

The Classical Review

<http://journals.cambridge.org/CAR>

Additional services for *The Classical Review*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



Oertel on Language *Lectures on the Study of Language*. By Hanns Oertel, Professor in Yale University. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons; London: Edward Arnold. 1901. Pp. xviii, 346. Price, \ \$3 net.

J. P. Postgate

The Classical Review / Volume 17 / Issue 01 / February 1903, pp 73 - 76
DOI: 10.1017/S0009840X00207397, Published online: 27 October 2009

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0009840X00207397

How to cite this article:

J. P. Postgate (1903). The Classical Review, 17, pp 73-76 doi:10.1017/S0009840X00207397

Request Permissions : [Click here](#)

cludes not words only, but morphological elements, such as the case-endings, and grammatical categories (Infinitive and so forth).

It is a pity that no other device suggested itself for marking elements which are not words than a line over the top; this is so misleading in the case of single vowels as to suggest quantity, as on page 1, line 7. It would have been better, too, to place all words with initial digamma together under that letter in its place; at present they are to be sought under the vowel which follows the digamma. No further criticism need be added on the general plan, or indeed on the execution, which is excellent; but I add the misprints I have noted, together with a few suggestions. P. 1, line 4 read Λ for Δ . P. 4 read $\dot{\alpha}\beta\omicron\varsigma$ for $\dot{\alpha}\beta\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$. P. 6 under $\dot{\alpha}\gamma\gamma\alpha\rho\omicron\varsigma$, read 'postboat' for 'postboot.' P. 40 read $\dot{\alpha}\lambda\acute{\eta}\theta\iota\omicron\nu$ for $\dot{\alpha}\lambda\acute{\eta}\theta\iota\omega$. P. 50 *s.v.* $\dot{\alpha}\mu\epsilon\nu\theta\acute{\eta}\varsigma$, $\Gamma\rho\acute{o}\phi\omega\nu$ is probably the participle of $\gamma\rho\acute{o}\phi\omega$ (see the word). P. 53 under $\dot{\alpha}\mu\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$, $\dot{\alpha}\mu\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$ $\gamma\epsilon$ $\pi\omega\varsigma$ should be mentioned. P. 67

s.v. $\dot{\alpha}\nu\alpha\rho\iota\theta\acute{\epsilon}\nu\alpha\iota$, its use in *devotiones* should be added (it is mentioned on p. 76). P. 116 *s.v.* $\dot{\alpha}\rho\chi\acute{\epsilon}\phi\omicron\delta\omicron\varsigma$ read 'Chief' for 'Chef.' P. 116 for $\alpha\theta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$ read $\gamma\alpha\theta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$. P. 232 *s.v.* $\epsilon\gamma$ the volume of *C.I.A.* has been omitted. P. 252 last line, read 'Rome' for 'Rom.' P. 492 the *locus classicus* for the $\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\beta\eta\varsigma$ currency, Prof. Ridgeway's book, is not mentioned. P. 805 *s.v.* $\tau\epsilon\lambda\alpha\mu\acute{\omega}\nu$ a reference to Argos may be added, *Inscr. Pelop. Ins.* i. 517. A few words we have not been able to find are: $\dot{\alpha}\lambda\tau\eta\mu\alpha$ Cretan for $\dot{\alpha}\nu\acute{\alpha}\theta\eta\mu\alpha$ (*Mon. Ant.* iii. 402), $\dot{\alpha}\rho\gamma\mu\alpha\tau\alpha$ = $\epsilon\pi\acute{\alpha}\rho\gamma\mu\alpha\tau\alpha$ (*Od.* xiv. 446), $\dot{\alpha}\nu\theta\omicron\sigma\alpha\nu\tau\acute{\omega}\nu$ with first element indeclinable (*Cauer*, 40. i. 124), $\beta\acute{\alpha}\tau\alpha$ $\kappa\acute{\alpha}\rho\alpha\varsigma$ a Samian name (*Hesych.*) $\pi\iota\tau\tau\acute{\alpha}\kappa\iota\omicron\nu$ = $\pi\iota\nu\acute{\alpha}\kappa\iota\omicron\nu$ (*Bull. Corr. Hell.* xx. 58), and some verb-forms, such as $\acute{\omicron}\rho\acute{\omega}\rho\eta\kappa\alpha$ Herondas, $\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\epsilon\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\eta\sigma\epsilon$ papyri and Demetrius. But some omissions are sure to occur in such a book; there seem to be very few in this.

W. H. D. ROUSE.

OERTEL ON LANGUAGE.

Lectures on the Study of Language. By HANNS OERTEL, Professor in Yale University. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons; London: Edward Arnold. 1901. Pp. xviii, 346. Price, \$3 net.

PROFESSOR OERTEL'S work is a notable contribution to scientific philology. If all her bicentennial publications reach this level, Yale may well be proud of the series. The volume before us shows not only learning and acuteness above the common; but what is perhaps rarer, sobriety in speculation and a sound historical sense. Professor Oertel has besides a gift of exposition and writes in general a pure and lucid style. Though a German born, he has but few Germanicisms such as the order of words "wrong... is therefore everything which" (p. 90), an arrangement which English writers may admire but must not imitate. Exception may also be taken to 'resurrect' and to 'preempt,' while 'normative grammar,' in the sense of 'didactic grammar,' with an adjective apparently coined on the analogy of 'formative' does not strike us as a very happy invention. Professor Oertel (p. 59) after M. Bréal rightly insists upon the mischief which metaphors, such as that in the much abused 'root,' have done to the science

of language. (The dread of this mischief or the example of Steinthal have led him into a frequent use of mathematical symbols which I fear may deter some people from reading his book, and which would be just as useful to everybody concerned if they were in the notes instead of in the text.) Metaphors, however, are a necessary means for the communication of ideas that are novel or complex. To avoid figurative language is impossible, nor indeed does Professor Oertel avoid it. Witness the following sentence, p. 152: 'There is no psychical Hades in which sensations, as such, may lead a shadow-life, like Homer's $\nu\epsilon\kappa\acute{\upsilon}\omega\nu$ $\dot{\alpha}\mu\epsilon\nu\theta\eta\nu\acute{\alpha}$ $\kappa\acute{\alpha}\rho\eta\nu\alpha$, waiting for a sip of dark blood.' Figures are not dangerous to free thought until they are enshrined; and the true safeguard against the abuse of metaphor is its frequent and varied use.

His first lecture is an illuminating survey of the development of the ideas and methods of scientific philology up to the present day, and is one of the best things of its kind that I know. Out of a number of excellent characterisations I may single out for special mention the estimates of Wolf and Grimm. His historical sketch of the progress of phonetics will however remain incomplete until it recognises the

contributions of Alex. Bell, A. J. Ellis, and their successors in the English school.

Lecture II. deals with the classification of similar speech into dialects and languages, and the nature of inferred parent languages. In this very important chapter, after some sound observations upon the respective provinces of didactic grammar which tells us what shall be said, and of historical grammar, which tells us what has been said, Professor Oertel proceeds to investigate the concept of a dialect. In this investigation he appears to have designed not only to arrive at a result in the given case, but to furnish an example of the method of ascertaining the content of language-concepts in general. If this was its object, the economy was one of rather dubious value. An illustrative example of the methods of any science should be chosen from outside the region of its terminology. Letting this pass, it may be said that Professor Oertel's treatment is very suggestive. Its psychological colour will be obvious from a couple of quotations (p. 95):

'The knowledge which we obtain concerning speech is either subjective or objective. The knowledge which is based upon the direct acoustic sense-impressions conveyed to our brain by the speech-sounds—I term subjective. Objective knowledge of speech, on the other hand, is based on a direct examination of the stimuli producing our sensations.

In the naïve observation which formed the concept of a dialect the objective method played no part. It was formed wholly subjectively, *i.e.*, it is based on sensations only, not on a knowledge of the stimuli which gave rise to these sensations.'

And again (p. 108):

'Subjective uniformity makes the dialect...The question whether the inhabitants of two villages, A and B, belong to the same dialectal group can only be answered on the testimony of the villagers as to whether they believe they speak alike' (p. 109).

There is a good deal here upon which it is tempting to comment, but I must forbear. Proceeding further, Professor Oertel, with the help of mathematical symbols, sets forth the relation as he conceives it of a dialect to a language, *e.g.*, Latin, and of a language to a language-family, *e.g.*, Indo-European. He arrives first at the conclusion that 'an insurmountable bar separates language-forms from dialect-forms, for the latter, being subjectively identical with the momentary utterances of a definite person are perceptual objects, while the former are abstractions, purely classificatory devices' (p. 112). Again, 'As little as we can see a bird' (meaning an embodiment of the class-name *bird*), 'just as little can we hear

a language-form.' On the second question, after a statement of the serious difficulties which beset those who would reconstruct a parent language, in which I find much to agree with, he concludes that 'the essential point for us is that we cannot speak of a primitive homogeneous parent speech' (p. 127).

Lecture III. deals with 'changes in language,' and first with 'Imitative and Analogical changes.' The author lays stress, and proper stress, on the difference between what he calls 'primary' and 'secondary' changes. 'The *causes for a change* can only be studied where the change is *primary*. In the case of secondary or imitative changes we must seek for *reasons for their adoption*' (the italics are mine). The importance of social influences in determining the direction and spread of imitation in language is well brought out. Analogy is next treated of, and both by symbols and examples. Here, as in several other parts of the book, the influence of Wundt is very noticeable.

Lecture IV. is upon Phonetic Change. Professor Oertel takes up a sceptical attitude as regards several of the causes (*i.e.* 'ultimate causes') alleged to produce phonetic change: (1) the influence of climate and environments; (2) the influence of race mixture; (3) the anatomical change of the organs of speech; (4) physiological changes in the cerebrum. In the present state of our knowledge caution is justifiable; but perhaps Professor Oertel is too cautious. Under (3) he does not apparently quote all the cases where a certain configuration of the organs is said to have modified the sounds of speech. The one best known to me is the alleged development of the Indian 'cerebrals' through the greater height of the native's palatal arch. I should be glad to see a definite statement on the point. Professor Oertel rightly, as it would appear, finds a 'principal' cause of phonetic change in the 'change of speed' of articulation. Accelerate the rate of speaking, and the balance of the elements of speech is disturbed. He protests against the view that 'ease of utterance' is the aim of such changes, or a desire to get rid of what is insignificant, that is valueless, in language. The insensible influence which children exert in changing the sounds of a language so that the 'new generation' articulates differently from the old is brought into great and justifiable prominence. In his treatment of the vexed question of the 'uniformity of phonetic law' Professor Oertel adopts a sceptical attitude.

Three of his criticisms may be quoted: 'The whole theory rests upon three fundamental errors: (1) It tries to explain linguistic facts as the product of the individual instead of regarding them as social products; (2) It sees in social intercommunication a conservative factor only, while in reality social contact and the imitations which it entails are at the bottom of all changes as well; (3) It fails to distinguish between the origin of a change and its spread.'

The length of this chapter (85 pages), whose contents I have made no attempt to exhaust, contrasts with that of the next lecture on Semantic Change, the province of the science of meaning, which consists of only 54 pages. The author, indeed, is not responsible for this disproportion; in fact we may commend him on the ground that it is no greater. All the same it is here that lies the chief weakness of the book. The author is undoubtedly well acquainted with the literature of the subject, and his accounts and estimates of the various contributions are both full and sound in the main; in particular we may note with pleasure his references to Abel's work and Heerdegen's 'epoch-making' treatise on *orare*. Professor Grote's papers in the *Journal of Philology* (vols. iv. and v.), which anticipated a good deal since published, have however (not unnaturally) escaped him, and I am certainly surprised to see no reference to K. Brugmann's monograph on the 'Concept of Totality.' I, however, doubt whether the author has fully realised the exact relations and the actual situation of this branch of our science. Professor Oertel's sole bias appears to be towards a psychological treatment of language. This is not strange in a thinker who has been so deeply influenced by Wundt. The same tendency may be noticed in the work of a colleague, to whom Professor Oertel pays a very high compliment in his preface, Professor Morris, whose psychological chapter appears to me the most valuable part of his recent book. Now I hope no one will accuse me of being one to undervalue the use of psychology to the students of language whether natural or formal. There are scholars, whom I am not going to name, for whom I should prescribe it in large doses. In particular I think it is the one thing that can bring textual criticism, radical as well as conservative, to its senses. But in this regard the proper function of psychology is to interpret the results of linguistic inquiry, not to colour or overshadow their investigation. It is a facile and tempting way of obtaining 'results' to

apply the conclusions of one science straight off to the material of another; but this cheap deduction proves very costly in the end. So, when Professor Morris (*Principles and Methods in Latin Syntax*, p. 109) speaks of the advance in the science of Semantics since 1883 as if it were something considerable, and Professor Oertel, his colleague, utters no word of dissent, I must protest that this is by no means the case. By far the largest part of the work of the science of meaning is yet to be done, for unless it differs radically from all other anthropological sciences, it must work in the same way, that is to say by the most rigorous application of the inductive method to the whole available material. Until this is done, the science of meaning will not shake off the triple reproach of being casual, superficial and arbitrary. Professor Oertel may, of course, be aware of this, but it is much to be regretted that his readers will glean no hint of it from his pages.

I will make a further criticism. It is concerned with terminology, but is for all that a matter of some importance. Professor Oertel, through ignorance or neglect (the former, as I think) of an innovation in nomenclature which I proposed several years ago, gets into difficulties when he surveys the material of Semantics, as he employs only the current appellations which were designed for popular, not scientific use. Thus he diverts the meaning of 'name' (as a substitute for 'root,' of which he does not approve) to express a definite group of sounds which is the symbol for a perceptual or imaginary thing, quality, action, or state (cf. p. 283). Now to call *r-u-n* in 'a run' 'to run' 'we run' 'a runner' (the examples are mine) a 'name' is not exactly felicitous, and 'word,' which Professor Oertel must often have recourse to, is still less appropriate. I have, therefore, recommended the term *rheme*, whose convenience a single instance will show. *Upset* is one word, one rheme; *set up* is two words, and still one rheme. Professor Oertel's three fundamental categories (1) names; (2) expressions for the attitude of the speaker; (3) expressions of 'relation' coincide with my division into *rhemes* and *epirhemes*, except that *epirhemes* are further divided into two.

I have noticed very few errors or slips. What may be called psychical ones, I here set down in order that Professor Oertel may use the material that he has himself supplied. P. 101, fifth paragraph, (c) 'variable qualities,' 'mutable qualities' was meant; p. 112, end 'exactness'; p. 157,

middle 'Latin' read 'Greek'; 'Latin' occurs three lines above. In a new edition the blocks of German which occur with so

much frequency in the notes should be translated into English.

J. P. POSTGATE.

RECENT WORKS ON THE RIGVEDA.

Vedische Mythologie, von ALFRED HILLEBRANDT. Dritter Band. Breslau, 1902. Pp. xxii + 464. 22 M.

Die Sagenstoffe des Rgveda und die indische Itihāsaträdition, von EMIL SIEG. I. Stuttgart, 1902. Pp. vi + 152. 6 M.

THESE are works of first-rate importance for the study of the Rigveda. Professor Hillebrandt completes an undertaking in which he has been engaged for twenty-five years, and gives us a general view of Vedic Mythology with naturalistic interpretations, illustrated and enforced by his unrivalled knowledge of the ritual books. Dr. Sieg, who appears before the public for the first time, does not claim to have given as yet more than the comparatively short period of ten years to his work. His position is that the Indians possessed a body of mythological material in the form of tales of the gods, of which the kernel had been handed down from the times of the Rigveda, and which at one period was embodied in a formal collection, recognised as a 'fifth Veda.' This collection has been lost, but large parts of it remain in the form of extracts or paraphrases in the Brāhmanas, the Vedic commentaries, and the epic poems. This material he proposes to collect and arrange, and finally to apply to the interpretation of the Rigveda.

Both writers are of course aware that the principles on which their work is based are very far from being undisputed. Hillebrandt recognises that he stands alone in his position as a belated adherent of theories of the 'sun-myth' type. His disclaimer of any special reverence for naturalistic theories may readily be accepted, as well as his statement that newer theories as to ghosts and wizards, tree-spirits and totems are even less successful in giving a reasoned explanation of the Vedic cults. He has also made an advance on his predecessors in recognising that we have in the Rigveda successive strata of belief, and that the writers of the hymns were in greater or less degree ignorant of the history of the gods they worshipped. But these qualifications are very far indeed from

producing any confidence in the writer's explanations. He has chosen to regard the Vedic deities as a series of puzzles, for which he provides definite solutions. Mitra is the Sun, Indra is the Sun, Soma is the Moon, Varuna is the Moon, Agni is the Sun or the Moon or the household fire, Vṛtra is the Winter, and so on. For these theories as a whole it may be shortly said that there is no case. The interpretations suggested are read into the text of the hymns with much ingenuity, but few if any of them could occur to a student of the Rigveda who did not begin his work with the same prepossessions as the author. The whole argument falls to the ground as soon as it is recognised that naturalistic interpretation is later in date than the Vedic poems. The Brāhmanas and the ritual-books are thick with interpretations of the Vedic deities of the same type as Hillebrandt's: the very multiplicity of them makes them mutually self-destructive. In Greco-Roman philosophy we have just the same process: but it has not occurred to modern critics to interpret Homer by the aid of Stoic speculations as to the nature of the gods.

But if Hillebrandt's main positions are untenable, there is still much to be learnt by the way from his essays. If he complains that the Rigveda is uninteresting, that its hymns 'in endless monotony' invite the gods to drink the Soma, and torment themselves in order to adorn the uniform appearance of the (sacrificial) flame with fresh similes, we obtain here at least a starting point for understanding what the Vedic poets actually meant: namely, that Soma is a drink, and not the Moon: and that Agni is a flame, and neither the Sun nor the Moon, at any rate so far as these poems are concerned. Further we have the statement of a problem which really presses for solution, namely, who the gods are to whom the sacrificial fire appeals, and who are invited to share the Soma-drink. And on this last point in particular Hillebrandt's new volume throws considerable light.

Hillebrandt brings out very clearly the