

**INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF
LANGUAGE: A CRITICAL SURVEY
OF THE HISTORY AND METHODS OF
COMPARATIVE PHILOLOGY OF
THE INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649615513

Introduction to the Study of Language: A Critical Survey of the History and Methods of Comparative Philology of the Indo-European Languages by B. Delbrück

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Cover @ 2017

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BY

B. DELBRÜCK.

AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION, WITH A PREFACE BY THE AUTHOR.



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BREITKOPF AND HÄRTEL.
LONDON, TRÜBNER & CO. 57 AND 59, LUDGATE HILL, E. C. 8.
ENTRÉ STA. HALL.

1882.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1882, by E. Channing in the office
of the Librarian of Congress at Washington D. C.

PREFACE.

The character of the present work is mainly determined by the circumstance that it is intended by the author to facilitate the study of the "Grammars" which BREITKOPF & HÄRTEL are publishing, as well as the comprehension of comparative philology in its newest form.

The field of this "Introduction" is no broader than that of the above-mentioned "Grammars". Wherever in the following pages language, language-development, phonetic laws etc. are discussed, *Indo-European* language, *Indo-European* language-development etc., must alone be understood. I have felt the less inclination to discuss questions which lie outside the Indo-European domain, as for example those suggested by universal philology, because in reality the influence of philosophical linguistic research upon the science founded by BOPP has always been of slight account, and is very trifling at present. In limiting myself to the departments of phonetics and inflection I have also followed the "Grammars", but I must acknowledge that I should not, perhaps, have practised this self-denial if I had not just shown, in the fourth volume of my syntactical investigations (*Die Grundlagen der griechischen Syntax*, Halle, 1879), how in my opinion the comparative syntax of the Indo-European languages should be treated.

The book here laid before the public is divided into a historical and an analytical part. In the former the development of philology from BOPP's time to the present is roughly sketched,

with the especial aim of showing clearly how the problems which particularly occupy our attention today have developed naturally from what preceded them; in the second part the most important of these problems are discussed. In the fifth chapter (Agglutination Theory) I have expressed myself with more skepticism and reserve than formerly. But I have thought it best not to suppress my present views, since they are the result of mature deliberation, and I cannot believe that I shall ever have a more decided opinion on these points. In the sixth chapter (Phonetic Laws) I hope I have shown that the harmony between the representatives of different tendencies is greater than the uninitiated would be inclined to suppose, possibly greater than is recognized by many of these representatives themselves. All these discussions, as well as the historical part (chapters I—IV) and the seventh chapter (on the Separation of the Races), are not written for the narrow circle of my fellow-workers in this field, but mainly for those who do not make a special study of comparative philology. For this reason I have made use, so far as I was able, of the exceedingly abundant philological literature, but have quoted it only to a small extent.

In conclusion, I would like to say a word respecting my judgment of living scholars. In characterizing great men who are deceased, like BOPP and SCHLEICHER, I have imposed no restraint upon myself, but to proceed in the same way with reference to the living seemed to me unfitting. I have accordingly never attempted to picture in full the distinguishing characteristics and achievements of any living philologist, while I have not hesitated to define my position in regard to single views of my contemporaries. To this point I would fain call the attention of those readers who perhaps might be inclined to think that I have not done justice to this or that eminent living philologist.

Jena, August 20, 1880.

B. DELBRÜCK.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION.

In writing the present work, my only thought was to introduce some of my countrymen to the study of the Indo-European languages, and to call their attention to certain points in the history and present condition of this study. Accordingly, the preface, as well as my treatment of the subject, were destined for German readers. On this account it seems to me especially important that the English translation should be preceded by a few words of explanation, or, I might almost say, of apology.

Above all, I would deprecate any comparison of this short and unpretentious "Introduction" with the extensive works of MAX MÜLLER, WHITNEY and SAYCE. I by no means aim to furnish an explanation of the nature of language in general, as these scholars have done; it is only my wish to show how a minute section of the whole linguistic mass has been studied, and in my opinion ought to be studied. It is true that in one chapter, that which treats of agglutination, I touch on more general ground, and it would perhaps have been better if here I had at least attempted to discuss my disagreement with SAYCE'S views somewhat in detail. I hope that in case of a second edition I shall be able to extend my original plan in this direction.

Perhaps it may seem to the reader that not only the above-named English and American philologists have received insufficient consideration, but that the same is true of other foreigners, as for instance those exact scholars of whose views the "Mémoires de la société de linguistique" may be considered the exponent. I cannot wholly deny the justice of this criticism, but the following considerations will serve to explain my course. This book was written with the aim (how far it has been attained, I will leave others to judge) of contributing to the history of the German mind. It is universally acknowledged, by those who have traced the history of German development, that there is an immense gulf between the views of the Germans of today and those prevalent up to the fourth or fifth decennium of this century. This difference of view is almost as great in scientific fields as in the domain of politics. One side of this mighty revolution can be concisely expressed in the statement that we have passed from a philosophical epoch into a historical one. I attempted to show (as no one to my knowledge had done before) that the science founded by BOPP stands in evident connection with the philosophical endeavors of German scholars, and also how it has come about that in linguistic science a sort of metaphysics has arisen, which is at present undergoing a process of dissolution. But at the same time I wished at least to intimate that it is wrong to undervalue endeavors of this nature, since the occasion for such investigations is found in the linguistic material itself, and will probably continue in the future.

I would beg that my estimate of linguistic science and of the great philologists may be judged from this more general stand-point. It was not my intention to write a glorification of linguistic science, but to contribute toward a just estimate of it. My position with regard to the great philologists BOPP, GRIMM and others is as untrammelled as that we occupy to-

ward SHAKESPEARE and GOETHE. If a historian of literature asks whether GOETHE possessed dramatic talent in the highest and truest sense, no one will charge him with lack of reverence, but it will be recognized that he has only done his duty in proposing and answering this question. In the same sense I claim for myself the right to investigate what constitutes the actual power of that richly-endowed master to whom we owe the foundation of our science. Whoever reads with unprejudiced mind my sketch of BOPP and SCHLEICHER will, I hope, be impressed with the fact that my pen was guided by both love of truth and a feeling of veneration for these great men.

With the above remarks I would commend this book to the kind indulgence of the English and American public.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

When I began to translate this little book, shortly after its publication, I did not anticipate the various delays and interruptions which have postponed the completion of my task for a whole year. So long a delay might be fatal to the usefulness of a translation, in the case of a work which aimed at a systematic exposition of the whole science of comparative philology, down to the latest development of its smallest detail, and the discussion of all disputed questions relative to both method and practice. A treatise with such an aim in view would require constant revision and extension, and would be completely antiquated in the course of a year. The present work, however, only proposes to exhibit the historical development of the science, and while discussing the chief problems which now present themselves in this field, it does not claim to chronicle all the various attempts to solve them, nor to initiate the reader into the intricate details of a philological warfare which is today raging at its hottest. Therefore this little volume may be said to fulfil its avowed purpose as well at present as it did a year ago.

I was impelled to undertake this translation by the consideration that I had never found a book which appeared to me to give so clear and succinct an account of the rise and development of comparative philology in Germany. It therefore