

# Otto Jespersen and the introduction of new language-teaching methods in Denmark

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## Otto Jespersen and the introduction of new language-teaching methods in Denmark

As in many other European countries the teaching of foreign languages in Denmark before 1880 concentrated on reading comprehension, the study of grammar (often shrouded in Latin grammatical terms and concepts), and translation exercises consisting of strings of disconnected sentences. The leading Danish exponent of the international Reform Movement was Otto JESPERSEN, and this paper deals with his principles for improving foreign-language teaching in Denmark and the extent to which they were implemented in Danish schools by the turn of the century.

In his autobiography, which was written in Danish,<sup>1</sup> Otto JESPERSEN (1938, 45) stresses the importance that the Third Scandinavian Philologists' Meeting (held at Stockholm in August 1886) had for him personally. At the conference there was a long discussion of the need to reform the teaching of modern languages, and with two Scandinavian senior colleagues, the Swede J. A. LUNDELL and the Norwegian August WESTERN, JESPERSEN set up a Scandinavian association bearing the name *Quousque Tandem* (BRATT, 1982, 150–52; 1984, 68). This was the pen-name that the German phonetician Wilhelm VIËTOR had used in 1882 for a pamphlet entitled «Der Sprachunterricht muss umkehren», which inaugurated the era of the reform movement. Two years earlier, in 1884, JESPERSEN had opened a significant correspondence with Johan STORM, Professor of English and Romance Philology at the University of Oslo from 1873 to 1912.<sup>2</sup>

Although born in 1860 JESPERSEN was still at that time an undergraduate student at Copenhagen University. Following the tradition and expectations of his family JESPERSEN studied law when he matriculated at Copenhagen at the age of 17, but in 1881 – after four years of study and sick and tired of the cramming and rote-learning of law studies (1938, 27) – he switched to French as a major subject and English and Latin as minor subjects, a step which gave him a profound sense of intellectual release. Even before attending lectures in his first semester as a language student, JESPERSEN, «although I had not actually thought of concerning myself with

1 An English edition is in preparation (translation by David STONER), containing also, i. a., a completely revised JESPERSEN bibliography (A. JUUL, H. F. NIELSEN & J. E. NIELSEN (eds.)). In what follows, quotations have been taken from a provisional translation.

2 The letters between JESPERSEN and STORM quoted or referred to in this paper are held at the University of Oslo Library. The same applies to those between STORM and SWEET.

English» (1938, 28), had managed to get hold of STORM's *Engelsk Filologi, I. Det levende Sprog* (1879), which dealt mainly with phonetics and which convinced JESPERSEN of the inestimable importance of phonetics to language study. The enthusiasm that STORM felt for Henry SWEET's *A Handbook of Phonetics* (1877) induced JESPERSEN to buy and read SWEET's book right away.<sup>3</sup> A few years later, in 1885, SWEET published another important work, *Elementarbuch des gesprochenen Englisch*, and JESPERSEN made no secret of the fact that during this period of his life SWEET was his guiding star.<sup>4</sup> The *Elementarbuch* was not just a book, it was a treasure and delight. Cf. JESPERSEN, 1938, 40–41:

. . . I was impatient when my bookseller could not obtain it quickly enough; . . . When it did come, and also in the following years, I went through that book more thoroughly than almost any other book, partly on my own, partly with private pupils, and later several times at the University, and I always found fresh things to admire in it, both in its fine transcription with its marking of sentence stress and in its choice of phrase; even now, so many years later, it is not surpassed by any book on any major language.

Not surprisingly, in the autumn semester of 1881, JESPERSEN was among the students attending the lectures on phonetics given by Vilhelm THOMSEN, «a man whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose» (as JESPERSEN later expressed himself in a letter to STORM [November 25, 1884 (in translation); cf. fn. 2]).<sup>5</sup>

3 See RISCHÉL 1989 on JESPERSEN's early interest in phonetics. As early as in 1884, JESPERSEN had «already for some time» been collecting data «with a view to giving some day a description of the phonetics and grammar» of Danish (letter to STORM dated November 25, 1884 (in translation)).

4 In his letter of November 25, 1884 to STORM, JESPERSEN, in a discussion of English /I/ compared to the vowel in Danish *ikke* and *slip*, adds (in translation): «. . . I must admit that I am most grateful to SWEET not only for what I have learned from his works about general phonetics (and, let me add, the conception of language in general) but also for his exact definition of Danish sounds. I fully agree with you that in this field his works tower above what we Danes have hitherto achieved. . . » (cf. MACMAHON, 1991, 14–16). See COLLINS (1988, 37) on «the indispensable foundation of all study of language», a phrase by which SWEET (1877, v) referred to (articulatory) phonetics. Cf. also COLLINS's observation (ibid.) that the «reverence for practical abilities of observation and imitation was part of SWEET's phonetic philosophy that he was to hand on to Daniel JONES» – and fn. 16 below.

5 Towards the end of his life, affectionately recalling THOMSEN's lectures, JESPERSEN wrote as follows: «. . . it was a great experience to be taught the things I only knew from books from the lips of a competent person: living sounds instead of dead letters. In his introduction he mentioned the Bell vowel system, which he regretted he knew only through Storm and Sweet, as Bell's main work *Visible Speech* was not available in the bookshops. Next time I was able to go up to him with the abridgement *Visible Speech for the Million*, which I had managed to buy but whose existence he had no idea of. This was the commencement of my acquaintance with this delightful man, who became my protector and friend until he died» (1938, 28–9; cf. also MACMAHON, 1991, 12–14).

Of significance also for JESPERSEN's career as a language reformer was his translation into Danish<sup>6</sup> of Felix FRANKE,<sup>7</sup> *Die praktische Spracherlernung auf Grund der Psychologie und Physiologie der Sprache dargestellt*, which appeared in 1884. FRANKE's views on language teaching were very much in line with JESPERSEN's. According to FRANKE, the important thing was to absorb the foreign culture and the foreign way of thinking, and speech therefore took precedence over translation and grammar (cf. 1938, 38 and CHRISTOPHERSEN, 1972, 6). Until FRANKE's untimely death at the age of 25 in April 1886 quite a few letters were exchanged between FRANKE and JESPERSEN, in which thoughts on language teaching were developed. There was full agreement between the two on the vital importance of phonetic transcription, and when in November 1884 JESPERSEN informed FRANKE of his plan to publish an English grammar based on the spoken as well as the written language, with phonetic transcriptions included even in the sections on syntax and without any sharp division between syntax and morphology, FRANKE offered his full support. JESPERSEN's book, the first authored by him, appeared in July 1885 with the title *Kortfattet engelsk Grammatik for Tale- og Skriftsproget* (cf. SØRENSEN, 1989, 38). JESPERSEN received very favourable responses, if not in Denmark, from scholars abroad to whom he had sent it, for instance from VIËTOR and SWEET.<sup>8</sup> A Swedish version of the grammar appeared in the following year (JESPERSEN, 1886a; cf. BRATT, 1982, 173–4; 1984, 41, 45).

Undergraduate student though he was, JESPERSEN was thus by no means unknown when in 1886, together with LUNDELL and WESTERN, he founded *Quousque Tandem*<sup>9</sup> with the purpose of reforming modern language teaching in Scandinavia.<sup>10</sup> At that time he was a friend also of the French-

6 *Praktisk Tilegnelse af fremmede Sprog* (Copenhagen, 1884).

7 Felix FRANKE held no university degree, but had studied at various German universities and at the University of Geneva.

8 SWEET had some reservations about the reform movement. In a letter to STORM (December 16, 1886), his attitude was this: «. . . I do not believe in the Quousque Tandem principles, except for the first about beginning with phonetics texts. But in practice everyone seems to disregard this principle. . . . Even Franke (who was the best of them all) cannot tackle Satzphonetik, without which phonetic texts are only half-phonetic. What we want is, two or three men who will settle down quietly for ten years and work up the phonology, idioms, grammar etc. of their own natural speech. This is what I hope to do. . . .»

9 In his letter of March 27, 1887 to STORM, JESPERSEN invited him to become an honorary member and STORM accepted this invitation (cf. JESPERSEN's letter of March 20, 1888 to STORM).

10 Two years before, in his letter of December 2, 1884, JESPERSEN had found himself compelled to explain to STORM that he was not yet an M. A., mainly because (in translation) «my interests have made me work with what are not the set books and neglect other things specifically required for the examination; . . .» (cf. JESPERSEN, 1938, 46–7).

man Paul PASSY, who attended the conference at Stockholm (JESPERSEN, 1938, 45) and who had received substantial help from JESPERSEN (1938, 42)<sup>11</sup> while preparing the publication of a collection of phonetic texts in English after the death of FRANKE, who had previously been PASSY's adviser on this project. Shortly after his return from Stockholm JESPERSEN published an article on the programme of the language-reform movement («Den ny Sprogundervisnings Program») in the journal *Vor Ungdom* (JESPERSEN, 1886b).

The first point dealt with by JESPERSEN in his article is pronunciation. He recalls how, when first confronted with native speakers of French and English, he himself had difficulty not only in making himself understood but also in understanding the native pronunciation of words. His experience was by no means unique: in the 19th century the oral proficiency in foreign languages acquired by Danes at school was simply not good enough to enable them to communicate with native speakers when traveling and doing business abroad (SVANHOLT, 1968, 228). More attention, therefore, should be paid to pronunciation, and the oral instruction in schools should be accompanied by a consistent phonetic script. In most Danish<sup>12</sup> schools at this time the pronunciation of English was taught in accordance with J. LISTOV's system. LISTOV took the normal English spelling conventions as his point of departure, adding diacritics, using italics or inserting explanatory parentheses to indicate specific pronunciations. As a result the same sound could be denoted in several ways; similarly, for instance, there were seven different methods of indicating vowel length (JESPERSEN, 1886b, 355–8). No wonder that pupils were in for a surprise on their first meetings with native speakers of English. Since in JESPERSEN's view mere imitation was not enough for acquiring an acceptable pronunciation, it was of paramount importance to establish a phonetic script. Symbols should denote only one sound each, and new symbols should be introduced whenever necessary, so that a pupil would not associate Danish pronunciation with, for example, a completely different English sound. Finally, JESPERSEN found it advisable to introduce beginners to a foreign language by using phonetic script only. In this way, he maintained, they would be able to acquire a good pronunciation and a good oral proficiency without being confused by the orthographic conventions of the foreign language (1886b, 361–2).

11 PASSY had also asked JESPERSEN for assistance while working on his *Le français parlé* (1886); cf. JESPERSEN's letter of June 16, 1886 to STORM.

12 Cf. BRATT, 1977, 252–66 («Summary, The teaching of English in Sweden – a historical survey up to 1850») and her detailed and interesting description of books used in Sweden after 1820 (1977, 190–251).

In the second part of his article JESPERSEN (1886b, 363–8) criticizes the widespread rattling-off of grammatical paradigms and the use in foreign-language primers of disconnected sentences to illustrate grammatical points; cf. the following sentences taken from J. LISTOV's English primer (JESPERSEN, 1901a, 13; cf. LISTOV, 1864, 18):

My brother had not many lessons yesterday. Where had you been? The weather had been fine for a long time. This boy had only been in our house three or four weeks. Has your uncle had many tulips this year? How long had you had this frock?

Beginners should read coherent texts and they should not be forcefed with grammatical paradigms and exercises. In other words, a foreign language should be acquired in a *natural* manner. Taking inspiration from the British philosopher Herbert SPENCER and from *Inventional Geometry*,<sup>13</sup> JESPERSEN advocates the introduction of «inventional grammar» into Danish schools, a method by which pupils are to learn grammatical rules inductively. It might be added here that on the whole Herbert SPENCER, whose philosophical ideas were first brought to JESPERSEN's attention in his freshman year at Copenhagen University, exerted much influence on JESPERSEN's linguistic thinking (cf. 1938, 22; 1941, 5; J. E. NIELSEN, 1989, 13 and H. F. NIELSEN, 1989, 69). In JESPERSEN's *Sprogundervisning* (1901a, 101) Herbert SPENCER is once again (cf. JESPERSEN, 1886b, 363) quoted for the following utterance, «that intensely stupid custom, the teaching of grammar to children»!

As his third and final point JESPERSEN (1886b, 368–81) advocates the abolition or severe reduction of translation in foreign language teaching. Word and meaning should be linked in the foreign language itself and not through translation into the mother tongue which would prevent the natural absorption of the foreign language, inhibit communication and reduce the time actually spent on the foreign tongue. JESPERSEN therefore prefers paraphrase in the foreign language to translation, which should be used only when, for example, a new word or expression crops up.

After finishing his M. A. degree at Copenhagen in the summer of 1887, JESPERSEN went abroad for a year (England, Germany and France). During his stay in England he had begun to collect material for an English primer drawn up according to the principles outlined in his 1886 paper, and in

13 *Inventional Geometry* was the title of a very popular introductory book on geometry authored by W. G. SPENCER, Herbert SPENCER's father, and first published in London in 1860. It was translated into Danish by Georg BENDIX in 1886 under the title *Populær Geometri til Brug ved den første Undervisning* and with prefatory notes by H. HØFFDING and Herbert SPENCER (Copenhagen, Brødrene Salmonsens).

Germany, in 1888, he had sat in on H. KLINGHARDT's English classes at Reichenbach. According to JESPERSEN (1938, 56), KLINGHARDT had probably been more successful in introducing the new teaching methods than anybody else at that time. After returning to Copenhagen JESPERSEN began teaching French at Frederiksberg school, where he had been offered full freedom of method in his language classes. No adequate French primers were available, so he had to prepare a beginners' book of his own, *Fransk Læsebog efter Lydskriftmetoden* (JESPERSEN, 1889). Unlike later editions of this primer the first edition in the initial phase used phonetic script only and not the normal French spelling system (1938, 65; cf. SKOVGAARD-PETERSEN, 1976, 163–4).

Most important among his textbooks was undoubtedly the English primer, *Engelsk Begynderbog* (2 vols.), which JESPERSEN published in 1895 and 1896 together with Christian SARAUW. By this time JESPERSEN had become a *Dr. Phil.* (JESPERSEN, 1891) and Professor of English (1893) and had little time and motivation for publishing the English beginners' book which he had begun working on during his year abroad in 1887–8 (cf. above and 1938, 86). However, his former colleague at Frederiksberg school (and later colleague at Copenhagen University, where he became Professor of German in 1908), Christian SARAUW, who taught beginners' courses in English, invited JESPERSEN to collaborate in publishing an English primer. Material from American schoolbooks was incorporated in the primer, and a visit to England in 1894 enabled JESPERSEN to go through part of the manuscript with native English speakers (1938, 87). In comparison with the first edition of his French primer and in view of the ideas concerning pronunciation which he advanced in 1886 (cf. above) it is interesting to see how pupils are introduced to phonetic script and normal English orthography at the same time, phonetic script being placed at first under or next to regular script (cf. below) and in later editions on right-hand pages (1938, 87; cf. CHRISTOPHERSEN, 1989, 1). Throughout the two volumes of the primer there is a steady progression in the difficulty of the texts, which – although themselves coherent – deal with widely diverging subjects. Grammar is nowhere allowed to stand out mechanically or dogmatically but is «smuggled in gradually» (CHRISTOPHERSEN, 1989, 2; JESPERSEN, 1938, 87; cf. also BÆKKESKOV-OLSEN, 1969, 138–9). A few years later a Dutch edition was published (JESPERSEN & SARAUW, 1898; 1899).

1.



*Retskrivning.*

I can hop. I can run.  
See me hop! See me run!  
It is fun, fun, fun!

I can hop on one leg.  
Can you? Yes. — Let me  
see if you can. Yes, that  
is very good.

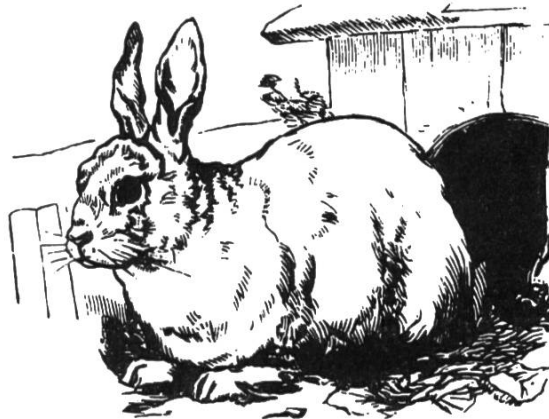
*Udtale.*

ai kãn hãp. ai kãn rãn.  
si· mi· hãp! si· mi· rãn!  
it iz fãn, fãn, fãn.

ai kãn hãp ån wãn leg. kãn ju·? jes. — let mi· si·  
if ju· kãn. jes, ðåt iz veri gud.

2.

one leg  
one ear



two legs  
two ears

1

(JESPERSEN & SARAUF, 1895, 1)



Among his efforts to improve the pronunciation of English in Denmark and Scandinavia should be mentioned JESPERSEN's phonetic transcription of the English vocabulary in John BRYNILDSEN's English and Dano-Norwegian dictionary (1902–7). This transcription seems to be the first in an English dictionary to take full account of phonetic reduction and loss in unaccented syllables (CHRISTOPHERSEN, 1972, 7; 1989, 10; JESPERSEN, 1902, xii)<sup>14</sup> and, according to JESPERSEN (1938, 98), the only one to do so until the publication of Daniel JONES's *English Pronouncing Dictionary* in 1917.<sup>15</sup> In 1901 JESPERSEN published a full-scale book on modern language teaching, *Sprogundervisning*, repeating and elaborating on the reform ideas advanced by JESPERSEN and his Scandinavian *Quousque Tandem* colleagues in 1886 (cf. SVANHOLT, 1968, 233–47). He stresses particularly the use of phonetics and phonetic script in language teaching, which he calls one of the most significant pedagogical advances of his time (1901a, 166).<sup>16</sup> *Sprogundervisning* appeared in an English translation three

14 Questions relating to vowels in unaccented syllables are among the points of special interest in the correspondence between STORM and SWEET (cf. STORM to SWEET, January 21, 1889 [«Queries to Sweet»] and February 23, 1889 [rewritten and abbreviated]; SWEET to STORM, February 18, 1889 and April 7, 1889).

15 JESPERSEN is not quite correct here: «... In this [BRYNILDSEN's dictionary], in contrast to the dictionaries then existing, I managed to indicate the actual weak or unstressed sounds in non-accented syllables; English and American dictionaries indicated the same sounds as in stressed syllables right up to the publication of Daniel Jones's pronouncing dictionary in 1917.» In fact, MICHAËLIS & JONES (1913) – «now generally forgotten ... though important as a pioneering work», as COLLINS (1988, 387) remarks – is a counter-example. For a fascinating account of the principles behind JONES's dictionaries and his battles with Robert BRIDGES over unstressed vowels, see COLLINS, 1988, 139–45, 154–8, 201–10. See also COLLINS, 1988, 395–8, 428–33 for a penetrating summing-up of JONES's contribution to practical and theoretical phonetics, and cf. COLLINS, 1985, 47–9.

16 Strangely enough, in his autobiography JESPERSEN, who, in the words of COLLINS (1988, 56), «like Passy and Jones ... was a master of lucid explanation, being a convinced believer in the importance of applied linguistics, especially in language teaching», has only a couple of brief references to JONES. Their critical nature demonstrates the diverging opinions of two kindred souls. Thus, referring to the Copenhagen Conference on Phonetic Transcription (1925), JESPERSEN makes the following observation: «... Daniel Jones's over-utilitarian views ('I'm no philologist') rather irritated the rest of us; but we were impressed by the sureness of his mastery of many difficult sound systems, and were grateful to him for his exposition of his system of cardinal vowels» (1938, 186–7); and in Chapter 16 («Retrospect») JESPERSEN has the following observation:

«Scholarly research ought not to have an eye for the possible use of the results, 'Utilitarian knowledge needs to be fructified by disinterested investigation, which has no motive beyond the desire to understand the world' (Bertrand RUSSELL). I was rather scandalized recently by reading an article by Daniel Jones, 'The Aims of Phonetics', in the first issue of the new *Archiv für die gesamte Phonetik*, in which only the practical usefulness of phonetics was emphasized without any kind of understanding of the value of the theoretical or historical study of language. Very much in my books and articles – and perhaps that which is in itself most valuable – is aimed exclusively at pure disinterested theory, at merely penetrating the essence of language (and language sounds) in order to expand

years later under the title *How to Teach a Foreign Language* (JESPERSEN, 1904), and from there it was translated into Spanish and Japanese. 1935 saw the publication of a second, less polemical edition of the Danish version of the book.

Thus, JESPERSEN's very early interest in phonetics, primarily inspired by the mere desire «to understand the world» (cf. above, fn. 16), became a highly influential factor in the development of the Continental reform movement. In Britain, on the other hand, as pointed out by LEITNER (1989, 32), many phoneticians regarded their science as a means of social integration – a point of view that was given a great deal of attention with the advent of broadcasting, «The less fortunate [among us]» as LLOYD JAMES put it (1933, 38–9), «are limited . . . in regard to . . . the speech outfits and you cannot raise social standards without raising the level of speech». (See also HONEY, 1985, 242–4; JUUL, NIELSEN & SØRENSEN, 1988; ix–xxxii; LEITNER, 1982; 1983.)

Let us now go on to discuss the extent to which the reform movement was successful in Denmark in introducing new language teaching methods at this time. It is true that in several respects JESPERSEN's efforts – closely bound up with his studies in the psychology of language (cf. VEJLESKOW, 1989) – were crowned with success. The English primer he had written in collaboration with SARAUW had become widely used in Danish schools by the turn of the century. But there can be no doubt either that JESPERSEN's reform plans were met with considerable scepticism,<sup>17</sup> especially concerning his wish to abolish translation. Even teachers who were in favour of the «direct method» in other respects, e.g. Vilhelm STIGAARD<sup>18</sup> (cf. SKOVGAARD-PETERSEN, 1976, 164), dissociated themselves from JESPERSEN on this point: translation was felt to be an indispensable and economical

our theoretical insight. – But *alongside this* in much of my work I have undeniably endeavoured to bring out something that may be of direct or indirect benefit to practical living, . . .» (1938, 219–20). See further below.

17 The minutes of a meeting arranged for grammar-school teachers in 1902 (*De lærde Skolers Lærerforening* . . . 108–94) afford ample evidence of the considerable degree of uncertainty with which teachers regarded the reform that was just round the corner (1903; see below). Here JESPERSEN's farsighted attitude and his optimism are of particular interest, e.g. his insistence on language proficiency as a vehicle for *cultural* education (116–17) through the study of a variety of themes (cf. JESPERSEN, 1903) including not only Britain and its links with South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada but also America (118–19). See also JESPERSEN, 1938, 100.

18 STIGAARD had been a friend of JESPERSEN's since 1881–2 when both were undergraduate students of French (JESPERSEN, 1938, 29). As grammar-school master of French and as author of textbooks STIGAARD was in favour of phonetic script (SKOVGAARD-PETERSEN, 1976, 162, 164). Stigaard's name is listed among the fellow reformers to whom JESPERSEN dedicated the second edition of his *Sprogundervisning* (1935).

method of controlling that a text had been properly understood by the pupils; cf. SØRENSEN, 1969, 135; SVANHOLT, 1968, 249. In a book, *Den daglige Undervisnings Form*, published one year after JESPERSEN'S *Sprogundervisning* appeared in 1901, Ernst KAPER, a grammar-school teacher of German, stresses the absolute necessity of dinning elementary grammar into the pupils when they start learning a foreign language (SVANHOLT, 1968, 251). It is a far cry from KAPER'S grammatical approach to JESPERSEN'S «inventional grammar»! Many language teachers also had some difficulty in understanding the necessity of introducing phonetic script, at least to the same extent as proposed by JESPERSEN. Phonetic script was felt by some teachers to be a scholarly pursuit which should be used only for denoting diverging pronunciation; cf. SKOVGAARD-PETERSEN, 1976, 164. JESPERSEN'S ideas met with least opposition with respect to their greater emphasis on oral proficiency, although a few teachers stuck to the belief that pupils would be able to learn to speak a foreign language by mere imitation and that therefore it was not up to schools to teach oral proficiency (SKOVGAARD-PETERSEN, 1976, 164).

When publishing the second edition of his *Sprogundervisning* in 1935, JESPERSEN found that the quality of foreign-language teaching in Denmark had improved since the publication of the first edition of the book. Among the reasons given for this (1935, 158–64) can be mentioned the improved training of language teachers and the fact that much more time was available for modern languages than had been the case in 1901. A turning-point in the language teaching in Danish grammar schools was the Education Act of 1903, introducing a modern language side in which English, German and French were the major subjects. Up to this time Latin had taken up a predominant position in Danish grammar schools, and even when an educational reform was being discussed at the turn of the century, the proposal was made that certain schools, on an experimental basis, should introduce a «modern humanities» side in which Latin was to be the major subject (and this in spite of the fact that Classics was to be retained along with Mathematics as the other two options). JESPERSEN countered this proposal in an article published in 1901 in the journal *Tilskueren*, where, among other things, he wrote (in translation):

Latin is a cuckoo in the nest, which has entered our schools and is there devouring far too much precious time. By resolutely flinging it out of the nest, we can stuff this extra time into the beaks of all the legitimate youngsters who are screeching for more food.

(1901b, 437, cf. 1938, 99 and SKOVGAARD-PETERSEN, 1976, 185). Both in his student days and later as a professor, JESPERSEN had worked hard to

make Latin an optional minor subject instead of an obligatory one for the M.A. degree at Copenhagen University, and he achieved his goal in 1901 (cf. J.E. NIELSEN, 1989, 23 and H.F. NIELSEN, 1989, 70). The position of Latin was seen as a major obstacle to increasing the amount of time and effort spent on modern languages as well as other useful subjects both at university and in grammar schools. By 1903 the position of Latin had been decisively weakened at both levels.<sup>19</sup>

However, the improvements in foreign-language teaching after 1903 would hardly have been possible were it not for the fact that the question of the further education of teachers in the Folkeskole (primary and lower-secondary education) was given more attention. The idea of courses for teachers had actually been nurtured since 1856: the years 1856–60 had seen the start of a series of courses (including one in English) which were to develop gradually into the present Royal Danish School of Educational Studies. The creative spirit behind these courses was the lynx-eyed Prime Minister, D.G. MONRAD. In a parliamentary debate in February 1864 he observed that in provincial towns a need for English had indeed been noticed but on closer inspection it had turned out that the English that was taught was (in translation) «not the language spoken in England; it was a rather peculiar kind of English. . .» (OLRIK, 1906, 23). MONRAD's happy thought was quite simple yet revolutionary: the knowledge you impart to teachers, he pointed out in 1864, is like «a deposit yielding immediate interest for the benefit of a great many» (OLRIK, 1906, 4).

Throughout the period until the turn of the century, courses in English were highly popular (OLRIK, 1906, 187) and from 1898 to 1901, at the request of Hans OLRIK, then principal of the School of Educational Studies, JESPERSEN was responsible for an annually recurring course in phonetics (1938, 85; OLRIK, 1906, 107); also, a few years later, he took an

19 In a country close to JESPERSEN's heart, in England, an attempt was made to retain or even strengthen the role of Latin (WALMSLEY, 1989). Here a grammar series was established, the Parallel Grammar Series, in which school grammars of languages such as English, French, German, Greek and Latin were all written according to principles laid down by E. A. SONNENSCHNEIN, Professor of Greek and Latin at Birmingham from 1883 to 1918. In SONNENSCHNEIN's opinion, uniformity of classification and terminology and uniformity of scope and format in the grammar series would facilitate the language instruction in English schools. SONNENSCHNEIN's ideas were looked on with approval by many of his contemporaries, but certainly not by JESPERSEN, who was strongly opposed to any type of «squinting grammar» and who criticized SONNENSCHNEIN for, e. g., declining English nouns in five cases, a procedure not even justifiable on pedagogical grounds (JESPERSEN, 1924, 173–80, esp. 180; cf. also CHRISTOPHERSEN, 1989, 7). To tie up the grammar of Latin with that of a modern language might make Latin a more useful subject, but in JESPERSEN's view it was hardly a boon to the teaching of modern languages. No wonder that SONNENSCHNEIN thought of JESPERSEN as his arch-enemy!

active part in the holiday courses that had been set up for teachers (1938, 120).

Thus JESPERSEN, through his multi-faceted pioneer work, had blazed the trail for his successors but when, shortly before the Second World War, at the age of 78, he looked back on his contribution to linguistics and language teaching, he was essentially modest. In his own words (1938, 220):

All this is bound up with my whole basic view of the nature of language as human labour to enable one person to grasp another's thought, feeling, and will. From this there necessarily follows the evaluative view with its two poles: easy to produce and easy to grasp; the best is that which, with the least effort, achieves the easiest, fullest, and most certain understanding. But from this all the rest follows, including the ethical task of working for an approach to this ideal.

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Otto JESPERSEN (1887)

By courtesy of the Royal Library, Copenhagen

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