

of grammatic process is easily discerned and hardly requires any preventive from error; therefore, what we are presently concerned with is words; how can their identity be safely established?

Language is the expression of thought and, as such, it is an aggregate of significative articulations. Therefore, in attempting linguistic comparisons, the student should, in the first place, observe principally the sound of the words. In languages possessing an abundant literature, as the European and the Asiatic, the orthography is of no importance whatever, unless it be considered as a means of discovering the origin of the words. Thus the German *vater* and the English *father*, though possibly different to the uneducated reader, are nevertheless one and the same to the scholar, who knows the phonetic value of the German *v*. Likewise, in comparing terms from American idioms, it is of the utmost importance to penetrate oneself with the particular orthography of the writer, as a word which appears different to the eyes may sound identical to the ear. Thus the Navajo *tana*, "man," may have exactly the same sound as the *déné* of the missionaries among the Northern Déné tribes.

Hence, while noting down foreign words or attempting linguistic comparisons, philologists could not too carefully precise the value of the letters used or, when extra signs or diacritical marks are found necessary, they could not too minutely explain the peculiar characteristics of their alphabet.* Instead of this, we occasionally come across writers who not only ignore themselves such all-important phonetic peculiarities, but do not even scruple to do away with such of them as they meet in others' writings. The most glaring instance of this unscientific carelessness which I have noticed of late is that of Dr. J. Campbell. The absence in his Déné vocabulary† of the apostrophe or other corresponding sign, inverted letters, capitals, accent or diacritical marks destroys the last vestige of genuineness in many words which were originally but dubiously Déné. I am wedded to no particular graphic system, nor do I think my own alphabet any better than that of others; but I hold that you cannot, without additional signs or graphic peculiarities, render with twenty-five letters an aggregate of more than sixty very different sounds.

And this seems to be the place to recall a common-sense rule which imposes itself on the transcriber of a foreign tongue: always write in such a way that all the letters be pronounced and that they constantly have the same value. It is useless to insist on such a self-evident principle.

* The reader will find my alphabet explained in my paper, "Déné Roots," *Trans. C. I.* vo. III, p. 153.
† *Transactions Canadian Institute*, vol. V., p. 214 of 217.