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For Classical Students

J. M. Edmonds

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CHAPTER I.

LANGUAGE AND THE STUDY OF LANGUAGE.

Introductory—Acquiring our own language—Acquiring a foreign language—Province of Comparative Philology—Change—*Elements of Language*—Speech—Gesture—Feature—Tone of Voice—Pitch—Emphasis or Stress—Speed—*Origin of Speech*—Imitation of Animals—Interjections—Symbolism—Metaphor—*Differentiation in Language*—*Classification of Languages by Form*—Isolating—Agglutinative—Inflexional—Incorporating—Position of English—of French—of German—of Greek and Latin.

THE facts we learn in acquiring a language may be grouped under four heads:

- (1) Vocabulary, or words pure and simple,
- (2) Accidence, or the inflexions of nouns, verbs, etc.,
- (3) Syntax, or the arrangement of words in sentences,
- (4) Spelling, or the relation of the written to the spoken language.

A child acquiring his native language learns these facts as a mass of associations. By imitating our own language. others he associates the sound-group *grass* with the thing 'grass,' and the sound-group *tree* with the thing 'tree'; the thing 'grass' and the thing 'tree' he associates together by means of a common characteristic, 'greenness,' that is, he acquires the abstract

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notion 'green,' and with this by imitation he associates the sound-group *green*. Simultaneously with the vocabulary, and in a similar way, he acquires the accidence and the syntax. The spelling-associations are acquired somewhat later.

When we learn a foreign language we acquire a new set of associations. With the thing 'grass' we learn to associate the sound-group *herbe* as well as the sound-group *grass*, and with the notion 'green' we learn to associate the sound-group *vert* as well as the sound-group *green*. That is to say, we start with the mass of associations of which our native language consists, and gradually extend them in a new direction. The new associations we group mentally under the heading 'French,' and the process of acquiring associations becomes a comparison between English and French. We learn to write down the symbol-group 'herbe' to represent the sound-group *herbe*, and not to write 'airb' as we should if the sound-group belonged to the heading 'English'.¹ We go through the same process with every new sound-group, and we gradually acquire a mass of associations such as *man = homme, is = est*. By a similar process we learn the inflexions *homme—hommes, est—sont*, and the sentences *l'homme est bon, les hommes sont bons*.

When we proceed to learn other foreign languages we begin to acquire fresh masses of associations, e.g. *man = Mann, man = homo, man = άνθρωπος, man = homme*. But we do not directly associate *Mann* with *homo*, or *άνθρωπος* with *homme*. For instance, we should find it difficult to translate a piece of German into French without first turning the German mentally into English. It is here that the

¹ In school teaching in England this order is frequently reversed, the spelling or look of a word being learnt before the pronunciation or sound.

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[More information](#)

I]

STUDY OF LANGUAGE

3

province of Comparative Philology begins. It takes such groups as *man—homme—Mann—homo—* Province of Comparative Philology. *άνήρ* and *he loves—il aime—er liebt—amat* —*έρει*, and compares the members of each group. In short, Comparative Philology (or, as it is sometimes called, Philology) deals with the phenomena of Language as Natural Science deals with the phenomena of Matter, i.e. it compares various phenomena, groups them under heads according to their common characteristics, and deduces the laws or principles which govern them. It is the business of Comparative Philology to answer as far as possible such questions as Why does the Frenchman say *il aime* where the Englishman says *he loves*? Has the Englishman always said *he loves*? If not, why not?

The Englishman has not always said *he loves*. In the time of King Alfred (849—901) he said *he* Change. *lufath* (spelt 'lufap'). Similarly the French *il aime* was once the Latin *ille amat*. Thus we see that language changes; in other words, if an Englishman of the time of Alfred were to come to life again he would have at least as great difficulty in understanding one of us as a Cockney has in understanding a Scotchman.

Before we deal with Change and its causes there are several points to be discussed. First, as to the Elements of Language.

Language is composed primarily of speech-sounds—vowels and consonants—formed by the organs of the throat and mouth (see Chapter II.); Elements of Language. (1) Speech. but it has many other elements. The phrase 'gesticulating foreigner' implies that foreigners when speaking employ Gesture, but that we do (2) Gesture. not. It is true that gesture is less common

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in English than in most other languages. We rarely shrug our shoulders or extend our hands while speaking. In church or in school, however, when we wish to avoid speaking, we can readily make known any simple want or intention in this way. Among some races, especially the lower races, gesture is far more widely employed, and in many cases enters directly into the spoken language. In Modern Greek οὐχί, 'no,' has degenerated into a mere parting of the lips accompanied by a tossing back of the head (the Classical ἀνακλίω). In the Grebo language of West Africa *ni ne* means 'I do it' or 'you do it' according to the gesture of the speaker. Indeed, our own system of counting by tens—*twenty, thirty, forty*—proves that our linguistic ancestors indicated numbers by their fingers as savages do to this day. Under certain circumstances elaborate gesture-systems have been developed entirely independent of speech. Among the North American Indians, owing to the great variety of languages, a common gesture-system is often employed, with which conversation can be carried on. Deaf-mutes have been known to develop a language of the same kind. We may note here that an Englishman who never employs gesture while speaking at home, on going abroad resorts to it frequently. This is partly, no doubt, owing to unconscious imitation of the inhabitants, but largely, too, because he feels that his imperfect pronunciation of the language requires help.

Another element of language is Expression of Feature.

(3) *Feature.* Just as we have learnt to associate a certain emotion with the noise we call laughing, so certain emotions such as pride, disgust, humility, shame, anger, have come to be connected with certain expressions of face, and thus an angry word is always accompanied by an angry look. This association of the expression of face

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

I]

STUDY OF LANGUAGE

5

with speech is so deeply rooted that in the dark we imagine it accompanying the spoken word. In this we are of course guided by the Tone of Voice, which we may call the fourth element in language. Even without the help of the facial expression it is not hard to distinguish a sarcastic laugh from a merry one. Our colloquial 'Irishism,' 'Don't look at me in that tone of voice,' acknowledges the close connexion between tone and feature. Indeed, it is not uncommon among intimates to express interest, interrogation, surprise, etc., by tone alone, i.e. by voice-murmur with the closed lips. Such symbol-groups as 'h'm,' 'humph,' are intended to express this on paper. When we talk of 'speaking kindly' to a dog, we know it is the tone of voice rather than the words which he understands. For this reason many men when calling a small animal will speak in falsetto.

Other elements of language are Musical Pitch, Emphasis or Stress, and Speed of Utterance. These are exemplified in such phrases as '*Ever* so far away,' 'I can't *tell* you how much I enjoyed it,' 'Then with a *terrific roar* the whole vessel was blown into the air.' In the last instance the noise and terror of the explosion, as well as the climax of the story, are indicated by the emphasis, the high pitch, and the slowness of utterance, of the two words in italics. In a sentence like 'I can't walk there,' the emphasis may be placed on any one of the four syllables with a different meaning in each case. The importance of these latter elements of speech is seen in reading aloud. To produce the full effect intended by the writer of the book the reader must guess the tone and speed of every sentence and the pitch and emphasis of every syllable; for this is more than the most scientifically accurate alphabet could convey.

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These subsidiary elements of language—Gesture, Expression of Feature, Tone of Voice, Pitch, Emphasis, and Speed of Utterance—occupy an important place in the languages of modern savages, and doubtless did so in the early stages of the languages of civilisation. The more highly-developed a language becomes, that is, the more perfect a vehicle of thought, the less reliance it places on these subsidiary elements. As we saw above, speech begins in the infant with associations, first, between sounds and things ('trees,' 'grass'), secondly, between sounds and notions or ideas ('green'). It is probable that it originated in the first instance in a similar way. The infant imitates its parents and others. What did the first speaker imitate? How did the association between the original sound-groups and the things they expressed come into existence?

*Origin of
Speech.*

Doubtless many of the first words were Imitations of the cries of animals such as *moo*, *baa*, uttered either for amusement, as children utter them now, or for purposes of decoying. Then the sound-group *moo* would be used to modify a gesture, such as that of pointing, to explain what kind of animal was pointed at. The stage of using a sound-group to modify a gesture or expression of the face was probably a long one, but a time must have come when a savage wished to express 'there is an ox' in the dark, where gesture and expression of face would be useless; and thus *moo* alone would be employed as a sentence-word with this meaning.

*Imitation of
animals.*

At a very early period in his history¹ man could doubtless express his feelings in a limited way by various Interjections, just as a dog

Interjections.

¹ The earliest stages of the growth of Language were probably contemporary with the 'monkey stage' of human development.

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can either bark or growl, and a hen either cackle or cluck, according to circumstances. Thus *ugh*, accompanied by suitable pointing-gestures, might mean 'I have the toothache,' or 'he has sprained his ankle.' After a long use of these primitive methods of communication, the savage, we may suppose, began to combine such a sound-group as *moo* with such a sound-group as *ugh*. 'There-is-an-ox there-is-pain' would be the result. Accompanied by suitable gestures this could mean 'I am going to stab that ox with this spear,' or 'Let us come and stab that ox with our spears,' or even 'They have killed this ox with their spears.' Once such combinations had become possible, sentence-words such as *moo* ('there-is-an-ox') and *ugh* ('there-is-pain') would gradually develop into true words, the one meaning 'ox' and the other 'stab' or 'kill.' These could be used in various combinations.

Another likely origin of words is Symbolism, such as Symbolism. the act of sucking-in the breath between the upper teeth and the lower lip to denote either drinking or sweetness to the taste. The Latin *bibere* may be *originally* a 'baby-word' of this kind. To this day we often denote the idea 'delicious' in this way. We may note here the symbolism seen in Vowel-Contrast. For instance, the Javanese say *iki* for 'this,' *ika* for 'that (near),' and *iku* for 'that (yonder),' and even the Greeks, when they wished to emphasise the nearness of a thing, changed $\tau\acute{o}\delta\epsilon$ to $\tau\omicron\delta\acute{\iota}$. In both cases degrees of distance are indicated by variety of vowels. The same thing is used to indicate sex. Thus in Finnish *ukko* is an old man, *akka* an old woman; indeed, such a phenomenon as *bonum*—*bonam* may be referred historically to the same principle¹.

¹ For the connexion between Vowel Gradation and Musical Pitch see Chapter VII.

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It should be borne in mind in discussing the probable origin of speech that, to become the fixed expression of any particular idea, a word would have to be employed constantly by a number of persons to one another and to stand tests such as ease of pronunciation (organic) and distinctiveness (acoustic). It was a case of the survival of the fittest.

We have still to discuss a most important element in the formation of speech,—Metaphor. This is an obvious way of expressing the hitherto unknown in terms of the known. When the native Australians first became acquainted with books they called them *mūyūm*, ‘mussels,’ because they open and shut in a similar way. The Basuto word for a fly, *ntsi-ntsi*, which is obviously imitative of buzzing¹, has been extended by metaphor to mean a courtier, i.e. one who buzzes round his chief. The history of three words for tobacco-pipe, *chibouk*, *calumet*, and our *pipe*, points to a similar origin. *Chibouk* comes from Central Asia, where it meant originally a herdsman’s flute. *Calumet* in the dialect of Normandy (from Latin *calamus*) is the name for a shepherd’s pipe, and was applied to the smoking-instrument of the Red Indians by the early colonists of Canada. Our *pipe* was once used with the same meaning. In the translation of the Psalms we read ‘Praise him upon the strings and pipe.’ We still speak of the pipes of an organ. A similar extension of association by metaphor gave us such words as *drain-pipe*, *wind-pipe*. The history of the word *junketing* is a case in point. From the Latin *iuncus*, ‘a reed,’ came Late Latin *iuncata*, ‘cheese made in a reed-basket,’ which in Italian appears as *giuncata*, ‘cream-cheese,’ and in French as *joncade*, ‘curds-and-whey,’ whence we have

¹ Cf. Mod. Greek *τρίτακος*, a cricket.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

I]

STUDY OF LANGUAGE

9

the English *junket*; from the *junketing*-parties where this delicacy was eaten we get the noun *junketing* meaning 'merry-making.' To take another instance, *peculiar* comes through French from the Latin *peculiaris*, originally the adjective of *peculium*, a slave's private hoard; this again is a diminutive of *pecunia*, 'money,' once 'property' of any kind, earlier 'live-stock' from *pecus*, 'cattle'; in Sanskrit¹ *paçu* means 'cattle,' and is formed from *paç*, 'to fasten up' (Latin *pango*, Greek *πήγνυμι*), the original meaning being doubtless 'domestic' as opposed to 'wild' cattle. If we wonder at the fewness of such self-expressive words as *cuckoo*, *buzz*, *hiss*, *pompom* in a language like our own, compared with the enormous number of such words as *go*, *black*, *man*, *never*, whose meaning is merely traditional, we have only to consider such extensions of meaning as these.

We have indicated briefly the Elements of Language (in the widest sense), and the probable Origin and Development of Speech (or Language in the narrow sense). We shall now discuss the causes of Differentiation in Language, i.e. the splitting up into dialects. These causes are mainly local.

Let us imagine a small village-community where, roughly speaking, everyone spoke to everyone else every day. So long as the conditions remained the same, the necessities of mutual intelligibility would preserve the language of the villagers from change, or if it did change the changes would, in the long run, be common to all the inhabitants. But suppose, under pressure of increasing population, decreasing fertility of the soil, or catastrophes such as floods and landslips, the community spread further and further, till natural boundaries such

¹ For the connexion between Latin and Sanskrit see Chapter v.

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[More information](#)

as rivers and mountains divided the speakers of the original language into new and distinct communities. Not only might names have to be found for new objects, but changes in the forms and uses of words (owing, e.g., to laziness or to defective imitation in infants) would not necessarily, under different circumstances, follow the same lines. Between some of the villages communication, in varying degrees, might be kept up. The divergence in dialect would probably be inversely proportional to the ease of inter-communication. Thus, if we call the original village A and its successive offshoots *in any one direction* B, C, and D, the chances of remaining mutually intelligible would be greater in the case of A and B than in the case of A and C or of A and D. Similarly the dialects of C and D would have more elements in common than those of B and D. B and C might have the same *number* of elements in common as C and D, but these would not necessarily be *the same* elements. If owing to any cause B or C moved from their intermediate position, the chances of A and D becoming mutually unintelligible would be greatly increased.

We have imagined our community as already so far advanced in civilisation as to dwell for long periods in one district. It will be understood that in the case of nomad or wandering peoples the circumstances would be still more favourable to differentiation.

(The causes of Change in language are discussed more fully in Chapter VI.)

The languages of the world may be classified in many ways, e.g. living and dead, written and un-written; they may be classified according to their descent, or according to their form.

*Classification
of Languages
according to
Form.*