

**CHAPTERS ON ENGLISH
(RE-PRINTED FROM
"PROGRESS IN
LANGUAGE")**

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Chapters on English (re-printed from "Progress in language") by Otto Jespersen

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BY

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PREFACE

WHEN the publishers told me that a reprint of *Progress in Language with Special Reference to English* (1894, second edition—practically without any changes, in 1909) was again called for, I thought it not advisable to issue the book once more in its former shape. It has always been to some extent prejudicial to the book that it was made up of two really distinct treatises: (1) chapters i.-v. and ix., dealing with questions of general philology, the development and origin of language, and (2) chapters vi.-viii., dealing with some special points in the history of English. It is true that the two parts were by no means incompatible, in so far as the general view of linguistic progress had influenced the way in which English grammar was treated in the special chapters, and inversely the results gained in these formed part of the evidence on which

the general conclusions were based. Still, it could not be supposed that everybody interested in the general problems of philology would care equally for subtleties of English grammar, nor, on the other hand, that students of English would like to buy a book, half of which was only loosely connected with his special field of interest. I have therefore thought it best now definitely to separate the two parts, the more so as the time that has elapsed since the first publication of my book has affected them in different ways. While, namely, so much has been written of late years on general linguistics that parts of the book, more particularly perhaps the controversial portions, may now seem a little out of date, the same cannot be said about the English chapters. Indeed, I see no inconvenience in reprinting them from the old plates, even though I should now, of course, be able to add much illustrative matter, and though it would be possible now to refer to some new treatises and new editions of standard works. Very little would, however, be gained by such changes, and I have, consequently, refrained

from any changes except those necessitated by the new numbering of chapters and sections.

The rest of *Progress in Language* I shall try to re-write so as to make it a better and fuller expression of my views on the origin and development of language as they have matured during long years of thought and study.

OTTO JESPERSEN.

UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN,

August, 1917.



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CHAPTERS ON ENGLISH.

CHAPTER I.

ENGLISH CASE-SYSTEMS, OLD AND MODERN.

1. (103) The arrangement of inflexions current in grammars, according to which all cases of the same noun, all tenses, persons, etc., of the same verb, are grouped together as a paradigm, is not a truly grammatical one: what is common to Old English *dæg—dæge—dages—dagas—dagum—daga*,—for instance, is not the flexional element, but the word, or stem of the word; the tie between all these forms, accordingly, is not of a grammatical, but of a *lexical* character. That such an arrangement may offer some advantages from a practical point of view cannot, indeed, be denied; but, on the other hand, it causes many things to be wrested from one another which belong together grammatically, *e.g.*, the termination *-um*, which is common to the dative plural of all the flexional classes. Besides, it forces us to separate from one another the two parts of grammar which treat respectively of the forms of words and of their uses. In the latter, we must needs deal with (say) all datives under one head, all genitives under another, and so forth, while in accordance these forms