

## Verner's Law

2020 1

One of the distinguishing qualities, which make the Teutonic branch of Indo-European family to stand out from the seven other branches, is the series of sound changes to which the name 'First Sound Shifting' has been given. Though first discovered by the Danish scholar Rasmus Christian Rask (1787-1832), it was Jacob Grimm, a German philologist, who formulated these changes into a law. A comparative study of I.E. and the Germanic branch made Grimm to conclude that the SE voiceless stop consonant P, T, K changed into the corresponding voiceless fricatives Ph, Th, Kh/h. Similarly voiceless fricatives Ph, Th, Kh/h changed into voiced stops B, D, G and voiced stops B, D, G changed into voiceless stops P, T, K.

Examples -

Sanskrit — English		
Pad	Foot	(P - F)
Pitar	Father	(P - F)
Tvam	Thou	(T - Th)
Trayaṣ	Three	(T - Th)
Kah	Who	(K - H)

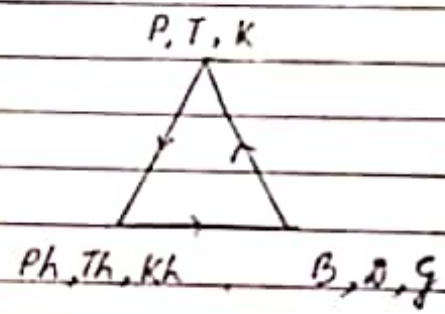
In spite of Grimm's explanation, there were some cases for which Grimm's law gave no explanation. Such points went against the law, putting its doubt and query. It was Karl Verner who explained these exceptions. For instance, he showed the residual cases and was able to correct the corresponding. The correspondence between /k/ and /h/ in Latin centum and English Hundred is according to Grimm's law but that between /t/ and /d/ is not.



In place of |d| it should be |th|.

Latin ————— English  
Centum ————— Hundred

In 1875 Karl Verner formulated that if the Aryan P, T, K immediately follows the position of the accent, it shifts regularly to the Low German Ph, Th, Kh/h. But if the accent has any other position, it becomes B, D, G by double shifting.



We can explain this shifting through this triangle.

By single shifting -

P, T, K — Ph, Th, Kh/h

By double shifting -

P, T, K — B, D, G

The true Teutonic types of Father, Mother and Brother are Fader, Moder and Brother. The true Aryan types are Pitar, Matar and Bhratar.

Aryan	Teutonic	English
Pitar	Fader	Father
Matar	Moder	Mother
<del>Bhratar</del> Bhratar	Brother	Brother



The last of these shows the shifting of /t/ into /th/. The two former shows shifting of /t/ into /ð/. Verner says that the reason of this anomaly is accent. That is to say 'Pitar' and 'Mater' were accented on the later syllables, but 'bhratar' upon the former.

The Aryan accent was an accent of pitch. Verner thinks that the Teutonic accent was stress also. The stress falling upon the vowel of an accented syllable preserved the consonant from further change. Thus the Teutonic 'brother' accented on the former syllable kept its /th/ unchanged. The Teutonic 'father' accented on the later syllable suffered a further change of /th/ into /d/, thus becoming 'Fader'.

To take another instance, we may exemplify the curious change of /s/ to /z/ and /r/, as to which Grimm's law says nothing. It only occurs where /s/ has been riced to /z/ because the accent does not precede it. Sanskrit casual verbs formed by suffix /aya/ as in /Bharāya/ (bore) the accent is on the suffix. The corresponding suffix in Teutonic is /gan/ or /zan/. Hence from the verb /rise/ /risan/ was formed in which by Verner's law, the /s/ became first /z/ and afterward /r/. Verner's law at once explains how the English verb /to rear/ is the correct casual form of the verb /to rise/. The /r/ in the modern form /were/ is also formed in this way while /was/ has an /s/.

4

To sum up, Verner's law is really an improvement upon Grimm's law. Many corresponding changes which took place in various languages were satisfactorily explained by Karl Verner to the great advantage of the serious students of linguistics.

—X—