

THE STUDY OF INDO-EUROPEAN VOCALISM
IN THE 19TH CENTURY

**AMSTERDAM STUDIES IN THE THEORY AND
HISTORY OF LINGUISTIC SCIENCE**

General Editor
E. F. KONRAD KOERNER
(University of Ottawa)

Series III - STUDIES IN THE HISTORY OF THE LANGUAGE SCIENCES

Advisory Editorial Board

Herbert E. Brekle (Regensburg); Ranko Bugarski (Belgrade)
H.H. Christmann (Tübingen); George Cardona (Philadelphia)
Rudolf Engler (Bern); Hans-Josef Niederehe (Trier)
R.H. Robins (London); Aldo Scaglione (Chapel Hill)
Jean Stefanini (Marseille)

Volume 3

Wilbur A. Benware

*The Study of Indo-European Vocalism in the 19th Century,
from the beginnings to Whitney and Scherer*

THE STUDY OF
INDO-EUROPEAN VOCALISM
IN THE 19TH CENTURY

FROM THE BEGINNINGS TO
WHITNEY AND SCHERER

A Critical-historical account

WILBUR A. BENWARE

University of California, Davis

JOHN BENJAMINS PUBLISHING COMPANY
AMSTERDAM/PHILADELPHIA

For George S. Lane



The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences — Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

© Copyright 1974 – John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Second printing 1995

ISBN 90 272 0891 3 / 90 272 0894 8

LCC 74-84624

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by print, photoprint, microfilm or any other means, without written permission from the publisher.

PREFACE

Die Untersuchung über die Vocal-
laute und Umlaute ist, wenigstens
für mich, das allerschwerste in
der Grammatik . . . und wir werden
noch lange nicht aufs Reine kommen.

Jacob Grimm, 1819, in a
letter to Georg Friedrich
Benecke

. . . heute [ist] die ganze ver-
gleichende Grammatik in der Vokal-
forschung aufgegangen.

Johannes Schmidt, 1884, in
a speech before the Berlin
Academy of Sciences

In the 19th century research on the Indo-European languages was to a large degree coterminous with the development of linguistics itself. The most notable accomplishments, as related in every history of linguistics, took place in the area of phonology. The present study examines one aspect of phonological investigation of the Indo-European languages: vocalism from the early 1800's to around 1870, the threshold of the neogrammarian era.

Besides the many general histories of linguistics which have appeared since Benfey's *Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft* (1869), two have given a close account of the research on Indo-European phonology: Bechtel's *Hauptprobleme der indogermanischen Lautlehre seit Schleicher* (1892), and Streitberg's "Die Erforschung der indogermanischen Sprachen" (1935) in Brugmann and Thumb's *Grundriss*. Both works contain a wealth of bibliographical information, indispensable for a history of Indo-European studies.

Indo-European Vocalism

The present study attempts to go beyond a mere chronological presentation of research on vocalism in the 19th century to examine other questions, such as the origin of the concepts which linguists employed and the methodology they advanced. Moreover, it attempts to illustrate anew that the history of any science cannot be reduced to a simple linear arrangement of discoveries. A history of the research on vocalism shows well the conflicts in viewpoints which characterize a science during any given period of its development. The problems were particularly acute in the study of Indo-European vocalism for two reasons: 1) vowel gradation was long treated as a problem of sound change in the history of each language, and 2) linguists held the false premise that a basic triad, consisting of *a*, *i* and *u*, lay behind the evolution of all vowel systems, an idea which carried the status of dogma into the 1860's. Such methodological presuppositions, of course, greatly complicated the research on vocalism until the era of the neogrammarians. The history of the long struggle to arrive at a clear idea of the number and nature of the vowels in Proto-Indo-European and their reflexes in the daughter languages shows a variety of paths which language scholars trod in order to find solutions. The quotations by Grimm and Schmidt above indicate the highly problematical aspects of vowel research during the past century.

A study the length of the present account cannot, of course, restrict itself rigidly to one aspect of the phonology (or even to phonology as a whole). Anyone familiar with the history of Indo-European studies will recall the interplay between the question of Indo-European palatals and velars and the Indo-European vowel system at the end of the 1870's as well as the postulates of Brugmann and Osthoff con-

Preface

cerning syllabic nasals and liquids. Nor can problems of the root and declension be entirely omitted when discussing vowel gradation. Thus, in this study any aspects of the grammar which impinge on Indo-European vocalism will be taken into consideration for the light they throw on the central issues of vocalism.

No doubt much of the story of Indo-European linguistics up to 1870 is simply of 'historical interest', that is, there is little to be found which we can appropriate for our present research in the Indo-European languages. Many of the ideas which circulated in the decades before 1870 appear somewhat bizarre today, not the least of which was the concept of language itself. Yet a basic knowledge of and reflections on the history of our own discipline should deliver us from the arrogance of attributing finality to our current views of language as well as from the folly of trotting out something as 'new' which has been said or done before. Historical knowledge of one's own discipline is there to provide a perspective, not simply to be treated as a subject of antiquarian interest. It is in this spirit that the present study is offered.

I dedicate this study to my former teacher, George Sherman Lane, Professor Emeritus of German and Linguistics at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, who supervised the original version as a doctoral dissertation submitted in 1970. To him I owe an incalculable debt for sharing his vast knowledge of the Indo-European languages, and for his helpful guidance and critical questioning at various points along the way. Special thanks are due also to E. F. K. Koerner of the University of Regensburg for his many useful comments, generous help and encouragement to publish this study, to Boyd Davis for her incisive criticisms of earlier versions of the manuscript and to Ruth Benware and Debbie

Indo-European Vocalism

Seiler for typing the final draft. Needless to say, all errors and infelicities remain the sole responsibility of the author.

Davis, California
May 1974

W. A. B.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	v
Abbreviations	xi
1.0 Basic Concepts of Language and the Methodology for its Study in the Early Nineteenth Century . .	1
1.1 The Two Revolutions	1
1.2 Language as an Organism	1
1.3 Grimm's Rationale for Three Basic Vowels	7
1.4 Antecedents and Origins of the Concept of Basic Vowels	11
1.5 Grimm's Accomplishment	14
2.0 Vocalism and Vowel Change: Rask, Grimm, Bopp . . .	19
2.1 The Relationship of Rask to Grimm	19
2.2 Bopp's Conception of Vowels	22
2.3 Bopp's Conception of Vowel Gradation	31
3.0 Vowel Gradation Theory after Bopp	39
3.1 August Friedrich Pott	39
3.2 Adolf Holtzmann	41
3.3 Theodor Jacobi	44
3.4 Summary of Vowel Gradation Theories	46
3.5 Dynamic versus Mechanical Changes	49
4.0 Proto-Indo-European, 'Sound Laws' and Vowels . . .	54

Indo-European Vocalism

4.1	Schleicher's Contributions	54
4.2	The Periodization of Linguistic History	55
4.3	Sound Laws	58
4.4	The Nature of Sound Laws	62
5.0	The Reconstruction of Proto-Vowels	66
5.1	The Relationships among the Indo-European Languages	66
5.2	Curtius' Postulation of a Greco-Italic Stage . . .	70
5.3	Schleicher's PIE Vowel System	74
5.4	Phonetics and Comparative Grammar	79
6.0	Conclusion	84
Appendices		94
Bibliography		97
Index of Authors		123

ABBREVIATIONS

AAWB	<i>Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philologisch-historische Klasse. Berlin 1804-1907.</i>
ADB	<i>Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie.</i>
AJP	<i>American Journal of Philology. Baltimore, Md. 1880-</i>
AnL	<i>Anthropological Linguistics. Bloomington, Ind. 1959-</i>
BB	<i>(Bezzenberger's) Beiträge zur Kunde der indogermanischen Sprachen. Göttingen 1877-1906.</i>
BVSpr	<i>Beiträge zur vergleichenden Sprachforschung auf dem Gebiete der arischen, celtischen und slavischen Sprachen. Berlin 1857-76.</i>
DVjS	<i>Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift. Stuttgart 1923-</i>
GGA	<i>Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen. Göttingen 1739-</i>
Gk.	Greek
Gmc.	Germanic
Goth.	Gothic
IE	Indo-European
IF	<i>Indogermanische Forschungen. Berlin 1891-</i>
IZAS	<i>(Techmer's) Internationale Zeitschrift für allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft. Leipzig, later on Heilbronn 1884-90. (Repr. Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 1973.)</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society. New Haven, Conn. 1843-1961.</i>

Indo-European Vocalism

<i>JbWK</i>	<i>Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik.</i> Berlin 1827-46.
<i>JLZ</i>	<i>Jenaer Literaturzeitung.</i> Jena 1874-79.
<i>KZ</i>	(Kuhn's) <i>Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung auf dem Gebiete des Deutschen, Griechischen und Lateinischen</i> [after 1874: ... auf dem Gebiete der indogermanischen Sprachen]. Berlin 1852-
<i>Lat.</i>	Latin
<i>Lith.</i>	Lithuanian
<i>NBM</i>	<i>Neue Berlinische Monatsschrift.</i> Berlin & Stettin 1799-1811.
<i>OCS</i>	Old Church Slavic
<i>OE</i>	Old English
<i>OHG</i>	Old High German
<i>ON</i>	Old Norse
<i>PBB</i>	(Paul und Braunes) <i>Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur.</i> Halle 1874-
<i>PIE</i>	Proto-Indo-European
<i>Portraits</i>	<i>Portraits of Linguists: A biographical source book for the history of western linguistics, 1746-1963.</i> Ed. by Thomas A. Sebeok, 2 vols. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1966.
<i>Skt.</i>	Sanskrit
<i>ZfdPh</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie.</i> Halle, later on Berlin 1869-
<i>ZföG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die österreichischen Gymnasien.</i> Vienna 1850-1920.

1.0 BASIC CONCEPTS OF LANGUAGE AND THE METHODOLOGY FOR ITS STUDY IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

1.1 THE TWO REVOLUTIONS.

During the 19th century the study of language underwent two revolutions.¹ The first - centered around the figures of Jacob Grimm, Rasmus Kristian Rask and Franz Bopp - introduced a new method into linguistics, which treated languages historically, explaining attested linguistic forms as the result of historical processes rather than as manifestations of logical categories of the mind. The second revolution - initiated by William Dwight Whitney and Wilhelm Scherer and culminating in the work of the neogrammarians - revised the conception of the object of linguistic investigation: language itself was redefined as a human institution rather than as a product of nature. In the present chapter Jacob Grimm's contribution to the first revolution will receive the greatest emphasis, especially as it impinges on Indo-European vocalism; the ideas of Rask and Bopp in this regard will be taken up in the chapter following.

1.2 LANGUAGE AS AN ORGANISM.

The modern reader who takes in hand linguistic works from the early 19th century finds a number of concepts which

are not explained and are assumed to be self-evident by their authors. Two such ideas important for this study, which the reader of that time would have found self-explanatory were, first, the conception of language as a natural organism, comparable to a plant, with its own peculiar development independent of its speakers, and, second, the notion of 'basic vowels'. Both of these concepts were current during the period under study and will be elucidated in the course of the present chapter.

The idea that language was an organism, a strange notion to linguistic practitioners in this century, must find its explanation in part in the intellectual climate of the 18th and early 19th century, which was experiencing an upsurge of the natural sciences, especially (Linnean) botany, comparative anatomy, biology and geology. References to these sciences crop up frequently in works on language, evidencing the attention which language scholars paid to the methods of the natural sciences. The differences among species were seen to be comparable to the differences among languages, each with its own particular development. When language scholars drew upon the natural sciences for a method, they also assumed that the object investigated - just as in biology or botany - was independent of man. Thus the early 19th century conceived of linguistic change as occurring independently of the speaker, i.e., language maintained a life of its own, changing according to inner laws which were often inscrutable to the investigator (cf. Bopp 1836:231; Telegdi 1966:235). As in any evolutionary process change was slow; the speakers were not aware of the alterations going on. This unawareness of change, however, was not understood in the same way it was a hundred years later, say in the studies of Gauchat (1905) and Hermann