ADAM SMITH'S "CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING THE FIRST FORMATION OF LANGUAGES"

By Stephen K. Land

Adam Smith's "Considerations concerning the First Formation of Languages" was first published in 1767 as an appendix to the third edition of Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. The published essay is an expanded version of lectures delivered by Smith as professor of moral philosophy at Glasgow,[1] thought to be revised versions of those he delivered at Edinburgh during 1748-51. Like many of the more philosophical essays of the mid-eighteenth century purporting to debate the origin of language, the "Considerations" is not primarily concerned with the genetic question. Smith begins his discussion, like Condillac,[2] by positing two "savages" isolated without language from all social contact, and then inquires how their joint activities in pursuit of the necessities of life might give rise to a basic language. But it is no more Smith's purpose than it is Condillac's to argue that as a matter of historical fact language did arise in this way. Both Smith and Condillac are concerned to set up conditions under which language might evolve naturally (i.e., without human or divine contrivance) in order to arrive at general conclusions about the nature of human language. Smith is particularly concerned with linguistic structure, and he develops in the "Considerations" a general theory of the primary or "natural" structure of language and of the nature and causes of linguistic structural change. The theory Smith advances, then, is not significantly genetic but is rather a general linguistic theory designed to account in particular for linguistic structures and to explain the historical relations between different structures in related languages.

The distinction involved here between factual and conjectural accounts is set out by Dugald Stewart along with the criteria of evaluation for conjectural histories:

> when different theoretical histories are proposed by different writers, of the progress of the human mind in any one line of exertion, these theories are not always to be understood as standing in opposition to each other. If the progress delineated in all of them be plausible, it is possible at least, that they may all have been realized, for human affairs never exhibit, in any two instances, a perfect uniformity. But whether they have been realized or no,

[1] Student notes of Smith's lectures on rhetoric, delivered in 1762-63, including the lecture on the origin and progress of language, have been published: J. M. Lothian, *Adam Smith's Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (London, 1963).

[2] Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* (Paris, 1746), part II, section i. Smith may not have read Condillac's work but must have known of it. He refers in the "Considerations" to Rousseau's *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1754) in which Rousseau takes up issues raised by Condillac.

is often a question of little consequence. In most cases, it is of more importance to ascertain the progress that is most simple, than the progress that is most agreeable to fact; for, paradoxical as the proposition may appear, it is certainly true, that the real progress is not always the most natural. It may have been determined by particular accidents, which are not likely again to occur, and which cannot be considered as forming any part of that general provision which nature has made for the improvement of the race.[3]

The conjectural historian is not concerned with historical fact, which is liable to historical accident, but with the general (or "natural") features of the human phenomena under consideration.

A number of factors condition Smith's theory. In the first place, data are drawn from too limited a field. Smith's interest in the nature and development of linguistic structure derives from the literary and philological concerns which were frequently the subject of his lectures.[4] Although, in the form of its publication by Smith, the "Considerations" is removed from its original context of the lectures on rhetoric and belles lettres it retains distinctive signs of the author's fundamentally philological concerns, particularly in the aesthetic criteria applied in the final pages and in the general restriction of data to the languages of western literary tradition: classical Greek and Latin, modern French, English, and Italian.[5] In this philological inclination and consequent restriction of data Smith is typical of his period in the history of linguistics, comfortably before the western discovery of the Sanskrit grammarians and the development of comparative studies.[6] Smith's conclusion that the simplicity of a language's "composition" varies in inverse proportion with the simplicity of its "principles" is clearly a function of his concentration upon the Latin and the modern languages derived from Latin.

Second, Smith's procedure and conclusions are adversely affected by his tacit assumption that linguistic structure can be adequately discussed in terms of parts of speech. His discussion rests upon the view that language universally reflects certain logical categories (substance, quality, relation, action, etc.) and, moreover, that it is methodologically proper to consider these categories reflected in language prior to consideration of the language's overall structure. In short, Smith makes it part of his purpose to determine the genetic order of the parts of speech and sees the structures of developed languages in terms of constructions from these predetermined parts. The

[3] "An Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith" in *The Collected Works of Dugald Stewart,* ed. Sir William Hamilton (Edinburgh, 1858), X, 37. Stewart's biographical memoir of Smith was read before the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1793.

[4] For discussion of the rhetorical background of the "Considerations" and for further references concerning Smith's relation to eighteenth-century rhetorical studies: Christopher J. Berry, "Adam Smith's *Considerations* on Language," *JHI,* 35(1974), 130-38.

[5] Smith occasionally mentions languages outside this tradition, such as Hebrew and Armenian, but in no specific detail.

[6] For further discussion of the linguistic background consult the relevant sections of a general history of linguistics, e.g., R. H. Robins, *A Short History of Linguistics* (London, 1967), ch. 6.

notion that the parts of speech may be considered in some respect prior to the structure of language, and, more generally, the question of the order of the lexical categories, is succinctly criticized later in the eighteenth century by Lord Monboddo, who remarks:

> if by *words* are meant what are commonly called *parts of speech,* no words at all were first invented; but the first articulate sounds that were formed denoted (i.e. would correspond to) whole sentences; and these sentences expressed some appetite, desire, or inclination, relating either to the individual, or to the common business which I suppose must have been carrying on by a herd of savages, before language was invented. And in this way I believe language continued, perhaps for many ages, before *names* were invented. For that the first articulate cries expressed the names of things. I can no more believe than that the neighing of a horse, or the lowing of a cow, is a name for any thing.[7]

Monboddo's work on language is frequently indebted to Smith and, indeed, the position underlying the passage quoted here is not far removed from the position at which Smith himself arrives in discussion of the "impersonal verb," but whereas Monboddo's account of linguistic structure avoids the common eighteenth-century error of considering language in the light of predetermined lexical categories Smith's does not.[8] As we shall see, Smith's consideration of language in terms of parts of speech leads him to see logical distinctions between linguistic structures where in fact there are none, with the result that his historical thesis explaining the order in which different linguistic structures evolve is seriously flawed.

Smith's general theory of linguistic structure has certain readily identifiable primitives. The first is the notion of *denotation* with which the "Considerations" begins: "The assignation of particular names to denote particular objects . . . would, probably, be one of the first steps towards the formation of language."[9] Smith is not concerned with the psychological or philosophical problems surrounding the assignment of names to particulars,[10] but is content to accept denotation without further discussion. All parts of speech are thought by Smith to denote in some broad sense: substantives denote objects, verbs denote events or parts of events, adjectives denote qualities, prepositions denote relations, and so forth. Discrimination between parts of speech and the establishment of the denotative priority of the noun substantive and of the "impersonal verb" is achieved through consideration of the different mental operations involved in the assignment of the different parts of speech. Parts of speech differ from one another according to what they

[7] James Burnet (Lord Monboddo), *Of the Origin and Progress of Language,* 2nd ed. (London, 1774-1809), I, 574-76.

[8] For further discussion of Monboddo's account of language structure see my "Lord Monboddo and the Theory of Syntax in the Late Eighteenth Century," *JHI,* 37(1976), 423-40.

[9] *The Works of Adam Smith,* ed. Dugald Stewart (London, 1811), V, 3.

[10] Smith could have found rudimentary discussion of some of these problems in Condillac's *Essai* and in David Hartley, *Observations on Man, his Frame, his Duty, and his Expectations* (London, 1749), pt. I, ch. iii, §1.

denote (substance, quality, relation, etc.), but the desired natural order among them is a function of the mental operations required for their employment.

These mental operations, which may be considered as further primitives of the theory, are *comparison* (from which follow *generalization* and *discrimination*), *abstraction* (or "analysis"), and *systematization* (which Smith calls "love of analogy"). Together these three operations account for the formation of linguistic structures on the given basis of denotation. Comparison is the bringing objects together before the mind and deciding whether they are similar or different. Realization that objects are similar amounts to *classification,* and the reflection of classification in language by the application of common names is generalization. The converse operation, based on the realization that the compared objects are *not* similar, does not have any special name in the text, but its occurrence is clearly required by Smith and for the sake of exposition let it be called "discrimination."

Smith ignores the traditional problems of classification; he does not, for instance, offer any criteria of similarity or attempt to determine the degree of resemblance appropriate to generalization. He makes matters as simple as possible by supposing that the classes we arrive at through comparison exist in nature; that is, that the objects we compare bear relations of resemblance or nonresemblance to one another, which relations are given in perception. On this point he enters briefly into controversy with Rousseau who, perhaps following Condillac, argued from the nominalist position that all objects and all ideas are particulars and that generalization is therefore a purely verbal affair. Rousseau propounds a problem: language consists originally of names for particulars and has developed general names, but there is apparently no explanation for the first formation of general names because generalization has no extra-linguistic foundation. Smith's view of generality as a formal expression of natural resemblance finds no difficulty here.

> It is this application of the name of an individual to a great multitude of objects, whose resemblance naturally recalls the idea of that individual, and of the name which expresses it, that seems originally to have given occasion to the formation of those classes and assortments, which, in the schools, are called genera and species, and of which the ingenious and eloquent M. Rousseau of Geneva finds himself so much at a loss to account for the origin. What constitutes a species is merely a number of objects, bearing a certain degree of resemblance to one another, and on that account denominated by a single appellation, which may be applied to express any one of them (6-7).

Smith's easy solution to the problem of classification is vital to his general theory. The natural basis for generalization provides a sharp distinction between that operation and the operation of abstraction which has no basis in nature. This gives Smith a principle of order among operations, which in turn provides the basis for the ordering of parts of speech and of linguistic structures. It must therefore be listed as an assumption of Smith's theory that objects of the natural world resemble or fail to resemble one another and that this resemblance or nonresemblance is given in perception.

The operation of comparison-generalization explains the development

of the common noun from the original proper noun. The operation of comparison-discrimination, applied to the class already denoted by a common noun, explains the subsequent development of adjectives and prepositions. The complete process as Smith describes it might be formalized as follows. Suppose we have two objects of the logical forms ABC and ABD respectively. Comparison reveals their similarity with respect to the elements AB and results in their being seen to be both members of the class x. Further comparison of the already determined members of x reveals that ABC and ABD differ with respect to C and D, which results in their being seen to be distinct, non-identical members of x. The linguistic reflection of the second operation is the development of adjectives denoting the features with respect to which members of x differ among themselves. An extension of the second operation accounts for the development of prepositions. Suppose there are three members E, F, G, of the class x and that while it is true that ErY (that E stands in the relation r to Y), it is not true that FrY or that GrY. Comparison-discrimination applied to the members of x will reveal that E differs from F and G with respect to their relation to Y, an observation which language reflects by denoting the relation r that differentiates E from F and G. Words denoting such relations are prepositions.

Smith employs the same operations of generalization and discrimination to account for the development of the Subject + Verb-Phrase structure from the primal "impersonal verb." The impersonal verb is a one-word sentence-equivalent denoting an event.

> Impersonal verbs, which express in one word a complete event, which preserve in the expression that perfect simplicity and unity, which there always is in the object and in the idea, and which suppose no abstraction, or metaphysical division of the event into its several constituent members of subject and attribute, would, in all probability, be the species of verbs first invented. The verbs *pluit, it rains; ningit, it snows; tonat, it thunders; lucet, it is day; turbatur, there is a confusion,* &c. each of them expresses a complete affirmation, the whole of an event, with that perfect simplicity and unity with which the mind conceives it in nature (27).

(This passage brings to light some further assumptions. Smith supposes that there are "events" in nature which are like "objects" in that they present themselves as units and are capable of simple denotation prior to any mental operation beyond mere name assignment. At the same time events are different from objects. The difference, which would not be easy to state, is reflected broadly in the difference between words which denote objects (nouns) and words which, either alone or in combination with other parts of speech, denote events (verbs).[11] Objects and events, along with the fact of their difference, should be listed as further primitives of theory.) The notion of a primal, pre-syntactic event-name at the root of linguistic structure is not entirely original to Smith who probably derived it from Condillac and Du Marsais *via* hints in Rousseau. It is an important structural concept

[11] Part of the difference is obviously that events include objects but not *vice versa.*

in eighteenth-century linguistics, and one which appears in various forms in the writings of Monboddo, Herder, and Bentham.[12]

Smith's account of the development of Subject + Verb-Phrase structures from the primal impersonal verb is as follows.

> It is easy to conceive how, in the progress of language, those impersonal verbs should become personal. Let us suppose, for example, that the word *venit, it comes,* was originally an impersonal verb, and that it denoted, not the coming of something in general, as at present, but the coming of a particular object, such as *the Lion.* The first savage inventors of language, we shall suppose, when they observed the approach of this terrible animal, were accustomed to cry out to one another, *venit,* that is, *the Lion comes;* and that this word thus expressed a complete event, without the assistance of any other. Afterwards, when, on the further progress of language, they had begun to give names to particular substances, whenever they observed the approach of any terrible object, they would naturally join the name of the object to the word *venit,* and cry out, *venit ursus, venit lupus.* By degrees the word *venit* would thus come to signify the coming of any terrible object, and not merely the coming of the lion. It would now, therefore, express not the coming of a particular object, but the coming of an object of a particular kind. Having become more general in its signification, it could no longer represent any particular distinct event by itself, and without the assistance of a noun substantive, which might serve to ascertain and determine its signification. It would now, therefore, have become a personal, instead of an impersonal verb (29-30).

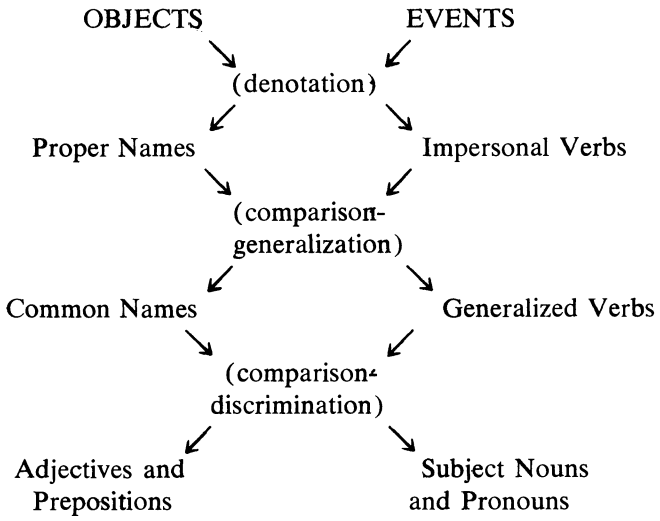
The development of the personal verb involves both generalization and discrimination. Suppose we have two events whose structures may be represented as ABC and ABD respectively. Comparing them we observe that they have a common element AB and that they differ with respect to C and D. The common element might, as in Smith's example, be the action as opposed to the agent that varies. Or, conceivably, the agent might be constant and the action vary (as in the events expressed in the sentences *venit lupus* and *abit lupus* respectively). As in the development of common from proper names we apply first the operation of generalization (to distinguish either a common agent or a common action) and secondly the operation of discrimination (to distinguish among the possessors of the common feature isolated by the first operation differences of either agent or action). Smith's illustration of this process is misleading in that it implies the dependence of the personal verb upon the prior development of common nouns. This does not appear to be necessarily the case, for we could obtain the same result—the creation of a Subject + Verb-Phrase structure—by employing only proper names (e.g., *Marcus* and *Petrus*) where in the example Smith uses common nouns.

A special case of the process in which the Subject + Verb-Phrase structure is developed by comparison operations from the impersonal verb is that of the development of the Pronoun + Verb-Phrase structure. Smith ob-

[12] For further discussion of the historical ramifications of this idea see my, *From Signs to Propositions: The Concept of Form in Eighteenth-Century Semantic Theory* (London, 1974), ch. 3 and 4; and note 8 above.

serves that "as the event, or matter of fact, which is expressed by a verb, may be affirmed either of the person who speaks, or of the person who is spoken to, as well as of some third person or object, it becomes necessary to fall upon some method of expressing these two peculiar relations of the event" (32-33). The same comparison operations that develop the generalized verb with variable subject will discriminate between first, second, and third person subjects. The linguistic reflection of this distinction is the system of pronouns as found in Latin or English.

Smith's theory of grammatical structures can now be represented as follows (where the operations appear in parentheses):



(The account here represented is not yet complete because it does not show the part played by abstraction.) Number, gender, and case may be explained in terms of the categories and operations of the diagram, and the appropriate morphological structures (covering the phenomena of declension, conjugation, and agreement) can be explained with reference to "analogy"—the principle of linguistic structure which reflects the human tendency to systematize (or, as Smith puts it, man's "love of analogy and similarity of sound" [13 and 19]). Smith's account of linguistic structure thus involves two sets of operations: i) the ordered operations of generalization and discrimination which account for the development of parts of speech from primitive denotations of objects and events, and ii) the unspecified operations of systematization which cause the syntactic and semantic features of number, gender, and case to be reflected in morphological patterns. The rudimentary account of the categories represented in the diagram shows moreover that in Smith's view the foundation of syntactic relation is a reflection of the interaction of the operations of generalization and discrimination. In terms of the development represented there are no syntactic relations between words until the final operation has been applied—i.e., until adjectives and prepositions have been developed as well as nouns, and until Subject + Verb-Phrase structures have been evolved. Once this stage has been achieved three basic structures are available—adjectival, prepositional, and subject-verb phrases. The dia-

gram shows that in Smith's view each of these phrase types has the same underlying operational structure: in each case the reference of a generalized term is made specific by an associated term. The vertical symmetry of the diagram reflects a pattern in the theory: the Verb-Phrase in a Subject + Verb-Phrase structure is a generalized denotation whose reference is made specific by the subject Noun-Phrase, and in much the same way the common noun in an adjectival or prepositional structure is a generalized denotation whose reference is made specific by the adjective or preposition.

The account represented in the diagram is not complete because the final stage, the development of adjectives, prepositions, and Subject + Verb-Phrase structures, involves not only discrimination but also *abstraction.* It is very difficult to see why Smith supposed the discrimination of (for instance) features common to some members of a predetermined class to involve abstraction whereas the original definition of that class in terms of the common features of its members apparently does not. Again, it is hard to see why the use of a word to denote a certain type of event (e.g., *venit* in Smith's example) does not involve abstractions whereas the discrimination of events according to their different agents does. In fact there is no inherent difference between the comparison operations whereby syntactic structures are generated in the diagram and the operation of abstraction as Smith presents it. The distinction he draws here lies not in the operations but in the relation between the resultant linguistic structures and the supposed structure of reality.

> An adjective is by nature a general, and in some measure an abstract word, and necessarily pre-supposes the idea of a certain species or assortment of things, to all of which it is equally applicable. The word *green* could not, as we were supposing might be the case of the word *cave,* have been originally the name of the individual, and afterwards have become, by what grammarians call an Antonomasia, the name of a species. The word *green* denoting, not the name of a substance, but the peculiar quality of a substance, must from the very first have been a general word, and considered as equally applicable to any other substance possessed of the same quality . . . . The person who first invented this appellation must have distinguished the quality from the object to which it belonged, and must have conceived the object as capable of subsisting without the quality. The invention, therefore, even the simplest nouns adjective, must have required more metaphysics than we are apt to be aware of (9-10).

The argument is that the creation of adjectives involves the conceptual distinction of quality from substance whereas the classification of objects under common nouns simply distinguishes one group of substances from another. The conceptual distinction between quality and substance is "metaphysical" (i.e., not a simple datum like the resemblances and differences of objects) and therefore, according to Smith, presupposes abstraction. The same is true of the creation of prepositions, and a very similar argument is applied to the development of Subject + Verb-Phrase structures.

> Every body must observe how much more simplicity there is in the natural

expression, *pluit,* than in the more artificial expressions, *imber decidit, the rain falls;* or *tempestas est pluvia, the weather is rainy.* In these two last expressions, the simple event, or matter of fact, is artificially split and divided in the one into two; in the other, into three parts. In each of them it is expressed by a sort of grammatical circumlocution, of which the significancy is founded upon a certain metaphysical analysis of the component parts of the idea expressed by the word *pluit* (28).

Here the distinction of agent from action is a result of "metaphysical analysis" (abstraction) of the event. In general, Smith's notion of abstraction rests upon a view of the world as constructed of objects and events. Conceptual analysis of the world below the level of objects and events into such categories as quality, relation, agent, and action, is "metaphysical" because it goes beyond the immediate data and therefore requires the operation of abstraction. Smith's abstraction can be defined only with reference to his theory of the structure of the world.

The structure of the world is reflected in the primal language of nouns and impersonal verbs, but the language structure generated in the diagram goes beyond the natural structure in so far as it involves abstraction. We now have the basis for what may be called Smith's first historical thesis, which might be stated as follows:

The greater degree of abstraction involved in the creation of a linguistic structure the later in time will that structure be invented.

This thesis, which achieves an historical ordering of structural types with reference to the notion of abstraction, depends upon Smith's view of abstraction as a sophisticated, "metaphysical," and therefore, in a certain sense, unnatural operation which is not available to the most primitive mind and which becomes available only gradually to the developing human intellect. We should notice two points with reference to this thesis. First, since it employs the criterion of abstraction in the ordering of structures it depends upon the theory of the structure of the natural world which determines what Smith means by abstraction. Secondly, the thesis not only achieves an ordering of structures but also implies an explanation of their development—namely, that the later structures develop from the earlier as the human mind develops its capacity for abstraction and that the developing capacity for abstraction is the immediate cause of the increasing abstraction of linguistic structures.

Because the structures ultimately generated in the diagram are highly abstract Smith seeks historically intermediate alternatives. He believes such an alternative can be seen in inflected structures, where declensions account for basic adjectival and prepositional functions and where the lexical distinction of subject from verb can be to some extent precluded by conjugation.

There is another expedient for denoting the different qualities, which, as it requires no abstraction, nor any conceived separation of the quality from the subject, seems more natural than the invention of nouns adjective, and which, upon this account, could hardly fail, in the first formation of language,

to be thought of before them. This expedient is to make some variation upon the noun substantive itself, according to the different qualities which it is endowed with. . . . [Mankind] would much more find themselves under the necessity of evading, by some similar contrivance, yet more difficult invention of prepositions. The different cases in the ancient languages is a contrivance of precisely the same kind. . . . As in the beginnings of language, therefore, mankind seem to have evaded the invention of at least the more abstract prepositions, and to have expressed the same relations which these *now* stand for, by varying the termination of the co-relative term, so they likewise would naturally attempt to evade the necessity of inventing those more abstract pronouns by varying the termination of the verb, according as the event which it expressed was intended to be affirmed of the first, second, or third person (10-11, 17, 34-35).

In this way Smith realizes the distinction between what have subsequently been called analytic and synthetic types of linguistic structure. The synthetic type works through variation of nominal and verbal stems whereas in the analytic type the distinctions signified by these variations are represented by means of separate lexical items.[13]

The distinction between these structural types (which is not original to Smith) is clear enough, but Smith's attempt to order analytic and synthetic types under the criterion of the first historical thesis is flawed by his ambiguous use of "abstraction." He wants to say, under the thesis, that the synthetic type is historically prior to the analytic because it is less abstract; but the synthetic type is less abstract only in the trivial sense that it employs inflected forms instead of "abstracting" lexical categories: it involves no less conceptual abstraction than does the analytic type. Smith's argument that the inflection of nominal and verbal stems corresponds to the structure of the world where relations and qualities are inseparable from objects and where actions and agents are inseparable components of events overlooks the fact that expression of a feature by regular inflection involves the conceptual isolation of that feature no less than does its expression in a separate lexical item. In this argument Smith is taking "abstraction" to be a merely formal matter defined in terms of the structural correspondence between languages and reality, but the first historical thesis clearly requires that "abstraction" denote a mental operation. Smith is presumably misled there by his concentration upon parts of speech. The analytic type does indeed require more distinct parts of speech than does the synthetic, a fact which seems to have led Smith to seek more fundamental differences between the two types than are really to be found. His argument needs a logical difference but only formal differences are apparent. Smith's error here leaves his first historical thesis without adequate justification.

[13] For discussion of Smith's theory of linguistic types and its influence on subsequent theories: Eugenio Coseriu, "Adam Smith und die Anfänge der Sprachtypologie," *Wortbildung, Syntax und Morphologie: Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag von Hans Marchand* (The Hague, 1968), 46-54.

This failure also affects the "maxim" which Smith states most concisely as: "language becomes more simple in its rudiments and principles, just in proportion as it grows more complex in its composition" (43). Smith does not define "composition" and "principles" but it is clear that the composition of a language consists in its lexical categories and the principles of a language are its morphological patterns. In effect, then, the maxim states that in a given language the number of distinct lexical categories (or parts of speech) varies inversely with the number of inflectional paradigms. As a synchronic principle the maxim makes an empirical claim and would seem to have a certain truth. But Smith probably intends more than this, for the maxim comes at the end of the historical argument and therefore seems to include the claim that languages do in fact *develop* from synthetic to analytic structures and that as they do so their lexical system grows in complexity in proportion as their morphological system grows more simple.[14] This historical reading of the maxim brings us back to the fact that Smith has not properly established the connection between synthetic structure and conceptual simplicity.

With the maxim we reach the end of what is integral to Smith's account of linguistic structure and the development of the parts of speech. The "Considerations" offers two further theses, each in its own way extraneous to the theory we have so far outlined. These are a second historical thesis and an aesthetic thesis based upon Smith's view that some language-structures can be said to be more natural than others in so far as they correspond more closely to the structure of reality. The aesthetic appendix to the main argument can be dealt with briefly. Smith argues that complexity of principles is preferable in language structure to complexity of composition and, conversely, that simplicity of composition is preferable to simplicity of principles—in short, that synthetic structures are preferable to analytic. Three specific stylistic reasons are offered for this preference—that analytic languages are "more prolix," "less agreeable to the ear," and restrictive of word order (44-48)—but Smith's evaluation derives fundamentally from the view central to his general theory of linguistic structure that the synthetic type is more natural. It may be added that while Smith's inclusion of a stylistic evaluation of the structures he isolates no doubt reflects his original consideration of language in the context of rhetorical and bellettristic studies, he may also have been following his immediate predecessors in the study of language development—for Condillac had combined structural, genetic, and stylistic considerations in his *Essai* and the question of word order he raised had been taken up in discussion of style by Diderot.[15]

[14] "Simplicity" is apparently determined by the number of distinct parts of speech a language employs (in the case of "composition") and by the number of distinctions which can be expressed by means of inflection (in the case of "principles"). The fewer parts of speech the simpler the composition, the fewer inflectional variants the simpler the principles.

[15] Condillac (1764), *loc. cit.;* Diderot, *Lettre sur les sourds et muets* (1751).

The second historical thesis consists in the explanation Smith offers for the development (in, for example, the Romance languages) of analytic from synthetic structures. Those who learn a synthetic language from birth are not aware of its difficulties, Smith argues, but the case is altered when it is learned deliberately as a foreign language. Learners of the language

would be extremely perplexed by the intricacy of its declensions and conjugations. They would endeavour, therefore, to supply their ignorance of these, by whatever shift the language could afford them. Their ignorance of the declensions they would naturally supply by the use of prepositions. . . . This change is undoubtedly a simplification of the language, in point of rudiments and principle. It introduces, instead of a great variety of declensions, one universal declension, which is the same in every word, of whatever gender, number of termination. . . . A similar example enables men, in the situation above mentioned, to get rid of almost the whole intricacy of their conjugation (36-38).

This expedient is the use of auxiliary verbs, after several examples of which Smith concludes that "upon the intermixture of different nations with one another, the conjugations, by means of different auxiliary verbs, were made to approach towards the simplicity and uniformity of the declensions" (39). Linguistic structure changes, then, from synthetic to analytic form when the language comes to be adopted by a sufficient concentration of non-native speakers.

It has long been observed that Smith's two historical theses offer alternative explanations for the single phenomenon of the development of one linguistic type from another, and that it is the first thesis which is best integrated with Smith's general theory.[16] The first thesis rests, as we have seen, on the notion of abstraction and ultimately upon the supposed relation between the structure of language and the structure of reality. Abstraction, it is assumed, accounts for analytic structures and, since the human capacity for abstraction develops more slowly than the capacities involved in the development of synthetic structures, analytic structures must be of later invention than synthetic. Such a thesis supposes an explanation of the development of analytic structures in terms of increasing intellectual abstraction. The second thesis, on the other hand, explains the development of analytic structures in terms of the mixing of peoples and rests upon a theory of language-learning, namely, that analytic structures are learned more readily than the synthetic.

The second historical thesis sits very awkwardly with the first. Smith offers a brief illustration of his second thesis:

[16] Otto Funke, *Englische Sprachphilosophie im späteren 18. Jahrhundert* (Berne, 1934), 30. René Wellek, *The Rise of English Literary History* (Chapel Hill, 1941), 92-93.

a Lombard, who was attempting to speak Latin, and wanted to express that such a person was a citizen of Rome, or a benefactor to Rome, if he happened not to be acquainted with the genitive and dative cases of the word *Roma,* would naturally express himself by prefixing the prepositions *ad* and *de* to the nominative; and instead of *Romae* would say *ad Roma,* and *de Roma.* . . . A Lombard, who wanted to say, *I am loved,* but could not recollect the word *amor,* naturally endeavoured to supply his ignorance, by saying, *ego sum amatus* (37-38).

This suggests very strongly that the analytic structures are more easily learned because they are in some sense more "natural" than the synthetic, but the first historical thesis rests upon the view that the synthetic structures are more natural. Leaving aside the uncertain question of the relative naturalness of the two structures we would still expect whichever type is the more readily acquired to be that first invented. It seems odd to say that man tends to invent synthetically structured languages rather than analytic but that he tends to learn analytic structures more easily than synthetic. We are left with an implicit distinction between language acquisition and language creation which Smith does not elaborate and presumably did not intend. The two historical theses are not compatible alternatives.

Philosophically the "Considerations" lies in the tradition going back to the mid-seventeenth century which attempts to measure the forms of language against the logical structure of the world. In line with this philosophical tradition Smith prefers the language which in his view comes closest to representing in its structures the supposed structure of reality.

In the history of linguistics Smith's work belongs among the many writings which, beginning in the 1740's, presented their theories in the form of speculation upon the origin and development of language. The more important of these are not so much answers to the genetic question of linguistic origins as "conjectural histories" concerned to formulate general theories of language. Smith's essay stands between two works in particular: on the one hand, Condillac's *Essai* to which Smith is indebted either directly or *via* Rousseau for the central concept of the primal event-name, and on the other hand, the extensive treatise of Smith's fellow Scot and near contemporary Lord Monboddo. Both these works set the problem of language in wider philosophical and anthropological contexts, both include a detailed account of the development of linguistic structures, both realize the distinction Smith draws between analytic and synthetic structural types, and both offer some relative evaluation of the structures discussed. Smith's essay is perhaps unusual in the linguistic work of the period for its limited aims and well defined area of investigation, but its main topics were common ones in the latter half of the eighteenth century.

The main drift of Smith's argument depends upon two notions in particular: that the human intellect has developed through time according to certain discoverable principles, and that the development of language is conditioned by the developing human mind. The first of these notions was

enlarged by the Lockean tradition of thought in the eighteenth century, and by none more systematically than by Condillac. The second notion stems from the association between grammatical and rational structures established by the influential grammatical and logical writings of Port-Royal.[17] The Port-Royal grammarians did not themselves think of the rational faculties as developing in time, but once this step had been taken we reach the position which provides the basis for grammatical theory in the later eighteenth century, namely, that grammar is not integral to language but is imposed upon it by the developing rational faculty. This position is derived simply from the notions were are considering. If grammar is a function of reason, as was generally supposed after the 1660's, it seems to follow that the less reason man possesses the less grammar will be found in his language. If we adopt the method of mid-eighteenth-century speculation and suppose for the purpose of enquiry a pre-rational man, or the state of man at the dawn of reason, we must suppose the language of man (if he has one) to be virtually without grammar. Such are the primal languages of names for objects and events variously proposed by Condillac, Smith, and Monboddo. The association of grammatical and rational structures in combination with the methods of post-Lockean speculation leads directly to the event-name concept—the idea that language is originally made up entirely of single words each equivalent to a grammatical sentence, and that the development of language to the forms we know is largely a matter of breaking down this primal sentence-name into its logical (or "metaphysical") parts.

Of the versions of the primal language we have mentioned Smith's is perhaps the simplest. Condillac bases the primacy of the word-sentence upon a psychological theory of the concurrence of ideas[18]; Monboddo alludes to Anaxagoras' principle of the continuity of matter[19]; but Smith assumes a simple theory of reality as composed of objects and events. Smith's use of the concept also differs from that of Condillac and Monboddo. Condillac, in his later writings, develops from the word-sentence concept a theory of language as the basis for logical analysis; Monboddo, in line with his rationalist inclination, rejects the word-sentence because it is the source of "barbarous" language types which human reason replaces with sophisticated (synthetic) "languages of art"; but Smith, again more simply, traces a line of continuous development from the primal name to modern language structures, employing only the faculties for comparison, abstraction, and analogy.

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[17] Antoine Arnauld and Claude Lancelot, *Grammaire générale et raisonnée, ou, l'art de parler* (Paris, 1660). Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole, *La Logique, ou, l'art de penser* (Paris, 1662).

[18] Condillac's ideas on this point are not developed in the *Essai* but in some of his later writings, particularly the *Grammaire* which forms part of the *Cours d'études* composed for Ferdinand of Parma during 1758-67 and published in 1775.

[19] Monboddo, I, 97.