

Titel: Various extracts and notes, [EFJ-DIDERICHSEN1] 033-0020

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2^o. In some cases the "Laws" partly seem to be directives for the most convenient description. Thus the "vowel-geometry" of Trubetzkoy may be regarded more modestly as advice for perspicuous arrangements of vowel-systems, which make the relevant oppositions appear in a very clear manner. As a matter of fact every vowel-system may be arranged either as a triangle, or as a rectangle, the outer sides of which show the same number of vowels, and the universality of the "law" might therefore be a mere reflex of this general possibility.

3^o. The only sound attitude, I think, towards most of these general laws, is to regard them as hypothetical generalisations based on empirical material, which is in many cases too scanty and heterogenous as to give secure predictions concerning future experiences, but certainly as worthfull points of departure which may be kept in mind by further research in order to gather new material for corroboration, falsification, or modification.

Grammont and Frei admit that the validity of the so-called Lautgesetze are restricted both locally and temporally, but "dans les limites des temps et d'espace qui lui sont propres une loi phonétique vaut d'une manière absolue ... Si une articulation se transforme dans un seul cas, elle se transforme également partout ailleurs, sauf obstacle particulier. Les lois phonétiques n'ont pas d'exception qui ne puisse admettre une explication psychologique ou historique, parce qu'elles sont le produit de causes inhérentes au langage d'un temps et d'un lieu déterminés, et qu'il n'intervient dans leur action nulle volonté humaine." I don't know if it is necessary to comment on this manifest of the last great Junggrammatiker, but it may be due to my subject to point out the decisive theoretical weakness of the theory. Everybody knows that there are lots of facts in linguistic change which are not explicable by psychological or historical reasons. This, of course, may be due to our lacking understanding or our lacking knowledge of the past. But a theory which frankly admits unexplicable exceptions, cannot be falsified by any empirical datum, and such a theory differs essentially from the so-called laws of natural sciences. Another weakness is the vast possibilities for explanations of apparent exceptions from the Lautgesetze: all sorts of analogic change may be stated, stressless or emphatic variants may be adduced, or the form may be considered as archaic literary, dialectal, emotive, individual etc. One sometimes wonder that there really are cases left which don't permit any explication.