

**THE GENERAL PRINCIPLES
OF LANGUAGE; OR, THE
PHILOSOPHY OF
GRAMMAR**

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The general principles of language; or, The philosophy of grammar by Thomas Jaffrey Robertson

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THOMAS JAFFREY ROBERTSON

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P R E F A C E .

THE study of Grammar has been so constantly pursued in a manner almost purely mechanical, that both teachers and pupils seem to have generally forgotten that any theory or philosophical basis can exist on which its great general principles are founded. It is true that the usage of each particular language will always guide and govern the practice of that language ; but besides this, the facts that words represent ideas, and that the connexions between ideas in the mind must be indicated by corresponding connexions in the words, afford a common basis for the great general rules which are identical in all languages.

The following treatise is an attempt to explain and illustrate these general principles—to show how they originate in the operations of the mind, and to what extent they are necessarily identical in all languages. It is not intended to introduce these considerations to the exclusion of the practical rules which operate in immediate connexion with the usage of any language, but rather to explain, so far as possible, the origin of these rules, and thereby afford a more accurate and precise means of examining the analysis of sentences, the nature of words, and their syntactical arrangement.

It was the original intention of the author to limit the following sketch strictly to the mere philosophy of Grammar, chiefly for the use of teachers and advanced students. Various considerations, however, have induced him to introduce into the work as much as possible of the practical application of the principles of general Grammar to the usages of the English language, and more especially to add, in the shape of an Appendix, a short introduction to the practical rules as commonly taught in schools.

The teacher is recommended in teaching beginners (at least young children) to commence with the Appendix, giving such explanation of the reasons of the different rules as the pupils are capable of receiving. He will find it convenient also to limit himself at first to the three principal parts of speech—the noun, verb, and adjective,—to combine these in easy propositions, with simple explanations of each part, and then to practise them in finding out the several parts.

A great variety of examples of analysis has been introduced, with a view to illustrate as many as possible of the different forms in which words are arranged in sentences, and to exhibit in the strongest light the very general nature of the great principles which constitute the philosophy of Grammar.

It was the writer's intention also to add two chapters, one explaining the numerous peculiar and idiomatic forms of speech in common use, and the other exhibiting and correcting the various incorrect and imperfect or ambiguous modes of expressing the thoughts so commonly heard; but the apprehension of rendering the work too costly for the convenience of the great mass of schools and teachers, rendered the omission of these chapters unavoidable.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

IN announcing a second edition of the "Philosophy of Grammar," the author gladly takes the opportunity of returning thanks for the rapid circulation of the first; and, with the view of making the work more worthy of the notice of teachers and students, he has taken great pains to correct errors, and has also introduced in the Appendix some additional matter explanatory of common incorrect modes of expression and peculiar phrases.

He again deems it necessary to remind his readers that his principal object was to add to the treatise at present in use, a sketch of the Philosophy of Grammar, including at the same time in an Appendix as much of the rudiments as will enable the work to be used as a text-book for children of all ages.

It must however be distinctly understood, that a mere "hearer of lessons" will find himself at a loss in the use of, at least, a large portion of the work. The teacher should be capable of giving all the explanations obviously required by the text; in short in this and many other subjects, "conversational teaching," at least with children, is the most effective method; indeed for a considerable time a text-book should be dispensed with, and when

placed in the children's hands, almost every line of it will require illustration and explanation. For this reason the author has carefully avoided questions at the bottom of each page, because they are apt to lead to mechanical teaching; any one who can read, can ask them; and after the old system, can "pandy" or "cowhide," every child who does not answer in the words of the book. All teachers who are entirely dependent on such questions and practise such a system should abandon the profession, and the sooner the better. In short no text-book will supply a deficiency in mental ability, a mind trained and taught by experience, and a spirit heartily engaged in the work.

PRINCIPLES OF LANGUAGE.

CHAPTER I.

LANGUAGE IN THE LOWER ANIMALS—LANGUAGE A RESULT OF THE POSSESSION OF INTELLECT, AND MUST FOLLOW ITS OPERATIONS—OPERATIONS OF THE MIND—THEIR EFFECT ON THE LANGUAGE OF DIFFERENT RACES—CONNECTIONS BETWEEN IDEAS INDICATED BY CORRESPONDING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN WORDS.

(1.) The intellect of man comprehends a variety of powers and faculties which are exhibited by the lower animals also in various limited degrees. These powers are perpetually exercised on the objects that surround them, and hence, as most creatures live in society, they may naturally be supposed to possess some means of imparting their feelings or thoughts to each other.—(In the use of the words "ideas," "thoughts," "notions," and others of a similar character, I shall be guided by their commonly received acceptation, without venturing to deal with the precise definitions adopted in mental philosophy; thus I shall speak of an idea as the mental impression received from external objects through the medium of our senses, and so on of the others.)

But how are these thoughts or ideas to be made known to his fellows by any creature possessed of intellect? Evidently by some sort of signs capable of being understood by the others, and we find traces of such signs observable in most, even of the inferior animals, with which we are acquainted; so arguing by analogy, we may fairly assume that no creature possessed of life, however low in the scale of creation, is altogether destitute of such a power. Consider language in its widest acceptation, apart from the

ject "man," and we compare with it the idea of the quality expressed by the word "mortality." By means of such comparison we form the opinion, which would be expressed in the English language by the phrase, "Man is mortal;" and some such process is carried on in the mind of every one when forming an opinion, no matter what his race or condition.

(10.) The immense difference that exists in mental power between the highly educated civilized man, and the lowest in the scale, as for instance the brown man of Sumatra, is no argument against the above statement. The latter race will have infinitely fewer and less complex ideas, and will be immeasurably inferior in the faculty of abstraction, the power that probably distinguishes the human intellect from that of the lower animals; but the mental operations, so far as they are performed at all, will be performed in the same way in both races, and hence the language of both will, to the same extent, partake of the same characteristics. Thus the dialects of the savage will have infinitely fewer words, because the ideas he requires to communicate are infinitely fewer. He will have few or no common terms; because his mind is deficient in the faculty of abstraction, by means of which we are enabled to frame common terms. He will have names, for instance, for particular kinds of motion or colour, but no words equivalent to the general appellation indicative of the whole class. Very possibly his dialect may consist only of the names of the objects around him, of their qualities, and what he does with them; but it will nevertheless equally represent mental operations, identical in their nature with those which take place in the mind of the most enlightened individual.

(11.) In short, as there are different ideas and different kinds of ideas in the minds of all to be represented by language, so the signs or words used for such purposes in any language must be different and of different kinds; and, as the ideas have various connexion and relations in the minds of all, so the signs or words representing them must by some means or other indicate such relations with