

**OUTLINES OF GENERAL
OR DEVELOPMENTAL
PHILOLOGY: INFLECTION**

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Outlines of general or developmental philology: inflection by R. G. Latham

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OF
GENERAL OR DEVELOPMENTAL
PHILOLOGY

INFLECTION

BY

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P R E F A C E.

THE present work is the '*Outline*' rather than the full exposition of the subject upon which it treats. And it is an outline of the *Method* of investigation rather than a collection of any specific results. Moreover, it is a work on General, or Developmental, rather than upon Comparative, Philology. In the latter branch of study there is no want of valuable works, and a fair amount of well authenticated and generally recognised details. In respect to the growth, development, and *à fortiori*, the origin and general character of Language, there are fewer works, fewer recognised facts, fewer trustworthy principles of criticism, and, not unnaturally, much more speculation.

The two principles which, in the present treatise, have carried the writer farthest are—(1.) That of beginning with the languages of the present time, and arguing from them backwards, *i.e.*, from the more familiar to the unfamiliar, from the more certain to the less uncertain. Theoretically, then, the best languages to begin with are those in the most advanced state of development; inasmuch as they have the longest history, and, as a rule, the greatest amount of material

for its investigation. The language, however, which everyone best understands is his own, whatever it may be: and this is really the starting-point in every philological investigation, either actual or possible. To an Englishman, the difference fortunately is unimportant, because his language is both the one which he knows best, and the one that belongs to the most advanced stage of development. It is, always, it may be said safer to argue in this way, *i.e.*, from the known to the unknown rather than *vice versá*: and there is no doubt but that such is the case. There are degrees, however, in the danger or difficulty of reversing the process: and if there is one subject of human knowledge which is more dangerous and difficult to investigate *à priori* than another, that subject is the growth and origin of language.

(2.) The second point is the necessity of looking more closely to the idea than to the expression of it. The former is the thought itself, the latter the sounds by which it is communicated to the person spoken to. The thought is the same throughout all languages and in every stage of each. The manner, however, in which it clothes itself in words or syllables differs with the conditions of time and place. In a word like ‘*γέγραφα*’ and a combination like ‘*I have written*,’ the expression is different both in the form and the principle of its formation. But the idea is the same, *viz.*, that of a certain action done in time past, but continued in its actual or possible operation up to the time of speaking, or time present. In like manner the differences be-

tween one and more than one; between male and female; between time past, time present, and time future; between certainty and contingency; between being an agent and being an object in an action, are universal. Of the combinations of sounds that express them the name is Legion. With the idea, then, so far as we have a clear conception of its nature, we have a certainty and a unity; with the guise it may take in language we have any amount of variety.

In the familiar terms *Person, Voice, Number, Case, Tense, Gender* and *Mood*, we have these mental conceptions not only recognised as such, but classified, named, and defined, converted, so to say, into categories. The signs of them are their Inflections. What those are taken by themselves, is taught as Etymology; how they stand to one another, we learn from Syntax. Of these two divisions it is only the former that deals in single words. In Etymology, moreover, it is the chief questions which are connected with the Inflections. There are other details in this division besides these; but Inflection gives us the most important of them: and to see our way to the origin and structure of this is to get an adequate conception of the most difficult problem in Language, save and except the mysterious one of its earliest infancy and origin—and even this, when the general character of its later history is known, is no illegitimate subject of speculation.

That the vast majority of Inflections originated as separate and independent words, first combined as compounds, and subsequently modified in form, in import,

or in both, may safely be assumed as the dominant opinion ; so that the extent to which they are reducible to elements of this kind is the leading question in the present investigation. These elements we are bound to seek, though we may fail to find them. Nor are our *data* wholly inadequate. There are three stages in the development of Language which are generally recognised, and for which we have three (perhaps four) current names—the *Analytic and Synthetic* represented, in different degrees of progress, by the languages of the Indo-European class, the *Agglutinate*, and the *Mono-syllabic*. Any pretence to exhaust the *data* thus supplied is out of the question. A short general view of the characters of the three stages, with an exposition of the chief materials that serve for the illustration of each of them, and an occasional instance of an Inflection reduced, or shown to be reducible, to its elements, is as much as the writer, in a short work like the present, can attempt, and he doubts whether he could do much more in a larger one. It is with these limitations that he wishes his book, though it bears a somewhat ambitious title, to be read. It is to the principles of the processes by which languages are changed, rather than to the changes themselves, that he chiefly refers. In the way of detail he limits himself to those that may serve as examples or illustrations. These he selects as he best can ; and when they either illustrate a rule, or explain a condition of thought, he makes much of them—sometimes, perhaps, too much. But this is about all that can be done safely.

CONTENTS.

PART I.

*SYNTHESIS AND ANALYSIS—MATERIALS FOR THE STUDY OF THE
SYNTHETIC AND ANALYTIC STAGES OF LANGUAGE—AGGLUTI-
NATION—SELECTED MATERIALS FOR THE STUDY OF THIS STAGE
—MONOSYLLABICISM—MATERIALS.*

SECTION I.

SYNTHESIS—ANALYSIS.

SECTION	PAGE
1—4. Inflections in Latin and in English	1
5—7. 'ὄ γέγραφα, γέγραφα' —'have written' as opposed to 'wrote'	2
8—12. Analysis of the expression; Perfect reduplicate	6
13—26. History of the Greek form	6
27—32. Generality of the change	10
33—35. Rate of change	12
36—38. Continuity	13
40. Dialect	15
41—48. Incidence and order of changes	16
49—50. 'Old' an equivocal term	18
51—52. 'Synthesis' and 'Analysis' correlative terms	19
53—54. 'I am singing'	19
55. 'I do sing'	20
56. 'Synthetico-Analytic' and 'Analytico-Synthetic'	20
57—58. Analysis and Synthesis	20
59. Analysis, Synthesis, and Inflection	21
60. 'Inflections' and 'Formatives'	21

SUB-SECTION.

MATERIALS FOR THE SYNTHETIC AND ANALYTIC STAGE
OF LANGUAGE.

SECTION		PAGE
61—63.	<i>Data</i> and Materials, their nature	21
64.	The Greek	22
65.	The Latin	22
66—69.	The Sanskrit and its congeners	22
70—76.	The German	24
77.	The Lithuanian	26
78—79.	The Slavonic	26

SECTION II.

AGGLUTINATION—FORMATIVES.

80—87.	<i>Formatives</i> as opposed to <i>Inflections</i>	28
88.	Formatives for Nouns	50
89—91.	“ Verbs	31
92.	Characters of the Agglutinate class	31
	Fin Declension	32
93.	Laplandic Declension	32
94.	“ Conjugation	32
95.	“ Verbum Nominale	35
96—97.	Agglutination and Synthesis	34
98.	Turkish Declension	36
99.	“ Conjugation	36
100.	Absence of Gender	38
101.	Yeniseian Declension	38

SUB-SECTION.

MATERIALS FOR THE AGGLUTINATE STATE OF LANGUAGE.

101—103.	The Fin or Ugrian Family	38
104.	The Turk, Mongol, Mantshu, Yeniseian	39
105—110.	The Dravidian Family	39
111—112.	The Brahui	41
113.	The Basque	41
114—115.	Other Agglutinate languages	42
116—123.	Literary records of the Agglutinate period	42