Adam Smith Reviewed

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PETER JONES and ANDREW S. SKINNER

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Languages

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Adam Smith: grammatical economist

FRANS PLANK

I

The Theory of Moral Sentiments says relatively little about language. It seemed to Adam Smith that the rules of justice, being precise, accurate, and indispensable, could usefully be compared to the rules of grammar, while the rules of the other virtues (such as chastity or veracity), on account of their looseness, vagueness, and indeterminacy, were more like 'the rules which critics lay down for the attainment of what is sublime and elegant in composition' (TMS III. vi. 11, VII. iv. 1). And, speaking of veracity, in a passage added in the sixth edition, Smith speculated that it was perhaps 'the desire of being believed, the desire of persuading, of leading and directing other people' upon which is founded the faculty of speech, speech being 'the great instrument of ambition' (TMS VII. iv. 25). Tangential though such comments may seem to the concerns of Adam Smith, the moral philosopher, the very aspects of language touched on so lightly in his first *chef-d'oeuvre* had once occupied much of his time. From 1748 to 1751 he had first distinguished himself among the Edinburgh *literati* as a public lecturer on that loose, vague, and indeterminate subject, rhetoric and belles-lettres. In 1751 his inaugural address as Professor of Logic and Rhetoric at the University of Glasgow was devoted to the origin of ideas, and throughout his thirteen years at Glasgow University, soon transferred to the Chair of Moral Philosophy, he continued to lecture on rhetoric and belles-lettres. His first publication, appearing in the *Edinburgh Review* of 1755, took issue with Dr Samuel Johnson on the insufficiently grammatical arrangement of the diverse meanings and uses of the items in his otherwise useful

Dictionary.[1] While Adam Smith did not care to have his rhetoric course preserved for posterity (on the contrary, he instructed his literary executors to burn the manuscript, but thanks to the notes students had taken in the session of 1762–3, which resurfaced in 1961, we know approximately what it was like), he set a high value on one part of it, namely the third lecture, treating 'Of the origin and progress of language'. He worked up this lecture into an article entitled 'Considerations concerning the first formation of Languages, and the different genius of original and compounded Languages' and published in *The Philological Miscellany* of 1761, a collection of translations mostly from the *Mémoires* of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres of Paris, of which Smith was once supposed, perhaps wrongly, to have been the editor (cf. Bryce's Introduction to the Glasgow Edition, p. 26). Presumably because this *Miscellany* was not very accessible, Smith had this cherished essay of his reprinted as an appendix of the third (1767) and subsequent editions of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. He might with more justification have foisted this piece on the readers of his *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, who would perhaps more easily have recognised certain common conceptual themes. But this would have entailed a delay of about a decade as this second magnum opus, although likewise deriving from lectures Smith had given at Glasgow and Edinburgh, was rather long in the making – and the popularity of the topic of linguistic evolution was rising.

Notwithstanding the not very felicitous choice of a host, the parasitic existence of Smith's *Dissertation on the Origin of Languages*, as it was called on the title page of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, was remarkably successful. There were few contemporary writers on language, especially in Scotland, who would not acknowledge their indebtedness to Smith's dissertation (or his lectures on which it was based), irrespective of sometimes wide disagreements. Its impact abroad is reflected by the appearance of at least four different French translations, of which three were published independently of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (cf. Noordegraaf 1977). When ideological opponents of Smith, such as the brothers Schlegel, the prime movers of Romanticism, aired views after the turn of the century on the development and classification of languages that bore some resemblance to Smith's, this was soon noticed (for example, by Manget 1809), and they were eventually taken to task

for having failed to acknowledge their predecessor (for example, by Pott 1876 and, more recently, by Coseriu 1968; cf. Plank 1987a).[2]

My aim in this chapter is to appraise the significance of Smith's dissertation as a contribution to language typology. That the celebrated moral philosopher and political economist did pioneering work also in this rather more peripheral department of learning has not gone unnoticed, and has lately become the conventional wisdom of historians of linguistics, owing in particular to Eugenio Coseriu (1968) who, much like August Friedrich Pott (1876) a century earlier, saluted Adam Smith as the actual founder of typology, or at least as the anticipator of the typological scheme(s) which Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel used to be credited with. It also transpired, however, that Adam Smith, the language typologist, had incurred intellectual debts too. And his chief creditors were easy to identify because Smith himself had acknowledged, not in his dissertation but in a letter to George Baird, that it was Gabriel Girard's *Les vrais principes de la langue françoise* (1747), meanwhile also widely recognised as an early typological classic, 'which first set me a thinking upon these subjects', and that the grammatical articles in Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* 'have given me a good deal of entertainment' (Rae 1895, p. 160). There is an unfortunate tendency among historians of linguistics to regard early typology as amounting to no more than a rough classification of languages into ones with much and ones with little or no inflexional morphology, with perhaps concomitant variations in the rigidity of word order. This preconception about what could, at the most, be apprehended about the systematic diversity of languages in the eighteenth century was responsible for a certain inattention to matters of detail; and in the case of Smith's considerations about grammatical structures, their origins and transformations, their real typological significance does lie in subtle details, as I hope to show in my reading. It had, at any rate, long been appreciated that languages could be grossly divided into inflecting and non-inflecting (or rudimentarily inflecting) ones, and it certainly was not Smith's intention merely to promulgate this sweeping generalisation, adopted even in such general works of the past century as Francis Bacon's *De dignitate et augmentis scientiarum* (1623) or John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693). His idea was to outline structural classes which would represent, and be explicable as, successive stages of linguistic, cognitive and social evolution.

II

From the original setting of the *Considerations Concerning the First Formation of Languages* one might infer that Smith's interest in language diversity and its *raisons d'être* must have been derivative of his primary concern with rhetoric and stylistics. In fact, however, it is only the short final section of the *Considerations* (paragraphs 42–5), evaluating ancient and modern languages, which is of such provenance. The most substantial first part (paragraphs 1–32) is an exercise in 'conjectural' or 'theoretical' history (as Dugald Stewart characterised this method of probing into the very distant past, already in vogue in contemporary France, in the wake especially of Locke and Montesquieu), developing a scenario of the early formation of languages with particular reference to parts of speech (or word classes) and inflexional morphology, that indispensable core of grammar where, as in justice, precision and accuracy reign. The second part (paragraphs 33–41) deals with actual history and highlights the role of the mixture of languages and peoples in changes of grammatical structure. These two historical issues, conjectural and actual, arguably were the subjects upon which Adam Smith was set thinking by the Abbé Gabriel Girard, with a little further prompting from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose discourse *Sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* of 1755, instantly taken notice of by Smith (see his Letter to the *Edinburgh Review* of 1755), had made a memorable, though not entirely unequivocal case for 'le premier langage de l'homme' being 'le cri de la Nature'. Rousseau in turn had drawn inspiration on this matter from Etienne Bonnot de Condillac's *Essai sur l'origine des connoissances humaines* (1746) as well as from John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), and at least the earlier of these two essays obviously was not news to Smith. Nicolas Beauzée's appearance in the *Encyclopédie* came too late (1765) to entertain and instruct Smith; César Chesneau du Marsais, his predecessor as chief linguistic contributor to the *Encyclopédie*, was less concerned with the Smithian theme of linguistic evolution than with key grammatical categories, but such knowledge could also be useful.[3]

Adam Smith was not an empirical comparatist of the calibre of his Edinburgh contemporary, James Burnett (Lord Monboddo), to mention only one of the philosophers who were beginning to see

the natural history of man and his institutions, including language, as an 'experimental' rather than as a purely theoretical and conjectural enterprise. To be sure, Smith, too, had sought to acquaint himself with peoples living in the different states through which mankind was, in his view, bound to pass (hunting, pasturage, farming, commerce). In his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and especially his *Lectures on Jurisprudence* he would refer, if often only *en passant*, to North American Indians (in particular the Iroquois and the West Indian Sugar Islanders), to Hottentots and negro inhabitants of the coast of Guinea and Africa in general, to the Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Javanese and East Indians, to Caucasians and Armenians, to Scythians, Tartars, Turkomans and Arabs, to Jews and Muscovites, and to Greeks, Romans, Teutons and their descendants. As to languages, mention is made in the *Considerations* of Ancient and Modern Greek, Etruscan, Latin, Gothic, the older Germanic tongues of the Lombards, Franks, and Saxons, French, Italian, (Old) Armenian, Hebrew, the languages of some savage nations Smith had read of (presumably in Charlevoix's *Histoire et description générale de la Nouvelle France* (1744), Lafitau's *Mœurs des sauvages amériquains* (1724), and Kolb[en]'s *The Present State of the Cape of Good Hope* (1731) – acknowledged sources in his *Lectures on Jurisprudence*), and above all, English. Smith was certainly less knowledgeable about the grammars of most of these languages than he was about the modes of subsistence of their speakers. But for him this was not something to worry about unduly:[4] at least to begin with, he ostensibly did not care for any of these languages actually attested in history at all, occupying himself instead with 'original' languages and even 'primitive jargons', whose existence was in the realms of conjectural history.

Smith's interest is not so much in the very first origins of what might legitimately be called human speech – the question that had been taxing the ingenuity of Condillac and Rousseau – as in the principled elaboration of the primitive jargons by those already endowed with these languages of sorts.[5] Crucial for this process are, first of all, the mental operations which the language-formers are capable of performing, and which are essentially the same as those still performed, if more expertly, by present-day man: (a) comparison, leading to discrimination or generalisation in response to differences or similarities in nature, and (b) abstraction, enabling mental representations to arrive at 'metaphysical analyses' of

monolithic realities of nature.[6] There are, secondly, momentous conditions on the formation, or (as one might put it) 'articulation', of language which derive from psychological propensities and physiological limitations of sign-users of all ages: inclining towards (c) diagrammatisation (called 'love of analogy' by Smith), they seek to mirror the syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships between the *denotata*, as represented in the mind, in the form of the denotations; and, being subject to (d) limitations of memory, they are prevented from storing an infinite number of expressions in their attempts to cope with the infinity of potential *denotata*. Aesthetic propensities, too, exert an influence on the elaboration of language: possessed of 'a certain spirit of system' and 'a certain love of art and contrivance' (which, as was explained in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* IV. i. 11, make man value the means more than the end, but all the same tend to promote the public welfare), language-formers are given to embellishing their sign systems with (e) 'similarities of sound', 'returns of the same syllables', i.e. rhyme.[7] These mental operations and cognitive and aesthetic conditions are intended to account for the way the pathetically modest categorial outfit of primitive jargons, little more than *cris de la Nature*, is expanding with increasing expressive demands, and in particular for the appearance of inflexional morphology prior to separate words with purely grammatical functions: A last general psychological assumption, intended to account for later, more revolutionary grammatical developments, is (f) that the untutored learning of a foreign language by adults is incomparably more difficult, hence more disruptive, than children's acquisition of their first language.

Language, or rather jargon, formation begins when particular events, existing in nature, are denoted by linguistic expressions. This primordial mode of denotation is holistic: complete events are denoted by atomic expressions without any internal structure (except a phonetic one). All particular events differing from one another, however minimally, call for distinct expression, and thus accumulates a lexicon of event denotations. These are called 'impersonal verbs' by Smith, but unlike their namesakes and descendants in later languages (such as Latin *pluit* 'it rains') they are applicable initially to particular events only, rather than to classes of similar events. By abstraction, events are then cognitively divided into their metaphysical elements, namely substances and

attributes, and with linguistic expression following suit, these are denoted respectively by nouns substantive and personal verbs. In principle, the separation of substances from attributes, with nouns substantive thus 'ascertaining and determining the signification' of, as it were, unsaturated personal verbs, is a step that may be repeated. In his *Considerations* Smith only illustrates the externalisation of substances which are destined to be combined with personal verbs as their grammatical subjects; but, given initial complete event denotations such as 'the-hunter-kill-the-wolf-with-the-stone-in-the-forest', it is virtually inevitable that objects and more circumstantial specifications will also be separated from the increasingly less comprehensive verbal core by the metaphysical analysts. In Smith's letter to George Baird of 7 February 1763 it is in fact suggested that subjects are only the first substances to be divided from attributes, and that objects would come next, yielding double unsaturated, or bivalent or transitive, personal verbs.

As an exclusively lexical denotation system is thus being transformed into a grammatical, i.e. combinatorial one, the obvious gain is that fewer distinct basic expressions are needed: instead of having to coin and memorise a novel denotation for any new event even when it shares the substance(s) or the attribute with another event, the new smaller-sized basic building blocks, namely nouns substantive and personal verbs, can now be intercombined freely. Much labour of the memory is facilitated and abridged by the application of proper, i.e. grammatical, expressive machinery – to adapt a phrase from *The Wealth of Nations* (I. i. 8). A coincidental advantage of the advent of the combinatorial mode is that the similarities between events sharing one or the other of their elements are now reflected diagrammatically by the partial formal identities of their composite denotations.

Smith is strangely non-committal concerning the relative historical priority of substance and event expressions. His exposition begins with nouns substantive (resembling Girard's, who also had the verb trailing the nominal parts of speech), but by the logic of his theoretical assumptions it is clearly the impersonal verb which must have come first in evolution.[8] For Smith this issue is, at any rate, less important than the subsequent elaboration of the stock of denotations of particular events and particular substances, proceeding in parallel.

Once the original proper names of particular substances have been transformed, by comparison–generalisation, into common

nouns substantive denoting multitudes of substances of the same kind[9] – at which point 'primitive jargons' become 'original languages' – there ensues the expressive necessity to distinguish substances from others of the same kind, now sharing the same general denotation; this is accomplished by the recognition of qualities peculiar to them. Once events have been metaphysically analysed into their constituent parts (see above), substances are also distinguished as to their syntagmatic relations (such as, in modern parlance, agent, patient, recipient, instrument, or subject, object, adverbial) relative to attributes or other substances. A third sort of difference, suggested by comparison–discrimination, consists in the quantities in which substances occur. In accordance with the increasing difficulty they present for the generalising and abstracting mind, quality distinctions are made before relational ones, which in turn precede quantity distinctions. The appearance of some quality distinctions (such as those of animacy, sex, size, or colour) before others, of some relational distinctions (such as local ones) before others, and of same quantity distinctions (such as those between individuals, pairs, and larger groups) before others, likewise reflects their relative cognitive difficulties.

In order to be able to express all such distinctions made in the mind, a speech community could create a multitude of distinct expressions of the class of nouns substantive, each denoting holistically a particular substance or kind of substance together with the respective quality, relation, and quantity. This, however, would soon overburden the speakers' memories, and would also run counter to their fondness for diagrammatisation. On both grounds a grammatical, combinatory solution would again, as in the case of the breaking-up of event denotations into substance and attribute denotations, be preferable to a lexical one. By means of distributing the expressive labour between basic lexical units and grammatical elements with a distinguishing function, novel composite expressions could be produced for the different qualities, relations, and quantities of one and the same substance as well as for the same qualities, relations, and quantities of different substances, which would partially resemble one another in form corresponding to the partial identities between their *denotata*. Smith now envisages two variants of the grammatical solution: one consists in the innovation of new classes of basic expressions for the newly distinguished classes of *denotata*, namely, of nouns adjective for

qualities, prepositions for relations, and quantifiers (including numerals) for quantities, syntactically recombinable to yield complex substance expressions; the other introduces morphological complexity, consisting in the formal variation of the inherited nouns substantive themselves. Initially the morphological variant will be more congenial to language-formers, not yet at the height of their comparing and especially abstracting powers.

Smith's contention that it requires less comparative and abstractive effort to express distinctions by formal variations of nouns substantive than by separate words predisposes him to ascribe peculiar formal properties to these morphological variations or modifications. Qualities, relations and quantities inseparably coexist with substances in nature; their metaphysical separation is only accomplished by abstraction. It is, thus, most 'natural', as well as most diagrammatic, to express quality, relational and quantity distinctions by inflexions of nouns substantive for gender (or also diminution/augmentation), case and number, since such formal variations too are, morphologically speaking, inseparable from the substance denotations they serve to vary: the meaningful parts 'thoroughly mixed and blended' after all constitute single words rather than syntactic constructions. Historically, these inflexional variations are supposed to have actually grown out of the originally invariable nouns substantive. Without especially emphasising this point, Smith implies that language-formers vary parts, in particular terminations, of the original form of words, thereby creating paradigmatic contrasts and imbuing the variable parts with meaning or, more precisely, semantically distinctive force. (For example, by altering the two final sounds of an originally invariable noun substantive such as *lupus* ('wolf'), one could produce a pair of words, *lupus* and, say, *lupa*, containing an invariable core, *lup-*, and variable terminations, *-us* and *-a*, and this paradigmatic contrast could be used to express distinctions such as the qualitative one between wolves of male and female sex.) Given a stock of nouns substantive differing randomly in their phonetic make-up, the variations of their terminations thus semanticised will initially also differ a great deal from one word to the other, and will continue to do so as long as truly general notions of qualities, relations and quantities, invariably recurring with all different kinds of substances, have not been attained. (For example, given two nouns substantive such as *lupus* ('he-wolf') and *arbor* ('tree'),[10]

it is to be expected that, once their terminations are varied to express relational contrasts, the sets of their inflexions will be different, consisting, say, of *-us/-ī/-ō/-um/-ō/-e* with *lup-* and of *-Ø/-is/-ī/-em/-e/-Ø* with *arbor-*.) When nouns substantive need to be qualified for more than one category at the same time, the necessary changes could be made in different places, provided the original words are sufficiently long. Smith, however, tacitly assumes that all distinctions will be expressed cumulatively in the termination. (For example, a single final sound *-ō*, contrasting with *-ae*, as well as with *-us/-ī/-um/-e*, as well as with *-īs*, could thus be made to differentiate gender (masculine), case (dative), and number (singular) in association with *lup-* ('wolf').) Consequently, as qualities, relations and quantities proliferate, the variations of the terminations of nouns substantive needed to express them will multiply. If there are as few as three genders (which is the maximum Smith had encountered), ten cases (as supposedly in Old Armenian),[11] and three numbers (as in Greek, Gothic and Hebrew), a word would need as many as ninety variants to distinguish them all cumulatively by contrasts in its termination. The non-uniformity of these terminal inflexions across different words further increases the formal variations that need to be memorised at this stage.

Owing to the haphazard manner of their creation, inflexional systems of this kind are liable to grow unwieldy, unless they are regularised at least to some extent. What causes most offence in Smith's view is the near-random variety of the set of inflexions associated with words of the same class, nouns substantive. In consequence of the love of analogy, the human disposition that is so fundamental to grammar, these sets of inflexions are made more uniform, presumably (and this is my interpretation) by the transference of one inflexional set to words which had previously been inflected differently or not inflected at all. This transition from chaos to order, from inflexions peculiar to individual words, hence to be memorised individually, to inflexions applicable to larger groups of words, hence predictable by more or less general rules, is effected 'insensibly, and by slow degrees' and 'without any intention or foresight in those who first set the example, and who never meant to establish any general rule' (paragraph 16). As if led by an invisible hand, the language-improvers thus promote ends which were not part of their original intention (to adapt another phrase which Smith was so fond of as to use it in both *The Theory*

of Moral Sentiments IV. i. 10 and *The Wealth of Nations* IV. ii. 9, and indeed already in an essay on the history of astronomy, written prior to 1758).

If the formers of original languages, despite such gradual improvements in point of regularity, eventually switch from the morphological to the syntactic mode of composite denotation and introduce special parts of speech to take care of tasks previously fulfilled by inflexion, it is because their powers of comparison and abstraction have matured and because syntax is more economical than even regularised inflexion. Considering that sex and animacy are only two of a huge number of qualities potentially qualifying kinds of substances, the creation of a special word class, noun adjective, is virtually inevitable for economical reasons alone. Certain kinds of qualities, in particular sex/animacy, representing the 'most extensive species of qualification', may nevertheless continue to be distinguished inflexionally.[12] If nouns adjective then accompany nouns substantive in syntactic construction, speakers, out of 'love of similarity of sound' and 'delight in the returns of the same syllables', make them agree in the inflexional variations exhibited by the substance denotations; and, owing to this unmistakable indication of their connectedness, they need not place substantives and adjectives next to one another. The inflexional variation of adjectives introduced in the process of cutting down on substantival inflexion may again become considerable: in order to be able to agree with nouns substantive in three genders, five cases, and two numbers (as in Ancient Greek), nouns adjective, provided they all inflect alike, ideally need as many as forty-five variant forms. Of relations it is the least abstract and general ones, especially those to do with spatial qualifications, which first find expression in a word class of their own, namely as prepositions. The more abstract and general ones, such as those denoted by *to*, *from*, *by*, *for*, *with*, and especially *of* (which denotes relatedness as such) in English, tend to resist this innovation and continue to be expressed by case inflexions, or also by rigid constituent order, at the original stage.[13] Quantity, the most abstract and general category of all, continues longest in the inflexional mode, minimally in the form of a two-way opposition between singular and plural, notwithstanding the availability of separate quantity words in a class of their own.[14]

The elaboration of attributes, expressed by verbal phrases,

proceeds along similar lines, and is treated more cursorily in the *Considerations*. There is, firstly, an analogous development from the particular to the general. When the complete events of old, as the perfect simplicity and unity which events have in nature was still conceived as such in the mind and reflected in language (or rather jargon), are metaphysically analysed into substances and attributes, and their denotations artificially split and divided accordingly, attribute expressions are initially particular rather than general terms, in so far as they are only attributable to particular substances and, eventually, particular kinds of substances. For example, once the substances are externalised from complete events such as 'the-lion-come' and 'the-wolf-come', categorisations of these particular (kinds of) substances will continue to inhere in attribute denotations, whose meanings could thus be rendered as 'terrible-animal-come' or, already more generally, 'terrible-substance-come'. With increasing generalisation such substance-related categorisations become virtually empty, degenerating to mere reminders that the impersonal verb is, as we called it above, unsaturated and requires a noun substantive 'to ascertain and determine its signification'. Observing that those impersonal, not metaphysically divided verbs which have managed to survive in languages such as Latin are all third person singular forms, Smith conjectures that this must also have been the form of verbs when they first turned personal. There is actually no reason, by Smith's own principles, why the impersonal verbs of the holistic stage should have been in any person-number form at all. However, if third person and singular are understood as the unmarked, negatively defined categories of person ('neither speaker nor addressee') and number ('absence of number specification'), it is plausible to assume that general valency indicators on already personalised verbs will take the form of precisely these categories and that surviving impersonal verbs, too, will adopt such markers indicating the absence of a speaker-addressee and number-specified subject. (Note that by the logic of Smith's principles, personal verbs should be associated with further markers of this kind once substances in relations other than that of subject are externalised as well.)

Like nouns substantive, personal verbs, secondly, need to be further diversified as comparison and abstraction increase the fund of their *denotata*. Abstract though the idea of three speech-act roles is, it will sooner or later occur to language-formers that attributes

can hold of the speaker, the addressee, or a non-participant in the speech act, or of any combinations of these. It will likewise be recognised that attributes may be ascribed to substances involved in the event in opposite capacities, for example as agent or as patient; that events may be localised in time as anterior to, simultaneous with, or posterior to the speech act; and that attributions may be affirmed or denied or put forward as a request, wish, or mere possibility. Originally separate personal verbs are coined, and individually memorised, to take care of all such distinctions; but the lexical mode of denotation is eventually superseded by the inflexional one, where, more economically as well as diagrammatically, the terminations of personal verbs are varied to express distinctions of person (or, more precisely, role) and number of the substance and of voice, tense and mood of the attribution.[15] Even though Smith is less explicit here, verbal inflexions may be expected to have the same formal properties as their nominal counterparts, i.e. to be thoroughly mixed and blended with the invariable part of verbs, to differ a great deal from one verb to the other, and to cumulate the several inflexional categories. And this haphazardly created system of verbal inflexions will also be regulated by successive generations of language-improvers, insensibly striving, and (as if led by an invisible hand) succeeding, to reduce the conjugational variety to some order. Owing to continuing limitations especially of their abstracting powers, these improvers, however, will not be quick to seize on the least 'natural' syntactic mode of combination, to which end they would have to avail themselves of entirely new classes of words specifically to denote person and number (i.e. personal pronouns) and voice, tense, and mood (i.e. auxiliaries).

Shunning the inductive search for interdependencies in grammatical systems, a method already favoured by a few more empirically minded linguistic comparatists, Smith emphasised speculative reasoning in his portrayal of the original genius, and accordingly qualified most of his statements by phrases such as 'probably', 'it is natural to suppose' or 'it is easy to conceive how'. In view of his explanatory pretensions this approach was virtually forced upon him. Since the crucial structural traits of the original genius were only explicable in terms of the circumstances of the first, or at any rate the early, formation of languages, and since he did not expect that such formations almost *ab ovo* might actually

be anywhere observable, an excursion to the realms of conjectural history was inevitable. These realms, nevertheless, were not entirely imaginary. Smith believed that there were indeed actual-historical languages which were not removed from their formative periods far enough to have been deprived entirely of their original genius. 'Ancient' languages in this sense were Ancient Greek, Old Armenian, Hebrew, and probably the languages of savage nations about which Smith had read (but was not so well informed as to be able to tell with any confidence). In a way, Smith was merely posing as a conjectural historian, modelling the original genius, or at least its later stages, on the genius of Ancient Greek, the ancient language within his purview where all in all he found the richest inflexional system. His aim as an actual historian, then, was to confirm the seniority of the ancient over the modern languages, a seemingly self-evident supposition which had, nevertheless, been seriously questioned, notably by the Abbé Girard's insistence on the immutability of genius (see below), and also by all those who took the dearth or even absence of inflexions from words in syntactic construction, as perhaps best exemplified by Chinese among modern languages, for conclusive proof of originality.[16] To make his point, Smith needed to argue that the structural mechanisms of the ancient languages could be traced further back in time than those of modern languages. His considerations about the first formation of languages were one part of this argument. The second part was to show how the structure of modern languages could develop from that of those ancient ones which had, perhaps for surprisingly long, managed to guard their original genius. As it turned out, what was being contrasted to the genius of original languages was not in fact the genius of modern, but that of 'compounded' languages.

Before we turn to compounding, it is instructive to consider a question on which Smith was somewhat evasive: what would have been the outcome if the reformation of original languages along Smithian lines had continued undisturbed? The variety of inflexional classes, already in the process of being (insensibly) regularised, would eventually have been reduced to a single declension for all nouns substantive and nouns adjective, and to a single conjugation for all personal verbs. Cumulatively expressed inflexional categories would eventually have been divided up between separate variable parts of words, with one portion of the

termination of nouns substantive, for example, denoting number and another denoting case; if there were two numbers and six cases, eight forms would suffice to make all distinctions (since the singular suffix could now be combined with the nominative, accusative, genitive, etc. case suffixes, and likewise the plural suffix), as opposed to the twelve forms needed as long as number expression was not disentangled from case expression. The tight links between the invariable part of words and their inflexions would have been loosened and eventually severed in the wake of improving abstraction, so that ultimately the original morphological constituents of words, i.e. the inflexions, would be transformed into syntactic constituents of nominal and verbal phrases, i.e. into words of their own – namely quality, in particular gender words, relation words (prepositions), quantity words (quantifiers, numerals), person-number words (personal pronouns), voice, tense, and mood words (auxiliaries). From the point of view especially of formal economy, this result would have been eminently desirable; and yet Smith chose not to extend his evolutionary scenario from conjectural antiquity into the not-so-distant actual-historical past or even the present in this principled manner. What he would have found rather implausible, I believe, was the idea of separate function words originating from inflexions grown syntactically autonomous. Nothing in the form of prepositions, quantifiers, numerals, personal pronouns, or auxiliaries in languages such as English or French pointed to such a bound morphological origin; and these function words, moreover, all preceded their principal words, whereas inflexions had been word-final. What appeared much likelier was that these function words had always been genuine words, if of a fairly general meaning, hence of late origin. The tense and voice auxiliaries, for example, seemed to be, and to have been coined as, general verbs of possession (*have*) and existence (*be*) in English. Therefore, inflexions must surely have had a different fate than that of being converted into function words. Presumably they had simply disappeared. But this material loss was not something the invisible hand, instrumental in the optimisation of poorly-organised inflexional systems, could be held responsible for. Such discontinuities required more extraordinary circumstances, like those attending 'the mixture of several languages with one another, occasioned by the mixture of different nations'.

No matter how extraordinary their effects, language mixtures in

fact were nothing unusual.[17] According to Smith, Latin is compounded of Ancient Greek and Etruscan, Modern Greek of Ancient Greek and apparently Turkish, Italian of Latin and the Germanic dialect of the Lombards, French of Latin and the Frankish variety of Germanic, and English – the most compounded language of all – of Norman French and Saxon. These ubiquitous and possibly repeated mixtures are the catastrophes in the natural history of languages, responsible for the most conspicuous demarcations of an otherwise continuous temporalised chain of structural variations. It is only on such occasions that linguistic structures are fundamentally remodelled, because 'the intricacy of declensions and conjugations', while not beyond the reach of children 'insensibly' and slowly acquiring their original mother tongues, is an insurmountable obstacle in the learning of a foreign language under the less favourable circumstances of conquests or migrations of nations. The tendency here is for the inflexions not to be learned at all by the new non-native speakers, and the languages resulting from such imperfect learning will accordingly be simpler 'in rudiments and principles' than those previously spoken by native speakers. The expressive tasks of inflexions are now, with increasingly fewer exceptions (such as perhaps two nominal numbers), performed by function words, uniformly accompanying all principal words of a given class, or also, even more economically, by 'the place of the words', 'the order and construction of the sentence'. The opposition of personal and impersonal verbs is bound to disappear, as is agreement between nouns substantive and nouns adjective, simply as a concomitant of the loss of the relevant inflexions. The relationship between genealogical and inflexional complexity, to put it in a nutshell, is this: 'the more simple any language is in its composition, the more complex it must be in its declensions and conjugations; and, on the contrary, the more simple it is in its declensions and conjugations, the more complex it must be in its composition' (paragraph 36).[18]

By insisting on the necessity of mixture for changes of genius, Smith was in principle free to include ancient as well as modern languages in either structural class. While he did not specifically mention any modern language that was structurally original (because uncompounded),[19] Latin, ancient as well as allegedly compounded of Greek and Etruscan, provided most of the inflexional exemplification. If mixture as such was to be the genealogical

watershed, ancient Latin would have had to be classed with modern French and Italian, themselves mixtures of Latin with Germanic ingredients, while Ancient Greek, presumed uncompounded, would have been in the opposite class. Here Smith seemed to be at odds with virtually all eighteenth-century comparatists (including Girard), whose structural classifications recognised more similarities between the two principal ancient tongues of Europe than between Latin and modern Romance. And it would indeed have been difficult for Smith to deny that the difference between Ancient Greek and Latin was but slight on his own structural criteria. What he was guilty of was to have exaggerated the impact of mixture as such (which, on my interpretation, he had to do in order to solve the problem of the material loss of inflexions). The structural distance between the original and the compounded genius undeniably increased when mixtures recurred, Smith's extremes being Ancient Greek and, its descendant by multiple compounding, contemporary English. But this increase was steady throughout. There was in particular no great leap forward when Greek lost its compositional virginity and brought forth Latin in intercourse with Etruscan, by comparison with the advances which the offspring of this union, impure from its conception, made subsequently, coupling promiscuously. Smith's structural contrast basically was between languages with inflexional and with function-word expression of accessory categories, and the transitions between the attested extremes were evidently more or less continuous, showing no single sharp boundary at the first historical passage from uncompoundedness to compoundedness. The dividing line Smith wished to draw between the original and the compounded genius, thus, was structurally more artificial than he was prepared to admit.

In the evaluative part of the *Considerations* the focus indeed was on structural contrasts as exemplified by the ancient and modern literary languages of Europe rather than on the purely geniological distinction. Smith's aesthetic evaluations concurred with conventional Classicist wisdom but were less arbitrary, in so far as they were tied to those structural features which had been derived from general principles of language formation and transformation, evolutionary or revolutionary. Modern, multiply-compounded languages, while superior in simplicity of rudiments and principles, are inferior to ancient, closer-to-original (i.e. uncompounded or less

compounded) languages in three respects: they are more 'prolix' because they need more words to express the same *denotata* (compare concise Latin *amavissem* with verbose English *I should have loved*); they are 'less agreeable to the ear', owing to the lack of variety of terminations; and, devoid of inflexional markers of connectedness, they are more severely constrained in the syntactic arrangement of words. As to prolixity, it should be noted that its single measure was the number of words, the unit which still used to take pride of place (in Smith's case not only for purposes of evaluation), rather than the number of sound segments, syllables,[20] or smallest meaningful units (such as invariable word-cores and terminations). On the second point, agreeableness to the ear or 'sweetness', Smith could seem inconsistent, in so far as his praise of variety of terminations squares oddly with his previous motive for the creation of inflexional agreement, namely 'the love of similarity of sound'. His idea apparently was that the danger of phonetic monotony was greater if a language was entirely innocent of inflexions, hence would have to use the same function words uniformly with all principal words.[21] As to constraint, Smith evidently saw no great inherent value in the rigid adherence of word order to the 'ordo naturalis' of subject–verb–object, reflecting the cognitive sequence cause–action–effect, which had struck many a *lumière* in France as the single most beneficial excellency of his native tongue. His preference here was for 'latitude'. As long as perspicuity was guaranteed by inflexions, one could give free play to one's passions and 'invert' or 'transpose' words freely even in prose, according to the rule (as it was put in the fifth lecture on rhetoric and belles-lettres): 'Let that which affects us most be placed first, that which affects us in the next degree next, and so on to the end' (i. v. 52b).[22]

III

What was it that the typological *discours* that had unfolded spasmodically since around 1600 AD owed to the intervention of Adam Smith? In particular, how did his *Considerations* relate to their first stimulus, the Abbé Gabriel Girard's *Les vrais principes de la langue françoise: ou La parole réduite en méthode, conformément aux loix de l'usage*, which had just appeared, in 1747, as Smith began his first series of public lectures on rhetoric and belles-lettres at Edinburgh?

Girard's *Les vrais principes*, essentially a contrastive grammar of

French and Latin, set out the parts of speech in a sequence that was supposed, as was the custom, to correspond to their historical evolution. The origin and progress of language, however, was not really his subject; what he was concerned with primarily was to show that French differed rather radically from Latin and that these two languages should be seen as representatives of two fundamentally different types (or *génies*). French, like Italian and Spanish, exemplifies the 'génie analogue'. Here the linear order of the major clause constituents mirrors the natural sequence of ideas, with the agent (subject) coming first, followed by the action (verb), followed by whatever is acted on or aimed at or otherwise involved in the action (objects, adverbials). Concomitants of this natural order, fairly resistant to inversions, are the absence of nominal case marking, hence also of case agreement between nouns and adjectives, and the presence of a definite article as a separate part of speech. Further, to compensate for the lack of cases, analogous languages employ prepositions to identify the relations especially of circumstantial specifications. They also use function words (adverbs, perhaps aided by the definite article) rather than inflexion for the gradation of adjectives. Latin, like Russian and Church Slavonic, represents the 'génie transpositive'. Here constituent order is flexible and arbitrary, unrestrained by the natural order of ideas and instead following the speaker's momentary imagination. Case marking is present, and is also exploited in adjective agreement. Prepositions play a less prominent role. Adjective grading is inflexional. And there is no definite article. There is yet a third class recognised by Girard, called 'mixte' or 'amphilogique' and exemplified by Ancient Greek and Teutonic. It shares the definite article with the analogous class, and cases (and presumably further inflexional categories) and the imaginative free constituent order with the transpositive class. (A further mixed class would be logically possible, but is tacitly assumed unattested: it would be characterised by a natural rigid constituent order and the absence of cases, herein resembling the analogous class, and by the lack of a definite article, sharing this trait with the transpositive class.)

Girard was not at a loss for explanations of the major systematic interdependencies which he had induced from the range of languages with which he (*Secrétaire interprète du Roy* for Slavonic) had some familiarity. The two, by no means novel, principles which he

invoked to explain the correlation between the rigidity or flexibility of constituent order, the absence or presence of case inflexion, and the more or less extensive use of prepositions, were ambiguity avoidance (*la clarté*) and economy: the lack of any distinctive relational marking could cause confusion, but the simultaneous use of more than one kind of marking would needlessly overburden the speaker or writer, who will therefore opt either for rigid natural order, plus, where necessary, prepositions, or for case inflexion, perhaps also supplemented by some prepositions, but not for both. The analogous or transpositive/mixed expression of adjective grading by special function words or by inflexions remained unaccounted for by Girard, but could have been explained as following the genius-specific mode of expression of the most conspicuous, i.e. the relational categories of accidence. Why rigid order and the absence of cases should imply a definite article was a mystery, unless one put faith in Girard's whimsical conjecture that the original formers of transpositive languages, eager to distinguish and name, immediately invented nouns and omitted to avail themselves ever after of 'those words which announce and particularise without naming', which properly were the first part of speech they should have invented, as did the framers of analogous and mixed languages.

Girard showed little interest in mechanisms of grammatical change as occurring in fully-formed languages. He was of course not blind to the possibility of mixtures, but their effect to him seemed essentially limited to the borrowing of words. The interdependent traits which constituted his three *génies* in particular were, in his view, as immutable as species still were for the vast majority of natural historians. This enabled the linguistic patriot, unconventionally but not entirely idiosyncratically, to deny that French was a daughter of Latin, with which it shared no more than the grammatical universals and a portion of its vocabulary – for how could all these inflexions have been lost, the word order been firmly fixed, and a definite article as well as some prepositions been innovated?

The structural similarity between Smith's original and compounded genii and Girard's transpositive and analogous *génies* respectively is unmistakable. In a way Smith's systematic interdependencies were more comprehensive because they included the inflexional or function-word expression of accessory categories of

verbs as well as of nouns, the verbal sphere having been neglected by Girard.[23] As to inflexional categories in the nominal sphere, Smith included non-relational ones such as gender and number, but disregarded adjective grading, which, however, could have been added without difficulty as a further accessory category whose expression was governed by Smith's general principles. Smith came down more resolutely than Girard in favour of inflexions rather than linear ordering as the fundamental trait determining the genius. For Smith, the freedom of word order seemed a rather trivial *implicatum* of the availability of segmental (inflexional or function-word) relational markers, and he did not much care, either, how subject, verb, and object were arranged once their order had become fixed, owing to the demise of inflexions. Considering that the all-decisive choice in Smith's system was between the inflexional or function-word expression of the accessory categories of principal words, it could seem surprising that he disregarded the definite article, the one part of speech whose presence or absence had been found typologically significant by Girard. The reason for this omission of Smith's presumably was not that he doubted the empirical validity of Girard's definite-article implication, but that he lacked evidence for a change from inflexional to function-word expression of definiteness in accordance with his developmental principles; in Ancient Greek, for instance, there had already been definite articles, whereas in Latin, its descendant by compounding with Etruscan, this part of speech was unaccountably missing. While there was, thus, no equivalent of Girard's *génie mixte* in Smith's geniology, it could accommodate a distinction, relevant perhaps only for the remote past, between pre-inflexional as well as pre-syntactic languages, equipped only with impersonal verbs, and not-yet-inflexional but rudimentarily syntactic languages, dividing event denotations into personal verbs and nouns substantive.

If impersonal verbs, in Smith's sense, were taken as the point of departure, subsequent linguistic developments had perforce to be analytic. That they actually had been in this direction was at the time a fairly common assumption.[24] From the Abbé Jean-Baptiste du Bos (*Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (1719), mentioned in Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* as well as in his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*) to Denis Diderot (*Lettre sur les sourds et muets* (1751)), many a writer had praised the comprehensiveness

of the inflected words of the classical languages, largely lost in their modern descendants. What Smith, however, seized on as the hallmark of primeval jargons and languages was a particular species of such pre-analytic words, encompassing entire events and thus being tantamount to whole sentences. In this he echoed Rousseau's opinion about the first language formers: 'ignorant la Division du Discours en ses parties constitutives, ils donnérent d'abord à chaque mot le sens d'une proposition entiére' (1755).[25] What Smith added was the designation of these sentence-words as 'impersonal verbs', which he borrowed from the grammar of classical languages where he believed that same such all-encompassing words had actually survived. This, too, was not without precedent closer to home: in *An Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer* (1735), Thomas Blackwell, Professor of Greek and Principal of Marischal College at Aberdeen, had also called 'the *primitive Parts* of the Languages reputed *Original*' 'rough, undeclined, impersonal Monosyllables' (pp. 58–9). If Smith's familiarity with exotic tongues had been more thorough, he might have discovered that the impersonal verbs of Greek and Latin were not the only non-conjectural witnesses to the verisimilitude of his theory. It seemed to be in a speculative vein what Maupertuis, for example, remarked on this matter: 'Un sauvage dont la langue n'est point encore formée, pourroit confondre et exprimer tout à la fois le pronom, le verbe, le nombre, le substantif, et l'adjectif; et dire en un seul mot: *J'ai tué un gros ours*' (*Dissertation sur les différens moyens dont les hommes se sont servis pour exprimer leurs idées*, 1756). However, experts in American Indian languages had for some time been reporting that the sentences especially in Huron and Iroquois indeed appeared to consist of nothing but verbs which incorporated all accessory specifications as well as subjects and objects, so that there was scarcely a need for word-external syntax.[26] It was to take some time yet before the full significance of 'polysynthetic' or 'incorporating' languages was grasped by comparatists. Among these, both James Burnett (see especially the first volume of his *Origin and Progress of Language*, 1773) and Peter S. Du Ponceau (see especially his final account of 1838) were much indebted to Smith for preparing this recognition theoretically by making the point that verbs could be semantically (and, as it then turned out, also morphologically) more inclusive than those of English or even Latin and Ancient Greek.[27]

As to the two genii of indubitably actual-historical standing,

Smith's evolutionary perspective was more conducive than Girard's tenet of geniological immutability to perceiving the difference between them as gradual rather than categorical with respect to inflexion. The traditional position that languages were either inflecting or uninflecting had been overly general: taken literally, the systemic implication was that either all or none of the *words* of a class of words potentially susceptible to inflexion (i.e. nouns, adjectives, verbs) would have to be inflected, and that either all or none of the *classes* of potentially inflectable words would have to be inflected. In a way, Smith was more of a traditionalist than Girard, who exempted the accessory categories of verbs from the obligation to conform to nominal and adjectival standards. On Smith's principles, nominal and verbal inflexions had to be expected to flourish or to wilt in unison – which in fact was not always what they really did, with verbal inflexions often being richer and more robust than nominal ones, as had already dawned on an earlier *grammarien-philosophe*, Tommaso Campanella (1638). Where Smith instead saw gradual differences between older and younger original languages, and also between original and even multiply-compounded languages, was in their more plentiful or more meagre supply of inflexional categories and categorial differentiations. Since, in accordance with their increasing abstractness and generality, quality inflexions (gender) will appear first, followed by relational inflexions (case), followed in turn by quantity inflexions (number), there should be original languages with gender alone, with gender and case, and with all three. Synchronically, number would, thus, imply case, and case would imply gender. This law of permissible inflexional variation, however, would only seem to hold for phases of inflexional expansion, because, as function words are gradually taking over, gender is apparently destined to go first, followed by case, with number as the longest-lasting inflexional survivor, which reverses the synchronic implications.[28] And there should be similar, equally phase-specific, implications between the realisations of individual categories – for example between the more and the less abstract relations, i.e. the subject/object/attribute and the local/adverbial cases, or between the more and the less general numbers, i.e. the plural and the singular/dual. Smith further suggested interdependencies between the inflexions of different parts of speech: there was to be no dual number with personal verbs unless there was

also one with nouns substantive, and there were to be no inflexions of nouns adjectives which were not also found on nouns substantive – as predicted by the analogical mechanism of creating agreement by rhyme.

Girard's main explanatory notions had been the need to avoid (especially relational) ambiguities and that of doing so economically. On this Smith no doubt concurred; but for him economy, dictated by the basic principle of the limited human memory, served to explain not only why word order need not be rigid if there are case inflexions, but also, and more importantly, why the lexical mode of denotation was continually replaced by the combinatorial mode as the expressive demands were growing, and why inflexions, always coming in several declensions and conjugations, were abandoned for function words, ensuring uniform or 'universal' declension and conjugation. Formal economy in fact had already had a long tradition as a force counterbalancing the communicative requirement that the expressive resources be copious. It used to be invoked to explain why, instead of new words being coined, those already existing had their meanings extended metaphorically.[29] In Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, the second most important end of language was said to be that of conveying ideas 'with as much ease and quickness as is possible', which was prevented if there were no distinct names for complex ideas and these therefore had to be made known 'by an enumeration of the simple ones that compose them' (1690, III, x). In his discourse on inequality (1755) Rousseau noted that, unless particular terms had been supplemented or replaced by general terms, the dictionaries of the original language-formers would have grown inconveniently copious. And this idea was applied also to number inflexion in such a minor work as Dr Blacklock's: 'To assist the memory, and shorten discourse, general terms have been invented, which may naturally contain all the individuals of a kind; or, by a small alteration in the same word, express them singly' (1756, p. 8). In his *Encyclopédie* article on 'Conjugaison' (1753) du Marsais remarked that, if languages had been devised by philosophers, they would contain no more than a single conjugation for all verbs alike, and that there indeed were languages which distinguished such verbal categories, 'avec netteté', by 'particules'. Economy as a force more or less fundamentally shaping the structure of languages was

thus in the air in the mid eighteenth century; but it could well have been Smith, in his *Considerations* and earlier lectures, who first brought it to bear on such specific a phenomenon as the variety of inflexion classes. Very soon after, Joseph Priestley, in *A Course of Lectures on the Theory of Language, and Universal Grammar* which he gave at Warrington Academy and which he made available in print for the use of his pupils (1762), justified the superiority of prepositions (or postpositions) and auxiliaries over inflexions in exactly the same economical terms, without, however, listing Smith's *Considerations* among his sources.[30] And in the anonymous article 'Language' in the first edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (1771, vol. II), probably manufactured by the editor, William Smellie, himself, inflexion classes were recognised as a contingent characteristic of the transpositive genius; but, motivated by the need to keep grammars within the bounds of what can be handled with facility by humans, this abundance of forms was claimed to be typically reduced, even at the expense of accuracy, by making 'the same word serve a double, treble, or even quadruple office', i.e. by neutralising or syncretising inflexional distinctions (as for example in Latin *puellae*, which may be genitive, dative, or ablative singular or nominative or vocative plural). Thus the gospel of Adam Smith, the grammatical economist, began to be spread.

Smith placed perhaps a little too much trust in the explanatory value of the mental operation of abstraction. Recall that his contention was that inflexions are less abstract than, hence developmentally prior to, function words. This rationale, however, tends to exaggerate the difference between morphological (word-level) and syntactic (phrase-level) constructions. According to Smith, separate function words could only be innovated for the expression of accessory categories if these categories as such were mentally abstracted, i.e. metaphysically divided from the *denotata* of the principal words. But the alternative expression of such categories, namely variation of the termination of principal words, also presupposes this same metaphysical division, or else there would have been no reason to vary the terminations in the first place. The difference, thus, is a mere formal one, pertaining to the ways the expressions of primary *denotata* and of accessory categories are separated and combined linguistically.[31] The alternative, which seemed more 'natural' because less 'metaphysical' to Smith,

involves less separation only in so far as meaningful parts are combined in tighter morphological rather than in looser syntactic constructions, i.e. in words rather than phrases.

Despite this internal weakness, Smith's reliance on the interplay of metaphysical division and formal separation lead him to postulate a most interesting novel interdependency between these three traits of inflexional systems: (i) inflexions are intimately joined to stems, (ii) owing to synonymy of inflexions there are coexisting inflexion classes (i.e. declensions and conjugations), and (iii) inflexions express several categories cumulatively. (A further correlate was soon to be added, in 'Language' in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*: (iv) owing to homonymy of inflexions paradigmatic distinctions may be neutralised.) Smith's perception of these properties was no doubt inspired by the classical languages, and on the strength of his principles he took their co-occurrence for granted. The anonymous author of 'Language' in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* was more cautious, and saw these co-occurrences as 'moral certainties' rather than 'physical necessities'. Even if this should be only an empirical contingency, these three or four properties in fact do tend to co-vary. If Smith's acquaintance with Turkish, one of the languages he mentioned in passing, had been closer, he would have noticed that the declensions and conjugations there are more or less uniform, that there is virtually no inflexional cumulation (as well as virtually no inflexional neutralisation), and that inflexions are far less thoroughly mixed and blended with stems. In short, the inflexions of languages such as Turkish would have been seen to resemble postposed function words – except that they were still part of morphological rather than syntactic constructions, if less close-knit ones. The only parameter that would have had to be recognised as admitting of gradual variation was (i), relating to the tightness of morphological fusion, and Smith would have been the first to realise, from theory rather than observation, the systemic contrast between what came to be known as flective and agglutinative morphology.[32]

What all of Smith's general principles were designed for was the explication of structural genii as developmental stages. In contradistinction to Girard, Smith thus had a theory of linguistic change, or at any rate of the evolutionary (growth by semanticisation, regularisation) and revolutionary (loss) changes in inflexions. Smith's

inflexional history was linear and irreversible. Inflexions appeared out of principal words, were perhaps transferred to other words of the same class, and disappeared again in the wake of language mixtures. (There were no objections, then, to acknowledging Latin as a grammatical, rather than only as a lexical, ancestor of French.) Once the original genius was lost, it could not be revived: with the advent of economically superior function words, there could have been no point in principal words beginning again to grow inflexions, and for history thus to repeat itself. What Smith's diachronic theory had nothing to say about, however, were the function words. Relative latecomers owing to the generality of their meaning, they seemed otherwise immutable. There were no reasons, in Smith's scenario, to expect them to have lost semantic or formal substance in the process of being appropriated, from the fund of principal words, for specific grammatical functions, or even to be potentially capable of losing further substance and indeed their syntactic autonomy and thereby to become veritable inflexions, and eventually to wear out and disappear – at which point the cycle of grammaticisation, coalescence and erosion would begin anew. Developments of this kind, providing an alternative source of inflexions, would have been counter to Smithian principles. And yet speculations that this was precisely what had happened, as inflexional languages were first formed as well as later, when compounded languages such as French recreated some verbal inflexions, were already on record – for example in Condillac's influential *Essai sur l'origine des connoissances humaines* (1746, II, i, ix).[33] A heated debate would soon begin to rage over this issue.[34]

But Adam Smith had had enough of this and left grammatical economy to others. His view of *homo oeconomicus* was not going to be entirely dissimilar from his portrait of *homo grammaticus*, but his system of economics now demanded his exclusive attention, and perhaps promised to provide even better entertainment.[35] A certain, well, indifference had after all often come over him when discoursing on the subject of grammar – which no doubt was why, during his professorship at Glasgow, he used to cut short the second of his annual lectures on rhetoric and belles-lettres, much to the relief of the scribblers: 'but this as well as many other grammaticall parts we must altogether pass over as taedious and unentertaining'.

Notes

This paper is dedicated to the memory of Thomas Frank, esteemed fellow student of the linguistic thought of the Enlightenment and amiable 'Ambassador from the Dominions of Learning to those of Conversation' (to borrow a phrase of David Hume's).

Earlier versions were read at the Edinburgh Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities on 10 September 1986, reporting on research done with the Institute Project on the Scottish Enlightenment (where Tom was a co-Fellow), and in the Department of Linguistics of the University of Edinburgh on 22 October 1987.

1. Of the two words Smith used as examples, one, 'but', had already been dealt with in Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (III. vii. 5), and the other, 'humour', also resembled an example of Locke's, 'liquor' (III. ic. 16).
2. See Plank (1987b) for a case study on the possible propagation of Smith's linguistic ideas. It would be interesting to know whether any of Smith's linguistic assumptions had been included in the 'pretty long enumeration . . . of certain leading principles, both political and literary, to which he was anxious to establish his exclusive right; in order to prevent the possibility of some rival claims which he thought he had reason to apprehend' (Stewart, 1795, p. lxxx), which he had drawn up in 1755 and the manuscript of which is lost.
3. There is a direct reference in the *Considerations* (paragraph 30) also to Sanctius's *Minerva* (1587/1733), concerning impersonal verbs. I wonder whether Smith was perhaps given further entertainment by the grammatical articles in Ephraim Chambers' *Cyclopædia* (1728 or later editions), by James Harris's *Hermes* (1751), Anselm Bayly's *Introduction to Languages* (1758), by Classical Philologists, or by the grammar of Port-Royal (1660, often re-edited).
4. However, Manget (1809, p. xv), his French translator, commentator and editor, already thought that he should have.
5. Incidentally, Smith did not occupy himself with the question of linguistic monogenesis or polygenesis. His developmental scheme would have been more compatible with the latter.
6. A number of studies have been devoted specifically to the exposition of Smith's principles, of which at least the following should be mentioned here: Berry (1974), Land (1977; 1986, pp. 133–59), Windross (1980) and Christie (1987). None of these, however, fully appreciates Smith's subtlety as a comparative grammarian.
7. In contrast to natural rhyme, verse is considered conventional in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (IV. i. 6–7).
8. The letter to George Baird of 7 February 1763 is unequivocal on this point: 'Verbs . . . being, in my apprehension, the original parts of speech, first invented to express in one word a compleat event' (*Correspondence*, p. 88).
9. The idea that particular terms become general, rather than the other way round, was a traditional one (also held by Locke, among others) but was not entirely uncontroversial. Evidence in its favour is supposedly the natural disposition of mankind, and especially of little children and a clown (i.e. idiot) Smith knew, 'to give to one object the name of any other' (*Considerations*, paragraph 1). Thus, by antonomasia, we call a philosopher a 'Newton', or the clown would have called any river, had he but been carried to another, a 'river', which term in his use was the proper name of the river which ran by his own door.
10. I have replaced Smith's own example *Hercules* by *lupus*, which shares fewer inflexions with *arbor*.
11. Bryce, in the Glasgow Edition of the *Considerations* (pp. 211–12), has found no source for Smith's attribution of ten cases to Armenian. I have. Chambers' *Cyclopædia* (4th edition, 1741) as well as du Marsais in the French *Encyclopédie* (vol. II, 1751) referred s.v. *Case/Cas* to F., or P., Galanus as their authority for the claim that Armenian had as many as ten cases. Father Clemente Galano's *Grammaticae et logicae institutiones linguae literalis armenicae Armenis traditae* of 1645 was for a long time the best-known source of information for this language, and his ten-case theory was a persistent one, even though there were rival claims conceding Armenian no more than six cases.
12. Presumably it is its lack of 'extensiveness' which has prevented such a prominent qualitative category as colour, supposedly perhaps the least metaphysical one, from ever being expressed inflexionally.
13. Words denoting qualities and relations 'in abstract' (such as 'greenness' or 'superiority'), derived from words denoting them 'in concrete' ('green', 'superior'), are yet later developments.
14. On the model of nouns adjective, relation and quantity words, once innovated, might be expected to be supplied with inflexions enabling them to agree with nouns substantive. This is a point disregarded by Smith, though.
15. Smith mentions that event denotations can be affirmations or denials, but does not dwell on the mode of expression of these fundamental categories, which might perhaps have been related to mood. Unlike verbal person, emanating from verbs themselves, verbal number is supposed to be transferred from nouns substantive by agreement.
16. An interesting source, perhaps unknown to Smith, was John Webb's 'essay endeavouring a probability that the language of the empire of China is the primitive language spoken through the whole world before the confusion of Babel' (1669/1678). Uninflected words are of course also characteristic of Smith's earliest stage, where they are not, however, joined in genuinely syntactic constructions, as they reputedly are in Chinese.
17. And they were also a popular topic of linguistic writings ever since the story of Babel. In *The Philological Miscellany* (1761), for example, Smith's *Considerations* were followed by (anonymous) 'General Remarks on the Origin and Mixture of antient Nations, and on the Manner of studying their History', excerpted from essays of Mons. Freret. And, like Smith, James 'Hermes' Harris would in fact call mixed languages 'compounded' (1751, p. 408) – a term which is used ambiguously in the *Considerations*, greatly confusing commentators such as Coseriu and Land.
18. It is here that Smith makes the enormously influential comparison

(see Plank, 1989) between languages and mechanical engines, also allegedly continuously simplified by successive generations of improvers (a thesis belied by James Watt's complication of the Newcomen engine). Smith favoured this mechanistic imagery for systems of all kinds.

19. The Slavonic languages, where the Abbé Girard's special extra-ecclesiastical expertise was, might have fitted this bill.
20. Manget (1809, p. 104) counted no more syllables in 'I should have loved' than in *amavissem*, viz. four.
21. Employing this criterion a little differently, the author of 'Language' in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (1771) on the contrary found a greater variety of sounds in uninflecting than in inflecting languages.
22. The only other, subsidiary, word-order rule worthy of attention was that 'your Sentence or Phrase never drag a Tail' (*ibid.*).
23. Girard was in fact deliberating whether to include the optional or obligatory accompaniment of finite verbs with subject personal pronouns (as in Latin and French respectively) in his geniological system.
24. Support for it came from current beliefs about similar developments of writing systems. In the *Considerations* (paragraph 30), Smith in fact drew on this supposed parallel, pointing out that economy was the driving force in the replacement of characters representing whole words by characters representing phonetic parts of words. William Warburton's ideas about hieroglyphs, as aired in his *Divine Legation of Moses* (1738–41), carried great authority in this matter.
25. For a verse rendering of this theory one may compare the blind Dr Thomas Blacklock's (mistitled) *Essay on Universal Etymology* (1756, p. 5), panegyrising 'The advantages of Grammar':

> As when, subjected still to Discord's sway,
> All Nature dark, deform'd, and blended lay;
> Till twins of Heav'n, fair Light and Order, came;
> And that illum'd, and this adorn'd the frame:
> Thus from these *atoms*, to our wond'ring eyes,
> Discourse, a fair-proportion'd pile, shall rise.

Blacklock felt particularly indebted to Harris's *Hermes* (1751), but may well have been in the audience when Smith first lectured on rhetoric and belles-lettres at Edinburgh.

26. On such grounds Gabriel Sagard (1632) had concluded that there was no point in writing a grammar of Huron; a dictionary, primarily of verbal phrases, was all that could be supplied for such a deficient language. Lafitau (1724, vol. II, p. 488) already came closer to penetrating the design of these idioms: 'Les langues huronnes et iroquoises n'ont proprement que des verbes qui en composent tout le fonds, de sorte que tout se conjugue et que rien ne se décline; mais dans ces verbes, il se trouve un artifice admirable.' Lafitau was among Smith's sources in his *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, but was evidently not exploited to the full.
27. Whether Wilhelm von Humboldt's co-discovery of the incorporating type was as independent of the Smithian tradition as some historians (e.g. Rousseau, 1984) would have it, is a question that would merit closer attention.

28. For this phase there would be analogous implications between different classes of function words: numerals/quantifiers imply prepositions, which in turn imply adjectives.
29. Jones (1982, p. 141) points to the currency of such ideas in his outline of the background of David Hume's linguistic thinking.
30. In several anonymous additions to Priestley's lectures, included in their republication (1824), the striking similarities to Smith's principles are noted.
31. Cf. Land (1977, p. 686) for this criticism.
32. From the way paradigms were presented in descriptive or pedagogical grammars of agglutinative languages, one could long have inferred the systematic difference between this morphological type and Latin- or Greek-style inflexion. But no-one had, so far as I can tell. In the heyday of morphological typology, the nineteenth century, the interdependent parameters (ii)–(iv) were given far less attention than they had received from Smith and the encyclopædic Anonymous.
33. Condillac accordingly assumed that originally there had only been a single, uniform conjugation for all verbs, supplied by inflexions deriving from formerly autonomous words. The cause for the multiplication of inflexion classes in this scenario, the reverse of Smith's, were mixtures of languages.
34. The list of protagonists was to include John Horne Tooke, Friedrich Schlegel, Franz Bopp and a latecomer, Otto Jespersen. See Plank (1989) for a historical survey of the Secretion (Smith, Schlegel, Jespersen *et al.*) *vs.* Coalescence (Horne Tooke, Bopp *et al.*) controversy.
35. Apart from languages and economies, mechanical engines and the universe were Smith's other favourite systems *où tout se tient*. Living organisms or the earth were the favourites of others. Perhaps Skinner (1974, p. 45) exaggerates the influence of the Physiocrats, and in particular Quesnai, upon systemic thinking when he states that they were among the first to proposition that 'in nature everything is intertwined'.

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