

**PRINCIPLES OF GENERAL
GRAMMAR, ADAPTED TO
THE CAPACITY OF YOUTH**

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Principles of General Grammar, Adapted to the Capacity of Youth by Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy

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ANTOINE ISAAC SILVESTRE DE SACY

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Entered, according to Act of Congress, by Flagg, Gould and Newman, in the
Clerk's Office, of the District Court of Massachusetts, in the year of our
Lord, 1834.

NET.

DEDICATION.

TO MY SON.

For you, my dear son, this little work was undertaken, and to you I dedicate it. Convinced that nothing is more necessary, than early to accustom ourselves to systematize the knowledge we acquire, I have thought it my duty to put within the reach of your youthful capacity, the first principles of General Grammar, in order that they may serve you as a guide in the study of languages, to which you are about to devote the first years of your education. If you seize these principles,—if, by their light, you discover the relation which ought to subsist between the different parts of speech, in order faithfully to express the connexion of those ideas which unite in forming the conclusions of our understandings—the diversity of means which languages employ to accomplish this end, will present to you nothing painful or forbidding. You will, in this way, accustom yourself to refer to well digested general principles, the different branches of each of those sciences which you may successively acquire, and you will contract the happy habit of connecting your ideas, of combining them, of tracing back consequences to principles, effects to causes, and thus of weighing well your own opinions and those of the persons with whom you may associate. In whatever condition you may be called to serve your country, you will reap the fruits of this method, peculiarly fitted, as it is, to train up the understanding, and to preserve the heart from the illusions and enchantment of the passions.

*May heaven deign to bless these first efforts of thy father, to form thy mind and heart, and to render thee one day worthy of the Eternal Author of thy being, and of the noble destination to which he calls thee, that of laboring to promote *thine own* happiness, in contributing to promote that of *thy species*!*

ADVERTISEMENT.

By the Author.

THE little work which I now publish, under the title of "Principles of General Grammar, fitted for the capacity of Youth," is little else than an abstract of the best writings on this subject which have appeared in France, and, specially, of the Portroyal "General and Rational Grammar," of "Beauzée's General Grammar," and of "The Natural History of Speech," and the "Universal Grammar," by Court de Gebelin. In adopting the greater part of the principles of these learned writers, I have disposed them in the order which appeared to me the most fitted to show their justice and to portray them distinctly; I have stripped them of every metaphysical and polemical discussion, and have discarded, as far as possible, every scientific expression, although shorter and more convenient, to substitute for them terms taken from ordinary discourse.

I have made no application of the principles of General Grammar to particular examples taken either in the French or any other language, except so far as was necessary to make myself intelligible. This has appeared to me an indispensable precaution in order to give the greatest possible generality to the principles, and to avoid generalizing what is peculiar to certain languages. Many valuable writers, in treating of the principles of universal Grammar, have not, in my opinion, taken sufficient care, to avoid this last mistake. If I myself have sometimes swerved from the rule, it has only been to show that the peculiar usages of certain languages do not contradict general principles.

I have entirely suppressed that part of universal grammar which relates to the elements of speech and the art of writing. The consideration of the first of these subjects, viz. of the natural organs of speech, and of the nature and variety of the sounds and articulations which we produce by their help, is, without doubt, well fitted to cause us to admire the power and wisdom of the Creator, as well as the variety of the means which he uses to accomplish his de-

signs. It is also of great use in researches into the science of etymology, and into the comparative grammar of ancient and modern idioms. It belongs not, however, to primary, nor even to ordinary, instruction. It is nature and imitation which teach children the use they must make of their organs of speech, in order to pronounce their mother tongue; and it is, also, by imitation, and not by a scientific knowledge of the organs of speech and of the principles of grammar, that the man more advanced in life learns articulations foreign to the language of the country which gave him birth. As to the art of writing—that ingenious method of rendering speech permanent, by painting articulate sounds, and thus making the communication of ideas independent of distance of time or space—the sound and luminous principles of general grammar ought to be considered as a perfect theory, from which all nations which have adopted an alphabetical or syllabical method of writing have more or less departed. However imperfect may be the usage in point of orthography, nevertheless to that we must yield; from that, we must learn how each nation has agreed to write the words which compose its language. A total reform in orthography, which should aim to render writing perfectly conformable to pronunciation, must be regarded, as it respects most nations, as a philosophical chimera to which custom will never yield; and a partial reform, which, correcting, in certain points, the discordance existing between writing and pronunciation, should suffer a part of the abuses to remain, would, in some sort, consecrate those it had spared, and would not, moreover, be without great disadvantages, especially as it regards the science of etymology.

For the same reasons, I have suppressed what *might* be said on the subject of *punctuation*, the system of which is so imperfect, even among those nations which have most multiplied its signs.

I have almost always preserved those technical expressions which were consecrated by usage, however imperfect they were, that the child who shall have studied these Principles, may nevertheless be able to make use of those elementary books designed for the study of the languages.

Many paragraphs and even whole Chapters will be found enclosed in []. These should be passed over by children

who are studying for the first time these Principles of Grammar.

I may sometimes have fallen into error, especially on a subject to which I have devoted no very large portion of my time. Perhaps too I may not, always, have seized the most simple, the most precise, and at the same time the most intelligible expression. I shall receive with gratitude the remarks of all whom their natural talents, a profound study of these subjects, or long experience in the department of public instruction, shall have qualified to rectify the mistakes into which I may have fallen. I shall esteem myself happy if this little work should merit their attention, and if they should judge it fitted to render easy to children a study sufficiently dry of itself, and often forbidding from the aspect under which it is presented. To make myself useful is my only wish : to have attained this end, will be to me the most flattering reward.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.*

I have permitted the preceding Advertisement to remain as in the first edition; but I ought to add a word in relation to the changes I have made in this. Those who will take the trouble to compare the two editions will find that the alterations consist in a few corrections, some difference in the arrangement of the matter, and a great many additions. The reception with which the public has honored the first edition of these "Principles of General Grammar," imposed an obligation upon me to spare no labor in order to render them more exact and complete; and by habitual application of these principles, by meditation upon the difficulties which presented themselves, and, finally by comparing the habits of many different languages, whose particular grammars I have studied for that purpose, I have collected a mass of observations which have enabled me to resolve difficulties and to reduce to a common analogy things which appeared widely to deviate from it. The corrections and additions made in this new edition are, at least for the most part, the fruit of this labor.

I do not pretend, however, that among these additions there are not many which can with difficulty be understood by children and beginners. Of this number is the disquisition concerning the extension and comprehension of Appellative Nouns into which I have entered in Chap. 4th of Part 1st. I could not however omit these remarks, as they were necessary to serve as a foundation for the distinction which I was about to make between Circumstantial and Qualificative Adjectives, which appears in Chap. 7th of the same Part. The 3d Chap. of Part 2d, in which I treat the subject of Cases, has received a great many additions, which, I think, cannot but throw light upon the design of these grammatical inflexions which are unknown to our language. Chap. 4th of the same Part, in which I have treated of Tenses and the 8th Chap. on the subject of the Modes of Verbs, have been considerably enlarged, and, so to speak, entirely made anew: these two Chapters are those in which I have discovered the greatest number of inaccuracies. What relates to the Tenses, will present, I think, no serious difficulties: as to the theory of Modes, it was necessary either to renounce the

* See note on p. 156.

idea of explaining it, or to ascend to the operations of our intellectual faculties, to analyse them, to classify them, and deduce from them the variations of modes: it was necessary further, in order to complete the subject, to consider Propositions which are the expressions of the operations of the understanding and the motions of the will, at first independently, and then under those relations which bind and chain them in discourse. Had I possessed more talent, I might perhaps have infused more interest into the explanation of this truly philosophical subject; but, at least, I may give this testimony for myself, that I have neglected no means which could enable me to treat it with precision and perspicuity.

The 3d Part, with the exception of the 1st Chapter and a portion of the 2d is entirely new; and the models of Analysis of the English and Latin languages contained in the 5th and 6th Chapters, must be considered as the result of the whole work. This 3d Part should not be studied, until a perfect knowledge of the first two parts has been acquired: the 4th Chapter, especially, requires a mind already familiar with analysis.

I must here insist upon the advice which I have already given, not to require beginners to study in the first two parts, those portions included in brackets. A distinction should also be made between these portions of the work themselves: some should be studied at a second perusal, while the study of others should be deferred still later.

It is only by repeated application of these principles that we can hope to naturalize them, as it were, in the minds of children, and to awaken their understanding, which must act in this work still more powerfully than their memory. It is, therefore, the duty of instructors, after being thoroughly imbued with these principles themselves, to cause their pupils to apply them often, and to a great number of examples. In this way the pupils will, as it were, instinctively employ them, or rather, they will discover in themselves, by the exercise of their own understanding, those principles which were at first trusted to their memories; and when they shall thus have appropriated them to themselves, they will run no risk of forgetting them. In giving propositions or phrases to be analysed, however, this kind of labor should be proportioned to the degree of the pupil's advancement; and if he meet with problems, the solution of which he has never been taught (which