

plainly marked in American tongues that the machinery for connecting sentences is absent. This machinery consists properly of the relative pronoun and the conjunction. You will be surprised to hear that there is no American language, none that I know, which possesses either of these parts of speech. That which does duty for the conjunction in the Maya and Nahuatl, for instance, is a noun meaning associate or companion, with a prefixed possessive.*

Equally foreign to primitive speech was any expression of *time* in connection with verbal forms; in other words, there was no such thing as tenses. We are so accustomed to link actions to time, past, present, or future, that it is a little difficult to understand how this accessory can be omitted in intelligible discourse. It is perfectly evident, however, from the study of many American tongues that at one period of their growth they possessed for a long interval only one tense, which served indifferently for past, present, and future;† and even yet most of them form the past and future by purely material means, as the addition of an adverb of time, by accent, quantity or repetition, and in others the tense relation is still unknown.‡

In some tongues, the Omagua of the upper Orinoco for example, there is no sort of connection between the verbal stem and its signs of tense, mode or person. They have not even any fixed order. In such languages there is no difference in sound between the words for "I marry," and "my wife;" "I eat," and "my food," between "Paul dies," "Paul died," "Paul will die," and "Paul is dead."§ Through such tongues we can distinctly perceive a time when the verb had neither tense, mode, nor person; when it was not even a verb nor yet a verbal, but an epicene sound which could be adapted to any service of speech.

* In Maya the conjunction "and" is rendered by *yel*, a compound of the possessive pronoun, third person, singular *y*, and *el*, companion. The Nahuatl, *thuan*, is precisely the same in composition.

† Die meisten amerikanischen Sprachen haben die Eigenthümlichkeit, dass in der Regel die Haupttempora in Anwendung kommen und unter diesen besonders das Präsens, selbst wenn von einer bestimmten, besonders aber von einer unbestimmten Vergangenheit gesprochen wird. J. J. von Tschudi, *Organismus der Khetsua Sprache*, s. 196. The same tense is also employed for future occurrences. What classical grammarians call "the historical present," will illustrate this employment of a single tense for past and future time.

‡ The Chiquita of Bolivia is an extreme example. "La distinction du passé, du présent et du futur n'existe pas dans cette langue étrange." *Arte y Vocabulario de la Lengua Chiquita*. Por L. Adam, y V. Henry, p. x.

§ On the Verb in American Languages. By Wilhelm von Humboldt. Translated by D. G. Brinton, in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 1836.