

**INVESTIGATIONS INTO THE
LAWS OF ENGLISH
ORTHOGRAPHY AND
PRONUNCIATION. VOL. I. NO. I**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649427239

Investigations Into the laws of English Orthography and Pronunciation. Vol. I. No.I by R. L. Tafel

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R. L. TAFEL

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*From Prof. Max Müller
Leipzig
1862*

INVESTIGATIONS

INTO THE

LAWS OF ENGLISH

ORTHOGRAPHY AND PRONUNCIATION.

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Vol. I, No. I.

NEW YORK:

B. WESTERMAN & CO., 440 BROADWAY.

LONDON: WILLIAMS & NORGATE.

1862.

C. SHERMAN & SON, PRINTERS, PHILADELPHIA.

PROSPECTUS.

THE present work, which is in process of publication by the American Philosophical Society, will appear in semi-annual numbers of 100 to 150 pages, large octavo; four numbers to compose one volume. The price for subscribers will be \$1 a number, to be paid for upon the reception of each number. The whole work is to be completed in three volumes.

The plan of the work is the following: In the **FIRST PART** are treated the elementary sounds of language in general, and of the English language in particular; the whole of this part is contained in the first number. The **SECOND PART** will contain the history of the English language. In it will be collected the various elements composing the English language, viz.: the Celtic, Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian, Norman-French, Latin, and Greek; and the process of their anglicization will be studied. The **THIRD PART** will be devoted to an investigation of the laws of English accentuation; and in the **FOURTH PART**, finally, will be established the laws of English Orthography and Pronunciation.

Subscribers will please to send in their names, either to the undersigned publishers, or to the author, Prof. R. L. Tafel, Washington University, St. Louis, Mo.

B. WESTERMAN & CO.,
440 Broadway,
NEW YORK.

INTRODUCTION.

§ 1. A STRICTLY phonetic mode of writing prevailed originally in those languages which produced their own alphabets, as in the Sanscrit, Arabic, Phœnician, &c. When these alphabets were afterwards adopted by other languages, either some of the superfluous signs were dropped, or deficiencies were made up by the introduction of new signs, as in the Greek, Latin, and also in the Russian of the present day, so that these languages too may be regarded as phonetic. The same may be observed with regard to the Italian, Spanish, German, and most other languages. In the French, and still more in the English language, the case is different, for not only are some of the consonants silent under certain conditions, but in the English language, likewise, the vowels and diphthongs, or rather digraphs, have three or four different modes of pronunciation. Still, even in these languages, the consonants which are now mute, were formerly pronounced, and each of the vowels and diphthongs expressed but one sound. That such was the case in the Anglo-Saxon language we may infer from the fact that the present Germanic tribes, who originally spoke the same language with the Anglo-Saxons, still retain this custom, and their written language, even at the present day, is a reflex of their spoken language. In England the vowels and diphthongs became diversified when the Anglo-Saxon language was wedded to the French. Of this process I shall treat more extensively hereafter. This process was brought about in the popular pronunciation, according to some fixed laws, based on the relationship among the vowels themselves, and their affinity to some of the consonants. This I shall endeavor to prove in a future part of my work.

From this general statement of the changes which took place in the English language, it is evident that before we can discuss the

pronunciation of the English language at all, we require a minute insight into the formation of the vowels and consonants, and into their mutual relations. In support of my own theories I shall mainly adduce the work of Dr. E. Brücke of Vienna, member of the Imperial Academy of Sciences, on the principles of phonology, which was first printed in the *Journal of the Austrian Colleges* for 1856, and afterwards published separately, with the addition of a valuable plate, exhibiting the various positions of the tongue, and of the mouth in general, in the pronunciation of some of the vowels and consonants. The researches of Dr. Brücke are carried on in the most systematic and thorough manner, and the style in which he treats his subject betokens at once the finished scholar and the man of clear understanding. Moreover, as he gives us in a nutshell, as it were, all that has previously been done in this department, I regard him as the first authority in all matters connected with the physiology of language.

Dr. Brücke opens his subject in the following manner: "In investigating the sounds of language we can proceed in a twofold way. We can examine the manner in which cognate sounds become affected by each other, and by tracing the changes which the various sounds undergo, in the course of time, and in passing from one language into another, we are enabled to draw conclusions as to their nature and their several attributes. Such is the mode of the linguist. On the other hand, we can institute direct observations and experiments, with a view of ascertaining the way in which and the conditions under which they are produced by the organs of speech; and in this manner, also, we can acquire knowledge concerning their respective nature and properties. Such is the mode of the physiologist. Neither method, when properly applied, can ever lead to contradictory results, but they may produce different results which are mutually supplementary to each other; thus the linguist in the course of his examinations may evolve a series of laws which are to be explained on physiological grounds. Unless the linguist take a physiological view, he can never have a full idea of language; for, in case he neglects this, he only knows that much concerning language which is heard by the ears and written with the hands; he knows as little about the wonderful mechanism which gives birth to language, as about the hidden wheel-work directing the motions of an automaton. Those laws which were formerly derived from euphony, are not so much owing to this cause as to the mechanical arrangement of the organs producing the sounds of language, which can only produce them with volubility and precision in certain combinations. It is

certainly true that the linguists have always evinced an interest in that part of science which treats of the formation of sounds, but up to the present day it cannot be said that they have heartily embraced the facts revealed to them by physiology; else they could not have advanced such systems of sounds, in which not only the original relationship existing between these sounds is disregarded, but even the simple and the compound consonants are not strictly separated."

In these remarks I perfectly agree with Dr. Brücke, and I am firmly persuaded, that all laws regarding the interchange of vowels and consonants, and thus also the laws of English pronunciation, can only be explained on a physiological basis.

§ 2. Of the history of phonology or the science of elementary sounds Dr. Brücke gives us the following sketch:

"To judge from the systematizing and the development of the written characters among the Hindoos, the physiological part of phonology seems to have reached among them, at an early time, a high degree of perfection; indeed, much more so than among the Greeks. At a later period the Arabians made a frequent and close study of the sounds of language, while in Europe, during the middle ages, phonology was not cultivated at all. However, it is only in modern times that the results of a physiological study of the sounds of language were applied to life and tested by practice. For there was still an immense difference between writing many things on the formation of the sounds in language, and being so far acquainted with their essential nature as to be able to instruct beings deprived of the sense of hearing in language by their sense of sight and feeling, and thus to make them participants of the blessing of language."

"Pietro Ponce, a Spanish Benedictine monk, who must be regarded as the founder of the science of phonology, and the benefactor of thousands of men, yea, their deliverer from a state of idiocy like that of the brutes, was the inventor of the instruction of the deaf and dumb. He died at Oña A. D. 1584. . . . His success, both as regards the intellectual development of his pupils and their facility in speaking, seems to have been very remarkable, according to the trustworthy testimony of contemporaries. He is said to have written a book on this subject, which has been lost."

"The oldest work extant on the instruction of the deaf and dumb is written by Juan Pablo Bonet, '*Reduccion de las letras y arte para enseñar á hablar los mudos: Madrid, 1620*'; of which extremely rare work there is a copy both in the Imperial and the University libraries in Vienna. Its author was a secretary of the constable of

Castile, whose brother had lost his sense of hearing, when he was two years old, and hence was deaf and dumb. This circumstance induced him to prosecute those studies, the fruits of which he bequeathed to us in his work"

"Independently of the discoveries of the Spaniards, physiological phonology and its practical application to the instruction of the deaf and dumb was established by the celebrated *John Wallis*,* who prefixed to his English grammar, first printed in 1653, a '*Tractatus grammatico-physicus de loquela*,' and in the years 1660 and 1661 instructed two deaf and dumb pupils. His success was no less remarkable than that of Ponce, and in a letter to *Amman*, a Swiss living in Holland, who about thirty years later discovered independently the mode of instructing the deaf and dumb, he states that he proceeded so far as to enable one of his pupils to pronounce the most difficult Polish words, enunciated for him by a Polish nobleman, so that the latter was astonished at his proficiency. As Wallis was a very learned man, in elaborating his system of phonology he was enabled not only to take into consideration the English, but also the Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, Persian, German, French, Cymric, and Gaelic languages."

"The greatest progress in phonology was made towards the close of the eighteenth century in Germany, at Vienna, where *Wolfgang von Kempelen*, in constructing his speaking-machine, was not only led to investigate the manner in which man produces the sounds of language, but also to examine the conditions under which they can be pronounced at all. In these endeavors he was more successful with regard to the consonants than the vowels, of which *Robert Willis* (1828) first gave us a satisfactory account. *However, the formation of the vowels still presents to us considerable theoretical difficulties, which it will take a long time perhaps to solve in a satisfactory manner.* With respect to all the rest we may say that *Kempelen* has left us a system of physiological phonology, which was improved and completed, it is true, in after-times, but which was so firmly established by him, that it furnishes the surest foundation for all subsequent investigations."

* *Dr. Brücke* calls him erroneously a "bishop." He was no bishop, but professor of geometry at Oxford, and afterwards one of the royal chaplains; he was also one of the earliest members of the Royal Society. *Dr. Brücke* evidently confounds him with *Bishop John Wilkins*, who lived at the same time, and rendered himself famous by his "*Essay towards a real Character and Philosophical Language.*"

In his own researches, *Dr. Brücke* bases himself on the works of *Kempelen* and *Willis*, and at the close of his work, gives a synopsis of the systems of *J. Wallis* (*Gram. Linguae Anglicae*, Oxon. 1653), *Court de Gebelin* (*Monde primitif, &c.*, Paris, 1757), *Kempelen* (*Mechanismus der menschlichen Sprache*, Wien, 1791), *du Bois-Reymond* ("Cadmus oder allgemeine Alphabetik," in a journal called "die Musen," 1812), *Chladni* (*Gilbert's Annalen*, 1824), *Purkiné* (*Badania w przedmiocie fizjologii mowy ludzkiej*, 1836), *Dr. Joh. Müller* (*Lehrbuch der Physiologie*, 1844), *Ellis* (*Essentials of Phonetics*), *Lepsius* (*Das allgemeine linguistische Alphabet*, Berlin, 1855), *Max Müller* (*Languages of the Seat of War*, London, 1855). In addition to these works, I have consulted *Olivier* (*Urstoffe der menschlichen Sprache*, Wien), *Bindzeil* (*Abhandlungen zur Allgemeinen Vergleichenden Sprachlehre*, Hamburg, 1838. This work is a general repository of everything almost that has been published on the subject of phonology), *K. Heyse* (*System der Sprachlaute in Hüfer's "Zeitschrift für die Wissenschaft der Sprache,"* Vol. IV 1, 1853, and also in his "System d. Sprachwissenschaft," edited by *Steinthal*, 1856), *Falkmann* (*Declamatorik*, Hannover, 1836), *Rapp* (*Physiologie d. Sprache*, Stuttgart, 1836), *Dr. Bruch* (*Zur Physiologie d. Sprache*, Basel, 1854), *Dr. Rush* (*Treatise on the Human Voice*, Philadelphia), *Sir John Herschel* (*Treatise on Sound*, in "Encyclopædia Metropolitana"), and also the introductions prefixed to the dictionaries of *Walker*, *Smart*, *Webster*, *Worcester*, and *Flügel*. A great deal of information has been derived from the excellent articles of *R. von Raumer* on phonology, orthography, and permutation of the consonants, in the *Journal of the Austrian Colleges*, where among other works he has also reviewed the essay of *Dr. Brücke*. It is quite interesting to watch the encounter between these two gentlemen, of whom the former represents the linguists, desiring to acquire a physiological basis for their science, and the latter the physiological observer, unembarrassed by any linguistic system. In addition to his linguistic opponent, *Dr. Brücke* had to cope with adversaries in his own camp, as with *Professor Kudelka*, *Dr. Merkel*, &c.

As regards my own mode of proceeding in this matter, I became early imbued with the idea that the problem of English pronunciation and orthography can only be solved on physiological grounds, and thus, studying the interchanges of the vowels and consonants in the English and other languages on the one hand, and experimenting on the physiological formation of the vowels and consonants on the