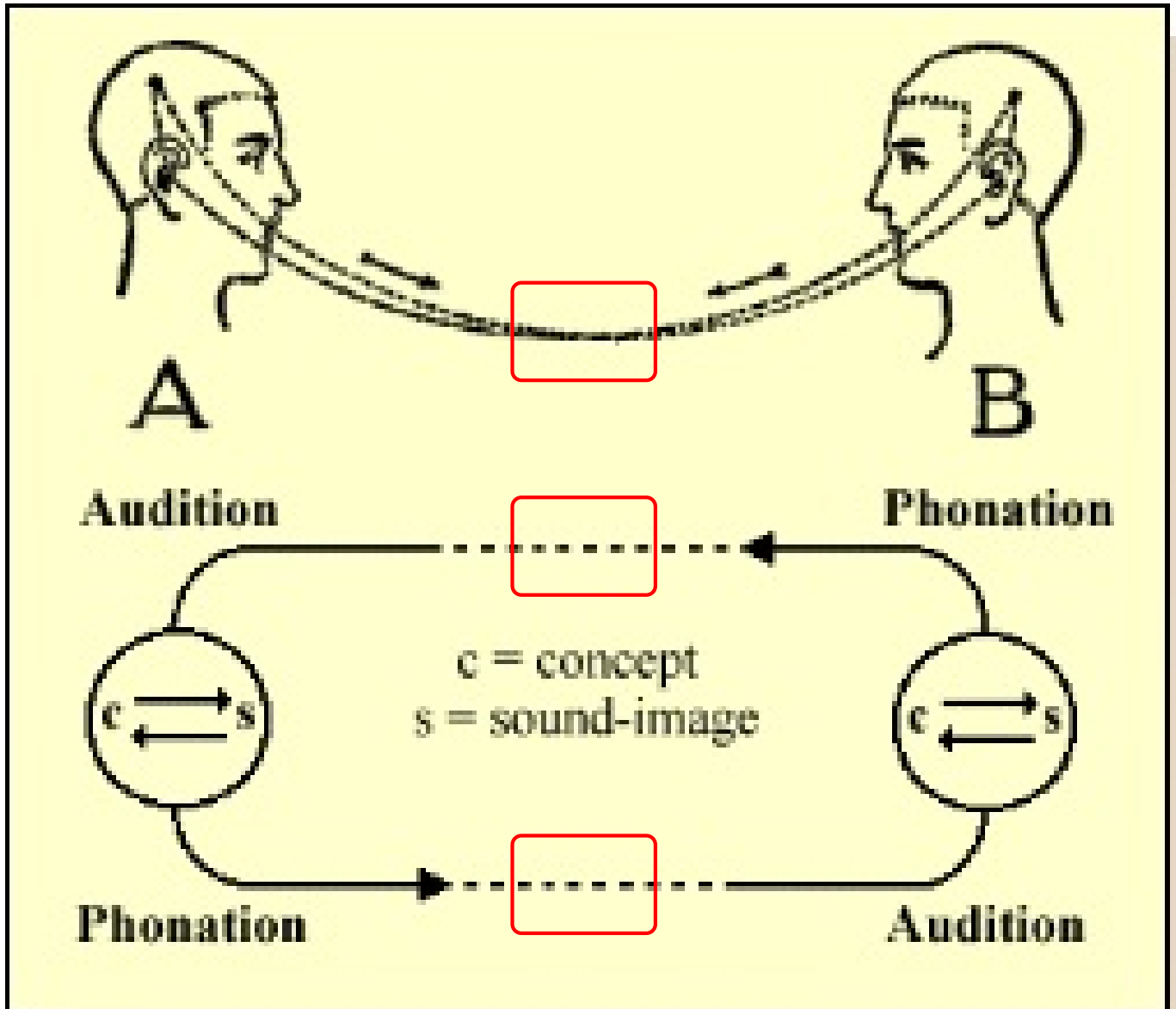


An Inter-Organism Perspective (Saussure)



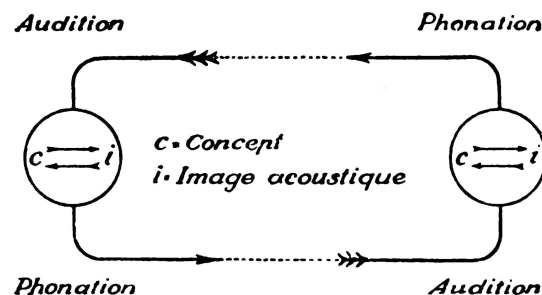
Note: In this course, we will be concentrating on the portion outlined in red. For more detail, see page 2 (in French).

Place de la langue dans les faits de langage.

Pour trouver dans l'ensemble du langage la sphère qui correspond à la langue, il faut se placer devant l'acte individuel qui permet de reconstituer le circuit de la parole. Cet acte suppose au moins deux individus ; c'est le minimum exigible pour que le circuit soit complet. Soient donc deux personnes, A et B, qui s'entretiennent :



Le point de départ du circuit est dans le cerveau de l'une, par exemple A, où les faits de conscience, que nous appellerons concepts, se trouvent associés aux représentations des signes linguistiques ou images acoustiques servant à leur expression. Supposons qu'un concept donné déclenche dans le cerveau une image acoustique correspondante : c'est un phénomène entièrement psychique, suivi à son tour d'un procès physiologique : le cerveau transmet aux organes de la phonation une impulsion corrélative à l'image ; puis les ondes sonores se propagent de la bouche de A à l'oreille de B : procès purement physique. Ensuite, le circuit se prolonge en B dans un ordre inverse : de l'oreille au cerveau, transmission physiologique de l'image acoustique ; dans le cerveau, association psychique de cette image avec le concept correspondant. Si B parle à son tour, ce nouvel acte suivra — de son cerveau à celui de A — exactement la même marche que le premier et passera par les mêmes phases successives, que nous figurerons comme suit :



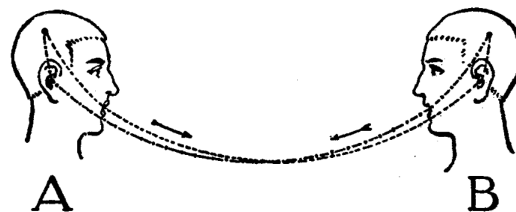
Saussure's representation of the speech circuit:

Saussure, Ferdinand de, *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916). éd. Bally / Sechehaye. Payot, 1971. pp 27-28

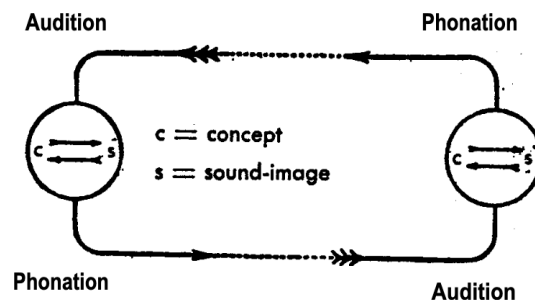
I propose to study language – both spoken and written – at the point where it is a “purely physical” process.

Place of Language in the Facts of Speech

In order to separate from the whole of speech the part that belongs to language, we must examine the individual act from which the speaking-circuit can be reconstructed. The act requires the presence of at least two persons; that is the minimum number necessary to complete the circuit. Suppose that two people, A and B, are conversing with each other:



Suppose that the opening of the circuit is in A's brain, where mental facts (concepts) are associated with representations of the linguistic sounds (sound-images) that are used for their expression. A given concept unlocks a corresponding sound-image in the brain; this purely *psychological* phenomenon is followed in turn by a *physiological* process: the brain transmits an impulse corresponding to the image to the organs used in producing sounds. Then the sound waves travel from the mouth of A to the ear of B: a purely *physical* process. Next, the circuit continues in B, but the order is reversed: from the ear to the brain, the physiological transmission of the sound-image; in the brain, the psychological association of the image with the corresponding concept. If B then speaks, the new act will follow—from his brain to A's—exactly the same course as the first act and pass through the same successive phases, which I shall diagram as follows:



Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in general linguistics*. Eds. Charles Bally & Albert Sechehaye. Trans. Wade Baskin. NY: The Philosophical Society, 1959.

In spoken language: physical sound waves just as they're about to hit my eardrum.

In written language: photons just as they're about to hit my retina.

I will never attempt to work out "what you probably meant", because I am not a mind-reader. I will always work with exactly the sequences of sounds and pauses (or of letters and spaces) you give me, and will impose only the most neutral, natural interpretation on them.

Beware.