

Prelude to the *Principles* of 1949

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‘In choosing between the various proposals that have been made for revising our alphabet, we’ve been guided by the following principles, which I think are admitted by *most* of our readers as essential to a *practical* system of phonetic spelling.’ (Passy 1888: 57)

Thus Paul Passy introduces the first statement of the IPA’s six principles. With only minimal alteration, the six have acted as the cornerstone to the IPA’s transcriptional practices for more than 120 years.¹ Paul Passy (1859–1940), the editor of the journal at the time, may have drawn them up himself, or else been advised by Henry Sweet and Otto Jespersen. In 1896, Passy’s *Écriture phonétique* established the format for later equivalent versions, namely a statement of how the IPA’s notation should be used, with exemplifications from numerous languages and dialects. For the 1896 booklet, Passy used transcriptions of a short passage provided by readers of *The Phonetic Teacher* and *Le Maître Phonétique*.

In the 1900s, several versions of what became known as the *Principles* were published: 1900 (French), 1904 (English), 1905 (French), 1908 (French) and 1912 (English). Passy was responsible for all of them, except the 1904 version, which he co-authored with Ernest R. Edwards.²

L’Écriture phonétique of 1896 was reprinted in a revised version in 1921. In 1933, Daniel Jones and the Italian phonetician Amerindo Camilli published an Italian version (Jones & Camilli 1933). This was followed in 1944 by a Spanish version, edited by Jones with Ivar Dahl, a Scandinavian phonetician and philologist (Jones & Dahl 1944). A German version had been mooted as early as 1906, but was never realized.

In 1912, the Association appealed to its members for financial help with the costs of producing and marketing the *Principles*: ‘This pamphlet is absolutely essential for the proper carrying on of our propaganda’ (Jones 1912). And so the ‘Principles Fund’ came into being. The appeal was repeated regularly until 1914, when, just before the start of World War I, the debt stood at £27. 4s. 4d. – at least £2000 in today’s money.

The 1949 version of the *Principles*, edited by Jones and reproduced in this volume, served the Association well for almost twenty years, until in the late 1960s the decision was made to revise both the *Principles* and the Alphabet (Gimson 1969). In the event, only the Alphabet was updated, and disseminated as ‘Revised to 1979’. It was to be another thirty years before the appearance of the *Handbook* (International Phonetic Association 1999), which provided

¹ There is a slight mismatch between the wording of the first principle in the 1888 version and the 1949 one. Passy writes ‘separate sign’, Jones ‘separate letter’. Passy’s list of symbols and diacritics of 1888 is reproduced in MacMahon (1996: 832–833).

² Edwards (1871–1948) was bilingual in English and Japanese, a phonetician and one of Daniel Jones’ school-masters. See further Collins & Mees (1999: 28).

the public with an up-to-date account of articulatory phonetics and phonology in relation to notational practices.³

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³ Given the complexity of setting phonetic fonts in a pre-computer age, it is not surprising that occasionally a misprint has crept into the 1949 text. For example, at the bottom of page 15, last complete line, there is a missing ‘omega’ diacritic under the [k]. On page 51, in the Afrikaans *spécimen*, introductory remarks, line 7, the raising diacritic next to the [u] is problematic. (These misprints were first pointed out by the late Betsy Uldall.)