Philologists Meet Algonquian:
Du Ponceau and Pickering
on Eliot's Grammar

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For Eric Hamp
on his 70th birthday

In 1822 the Massachusetts Historical Society published in volume 9 of its Collections a reedition of John Eliot’s *The Indian Grammar Begun* (Eliot 1666) under the title *A Grammar of the Massachusetts Indian Language by John Eliot. A new edition: with notes and observations by Peter S. Du Ponceau, LL.D. and An introduction and Supplementary observations by John Pickering* (Eliot 1822). The introduction on the Massachusetts language was written by the Boston lawyer John Pickering (1777–1846), a polyglot who had been active in the field of philology and who was strongly interested in the study of native American languages. The addition of Du Ponceau’s observations and of Pickering’s supplementary observations is hardly surprising. John Pickering, who devoted all his spare time to the study of languages was in close epistolary contact with Peter Stephen Du Ponceau,²

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² On John Pickering’s life and scholarly career, see White (1848) and Pickering (1887). In 1818 Pickering published an *Essay on the Pronunciation of the Greek Language*; it was followed the same year by *On the Adoption of a Uniform Orthography for the Indian Languages of North America* (Pickering 1818).

³ On Peter Stephen Du Ponceau, see Coulet du Gard (1969), Dunglison (1844), Nadelmann (1953), Pratt (1972), Smith (1983), Tieck (1965), and Whitehead
who at that time was the Corresponding Secretary of the Historical and Literary Committee of the American Philosophical Society, a committee set up in 1815 "for making researches into and collecting materials for the history of the United States and of Pennsylvania in particular". With Peter Du Ponceau, as well as with his other favourite correspondent Wilhelm von Humboldt, John Pickering shared an interest in the structure of languages, and especially in those languages (such as Chinese or the American Indian languages) which had received less attention or were considered very different from the familiar European languages.

It was especially Peter Stephen Du Ponceau (1760–1844), a native Frenchman who had come to the U.S. in 1777 and who had established himself as a lawyer in Philadelphia, who urged the study of native American languages, on which he entertained a lively correspondence with missionaries (especially with John Heckewelder) and scholars in Europe and America. Du Ponceau's interest in languages was as we would call it today a "typological" one; but in line with Humboldt's organicist view of language, he linked the structural-typological analysis of languages with the study of civilization and the history of mankind. This type of study is the province of what Du Ponceau called "Philology", or the "Comparative science of languages" (in his French writings he uses the term philologie comparée). Du Ponceau not only practised this comparative science of languages — as did Pickering, whose endeavours were, however, much more modest — by studying intensively Chinese, and gathering information on American Indian languages, as well as Coptic, Berber, Armenian, etc., but he also theorized about it, trying to define its scope and status. The most elaborate statement can be found in a letter of 1836 sent to Mahlon Dickerson, the Secretary of the Navy, in reply to a request concerning linguistic research to be undertaken in the context of the Wilkes Expedition in the South Seas. Du Ponceau's reply takes the form of a six-page letter on the object and usefulness of philology. A few passages may be quoted here to show the relevance of this document:

The object of this science [= Philology] is from the variety of languages which exist on the surface of the earth, to trace, as far as possible, the history of mankind. It tends also to facilitate commercial intercourse. It is only since

(1939). Du Ponceau’s main linguistic works are his Report on the American Indian languages (1819), his Mémoire on their grammatical system (1838), and his Dissertation on the Nature and Character of the Chinese system of writing.

See, e.g., Du Ponceau (1826:1): "La Philologie comparée, que les Allemands appellent Linguistique et dont l'étude est si récente qu'elle n'a pas encore de nom parmi la plus part des nations de l'Europe, est cependant une des sciences les plus importantes et les plus dignes de l'attention du Philosophe."

APS Archives, PSD to Committee (File Dickerson), 17 Oct. 1836. A critical edition of this document is in preparation.
the beginning of the present Century, that barbarous languages, as they are called, that is to say, the idioms of those nations who are not possessed of the art of writing, has been seriously attended to. But great progress has been made in the acquisition of this knowledge. Not only vocabularies, but grammars & dictionaries have been published, of languages hitherto unknown, except by name, and sometimes even not so far. Before that time, Missionaries & travellers alone paid attention to the languages of savage Nations. The former, having only in view their laudable object, & not caring otherwise for the promotion of science, kept their works in manuscript or printed only a few copies for the use of their professional brethren, & those could not be purchased from the Booksellers; the latter confined themselves to a few meagre vocabularies, dispersed thro' numerous books of travels, & of little use to the Philosopher who had not access to the large libraries of Europe, in few of which the Collections could be found complete.

Philosophy, at last, took hold of the subject, and then began a new Science, called the "comparative Science of languages". The learned Societies of the United States have acquired their share of distinction in the promotion of this science. They have made known the forms & character of many Indian languages, & contributed largely to the mass of acquired knowledge.

Du Ponceau then outlines the task of the Philologist, observing first that languages "are to be considered in two points of view": (1) as to the words composing them, and (2) as to their "structure or Grammatical forms". With respect to the collection of vocabularies, Du Ponceau refers to Gallatin's "List of English words intended for Indian vocabularies", and stresses that the "Philologist will only take care to have the same words in his different vocabularies." As to the study of the structure of languages, he writes:

The short stay which the expedition will probably make, in the different places where it will stop, will give but little opportunity to the Philologist to become acquainted with the Grammar of the several idioms, as that seems to require some previous knowledge of the language. Yet that may be obtained in some degree, at least, with the aid of Missionaries & Interpreters, where these are to be found. It would be desirable that they should, at least, obtain the conjugation of some verbs, and some sentences of the most common use. The Lord's Prayer, in each language, is particularly recommended, not because it is the best in a Grammatical point of view, but because it is that which Philologists have chosen from time immemorial, and, therefore, is the best to serve as an object of comparison. It is also recommended because it is the easiest to be obtained from missionaries. The Philologist should parse it as well as he can, so as to give the full meaning of each word of which it is composed.

It is in the light of this comparative outlook that we have to see the reedition of Eliot's grammar, supplied with notes and observations by Peter Du Ponceau and John Pickering. In fact, Eliot's descriptive grammar was

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6 This list forms the basis of the classificatory attempt in Gallatin (1826).
seized upon as an occasion to show the importance of philology, and to stress the specificity of the structure of American Indian languages. This is very clear from the opening paragraphs of Du Ponceau's observations:

The great and good man, whose work has given rise to the following observations, did not foresee, when he wrote his Indian grammar, that it would be sought after and studied by the learned of all nations, as a powerful help towards the improvement of a science not then in existence: I mean the *Comparative Science of Languages*, which of late has made such progress in our own country, as well as in *Europe*, where our aboriginal idioms have become a subject of eager investigation. The *Augustine* of New England had no object in view, but that which he expresses in his title page — "the help of such as desired to learn the Indian language for the furtherance of the Gospel among the natives" . . . Yet before I proceed to the Language of the Massachusetts Indians, I may be permitted to shew what fruits have been derived from the pursuit of our science, since it has begun to be considered as an interesting object of study. What great advantage may be derived from it in the end — whether it will enable us to solve the problem of the origin of the population of this continent, or lead to some other discovery not yet thought of, though not less important than those that have been mentioned, is yet in the womb of futurity, nevertheless it is certain, that the researches of modern philologists have brought to light many curious and interesting facts, of which our ancestors were entirely ignorant, and by means of which the science has acquired certain fixed points, from whence we may proceed with greater ease to further and more particular investigations. (Du Ponceau 1822:i–iii)

Eliot's grammar proved to be an excellent opportunity to show the progress of the comparative science of languages, and this for at least two reasons. First, because it was a rather unbiased attempt to lay down into rules a native American language. In achieving this Eliot was very much in line with earlier attempts to show the regular or rule-like nature of the European vernaculars, for a long time considered to be inferior to the classical languages, because of their alleged chaotic and vacillating nature. Eliot's merit has been to show that this rule-like nature could also be found in the languages of the New World, and more particularly that the Massachusetts language also displays "a reason of Grammar", in conjunction with a universal logic. Kenneth Miner (1974) has described Eliot's grammar as the first attempt at a scientific grammar of an Indian language. For Eliot, who modestly observed that his *Essay* was "not worthy the Name of a Grammar", the issue was perhaps not so much that of presenting a scientific grammar: it was to apply the general scheme of grammar (as divided into an art of making words and an art of ordering words for speech) to the Massachusetts language. In applying this scheme, Eliot worked with the levels of sounds (for the notation of which he used the Roman alphabet, with a number of specific values given to some letters or their combinations, e.g., *(g)*, *(j)*, *(8)*, 7

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7The symbol 8 is used here for the 17th-century notation for the high velar
and with a number of diacritics), and of "parts of speech" (considered from the point of view of their formation and their construction). In applying this Latinizing model of grammar to Massachusetts, Eliot did not fail to notice the divergences between Massachusetts and languages such as Latin or English. As a case in point one can mention the "variation of nouns", about which Eliot says the following:

The variation of Nouns is not by Male and Female, as in other Learned Languages, and in European Nations they do... The first kinde of Nouns is, when the thing signified is a living Creature. The second kinde is, when the thing signified is not a living Creature. Therefore I order them thus:

There be two forms or declensions of Nouns: Animate/Inanimate. (Eliot 1666:8–9)

Eliot also puts in evidence "the affixing of the Noun with the Pronoun", which as a "manner of speech" is "a new thing to us that know the European or Western Languages" (1666:11). But he is perhaps most original in the description of what he calls the three ranks of nouns (viz. the primitive, the diminutive, and the possessive: e.g., nunksqua 'a girl', nunksquaes/nunk-squaemes 'a little girl', nunnunksquaeum 'my girl'), and in his attempt to bring some order in the suffix forms of the verb (animate conjugation). As noted by Eliot, the complex morphology of the noun and the verb reduce the role of "other syntax (is)" in the language:

There be five Concordances of the Suffix form Active, wherein the Verb doth receive a various formation... The reason why I call them Concordances, is, because the chief weight and strength of the Syntaxis of this Language, lyeth in this eminent manner of formation of Nouns and Verbs, with the Pronoun persons (Eliot 1666:17);

But the manner of the formation of the Nouns and Verbs have such a latitude of use, that there needeth little other Syntaxis in the Language. (Eliot 1666:23)

Eliot's grammar was a precious document for Du Ponceau and Pickering, but not only because of its fairly unbiased description and its rather vowel (noted by two o's written into each other); the same symbol is used in Goddard and Bragdon (1988).

By formation Eliot (1666:6–7) understands the "general qualifications" (i.e., primitive vs. derivative words; simple vs. compound words), as well as "the kindes" of words (i.e., parts of speech: nouns, verbs, adnouns, adverbs, pronouns and conjunctions).

These are divided into "suffix animate object", "suffix animate mutual", "suffix animate end and inanimate object", "suffix animate form social", and "suffix form advocate or in stead form" (Eliot 1666:17–18).

See Pickering (1822:4): "Some of the facts here stated, however extraordinary they may be thought by speculative persons, who have formed their theories upon
carefully arranged paradigms. Another reason for its choice was the fact that the grammar could be verified in Eliot’s Bible translation,\textsuperscript{11} which offered much more illustrative data. Du Ponceau expressly noted this point:

My task is that of an annotator of the venerable Eliot’s Grammar of the (Massachusetts) Indian language; and my object is to communicate, in aid of this valuable work, some of the most material facts and observations which several careful perusals of its contents, with collateral studies, have disclosed and suggested to me. Among those studies, I have not neglected that of his translation of the sacred writings, from which I have derived a greater insight into the nature, forms and construction of this curious language, than could be obtained from the Grammar alone . . .

This translation of the Bible by our venerable Eliot is a rich and valuable mine of Indian philology. A complete grammar and dictionary might, with labour and perseverance, be extracted from it; for there is hardly a mode or figure of speech, which is not to be found somewhere in the sacred writings. It has been of great use to me in the investigation of the character and structure of the American languages, and I hope to derive still further benefit from it. Every copy of it, that is yet extant, ought to be preserved with the greatest care, as it is hardly to be hoped that it will ever be entirely reprinted. (Du Ponceau 1822:v, ix)

How did Du Ponceau and Pickering conceive their task of annotators? It must be pointed out from the very outset that Pickering’s remarks are dependent on Du Ponceau’s ideas. This holds not only for the supplementary observations on Du Ponceau’s notes, but also for the introduction, in which Pickering heavily relies on Du Ponceau’s statements in the first volume of the \textit{Transactions of the Historical and Literary Committee of the American Philosophical Society}. Pickering’s introduction points out the importance of comparative philology, and recalls the main ideas of Du Ponceau’s “Report on the Indian languages” (1819), viz. that the American Indian languages manifest a number of interesting characteristics (such as the compounding of subjects and objects with the verb, and the absence of the verbs \textit{to have} and \textit{to be}), and that they offer facts which are in plain contradiction with the speculations of certain philosophers about these languages. These speculations wrongly attributed lexical\textsuperscript{12} and morphological poverty to these

\textsuperscript{11}Eliot (1663, second edition 1685 [in fact 1680–1685]); Du Ponceau and Pickering had seen both editions, but relied mostly on the second one.

\textsuperscript{12}The common assumption was that the “savage languages” lacked an elaborate series of numerals and a vocabulary for “metaphysical ideas”.

the study of the European languages alone, will be found to have been noticed in the following Grammar of the venerable \textit{Eliot}, composed at the distance of a century and a half from our own age, and long before any favourite theory or philological enthusiasm can be supposed to have warped the judgment of the writer and led him to distort his facts, in order to make them suit an ingenious hypothesis.”
“savage” languages — an opinion which Clavigero (1780) had already refuted on the basis of data from Nahuatl. For the North American languages, Du Ponceau and Pickering found themselves in a similar position, and were confirmed in this by Heckewelder:

For my own part, I confess that I am lost in astonishment at the copiousness and admirable structure of their languages; for which I can only account by looking up to the GREAT FIRST CAUSE. (Pickering 1822:7, quoting Du Ponceau)

The almost inconceivable degree of regularity in the American languages is not the least curious of their peculiarities. Molina says of that of Chili: “What is truly surprising in this language is, that it contains no irregular verb or noun”. Every thing in it may be said to be regulated with a geometrical precision, and displays much art with great simplicity, and a connection so well ordered and unvarying in its grammatical rules, which always make the subsequent depend upon the antecedent, that the theory of the language is easy and may be learned in a few days . . . Mr. Heckewelder observes of the Delaware that the verbs are conjugated through all their negative, causative and various other forms, with fewer irregularities than any other language that I know of . . . Mr. Du Ponceau says too, of the same language, that “it would rather appear to have been formed by philosophers in their closets, than by savages in the wilderness”. (Pickering 1822:12)

Of course, these statements were based on the then available information on North American languages, and as well known the linguistic horizon was a restricted one in the 1820s. This explains why Du Ponceau could write that the “model of those languages [= those of the American Indians] has been found to be the same from north to south, varieties being only observed in some of the details, which do not affect the similarity of the general system.” But the concordance of the grammatical system is a matter of what Du Ponceau called the “ideological” branch of philology; another branch is “etymology”, the study of words leading to conclusions concerning the descent of languages. Here Du Ponceau writes,

And yet our American idioms, except where they can be traced to a common stock, differ so much from each other in point of etymology, that no affinity has been yet discovered between them. (Du Ponceau 1822:iv)

In Pickering’s introduction we find an attempt at classifying the “numerous dialects of North America” into three or four classes, viz. Karalit (the language of Greenland and of the Eskimos), Delaware, Iroquois, and — on the authority of Heckewelder — the Floridan languages. It is to the Delaware

13 It is interesting to note how many key terms of modern linguistic theorizing (ranging from sociolinguistics to historical linguistics), such as “standard language”, “structure”, “stock”, etc., can be found in Du Ponceau’s and Pickering’s writings; Du Ponceau must probably be credited with having first proposed the term “polysynthetic”.

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language that Pickering assigns the one described by Eliot, which he calls Massachusetts. All the New England varieties are thus brought back to one principal dialect, on the basis of statements made by Gookin, Roger Williams, Jonathan Edwards, and John Heckewelder:

It appears, that the Lenape may properly enough be considered as the principal, or standard language of the New England Indians, as well as of various tribes that inhabited the adjacent territories. (Pickering 1822:20)

We can now turn to Du Ponceau's observations on the structure of the Massachusetts language. They are grouped according to the parts of speech discussed by Eliot, and they intend — as could be expected — to place the Massachusetts data within a larger context. As such, Du Ponceau compares the animate endings -og in Massachusetts, -ock, -og and -auock in Narragansett, -ak in Delaware, and the inanimate endings -ash (Massachusetts), -ash/-anash (Narragansett), and -all/-wall (Delaware). He also attempts to link what he calls the "pronoun-article" mo in Massachusetts with the prefixed m- in Delaware, Shawnee, Potawatomi, Penobsot (and also refers to the prefix na- in Otomi). For this prefix m- as attested in Delaware, Du Ponceau quotes from a letter by Heckewelder, who is also quoted at length in the paragraphs on the adjectives, which are devoted to the various ways of translating the English adjectives "old" and "young" in Delaware. In his observations on the pronouns, Du Ponceau relates the Massachusetts forms to those of Delaware (stating that "their etymology may be traced to the same source"), and then discusses the issue of an exclusive/inclusive plural:

The particular plural of the Delawares, or the American plural, as Mr. Pickering very properly calls it, has excited much attention among philologists. Our author [= Eliot] makes no mention of this distinction; yet there is great reason to believe, that it exists in the Massachusetts idiom. In the Delaware,

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14 Pickering (1822:15–16) distinguishes five principal nations in New England at the time of the first settlement: the "Pequots", the "Naragansets", the "Pawkun-nawkuts", the "Massachusetts" and the "Pawtuckets". See also Du Ponceau's observations (1822:vii).

15 As is clear from Du Ponceau's examples (metah 'the heart', muhhog 'the body'), this "pronoun-article" is the indefinite possessor marker.

16 Heckewelder sent Du Ponceau the following information: "The word old is employed by us in the most general sense. We say in our languages, an old man, an old horse, an old dog, an old basket, &c. The Indians, on the contrary, vary their expressions, when speaking of a thing that has life and of one that has not; for the latter, instead of the word old, they use terms which convey the idea, that the thing has lasted long, that it has been used, worn out, &c. Of all which take the following examples:

1. Kikey, old, advanced in years (applied to things animate).
2. Chowiey, or chowiyey, old by use, wearing, &c." (Du Ponceau 1822:xvii)
the particular plural, though not mentioned in Mr. Zeisberger's Grammar is expressed by niluna, which means we, some of us, with relation to a particular number of persons. It is to be observed, that it begins with the letter n, indicative of the first person; which being repeated in the last syllable na, seems as if it meant to say, we, we; that is, we, particularly speaking, but not all; whereas the general plural, kiluna (we, all of us) begins with the pronominal affix of the second person, as if to say, we and you, or we you and all. The same difference is found in the Massachusetts, where we is expressed in two modes, neenawun and kenawun; the one in the same manner beginning with the affix of the first person, afterwards repeated, and the other with that of the second person; from whence, and the great affinity of the two languages, I strongly conjecture that neenawun means the particular, and kenawun the general plural. This might, I dare say, be ascertained by searching for examples in our author's translation of the Bible; but these notes having been called for sooner than I expected, I have not time at present for the investigation. If the rules of analogy are not deceptive, it will be found, I believe, that I am right in my conjecture. (Du Ponceau 1822:xix–xx)

As an interesting side remark Du Ponceau notes that apparently in Cherokee there is a dual like in the Classical Indo-European languages, which is lacking in Delaware and Massachusetts:

There are varieties in the polysynthetick forms of the Indian languages, which do not, however, affect their general character. Absolute uniformity is not to be found in any of the works of nature; and there is no reason why languages should be excepted from this universal rule. (Du Ponceau 1822:xx)

Du Ponceau's observations end with a section concerning the verb, and this is also the main topic of Pickering's supplementary observations (1822:xxx–xliv).17 Du Ponceau first points to the typical compounding of subjects and objects with the verbs — for which he once uses the term transitions, coined by the "Spanish-Mexican" grammarians — and expresses his admiration for the complexity of the verbal system in the American languages:

What shall we say of the reflected, compulsive, meditative, communicative, reverential, frequentative and other circumstantial verbs, which are found in the idioms of New Spain, and other American Indian languages? The mind is lost in the contemplation of the multitude of ideas thus expressed at once by means of a single word, varied through moods, tenses, persons, affirmation, negation, transitions, etc. by regular forms and cadences, in which the strictest analogy is preserved! Philosophers may, if they please, find here proofs of what they have thought proper to call barbarism; for my part, I am free to say, that I cannot so easily despise what I feel myself irresistibly compelled to admire. (Du Ponceau 1822:xxii)

Du Ponceau deplores the fact that Eliot's grammar provides only scanty information on the verb conjugations, and he has recourse to Zeisberger's

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17 A smaller portion deals with the forms of the numeral one (nequt and pasuk).
grammar of Delaware in order to outline the general structure of these conjugations (contrastng, e.g., the Massachusetts future built with the auxiliaries *mos* and *pish*, with the Delaware future in *tsch*). The remainder of Du Ponceau’s observations is taken up by a discussion of the translation of the sentence “I am that I am” in Exodus 3:14. Since Du Ponceau had written in his Report to the Historical Committee of the American Philosophical Society (1819) that the verbs *to have* and *to be* were lacking in the Indian languages, and had stated, on Zenteno Tapia’s (1753) authority, that the Biblical sentence was untranslatable in Nahuatl, he was now intrigued by the discrepancy between Eliot’s statement in his grammar that the Massachusetts do not have a “compleat distinct word for the Verb substantive” and his translation of the Exodus passage as *nen nuttiinniin nen nuttiinniin*. This crux forms the subject matter of an extensive correspondence between Du Ponceau, the missionaries Heckewelder and Dencke, the Boston judge Davis, and John Pickering. The upshot of this correspondence, almost fully quoted in the observations and supplementary observations, can be summarized as follows:

(a) On the basis of Heckewelder’s information, Du Ponceau maintained his statement about the absence of the substantive verb, and therefore interpreted Eliot’s translation as an approximative rendering;

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18 In connection with this Du Ponceau has an interesting remark about the Latin or European bias of Spanish authors of Meso-Amerindian grammars: “I have observed elsewhere, that those who write Indian grammars strive too much to assimilate the forms of those languages to their own or to the Latin, whereas they have a grammar peculiar to themselves, which ought to be studied and explained. The curious and not very natural coincidence, which the Spanish grammarians have almost generally found between the Latin forms and those of the languages of their Indians, inclines me to suspect the accuracy of those writers” (Du Ponceau 1822:xxiv).

19 As pointed out by Ives Goddard, this sequence is a remarkably accurate attempt at translating the troublesome Exodus passage, by using the verb *to be* first with an oblique complement, and then in the subordinative.

20 In his letter of 8 April 1819, Heckewelder furnished the following observation: “I cannot believe, that any of the tribes connected with the *Lenni Lenape* can translate into their language the words *I am that I am*, so as to come up to the same meaning. The late David Zeisberger and myself sought many years in vain for this substantive verb. We had the best chapel interpreters, I may say orators, some of whom were not at a loss to interpret critically almost all scripture passages and expressions; yet with regard to the one in question, they never came up to the meaning, but made use of the best substitute they could; for instance: *I abtschi gutteli n’dellsin* ‘I always act the same’, *elsia, natsch abtschi n’dellsin* ‘so as I do, I shall always do’, or ‘I shall always act the same’; or again, *elinazia abtschitsch n’dellinizin* ‘as I appear (*am* to appearance), I shall always be’. I cannot find a single instance in the language, in which the verb *I am* is used by itself, that is to say, uncombined with the idea of the act about to be done” (quoted after Du Ponceau 1822:xxvii).
Du Ponceau interpreted *nuttinniin* as the Massachusetts equivalent of Delaware *n'dellsin*, with *nut* corresponding to Delaware *n'd* or *n't*, *tin* to Delaware *tel* or *del*, and *in* as the verbal ending. Du Ponceau translates then the passage as “I do so, I do so”, and quotes other passages in Eliot’s Bible translation where *tin* seems to mean “to do, to act”. He modestly adds: “this is, however, but my humble conjecture, which I offer with great diffidence, after the question has been given up by those who are much more skilled than I am in the Indian languages; of which I profess to know nothing except the little I have acquired in the solitude of the closet” (Du Ponceau 1822:xxix);

(c) Pickering, looking for the Massachusetts renderings of *to be* in Eliot’s Bible, and noting the diversity of expressions, confronted his findings with Cotton’s vocabulary of Natick, and relaunched the discussion through a new epistolary exchange with Du Ponceau and, via the latter, with Heckewelder. He reaches the same conclusion as Du Ponceau as to the approximative nature of Eliot’s translation, but not totally convinced by the equation with Delaware *n'dellsin*, he compares *nuttinniin* with the Narragansett forms *ntiin, wuttiin*, etc., given by Roger Williams (1643). This “other view of the subject” is presented as a mere conjecture, and proposed with the approbation of Du Ponceau: Pickering analyzes *nuttinniin* as containing a sequence comparable to the form *ntiin* “I live” in Williams’s vocabulary.

Now, if Eliot’s verb *nuttinniin* is in fact the same with Williams’s verb *n’tiin*, the signification of it, as the reader perceives, is very different from that of the pure substantive verb; some other idea being united with that of mere existence in the abstract. How far this analysis of the verb *nuttinniin* may be well founded, is submitted to the candid reader, with all that hesitation, which ought to be felt by one, who has no more knowledge of the Indian languages than I possess. (Pickering 1822:xliii)

We can conclude our story on this humble note. I would just like to add that it would be unfair to criticize Du Ponceau and Pickering from a modern point of view for some of their conjectures or for maybe asking the wrong questions about a language which, in spite of careful linguistic and philological analysis in the past decades, still keeps some of its secrets. We should rather appreciate their efforts as philologists, in a twofold sense, viz. as comparative philologists interested in the structure of languages, approached without too much apriorism, and then also as text philologists, interpreting the rich corpus of Eliot’s Bible translation in confrontation with his grammatical description of the Massachusetts language and with data from other Algonquian languages.

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