

LANGUAGE

By the same Author

ESSENTIALS OF ENGLISH GRAMMAR
THE PHILOSOPHY OF GRAMMAR
A MODERN ENGLISH GRAMMAR
(*in seven volumes*)
A SYSTEM OF GRAMMAR
HOW TO TEACH A FOREIGN LANGUAGE
AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE
NOVIAL LEXIKE
CHAPTERS ON ENGLISH
MANKIND, NATION AND INDIVIDUAL
A GRAMMATICAL MISCELLANY OFFERED
TO OTTO JESPERSEN

LANGUAGE

ITS NATURE, DEVELOPMENT AND ORIGIN

by

OTTO JESPERSEN

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TO
VILHELM THOMSEN

Glæde, når av andres mund
jeg hørte de tanker store,
Glæde over hvert et fund
jeg selv ved min forsken gjorde.

PREFACE

THE distinctive feature of the science of language as conceived nowadays is its historical character: a language or a word is no longer taken as something given once for all, but as a result of previous development and at the same time as the starting-point for subsequent development. This manner of viewing languages constitutes a decisive improvement on the way in which languages were dealt with in previous centuries, and it suffices to mention such words as 'evolution' and 'Darwinism' to show that linguistic research has in this respect been in full accordance with tendencies observed in many other branches of scientific work during the last hundred years. Still, it cannot be said that students of language have always and to the fullest extent made it clear to themselves what is the real essence of a language. Too often expressions are used which are nothing but metaphors—in many cases perfectly harmless metaphors, but in other cases metaphors that obscure the real facts of the matter. Language is frequently spoken of as a 'living organism'; we hear of the 'life' of languages, of the 'birth' of new languages and of the 'death' of old languages, and the implication, though not always realized, is that a language is a living thing, something analogous to an animal or a plant. Yet a language evidently has no separate existence in the same way as a dog or a beech has, but is nothing but a function of certain living human beings. Language is activity, purposeful activity, and we should never lose sight of the speaking individuals and of their purpose in acting in this particular way. When people speak of the life of words—as in celebrated books with such titles as *La vie des mots*, or *Biographies of Words*—they do not always keep in view that a word has no 'life' of its own: it exists only in so far as it is pronounced or heard or remembered by somebody, and this kind of existence cannot properly be compared with 'life' in the original and proper sense of that word. The only unimpeachable definition of a word is that it is a human habit, an habitual act on the part of one human individual which has, or may have, the effect of evoking some idea in the mind

of another individual. A word thus may be rightly compared with such an habitual act as taking off one's hat or raising one's fingers to one's cap : in both cases we have a certain set of muscular activities which, when seen or heard by somebody else, shows him what is passing in the mind of the original agent or what he desires to bring to the consciousness of the other man (or men). The act is individual, but the interpretation presupposes that the individual forms part of a community with analogous habits, and a language thus is seen to be one particular set of human customs of a well-defined social character.

It is indeed possible to speak of 'life' in connexion with language even from this point of view, but it will be in a different sense from that in which the word was taken by the older school of linguistic science. I shall try to give a biological or biographical science of language, but it will be through sketching the linguistic biology or biography of the speaking individual. I shall give, therefore, a large part to the way in which a child learns his mother-tongue (Book II) : my conclusions there are chiefly based on the rich material I have collected during many years from direct observation of many Danish children, and particularly of my own boy, Frans (see my book *Nutidsprog hos børn og voksne*, Copenhagen, 1916). Unfortunately, I have not been able to make first-hand observations with regard to the speech of English children ; the English examples I quote are taken second-hand either from notes, for which I am obliged to English and American friends, or from books, chiefly by psychologists. I should be particularly happy if my remarks could induce some English or American linguist to take up a systematic study of the speech of children, or of one child. This study seems to me very fascinating indeed, and a linguist is sure to notice many things that would be passed by as uninteresting even by the closest observer among psychologists, but which may have some bearing on the life and development of language.

Another part of linguistic biology deals with the influence of the foreigner, and still another with the changes which the individual is apt independently to introduce into his speech even after he has fully acquired his mother-tongue. This naturally leads up to the question whether all these changes introduced by various individuals do, or do not, follow the same line of direction, and whether mankind has on the whole moved forward or not in linguistic matters. The conviction reached through a study of historically accessible periods of well-known languages is finally shown to throw some light on the disputed problem of the ultimate origin of human language.

Parts of my theory of sound-change, and especially my objections

to the dogma of blind sound-laws, date back to my very first linguistic paper (1886); most of the chapters on Decay or Progress and parts of some of the following chapters, as well as the theory of the origin of speech, may be considered a new and revised edition of the general chapters of my *Progress in Language* (1894). Many of the ideas contained in this book thus are not new with me; but even if a reader of my previous works may recognize things which he has seen before, I hope he will admit that they have been here worked up with much new material into something like a system, which forms a fairly comprehensive theory of linguistic development.

Still, I have not been able to compress into this volume the whole of my philosophy of speech. Considerations of space have obliged me to exclude the chapters I had first intended to write on the practical consequences of the 'energetic' view of language which I have throughout maintained; the estimation of linguistic phenomena implied in that view has bearings on such questions as these: What is to be considered 'correct' or 'standard' in matters of pronunciation, spelling, grammar and idiom? Can (or should) individuals exert themselves to improve their mother-tongue by enriching it with new terms and by making it purer, more precise, more fit to express subtle shades of thought, more easy to handle in speech or in writing, etc.? (A few hints on such questions may be found in my paper "Energetik der Sprache" in *Scientia*, 1914.) Is it possible to construct an artificial language on scientific principles for international use? (On this question I may here briefly state my conviction that it is extremely important for the whole of mankind to have such a language, and that Ido is scientifically and practically very much superior to all previous attempts, Volapük, Esperanto, Idiom Neutral, Latin sine flexione, etc. But I have written more at length on that question elsewhere.) With regard to the system of grammar, the relation of grammar to logic, and grammatical categories and their definition, I must refer the reader to *Sprogets Logik* (Copenhagen, 1913), and to the first chapter of the second volume of my *Modern English Grammar* (Heidelberg, 1914), but I shall hope to deal with these questions more in detail in a future work, to be called, probably, *The Logic of Grammar*, of which some chapters have been ready in my drawers for some years and others are in active preparation.

I have prefixed to the theoretical chapters of this work a short survey of the history of the science of language in order to show how my problems have been previously treated. In this part (Book I) I have, as a matter of course, used the excellent works on the subject by Benfey, Raumer, Delbrück (*Einleitung in das Sprachstudium*, 1st ed., 1880; I did not see the 5th ed., 1908, till

my own chapters on the history of linguistics were finished), Thomsen, Oertel and Pedersen. But I have in nearly every case gone to the sources themselves, and have, I think, found interesting things in some of the early books on linguistics that have been generally overlooked; I have even pointed out some writers who had passed into undeserved oblivion. My intention has been on the whole to throw into relief the great lines of development rather than to give many details; in judging the first part of my book it should also be borne in mind that its object primarily is to serve as an introduction to the problems dealt with in the rest of the book. Throughout I have tried to look at things with my own eyes, and accordingly my views on a great many points are different from those generally accepted; it is my hope that an impartial observer will find that I have here and there succeeded in distributing light and shade more justly than my predecessors.

Wherever it has been necessary I have transcribed words phonetically according to the system of the *Association Phonétique Internationale*, though without going into too minute distinction of sounds, the object being, not to teach the exact pronunciation of various languages, but rather to bring out clearly the insufficiency of the ordinary spelling. The latter is given throughout in italics, while phonetic symbols have been inserted in brackets []. I must ask the reader to forgive inconsistency in such matters as Greek accents, Old English marks of vowel-length, etc., which I have often omitted as of no importance for the purpose of this volume.

I must express here my gratitude to the directors of the Carlsbergfond for kind support of my work. I want to thank also Professor G. C. Moore Smith, of the University of Sheffield: not only has he sent me the manuscript of a translation of most of my *Nutidssprog*, which he had undertaken of his own accord and which served as the basis of Book II, but he has kindly gone through the whole of this volume, improving and correcting my English style in many passages. His friendship and the untiring interest he has always taken in my work have been extremely valuable to me for a great many years.

OTTO JESPERSEN.

UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN,
June 1921.

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ABBREVIATIONS OF BOOK TITLES, ETC.

- Bally LV = Ch. Bally, *Le Langage et la Vie*, Genève 1913.
 Benfey Gesch = Th. Benfey, *Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft*, München 1869.
 Bleek CG = W. H. I. Bleek, *Comparative Grammar of South African Languages* London 1862-69.
 Bloomfield SL = L. Bloomfield, *An Introduction to the Study of Language*, New York 1914.
 Bopp C = F. Bopp, *Conjugationssystem der Sanskritsprache*, Frankfurt 1816
 AC = *Analytical Comparison* (see ch. ii, § 6).
 VG = *Vergleichende Grammatik*, 2te Ausg., Berlin 1857.
 Bréal M = M. Bréal, *Mélanges de Mythologie et de Linguistique*, Paris 1882.
 Brugmann VG = K. Brugmann, *Grundriss der Vergleichenden Grammatik*, Strassburg 1886 ff., 2te Ausg., 1897 ff.
 KG = *Kurze Vergleichende Grammatik*, Strassburg 1904.
 ChE = O. Jespersen, *Chapters on English*, London 1918.
 Churchill B = W. Churchill, *Beach-la-Mar*, Washington 1911.
 Curtius C = G. Curtius, *Zur Chronologie der indogerm. Sprachforschung*, Leipzig 1873.
 K = *Zur Kritik der neuesten Sprachforschung*, Leipzig 1885.
 Dauzat V = A. Dauzat, *La Vie du Langage*, Paris 1910.
 Ph = *La Philosophie du Langage*, Paris 1912.
 Delbrück E = B. Delbrück, *Einleitung in das Sprachstudium*, Leipzig 1880; 5te Aufl. 1908.
 Grfr = *Grundfragen der Sprachforschung*, Strassburg 1901.
 E. = English.
 EDD = J. Wright, *The English Dialect Dictionary*, Oxford 1898 ff.
 ESt = *Englische Studien*.
 Foist KI = S. Feist, *Kultur, Ausbreitung und Herkunft der Indogermanen*, Berlin 1913.
 Fonetik = O. Jespersen, *Fonetik*, Copenhagen 1897.
 Fr. = French.
 Gabelentz Spr = G. v. d. Gabelentz, *Die Sprachwissenschaft*, Leipzig 1891.
 Gr = *Chinesische Grammatik*, Leipzig 1881.
 Ginneken LP = J. v. Ginneken, *Principes de Linguistique Psychologique*, Amsterdam, Paris 1907.
 Glenconner = P. Glenconner, *The Sayings of the Children*, Oxford 1918.
 Gr. = Greek.
 Groenough and Kittredge W = J. B. Greenough and G. L. Kittredge, *Words and their Ways in English Speech*, London 1902.
 Grimm Gr. = J. Grimm, *Deutsche Grammatik*, 2te Ausg., Göttingen 1822.
 GDS = *Geschichte der deutschen Sprache*, 4te Aufl., Leipzig 1880.

GRM = *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*.

GS = O. Jespersen, *Growth and Structure of the English Language*, 3rd ed. Leipzig 1919.

Hilmer Sch = H. Hilmer, *Schallnachahmung, Wortschöpfung u. Bedeutungswandel*, Halle 1914.

Hirt GDS = H. Hirt, *Geschichte der deutschen Sprache*, München 1919.

Idg = *Die Indogermanen*, Strassburg 1905-7.

Humboldt Versch = W. v. Humboldt, *Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues* (number of pages as in the original edition).

IF = *Indogermanische Forschungen*.

KZ = Kuhn's *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung*.

Lasch S = R. Lasch, *Sondersprachen u. ihre Entstehung*, Wien 1907.

LPh = O. Jespersen, *Lehrbuch der Phonetik*, 3te Aufl., Leipzig 1920.

Madvig 1857 = J. N. Madvig, *De grammaticae Betegnelser*, Copenhagen 1857.

Kl = *Kleine philologische Schriften*, Leipzig 1875.

ME. = Middle English.

MEG = O. Jespersen, *Modern English Grammar*, Heidelberg 1909, 1914.

Meillet DI = A. Meillet, *Les Dialectes Indo-Européens*, Paris 1908.

Germ. = *Caractères généraux des Langues Germaniques*, Paris 1917.

Gr = *Aperçu d'une Histoire de la Langue Grecque*, Paris 1913.

LI = *Introduction à l'étude comp. des Langues Indo-Européennes*, 2e éd., Paris 1908.

Meinhof Ham = C. Meinhof, *Die hamitischen Sprachen*, Hamburg 1912.

MSA = *Die moderne Sprachforschung in Afrika*, Berlin 1910.

Meringer L = R. Meringer, *Aus dem Leben der Sprache*, Berlin 1908.

Misteli = F. Misteli, *Charakteristik der haupts. Typen des Sprachbaues*, Berlin 1893.

MSL = *Mémoires de la Société de Linguistique de Paris*.

Fr. Müller Gr = Friedrich Müller, *Grundriss der Sprachwissenschaft*, Wien 1876 ff.

Max Müller Ch = F. Max Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. iv, London 1875.

NED = *A New English Dictionary*, by Murray, etc., Oxford 1884 ff.

Noreen UL = A. Noreen, *Abriss der urgermanischen Lautlehre*, Strassburg 1894.

VS = *Vart Språk*, Lund 1903 ff.

Nyrop Gr = Kr. Nyrop, *Grammaire Historique de la Langue Française*, Copenhagen 1914 ff.

OE. = Old English (Anglo-Saxon).

Oertel = H. Oertel, *Lectures on the Study of Language*, New York 1901.

OFr. = Old French.

ON. = Old Norse.

Passy Ch = P. Passy, *Les Changements Phonétiques*, Paris 1890.

Paul P = H. Paul, *Prinzipien der Sprachgeschichte*, 4te Aufl., Halle 1909.

Gr = *Grundriss der germanischen Philologie*.

PBB = *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache* (Paul u. Braune).

Pedersen GKS = H. Pedersen, *Vergl. Grammatik der keltischen Sprachen*, Göttingen 1909.

PhG = O. Jespersen, *Phonetische Grundfragen*, Leipzig 1904.

Porzezinski Spr = V. Porzezinski, *Einleitung in die Sprachwissenschaft*, Leipzig 1910.

Progr. = O. Jespersen, *Progress in Language*, London 1894.

- Rask P = R. Rask [Prisskrift] *Undersøgelse om det gamle Nordiske Sprogs Oprindelse*, Copenhagen 1818.
 SA = *Samlede Afhandlinger*, Copenhagen 1834.
- Raumer Gesch = R. v. Raumer, *Geschichte der germanischen Philologie*, München 1870.
- Ronjat = J. Ronjat, *Le Développement du Langage chez un Enfant Bilingue*, Paris 1913.
- Sandfeld Jensen S = Kr. Sandfeld Jensen, *Sprogvidenskaben*, Copenhagen 1913.
 Sprw = *Die Sprachwissenschaft*, Leipzig 1915.
- Saussure LG = F. de Saussure, *Cours de Linguistique Générale*, Lausanne 1916.
- Sayce P = A. H. Sayce, *Principles of Comparative Philology*, 2nd ed., London 1875.
 S = *Introduction to the Science of Language*, London 1880.
- Scherer GDS = W. Scherer, *Zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache*, Berlin 1878.
- Schleicher I, II = A. Schleicher, *Sprachvergleichende Untersuchungen*, I-II, Bonn 1848, 1850.
 Bed = *Die Bedeutung der Sprache*, Weimar 1865.
 C = *Compendium der vergl. Grammatik*, 4te Aufl., Weimar 1876.
 D = *Die deutsche Sprache*, Stuttgart 1860.
- Darw. = *Die Darwinische Theorie und die Sprachwissenschaft*, Weimar 1873.
- NV = *Nomen und Verbum*, Leipzig 1865.
- Schuchardt SID = H. Schuchardt, *Slavo-Deutsches u. Slavo-Italienisches*, Graz 1885.
 KS = *Kreolische Studien* (Wien, Akademie).
- Simonyi US = S. Simonyi, *Die Ungarische Sprache*, Strassburg 1907.
- Skt. = Sanskrit.
- Sommer Lat. = F. Sommer, *Handbuch der latein. Laut- und Formenlehre*, Heidelberg 1902.
- Stern = Clara and William Stern, *Die Kindersprache*, Leipzig 1907.
- Stoffel Int. = C. Stoffel, *Intensives and Down-toners*, Heidelberg 1901.
- Streitberg Gesch = W. Streitberg, *Geschichte der indogerm. Sprachwissenschaft*, Strassburg 1917.
 Urg = *Urgermanische Grammatik*, Heidelberg 1896.
- Sturtevant LCh = E. H. Sturtevant, *Linguistic Change*, Chicago 1917.
- Sütterlin WSG = L. Sütterlin, *Das Wesen der sprachlichen Gebilde*, Heidelberg 1902.
 WW = *Werden und Wesen der Sprache*, Leipzig 1913.
- Sweet CP = H. Sweet, *Collected Papers*, Oxford 1913.
 H = *The History of Language*, London 1900.
 PS = *The Practical Study of Languages*, London 1899.
- Tegnér SM = E. Tegnér, *Språkets makt öfver tanken*, Stockholm 1880.
- Verner = K. Verner, *Afhandlinger og Breve*, Copenhagen 1903.
- Wechssler L = E. Wechssler, *Giebt es Lautgesetze?* Halle 1900.
- Whitney G = W. D. Whitney, *Life and Growth of Language*, London 1875
 L = *Language and the Study of Language*, London 1868.
 M = *Max Müller and the Science of Language*, New York 1892.
 OLS = *Oriental and Linguistic Studies*, New York 1873-4.
- Wundt S = W. Wundt, *Die Sprache*, Leipzig 1900.

PHONETIC SYMBOLS

stands before the stressed syllable.

indicates length of the preceding sound.

[aː] as in <i>alms</i> .	[y] as in Fr. <i>vu</i> .
[ai] as in <i>ice</i> .	[ʌ] as in <i>cut</i> .
[au] as in <i>house</i> .	[ø] as in Fr. <i>feu</i> .
[æ] as in <i>hat</i> .	[œ] as in Fr. <i>sœur</i> .
[ei] as in <i>hate</i> .	[~] French nasalization.
[ɛ] as in <i>care</i> ; Fr. <i>tel</i> .	[ɛ] as in G. <i>ich</i> .
[ə] indistinct vowels.	[x] as in G., Sc. <i>loch</i> .
[i] as in <i>fill</i> ; Fr. <i>qui</i> .	[ʃ] as in <i>this</i> .
[iː] as in <i>feel</i> ; Fr. <i>fille</i> .	[j] as in <i>you</i> .
[o] as in Fr. <i>seau</i> .	[p] as in <i>thick</i> .
[ou] as in <i>so</i> .	[ʃ] as in <i>she</i> .
[ɔ] open o-sounds.	[ʒ] as in <i>measure</i> .
[u] as in <i>full</i> ; Fr. <i>fou</i> .	[ʲ] in Russian palatalization, in
[uː] as in <i>fool</i> ; Fr. <i>épouse</i> .	Danish glottal stop.

BOOK I
HISTORY OF LINGUISTIC SCIENCE