

**THE ARTICULATIONS OF  
SPEECH SOUNDS  
REPRESENTED BY MEANS OF  
ANALPHABETIC SYMBOLS**

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The Articulations of Speech Sounds Represented by Means of Analphabetic Symbols by Otto Jespersen

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MARBURG IN HESSEN  
N. G. ELWERT.  
1889.

## PREFACE.

Those readers who will refer to the *Kort udtigt over det philologisk-historiske samfundets virksomhed* (Copenhagen, 1882-84, p. 49), will find that on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, 1884, I read a paper *Om lydskrift*, where I set forth the outlines of a new system of sound notation. In the same year I had, when reviewing Hoffory's *Streitskrift* in the *Nordisk tidsskrift for filologi* (N. r. VI, 322), an opportunity for expounding my views on the possibility of a general system of speech sounds and on similar questions of what I termed linguistic metaphysics; some of these considerations have been inserted in the following pages. Since then I have been constantly extending and modifying my system of writing sounds and their elements; a last modification will be found in the Appendix, s. v. mixed.

As my object in writing this little volume has not been to give a full treatise on phonetics for the use of beginning students, but rather to suggest to professional phoneticians a new solution of the old problem of a standard notation, I have not treated the several sections of the phonetic science according to their intrinsic importance, but have dealt at some length with those chapters on which I had new observations or new theories to advance, passing more rapidly over such subjects as my predecessors have already done full justice to. — The transcription with Roman letters, used here and there, is a variety of 'Broad Romic' requiring no special explanation; printing in italics means wideness when applied to a vowel, but some change in the glottis, generally voicelessness, for the consonants.

I must here apologise for a few inaccuracies in the references to paragraphs; when the work was already half through the press, I shortened considerably the last section of it, cutting out especially my analysis of many diphthongs as being, perhaps, of too precarious a nature.

My best thanks are due to Professor A. H. Keane of the University College, London, for his most valuable assistance in correcting the proof-sheets.

Copenhagen, April 1889.

Otto Jespersen.

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*Denny fund.*





## I.

### PRINCIPLES.

As long as we are hampered with makeshift adaptations of the Roman alphabet, our advance will continue to be a mere crawl.  
Sweet, *S. N.*, 102.

§ 1. It is surely needless here to set forth the utility, nay the necessity of a thorough knowledge of phonetics for all those, who study languages either in their historical development, or simply in order to use them as a means of communication with people of different nationalities. But how is it that the phonetic science, acknowledged as its importance seems to be by everybody, has gained so little ground, and is still very far from having penetrated the minds of all linguists so as to be not only nominally, but essentially, the basis of all linguistic work? No doubt several reasons could be advanced for this fact, but I can hardly be mistaken in naming, as one of the most powerful, the want of a universally accepted notation and terminology. No two authors use exactly the same transcription; in fact, many use two or three different systems — the consequence being that the same symbol has two, three or more significations, and that the same sound is written almost in a new way by every new phonetician. Thus, to take only one instance, we find the French nasal *a* transcribed in at least 11 different ways:

- 1)  $\text{ã}$  (Lundell, Sievers, Victor),
- 2)  $\text{ã}$  (Broymann),
- 3)  $\text{ã}$  (Toussaint-Langenscheidt),
- 4)  $\text{ã}^?$  (Trautmann),
- 5)  $\text{ã}$  (Storm, Franke, Beyer, etc.),

- 6) *ay* (Sweet, *Hdb.*),
- 7) *an* (Sweet, *Sound Not.*),
- 8) *a N* (Passy, *Sons du Français*),
- 9) *a A* (Ellis, *Palaeotype*),
- 10) *ahn'* (Ellis, *Glossic*),
- 11) *a:* (Noreen).<sup>1</sup>

§ 2. If we turn to the phonetic nomenclature, we find the same bewildering confusion. Every author seems to think himself authorized to use old words, such as *dental*, *guttural*, *oral* and so forth, according to his individual fancy, and to coin new terms just as he likes. The Latin prepositions *ante*, *pro* and *post* are always ready at hand, and where they do not suffice, compounds such as *linguopalatal* or *palatolingual* or *medialveolar*, are easily formed. Indeed, if this tendency is not soon put an end to, I think we shall some day or other find ourselves talking about *medio-linguodorsoprepalatal unilateral sounds*! (y w). Now Condillac goes certainly too far in defining science as »une langue bien faite«, but the importance of an exhaustive and unambiguous terminology can hardly be overrated, and we must confess that the science of speech-sounds is very badly off in that respect, as will easily be seen by a glance at the alphabetic list appended to this paper.

§ 3. The following is an attempt to remedy this defect by applying to phonetics an idea expressed by Gaidoz with regard to another science: »L'anthropologie, says he, n'aura une langue vraiment scientifique que lorsqu'elle adoptera une notation analogue à celle de la chimie, et qu'au lieu de parler de race celtique, ou de race germanique ou de race slave, termes chimériques et faux, elle représentera dans un monogramme de lettres et de chiffres le crâne, l'angle facial, les cheveux, les os longs, etc., de la race humaine qu'elle veut déterminer, comme le chimiste représente par un monogramme de lettres et de chiffres la nature d'un composé chimique.« (*Revue Critique*, 11. déc. 1882.)

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Beyer, *Lausystem des Neufranz.*, Cöthen 1867, p. 58. — Lytkens and Wulff, in their excellent Swedish '*Ljullstra*' give under each sound a 'synonymic' list of the manner in which the sound has been written by the leading phoneticians. A complete synopsis of sounds and symbols would be a boon to the philological world, but I am afraid that the typographical and other difficulties are insurmountable.

If these monograms are conveniently devised, they will supply at once a good notation and a good nomenclature. But what is to be the basis of such a system for our science?

§ 4. The ordinary Roman letters with values similar to those attributed to them in our general alphabet are quite out of the question, because of their irrationality, and more especially of the multitude of cross-associations they cause; this has been so clearly demonstrated by Dr. Sweet (*Handbook of Phonetics* 1877; *Sound Notation in Transactions of the Philol. Soc.* 1881) that I need not add a single word in corroboration of his excellent disquisition.

The acoustic science, taken either as the science of sounds in themselves and independently of human hearing or as the science of the human ear and its perception of sounds, is, at least in its present state, quite unable to furnish us with a system of notation. Not even the best graphical representation of sound-curves can, in every case and with sufficient clearness, serve to distinguish sounds which in the languages are kept perfectly distinct; and not even the most ardent adherents of the 'acoustic' point of view have ever tried to base their phonetic terminology or any system of notation on the acoustic properties of sounds.

§ 5. We are, therefore, reduced to starting from the manner in which speech-sounds are produced by actions of the lips, tongue, etc., in other words, our system must be purely physiological or *genetic*. Several 'organic' alphabets of this description have been proposed by German phoneticians, — alphabets which, by the way, do not encourage any further attempts, as they have all failed utterly to solve the problem of creating a notation which could serve as a means of mutual understanding among the phoneticians: they have been used by no one besides their authors, and by these only to a very small extent. The sound-analysis on which they are based, being, moreover, quite insufficient now-a-days, it will not be worth while here to examine their structure.

But with Melville Bell's *Visible Speech* the case is different. To this inventor and to his followers we owe most of the progress made in phonetic analysis, and his alphabet has been used successfully by Bell himself as well as by others for various purposes, such as describing the sound systems of several languages with great accuracy, and teaching deaf and dumb persons to speak. An exami-