

LANGUAGE

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LANGUAGE

TO
A. S. B.

PREFACE

This book is a revised version of the author's *Introduction to the Study of Language*, which appeared in 1914 (New York, Henry Holt and Company). The new version is much larger than the old, because the science of language has in the interval made progress, and because both men of science and the educated public now attribute greater value to an understanding of human speech.

Like its predecessor, this book is intended for the general reader and for the student who is entering upon linguistic work. Without such an introduction, specialized treatises are unintelligible. For the general reader an orderly survey is probably more interesting than a discussion of selected topics, for these, after all, cannot be understood without their background. No one will ask for an anecdotal treatment who has once opened his eyes to the strangeness, beauty, and import of human speech.

The deep-rooted things about language, which mean most to all of us, are usually ignored in all but very advanced studies; this book tries to tell about them in simple terms and to show their bearing on human affairs. In 1914 I based this phase of the exposition on the psychologic system of Wilhelm Wundt, which was then widely accepted. Since that time there has been much upheaval in psychology; we have learned, at any rate, what one of our masters suspected thirty years ago, namely, that we can pursue the study of language without reference to any one psychological doctrine, and that to do so safeguards our results and makes them more significant to workers in related fields. In the present book I have tried to avoid such dependence; only by way of elucidation I have told, at a few points, how the two main present-day trends of psychology differ in their interpretation. The mentalists would supplement the facts of language by a version in terms of mind, — a version which will differ in the various schools of mentalistic psychology. The mechanists demand that the facts be presented without any assumption of such auxiliary factors. I have tried to meet this demand not merely because I believe that mechanism is the necessary form of scientific discourse, but also because an exposition which stands on its own

feet is more solid and more easily surveyed than one which is propped at various points by another and changeable doctrine.

I have tried everywhere to present the accepted views, not even avoiding well-used standard examples; on disputed matters I have tried to state the point at issue; and in both cases I have given references, in the Notes and Bibliography, which will enable the reader to look into things, and, if he chooses, to arrive at an opinion of his own.

Thanks are due to many scholars who contributed help and information, and to the publisher, the printer, and the very able typesetter, all of whom devoted great care to the making of this book.

L. B.

Chicago, January 1933.

PREFACE TO THE BRITISH EDITION

This edition differs from the American form of this book (New York, 1933) in two respects: the phonetic symbols conform to the usage of the International Phonetic Association, and the transcriptions of English forms represent a polite type of British ('Received' or 'Public School') pronunciation. Moreover, a few corrections have been embodied in the text. All these changes were subject to a limitation imposed by the method of manufacturing the book: the paging and alignment of the American edition had to be kept. Accordingly, the reader will find some American features (such as the spelling *-or* for *-our*) and some passages where the point of view (e.g., as to topography) is American. However, in all cases where corrections or additions seemed to have material bearing, these have been either incorporated into the text, or, where this could not be done, added in a list at the end of the book. For most of these improvements I am indebted to Professors R. G. Kent and D. Jones; the criticism and the published works of Professor Jones have aided me especially as to British pronunciation.

L. B.

Chicago, August, 1934.

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LANGUAGE

CHAPTER I

THE STUDY OF LANGUAGE

1. 1. Language plays a great part in our life. Perhaps because of its familiarity, we rarely observe it, taking it rather for granted, as we do breathing or walking. The effects of language are remarkable, and include much of what distinguishes man from the animals, but language has no place in our educational program or in the speculations of our philosophers.

There are some circumstances, however, in which the conventionally educated person discusses linguistic matters. Occasionally he debates questions of "correctness" — whether it is "better," for instance, to say *it's I* or *it's me*. His discussion of such things follows a fairly rigid pattern. If possible, he looks to the conventions of writing for an answer — as, say, for the question whether a *t* is to be pronounced in words like *often* or *soften*. Otherwise he appeals to authority: one way of speaking, he believes, is inherently right, the other inherently wrong, and certain learned men, especially the authors of grammars and dictionaries, can tell us which is which. Mostly, however, he neglects to consult these authorities, and tries, instead, to settle the matter by a kind of philosophical reasoning, which operates with terms such as "subject," "object," "predicate," and so on. This is the common-sense way of dealing with linguistic matters. Like much else that masquerades as common sense, it is in fact highly sophisticated, and derives, at no great distance, from the speculations of ancient and medieval philosophers.

It is only within the last century or so that language has been studied in a scientific way, by careful and comprehensive observation; the few exceptions will occupy us in a moment. *Linguistics*, the study of language, is only in its beginnings. The knowledge it has gained has not yet become part of our traditional education; the "grammar" and other linguistic instruction in our schools confines itself to handing on the traditional notions. Many people have difficulty at the beginning of language study, not in grasping the methods or results (which are simple enough), but in stripping

the Golden Age of Greece B.C. 500-500 Leaders, Philosophers, Dramatists, Artists, Scientists, etc.
 L. Cleisthenes, Aristides, P. Pythagoras 450 L. Pericles, P. Anaxagoras, Socrates, D. Aeschylus
 Euripides, A. Phidias, S. Herodotus, 400, Philip, P. Thucydides, D. Sophocles, Aristophanes, S. Democritus,
 Alexander 4, P. Plato, Demosthenes, EAST STUDY OF LANGUAGE, A. Praxiteles, S. Xenophon
 Thias, Aristotle

off the preconceptions which are forced on us by our popular-scholastic doctrine.

1. 2. The ancient Greeks had the gift of wondering at things that other people take for granted. They speculated boldly and persistently about the origin, history, and structure of language. Our traditional lore about language is due largely to them.

Herodotus, writing in the fifth century B.C., tells us that King Psammetichus of Egypt, in order to find out which was the oldest nation of mankind (whatever this may mean), isolated two newborn infants in a park; when they began to speak, they uttered the word *bekos*, which turned out to be Phrygian for 'bread.'

In his dialogue *Cratylus*, Plato (427-347 B.C.) discusses the origin of words, and particularly the question whether the relation between things and the words which name them is a natural and necessary relation or merely the result of a human convention. This dialogue gives us a first glimpse into a century-long controversy between the *Analogists*, who believed that language was natural and therefore at bottom regular and logical, and the *Anomalists*, who denied these things and pointed out the irregularities of linguistic structure.

The Analogists believed that the origin and the true meaning of words could be traced in their shape; the investigation of this they called *etymology*. We may illustrate their theory by English examples. The word *blackbird* obviously consists of *black* and *bird*: the species was named for its color, and, indeed, blackbirds are birds and are black. In the same way, the Greeks would have concluded that there was some deep-seated connection between a *gooseberry* and a *goose*: it was the etymologist's task to find this connection. The word *mushroom* would have presented a more difficult problem. The components are often altered; thus, *breakfast*, in spite of the difference in sound, is evidently the meal by which we *break* our *fast*, and *manly* a shorter form of *man-like*.

In Greek, as in English, however, most words resist this kind of analysis. Thus, *early* ends like *manly*, but the rest of the word is obscure; *woman* resembles *man*, but what is the first syllable? Then there is a residue of short, simple words that do not resemble others — words such as *man*, *boy*, *good*, *bad*, *eat*, *run*. In such cases the Greeks and their pupils, the Romans, resorted to guesswork. For instance, they explained the Greek word *lithos* 'stone' as derived from the phrase *lian theein* 'to run too much,' because this

is what a stone does *not* do. A Latin example of this sort has become proverbial: *lucus a non lucendo* 'a grove (*lucus*) is so named on account of its not being light (*lucendo*).'

These etymologies show us, at any rate, that the Greeks realized that speech-forms change in the course of time. In the systematic study of this change modern students have found the key to most linguistic problems. The ancients never settled down to any careful study of linguistic change.

The ancient Greeks studied no language but their own; they took it for granted that the structure of their language embodied the universal forms of human thought or, perhaps, of the cosmic order. Accordingly, they made grammatical observations, but confined these to one language and stated them in philosophical form. They discovered the parts of speech of their language, its syntactic constructions, such as, especially, that of subject and predicate, and its chief inflectional categories: genders, numbers, cases, persons, tenses, and modes. They defined these not in terms of recognizable linguistic forms, but in abstract terms which were to tell the meaning of the linguistic class. These teachings appear most fully in the grammars of Dionysius Thrax (second century B.C.) and of Apollonius Dyscolus (second century A.D.).

The Greeks made also some observations of detail, but this phase of their work, unfortunately, had less effect upon posterity. Their great epic poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, which they viewed somewhat as sacred scriptures, were composed in an ancient and otherwise unknown kind of Greek. In order to understand these texts and to make correct copies, one had to study their language. Most famous in this work was Aristarchus (about 216-144 B.C.). Other works of Greek literature were composed in conventionalized forms of various regional dialects: the Greeks had the opportunity of comparing several divergent forms of their language. When the language of the great Athenian writers of the fourth century had become antiquated, it was made a special subject of study, since it represented the ideal form of written discourse. All this work demanded careful observation of details. Some of the later grammarians, notably Herodian, the son of Apollonius Dyscolus, assembled valuable information on such topics as the inflection and accent of ancient Greek.

1. 3. The Greek generalizations about language were not improved upon until the eighteenth century, when scholars ceased

to view language as a direct gift of God, and put forth various theories as to its origin. Language was an invention of ancient heroes, or else the product of a mystical Spirit of the Folk. It began in man's attempts to imitate noises (the "bow-wow" theory), or in his natural sound-producing responses (the "ding-dong" theory), or in violent outcries and exclamations (the "pooh-pooh" theory).

In the etymological explanation of speech-forms there was no improvement. Voltaire is reported to have said that etymology is a science in which the vowels count for nothing and the consonants for very little.

The Romans constructed Latin grammars on the Greek model; the most famous of these, the work of Donatus (fourth century A.D.) and of Priscian (sixth century A.D.), remained in use as text-books through the Middle Ages. In the Middle Ages, when Latin was changing from its ancient shape into the forms which we know today as the Romance languages (French, Italian, Spanish, and so on), the convention remained of writing, as well as one could, in the ancient classical form of Latin. The medieval scholar, accordingly, in both the Latin countries and others, studied only classical Latin. The scholastic philosophers discovered some features of Latin grammar, such as the distinction between nouns and adjectives and the differences between concord, government, and apposition. They contributed much less than the ancients, who had, at any rate, a first-hand knowledge of the languages they studied. The medieval scholar saw in classical Latin the logically normal form of human speech. In more modern times this doctrine led to the writing of general grammars, which were to demonstrate that the structure of various languages, and especially of Latin, embodies universally valid canons of logic. The most famous of these treatises is the *Grammaire générale et raisonnée* of the Convent of Port-Royal, which appeared in 1660. This doctrine persisted into the nineteenth century; it appears, for instance, in the classical scholar, Gottfried Hermann's work *De emendanda ratione Graecae grammaticae* (1801). It is still embodied in our school tradition, which seeks to apply logical standards to language. Philosophers, to this day, sometimes look for truths about the universe in what are really nothing but formal features of one or another language.

An unfortunate outgrowth of the general-grammar idea was

the belief that the grammarian or lexicographer, fortified by his powers of reasoning, can ascertain the logical basis of language and prescribe how people ought to speak. In the eighteenth century, the spread of education led many dialect-speakers to learn the upper-class forms of speech. This gave the authoritarians their chance: they wrote normative grammars, in which they often ignored actual usage in favor of speculative notions. Both the belief in "authority" and some of the fanciful rules (as, for instance, about the use of *shall* and *will*) still prevail in our schools.

For the medieval scholar, language meant classical Latin, as it appears in books; we find few traces of interest in any other form of speech. The horizon widened at the time of the Renaissance. At the end of the Middle Ages, the study of Greek came back into fashion; soon afterward, Hebrew and Arabic were added. What was more important, some scholars in various countries began to take an interest in the language of their own time.

The era of exploration brought a superficial knowledge of many languages. Travelers brought back vocabularies, and missionaries translated religious books into the tongues of newly-discovered countries. Some even compiled grammars and dictionaries of exotic languages. Spanish priests began this work as early as in the sixteenth century; to them we owe a number of treatises on American and Philippine languages. These works can be used only with caution, for the authors, untrained in the recognition of foreign speech-sounds, could make no accurate record, and, knowing only the terminology of Latin grammar, distorted their exposition by fitting it into this frame. Down to our own time, persons without linguistic training have produced work of this sort; aside from the waste of labor, much information has in this way been lost.

The increase of commerce and travel led also to the compilation of grammars and dictionaries for languages closer at hand. The linguistic horizon at the end of the eighteenth century can be surveyed in the glossary of 285 words in two hundred languages of Europe and Asia which P. S. Pallas (1741-1811) edited at the behest of Empress Catharine of Russia in 1786. A second edition of this, in 1791, added eighty more languages, including some African and American. In the years 1806 to 1817 there appeared a four-volume treatise under the title *Mithridates*, by J. C. Adelung

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and J. S. Vater, which contained the Lord's Prayer in nearly five hundred languages.

The Renaissance turned the interest of a few scholars to the older records of their own languages. Franciscus Junius (1589-1677) accomplished an enormous amount of work in the study of the ancient documents of English and of the closely related languages, Frisian, Dutch, German, Scandinavian, and Gothic. This last — a language no longer spoken today — Junius knew from the famous Silver Codex, then recently discovered, a manuscript of the sixth century A.D. containing fragments of a Gospel translation; Junius published its text, together with that of the Anglo-Saxon Gospels. George Hickes (1642-1715) continued this work, publishing a Gothic and Anglo-Saxon grammar and a *Thesaurus* of miscellaneous information about the older stages of English and the sister tongues.

1. 4. The development so far outlined shows us what eighteenth-century scholars knew about language. They stated the grammatical features of language in philosophical terms and took no account of the structural difference between languages, but obscured it by forcing their descriptions into the scheme of Latin grammar. They had not observed the sounds of speech, and confused them with the written symbols of the alphabet. This failure to distinguish between actual speech and the use of writing distorted also their notions about the history of language. They saw that in medieval and modern times highly cultivated persons wrote (and even spoke) good Latin, while less educated or careless scribes made many mistakes: failing to see that this Latin-writing was an artificial and academic exercise, they concluded that languages are preserved by the usage of educated and careful people and changed by the corruptions of the vulgar. In the case of modern languages like English, they believed, accordingly, that the speech-forms of books and of upper-class conversation represented an older and purer level, from which the "vulgarisms" of the common people had branched off as "corruptions" by a process of "linguistic decay." The grammarians felt free, therefore, to prescribe fanciful rules which they derived from considerations of logic.

These misconceptions prevented scholars from making use of the data that were at hand: the modern languages and dialects, the records of ancient languages, the reports about exotic lan-

guages, and, above all, the documents which show us successive stages of one and the same language, as for instance of Anglo-Saxon (Old English) and modern English, or of Latin and the modern Romance languages. One knew that some languages resembled each other, but the doctrine of linguistic decay discouraged systematic study of this relation, since the changes which led, say, from Latin to modern French, were viewed as haphazard corruptions.

The illusion that Latin had lived on, unchanged, beside the Romance languages, led scholars to derive contemporary languages one from the other. Mostly they took Hebrew to be the language from which all others had sprung, but some thought otherwise, as, for example, Goropius Becanus of Antwerp, who patriotically derived all languages from Dutch.

It was plain that the more familiar languages of Europe fell into three groups by virtue of close resemblances within each group, resemblances such as appear in the following words:

GERMANIC GROUP

ROMANCE GROUP

SLAVIC GROUP

'hand'

English *hand*
Dutch *hand*
German *Hand*
Danish *haand*
Swedish *hand*

French *main*
Italian *mano*
Spanish *mano*

Russian *ruka*
Polish *reka*
Bohemian *ruka*
Serbian *ruka*

'foot'

English *foot*
Dutch *voet*
German *Fusz*
Danish *fod*
Swedish *fot*

French *pied*
Italian *piede*
Spanish *pie*

Russian *noga*
Polish *noga*
Bohemian *noha*
Serbian *noga*

'winter'

English *winter*
Dutch *winter*
German *Winter*
Danish *vinter*
Swedish *vinter*

French *hiver*
Italian *inverno*
Spanish *invierno*

Russian *zima*
Polish *zima*
Bohemian *zima*
Serbian *zima*

GERMANIC GROUP

ROMANCE GROUP

SLAVIC GROUP

'drink'

English <i>drink</i>	French <i>boire</i>	Russian <i>pit'</i>
Dutch <i>drinken</i>	Italian <i>bere</i>	Polish <i>pic'</i>
German <i>trinken</i>	Spanish <i>beber</i>	Bohemian <i>piti</i>
Danish <i>drikke</i>		Serbian <i>piti</i>
Swedish <i>dricka</i>		

There was apparent also a less striking resemblance between these groups; this wider resemblance extended to some other languages, such as, notably, Greek:

'mother': Greek *mētēr*, Latin *māter* (with its modern forms in the Romance languages), Russian *mat'* (genitive case *materi* — with similar forms in the other Slavic languages), English *mother* (with similar forms in the other Germanic languages);

'two': Greek *duo*, Latin *duo*, Russian *dva*, English *two*;

'three': Greek *treis*, Latin *trēs*, Russian *tri*, English *three*;

'is': Greek *esti*, Latin *est*, Russian *jest'*, English *is* (German *ist*).

1. 5. Outside the tradition of Europe, several nations had developed linguistic doctrines, chiefly on an antiquarian basis. The Arabs had worked out a grammar of the classical form of their language, as it appears in the Koran; on the model of this, the Jews in Mohammedan countries constructed a Hebrew grammar. At the Renaissance, European scholars became acquainted with this tradition; the term *root*, for instance, as a designation for the central part of a word, comes from Hebrew grammar. In the Far East, the Chinese had gained a great deal of antiquarian linguistic knowledge, especially in the way of lexicography. A Japanese grammar seems to have grown up independently.

It was in India, however, that there arose a body of knowledge which was destined to revolutionize European ideas about language. The Brahmin religion guarded, as sacred texts, some very ancient collections of hymns; the oldest of these collections, the Rig-Veda, dates in part, at a conservative estimate, from about 1200 B.C. As the language of these texts grew antiquated, the proper way of pronouncing them, and their correct interpretation, became the task of a special class of learned men. The antiquarian interest in language which arose in this way, was carried over into a more practical sphere. Among the Hindus, as among us, different classes of society differed in speech. Apparently there