

GRIMM'S LAW OF THE INTERCHANGE OF CONSONANT SOUNDS.

THE evidence that the group of languages known as the Aryan languages form a family—that is, are all sister-dialects of one common mother-tongue—consists in their grammatical forms being the same, and in their having a great many words in common. In judging whether an individual word in one of these tongues is really the same with a word in another of the tongues, we are no longer guided by mere similarity of sound; on the contrary, identity of sound is generally a presumption that a proposed etymology is wrong. Words are constantly undergoing change, and each language follows its own fashion in making those changes. Corresponding words, therefore, in the several languages must, as a rule, in the long course of ages have come to differ greatly; and these differences follow certain laws which it is possible to ascertain. Unless, then, a proposed identification accord with those laws, it is inadmissible. We are not at liberty to suppose any arbitrary omission of a letter, or substitution of one letter for another, as was the fashion in the old guessing school of etymology.

Of the laws of interchange of sounds in the Indo-European family, the most important is that known as Grimm's Law, so called after the famous German philologist who investigated it. It exhibits the relations found to exist between the consonant sounds in three groups of the Aryan languages—namely, (1) the Classical, including Sanskrit, Greek and Latin; (2) Low German, which we may take Gothic and English as representing; (3) High German, especially Old High German, in which the Law is more consistently carried out than in modern High German.

The scope of the Law is confined to the interchanges among the following consonant sounds, which are here arranged so as to show their relations to one another:

	Sharp.	Flat.	Aspirate.
Labial.....	p	b	f (p')
Linguo-dental.....	t	d	th (z)
Guttural.....	k (c)	g	ch (h)

The horizontal division into three orders depends on the organ chiefly used in the utterance. The differences between the vertical series are more easily felt than described. Pronounce first *ip* and then *ib*; in the first the lips are completely closed, and the sound or voice from the larynx abruptly cut off. In the second the lips are also completely shut, but a muffled voice is continued for a moment; it is produced by the vocal chords being still kept in a state of tension, and the breath continuing to issue through them into the cavity of the mouth for a brief space after the lips are closed. Next pronounce *if*; in this, although the voice-sound abruptly ceases, the lip-aperture is not so completely

closed but that a thin stream of breath continues to escape with the sound of a whisper. Hence the name *aspirate* given to such articulations. Now, interchanges do take place between members of these vertical series—that is, one sharp takes the place of another, as in Welsh, *pen*; Gaelic, *kin*; or in Russian, *Feodor* for *Theodore*. Such instances, however, are comparatively rare and sporadic. It is between members of the horizontal orders that interchanges chiefly take place—that is, labials with labials, dentals with dentals, etc.; and it is with these interchanges that Grimm's Law deals.

The substance of the Law may be presented in a tabular form, as follows:

(1) Classical.....	Sharp.	Flat.	Aspirate.
(2) Low German.....	Aspirate.	Sharp.	Flat.
(3) High German.....	Flat.	Aspirate.	Sharp.

The table may be thus read: A classical sharp labial, as *p*, is represented in Low German by the aspirate labial *f*, and in High German by the flat labial *b*; and so of the other orders.

EXAMPLES.

(A) INTERCHANGE OF LABIALS.

CLASSICAL.	LOW GERMAN.	O. H. GERMAN.
Sans., Gr., L. <i>pater</i> ..	E. father, Goth. <i>fadr</i> s	<i>vatar</i> .
Gr. <i>pteron</i> (<i>peteron</i>)..	E. feather... ..	<i>vedar</i> , Ger. <i>feder</i> .
L. <i>pulex</i>	E. flea, Scot. <i>flech</i> ...	<i>vlo</i> , Ger. <i>floh</i> .
L. <i>rapina</i>	A.S. <i>reaf</i> , E. <i>reave</i> ...	<i>roub</i> .
Gr. <i>kannabis</i>	E. hemp.....	<i>hanaf</i> , Ger. <i>hanf</i> .
L. <i>fra(n)go</i>	E. break, Goth. <i>brikan</i>	<i>prechan</i> , Ger. <i>brechen</i>
Gr. <i>phu</i> , L. <i>fu</i>	E. <i>be</i>	<i>þim</i> (1 am).

(B) INTERCHANGE OF LINGUO-DENTALS.

L. <i>tenuis</i>	E. thin.....	Goth. <i>dunni</i> , Ger. <i>dünn</i> .
L. <i>tectum</i>	E. <i>thatch</i> , Goth. <i>thak</i> .	<i>dach</i> .
Gr. <i>odont</i> , L. <i>dent</i> ...	E. tooth, Goth. <i>tunthus</i>	<i>zand</i> , Ger. <i>zahn</i> .
L. <i>lingua</i> (= <i>lingua</i>).	E. tongue.....	<i>zunga</i> .
Gr. <i>thugater</i>	E. daughter, Goth. <i>dauhtar</i>	<i>tohtar</i> .
Gr. <i>ther</i> , L. <i>fera</i>	E. deer.....	<i>tlor</i> .

(C) INTERCHANGE OF GUTTURALS.

L. <i>claudus</i>	E. halt.....	Goth. <i>halz</i> .
Gr. <i>kard</i> , L. <i>cord</i>	E. heart.....	<i>herza</i> .
L. <i>octo</i>	E. eight, Goth. <i>ahtan</i> .	<i>achte</i> , Ger. <i>acht</i> .
Gr. <i>gonu</i>	E. knee.....	<i>chnio</i> .
L. <i>ager</i>	E. acre, Goth. <i>akrs</i> ...	<i>achar</i> , Ger. <i>acker</i> .
Gr. <i>chen</i> , L. <i>anser</i> (= <i>hanser</i>).....	E. goose.....	<i>kans</i> , Ger. <i>gans</i> .
L. <i>hortus</i>	E. garden, Goth. <i>gards</i>	<i>karto</i> , Ger. <i>garten</i> .

It will be observed that there are a good many exceptions to the Law, especially in the case of the aspirates; the influence of adjoining letters often causes anomalies. The Law holds good oftenest in the beginning of words.