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NOTES AND DISCUSSION

The English Patient: English grammar and teaching in the twentieth century[1]

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In the first half of the twentieth century, English grammar disappeared from the curriculum of most schools in England, but since the 1960s it has gradually been reconceptualised, under the influence of linguistics, and now once again has a central place in the official curriculum. Our aim is not only to document these changes, but also to explain them. We suggest that the decline of grammar in schools was linked to a similar gap in English universities, where there was virtually no serious research or teaching on English grammar. Conversely, the upsurge of academic research since the 1960s has provided a healthy foundation for school-level work and has prevented a simple return to old-fashioned grammar-teaching now that grammar is once again fashionable. We argue that linguists should be more aware of the links between their research and the school curriculum.

1. INTRODUCTION

Why did English schools stop teaching grammar in the 1960s? This is not merely a matter for the history of education, because it also concerns the research community as a whole. We shall suggest below that one of the reasons was the lack of research on English grammar. Our primary focus will be on the history of English teaching in England, but other parts of the UK have had a similar history, and indeed the 'death of grammar-teaching' was a feature of most English-speaking countries at about the same time,

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[1] The first part of the article's title refers to a film, popular around the turn of the millennium, whose plot turns on the identity of a wounded combatant who turns out to be less English than his speech suggested. We argue that the fate of grammar-teaching has been linked to the crisis of identity through which the subject called 'English' has passed during the last hundred years.

so no doubt similar histories could be written about these other countries. However, England is special because this process has been sharply reversed since about 1980, so we are now experiencing a 'rebirth of grammar-teaching'. This development is of even more interest to the research community; for example, it opens new avenues of research, new markets for publications and new career routes for undergraduates. Our aim in this article is to explain why grammar-teaching died, why it revived and how it has changed between its old life and its new incarnation.

For several decades up to about 2000, most state schools in England taught little or no grammar, and it is still normal for school leavers to know virtually nothing about grammar; for example, in 1998 it was found that 'younger teachers had generally not been taught grammar explicitly as part of their own education' (Anon 1998b: 26). This situation is by no means inevitable. Many countries see grammar as an important part of the school curriculum. Historically, too, grammar has often loomed large in school teaching; for example, grammar was part of the 'trivium' of grammar, rhetoric and dialectic (Barton & Hudson 2002). Indeed it may be possible to trace grammar-teaching back to the Babylonian grammatical texts of about 2000 BC (Gragg 1994). We shall suggest that the rather special circumstances that undermined grammar-teaching in twentieth century England included lack of support from the universities.

Does it matter whether schools teach grammar? We take it for granted that it matters to the research community and to school teachers, but we also think it should concern the general public. In brief,[2] we see the following reasons why children should learn about grammar (including some standard metalanguage):

○ To expand their grammatical competence: explicit awareness of grammatical structure probably helps children to expand their competence to include the many grammatical patterns which are needed in adult life but not found in children's casual conversation.
○ To underpin this competence in performance (in writing, reading, speaking, listening): a shared metalanguage allows teachers and pupils to communicate about their performance and to explore complex links such as those between grammatical structures and genres.
○ To support foreign-language learning: explicit instruction is an important part of grammar-teaching and is easier if the pupils already have some understanding of how their first language works.
○ To develop their thinking skills: grammar is their main tool for talking about logical connections such as classification, causation and time, so they should understand this tool.

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[2] For more justification of these claims, see Walmsley 1984; Hudson 1992, 1998, 1999, 2001.

- ○ To develop their investigative skills: when grammar is taught through investigation of the children's existing knowledge, it is a good introduction to scientific method.
- ○ To appreciate their own minds: grammar is a highly interconnected mental system, and when taught well, most people find it interesting.
- ○ To develop a critical response to some of the ways in which language is used in their everyday environment.

Clearly it is a matter of debate how much understanding schools can impart. Our view is that the understanding must include some of the technicalities of grammar as well as more general ideas about language variation and use. However, this is also the view that underlies recent developments in English schools, which is why we believe that our colleagues may be interested to learn about these.

For our purposes, we divide the twentieth century into three periods:

- ○ up to the 1960s
- ○ from the 1960s to about 1988
- ○ post-1988

For each period we first describe the scene in the academic study of English grammar and then look at the state of grammar-teaching in schools, with some discussion of university courses which link the two.

2. EARLY HISTORY

2.1 *Linguistics and descriptive grammar 1892 to the 1960s*

The twentieth century witnessed an ever-widening gap in England between the practice of professional grammarians on the one hand, and the lay public and practice in schools on the other. To explain how such a state of affairs could come about, when grammar had played a central role in the curriculum for centuries, we need to look at the state of descriptive linguistics, and in particular the practice of writing grammars during the same period. What follows is a necessarily abridged account of the complex web of relations between linguistic practice, public perceptions of grammar, institutional shifts and political decisions which determined the place of English grammar-teaching in England throughout the course of the century.

The dominant figure in England at the turn of the twentieth century had been Henry Sweet (1845–1912). Sweet was essentially a philologist, concerned with the understanding of texts (hermeneutics) and textual criticism. He offered striking and original insights into the structure of English, as well as helping to lay the foundations for the scientific study of language in general, and phonetics in particular. Unlike some of his contemporaries, he believed that the study of language should begin with one's own native SPEECH. In the teaching world, Edward Adolf Sonnenschein probably occupied at least as

prominent a place in the academic consciousness as Sweet did, especially as far as the teaching of grammar in schools was concerned. Sonnenschein had founded the Birmingham Grammatical Society in 1885 with the purpose of promoting simplicity and uniformity of terminology in the teaching of the 'school' languages, and of encouraging grammatical research among teachers.

This work was to develop in two major directions. The first resulted in a series of books covering the most important languages taught in schools, which were uniform in classification and terminology, scope, size and type. This series – the 'Parallel Grammar Series' (PGS) – covered eight languages, each with its own printed grammar, and some with supplementary readers as well.

The second area into which Sonnenschein channelled his energies was the Joint Committee on Grammatical Terminology (JCGT) – the political arm, it might be said, of the practical work being done through the PGS. The committee published its recommendations in 1911 (Anon 1911). There was little danger of them being overlooked: with seemingly tireless energy Sonnenschein forged links not only with eight different associations in Britain, who were persuaded to nominate members for the Committee, but also with like-minded colleagues in the United States, Germany, Austria and France. However, for all this activity Sonnenschein's campaign came to little. This was in part because of the opposition of no less a figure than Otto Jespersen, who took a different view on both theory and terminology (Walmsley 1989).

The most prominent linguists of the following generation were Harold Palmer (1877–1949), Sir Alan Gardiner (1879–1963), Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942) and J. R. Firth (1890–1960). Since no chair of linguistics existed in Britain before the Second World War (Firth was the first to have the title 'Professor' conferred on him, in 1944) the linguistic work which did go on was done in other departments: Palmer's most impressionistic and creative years were spent abroad, first in Belgium, until his work was interrupted by the war, and later in Japan; Gardiner was a pre-eminent egyptologist who had studied in Paris and Oxford; Malinowski was an anthropologist who taught first at the London School of Economics, later at Yale University; and Firth, before moving to the Department of General Linguistics in the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, had been Professor of English in Lahore, India (until 1928), and later Senior Lecturer in Phonetics at University College London (UCL) under Daniel Jones. The linguistic interests of these four were understandably influenced by problems thrown up by their immediate duties, and these were only peripherally or not at all connected with the description of English as a mother tongue.

Up to the outbreak of war, it seems, little serious work on grammar was being pursued in Britain, still less on the grammar of English. The work which was published was produced primarily by free-lances or practising

teachers and was orientated to the needs of schools, journalists or civil servants. But although there existed only the most rudimentary institutionalised framework for academic work on the grammar of contemporary English in Britain, and little motivation to produce anything outside such a framework, writing grammars only constitutes a small part of the country's linguistic endeavour as a whole: the energies of the next generation were being absorbed by other tasks.

Outside the UK, by contrast, the first half of the twentieth century was a productive period for English grammars. Major works were published in the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany – in English, but not by British authors. During the same period, other important grammars appeared in the United States (Curme 1935, and the first of Fries's grammars – *American English grammar*, Fries 1940). The latter is significant in that it is the first grammar of English to be based on a specified, limited corpus of material – 2000 personal letters written to U.S. government departments, together with excerpts from 1000 others.

It goes without saying that the author of a scholarly reference grammar of English keeps a careful watch on what is being published elsewhere. This perspective gives a good impression of how the work which was being done in Britain was perceived from outside. Kruisinga, in the fifth edition of his *Handbook* (Kruisinga 1911) gives a list of 'those books … that have been found directly useful in the writing of this work' (Kruisinga 1911: XI). Of the twenty-one works listed, only two are English: Palmer 1924 and Sweet 1892–1898. Kruisinga's of course represents only one continental perception of the work that was being done in Britain; nevertheless, it is probably not far wrong in its assessment.

After the nineteen-twenties, however, a chasm opened up, and grammatical activity sank to an all-time low. The English grammars which did appear were produced almost entirely for use in schools; the structure of contemporary English failed to attract the interest of the few academics who could have engaged in it, and the work that was done seems to have exhausted itself in discussions about case or tense or mood (traditional touchstones for English grammars) or on the niceties of usage. Here again, looking at how the study of contemporary English was viewed from the outside is an instructive experience. Funke, in his *Englische Sprachkunde* (Funke 1950), surveyed the work done world-wide in English philology from 1935 onwards but cites only a handful of articles written in England and, to set against such names as those of Poutsma, Jespersen and Kruisinga, has only *The teaching of English in England* (for teachers); Palmer; Grattan and Gurrey's   AQ1 *Our living language* (Grattan & Gurrey 1925); and Treble and Vallins's *An ABC of English usage* (Treble & Vallins 1936).

Up to the outbreak of World War Two, then, little was being done in Britain for the descriptive grammar of English, and much of the older material continued to be recycled until well after the war.

According to Fries, the view that there was no necessary connection between a knowledge of systematic grammar and a practical control of good English had been propagated 'throughout more than half the nineteenth century' (Fries 1940: 19). Adamson, for instance – echoing Sweet (Sweet 1892: 4f.) – drew a clear distinction at the beginning of the twentieth century between grammar as a set of rules followed by speakers of a language on the one hand, and grammar in the sense of cognitive (explicit, reproducible) knowledge on the other: 'The distinction between the scientific study of a language as exhibited in its grammar and the attainment of the *art* of speaking the language is now generally recognized; as a consequence it is no longer held that a vernacular speech is acquired through its grammar' (Adamson 1907: 173; author's italics – R.A.H./J.W.). In the curricular constellation of the time, pressure was also growing to place more weight on literature at the expense of grammar. From the teachers' point of view, there was increasing uncertainty as to the purpose and use of grammar, and even as to its very nature. There can also be little doubt that parsing and analysis – particularly when coupled to the Joint Committee's terminology – baffled not just the pupils but many of the teachers, too.

A further disincentive to younger scholars was the sheer weight of scholarship in this area, coming out of the continent and the United States, and particularly from the Netherlands and Denmark: faced with such massive tomes, what could there be left to do? Bryan, for instance, wrote, 'The publication within the last few years of grammars by Poutsma, Kruisinga, Curme, and Jespersen would seem to render futile any further study of such an important subject as the respective functions of the preterite and the perfect tense in Present-Day English' (Bryan 1936: 363).

Nevertheless Funke, in his 1950 survey, presented a list of tasks still awaiting completion. He perceived among other things a pressing need for dialect studies – ('England ist nahezu das einzige unter den Kulturländern, welches dieses wichtige wissenschaftliche Instrument [a dialect atlas – R.A.H./J.W.] noch nicht besitzt' – 'England is just about the only civilised country still left not in possession of such an important scientific instrument' Funke 1950: 47). Reliable modern dictionaries of Old and Middle English were also needed; but above all, as Funke noted in the closing sentences of his monograph, there was a need for 'die *strukturale Analyse* der englischen Sprache der Gegenwart' ('the STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS of present-day English – Funke 1950: 159 – Funke's italics [R.A.H./J.W.]). In Britain, however, the skills which WERE available in the field of 'English' during this period were increasingly being absorbed by competing areas: by English Literature in the first instance, but also by Old and Middle English, by lexicography (the *New English dictionary*) and – under the auspices of one of Britain's most capable linguists, Allen Mawer, by onomastics – the Survey of English Place Names. The only two areas in which work being done in

England was of much interest to continental colleagues were phonetics and place-name study.

This picture was confirmed by a conference held in Oxford shortly after the end of World War Two. Following the recent military upheaval, continental scholars were anxious to renew contact with English colleagues. Zandvoort hoped to find out 'whether and how far there exists a consensus of opinion concerning the principles of the study of modern English' (Zandvoort 1952: 2). But Zandvoort was to be disappointed. In place of a thriving section on modern English language (as a counterpart to English Literature) there was virtually nothing. Zandvoort concluded: '[W]e can hardly look to our *English* colleagues for much guidance in these matters. As far as British universities and other institutions of learning are concerned the study of English, apart, perhaps, from that of English phonetics, may be said to be non-existent' (Zandvoort 1952: 2; emphasis in the original – R.A.H./J.W.).

While work on the description of English proceeded apace on the mainland of Europe, it was not apparently seen as sufficiently prestigious, intellectually challenging or stimulating, to draw scholars in England into its sphere of influence. A perceived gap in scholarship can, though, act as a spur to filling it. The question that exercised some scholars' minds was how to do this. In the United States, the new insights provided by structuralism were already beginning to work through into descriptive grammars. Fries (1940) had opened up new avenues for grammaticography with his description of a clearly defined corpus. Parallel to this, he developed a refined methodology based on the distribution of forms, with as little reference to meaning as possible (Fries 1951).

The first of the above features, the question of a corpus, raised questions of what it exactly was that grammarians thought they were describing. Treble and Vallins were interested in what one might call the etiquette of language. The usages they condemned were less ungrammatical in terms of English grammar than unacceptable in terms of usage. But the demand that pupils should take 'the language of everyday life' as their starting point for the study of grammar was faced with the apparent problem that 'we do not know for certain what forms and structures we actually do use in our daily lives; and examples in this book and in every grammar book that is now in use in schools are "concocted", being either made up … or reproduced from memory (or intuition!), and therefore are not reliable … until that survey [the Survey of English Usage – R.A.H./J.W.] has been made, we must continue to study the grammar of English in memorized or in inadequately observed usages …' (Gurrey 1961: 139f.). It was Randolph Quirk who was to fill this gap. Using much the same arguments – namely, that conventional grammars were unreliable, made use of concocted examples and were based more on the idiosyncratic registration of oddities than on systematic observation of the normal

(Quirk 1960: *passim*) – Quirk set up the Survey of English Usage at University College London in 1959.

It is at this point that the history of English grammaticography and the teaching of grammar in schools meet: the decline in activity in linguistics between the mid-nineteen-twenties and the early nineteen-sixties is mirrored by the gap in grammar-teaching in state schools over the same period. But although these two stories are intertwined, the two levels were subject to somewhat different pressures.

2.2 *Grammar and schools to the 1960s*

In a nutshell, the story of language study in twentieth century England and Wales is one of a discipline being systematically eradicated from the curricula of schools and universities, and disappearing from view before reinventing itself to become established once more in both contexts. On one level there are reasons for thinking that the way in which grammar was taught in schools in the first quarter of the century did something, at least, to contribute to its own demise. But on another level, the expulsion of grammar from the curriculum can be viewed as an almost ineluctable side-effect of the long-drawn out campaign of a new discipline to establish itself in the curriculum of schools and universities: English Literature.

Historians of 'English' like to place the demise of grammar in the 1960s ('by and large creative English [*sic*] will not include grammar-teaching as such' (Shayer 1972: 165)). But, as we have seen, the debate had been going on a hundred years earlier. The English Association identified the teaching of grammar as a 'vexed question' in 1923 (English Association 1923: 3; and note that §§254–266 in the Newbolt Report (Board of Education 1921) are headed *The problem*[!] *of grammar*) and 'the problem' remained a problem until the last quarter of the twentieth century.

To understand these developments we need to look a little more closely at the contents and methods of grammar-teaching. In the early decades of the century very little grammar, in comparison with literature, seems to have been required of elementary school teachers. The syllabus for the Preliminary Examination for the Elementary Schools Teachers' Certificate, to be taken in 1911, simply ordains '(1) English Grammar' and '(2) the Elements of English Composition and Literature' (Board of Education 1909: 7). The 1907 syllabus for candidates to become pupil-teachers gives under 'English': 'The elements of English Grammar, including the analysis of sentences and parsing. The first elements of etymology, Paraphrase of a short passage not previously seen … A short essay … A few simple questions will be set to test the general reading of the candidates' (Board of Education 1907: 4). And in fact, grammar had not been compulsory in English primary schools since 1890.

How it was taught at secondary level can be inferred from widely used books such as Nesfield (1900). After learning about the parts of speech in the first two sections, the pupils went on to do parsing and analysis in parts III and IV. To parse a noun, they needed to give its kind, gender, number and case. Thus, *deer* in *The deer in my father's garden nibble the grass with eagerness* [*sic*] was a common noun, common gender, plural, nominative. And *garden*, *grass* and *eagerness* were all in the 'objective' case. Why? Neither nouns nor pronouns in English have case in the conventional sense (cf. Hudson 1995) so there is nothing in the forms to tell us what case they are in. Luckily, where forms were not available, function came to the rescue. *Grass* is the object of *nibble*, and therefore simply has to be in the 'objective' case, while *garden* and *eagerness* are governed by (= 'the object of') prepositions and, since you had a rule which told you that nouns governed by prepositions are in the 'objective' (otherwise known as accusative) case, *garden* and *eagerness* must also be in the objective case. Q.E.D.

Well before the fallout following the publication in 1911 of the report of the Joint Committee on Grammatical Terminology (Anon 1911, Board of Education 1921) had begun to have its full effect, people had begun to wonder what exactly the point was – in a language which had no inflections whatever which could properly be called accusative (or 'objective') – of assigning words a hypothetical case in exercises like the above. When the Newbolt Report came out in 1921, the process of dissolution was accelerated, albeit inadvertently. This report found itself juggling with several different kinds of grammar at the same time – the grammar of English, traditional Latinate grammar, the grammar of form and the grammar of function, historical grammar, and 'pure' grammar. The authors recommended that the child's developing grammar as reflected in his or her writing skills should be fostered through the dual practice of reading literature and writing composition, whereas 'grammar as science' should be taught as explicit language study. The grammatical categories of Latin were, for this purpose, recognised as unsuitable. However, not enough was known about English, it was believed, for anyone to be able to teach it: '[it is] impossible at the present juncture to teach English grammar in the schools for the simple reason that no-one knows exactly what it is' (Board of Education 1921: 289f.). The conclusion advocated in the report was that 'pure' grammar should be taught instead. This new theory of grammar started from functional as opposed to formal categories. These were taken to be universal and hence to offer a suitable basis for comparison, and for translation in foreign language learning, and, best of all, they could be taught through the terminology proposed by the Joint Committee in 1911 (Board of Education 1921: 291).

What we witness in the early twentieth century, then, is a swing in grammatical thinking, away from form (tied up as it was with the individual word and with the exercise of parsing) towards function. Two further

strands are visible in these developments: the up-and-coming 'analytical' strand, which was to culminate in Immediate Constituent Analysis (I.C.A.) – and, ultimately, transformational grammar – and the older, dependency strand. In practice, a kind of hybrid grammar developed which, instead of making the verb the centre of the sentence as the old Latin grammars had, first divided the sentence into two (subject and predicate) and then explained the predicate in terms of dependencies on the verb. This swing from form to function is apparent in the subtitle to Westaway (Westaway 1933) – 'function VERSUS form' [authors' emphasis – R.A.H./J.W.]. However, attempts to develop a course in 'pure' grammar which met the requirements of the 1921 report ground to a halt within a fairly short period. The Newbolt Report thus marks the beginning of a long phase of reduced activity in English grammar-teaching which matched 'the black hole' in English grammar-writing. Both the desideratum and the yawning chasm were remarked on, but there was to be a gap of over a quarter of a century before the revival initiated by Quirk, soon followed by Halliday, began to effect a change.

The reasons for this decline lay, as indicated above, partly in the way that grammar had been perceived and practised for a generation or more. A further reason, though, was because under the pressure of English Literature there was felt to be no room for language study in an 'English' curriculum for schools. In order to establish itself as a worthwhile discipline at university level, English Literature felt that it needed to free itself from the shackles of 'philology'. At university, English philology was said to be too demanding – and too 'dry' – for the majority of undergraduates, and too few of them chose it – they preferred English Literature. One consequence of this was that graduate teachers of 'English' knew more and more about literature, but less and less about English language.

Although chairs of English had been founded in England in the nineteenth century – University College London being the first, in 1828 – a chair did not always mean a degree course: no honours schools of English were established before the end of the century. The man who was largely instrumental in getting a school of English established in Oxford was John Churton Collins. Himself an Oxford graduate (in Classics), he lectured on English Literature for the London University Extension Society. In 1885 the Merton Professorship was established at Oxford, and Collins applied for it, but unsuccessfully: Arthur Sampson Napier, a philologer, was appointed AQ2 instead. Over the next five years Collins maintained a campaign to make universities 'provide systematic instruction in literature as distinguished from Philology' (Collins 1891: vi). His argument turned essentially on the distinction between the scientific study of language and literature on the one hand, and a humane education on the other: Philology was a science, and 'of all the sciences … the most repugnant to men of artistic and literary tastes' (*ibid.*: 68). The 'two classes of students [of literature and

philology – R.A.H./J.W.], separated by differences of temper, by differences of genius, and differences of taste, should be provided for separately' (Collins *loc. cit.*). The result of 'forcing Philology into … a school of Literature … will be to sacrifice the education of that large majority who … are not capable of benefiting from scientific studies, to the education of a small minority … (Collins *loc. cit.*). Further, philology was not 'of much practical use, either directly in informing, or indirectly in educating' (*ibid.*: 67). Students of literature, on the other hand, would acquire knowledge which would 'be of immense and immediate service to them' (*loc. cit.*). A literary education would send students out into the world 'with enlarged minds, with awakened literary sympathies, and with cultivated tastes' (*loc. cit.*), whereas philology 'as an instrument of culture … surely ranks … very low indeed. It certainly contributes nothing to the cultivation of the taste. It as certainly contributes nothing to the education of the emotions. The mind it neither enlarges, stimulates, nor refines. On the contrary, it too often produces or confirms that peculiar woodenness and opacity, that singular coarseness of feeling and purblindness of moral and intellectual vision, which has in all ages been the characteristic of mere philologists'[3] (Collins 1891: 65).

The wave of public support which followed Collins' campaign was rewarded with success. A final honours school in English was established in Oxford in 1893 and a chair of English Literature in 1903. From Collins' time onward (he died in 1908) universities were in difficulties trying to resolve the inherent 'oppugnancy', as Collins had called it, between English 'Philology' and English Literature. Could philology continue to pursue an existence as a sort of handmaid to literature? Or should it be got rid of altogether? Or was there, as some believed, no essential inherent tension between the two? In Cambridge, the problem was resolved by placing the linguistic aspects of English studies (Anglo-Saxon) first together with archaeology and anthropology, later in a department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic as 'a modest companion to the mighty English Faculty' (Brooke 1993: 445). In Oxford the issue was finally (almost) resolved in the year 2000[!], when the English Faculty voted to abolish compulsory Old English from the undergraduate syllabus. In other words some degree courses in 'English', or even 'English Language and Literature', have progressively reduced the amount of language-work required, to the point where it has become a barely visible fig-leaf.

In an almost parallel movement, the nearest thing to philology which went on in schools – the teaching of grammar – was also progressively eradicated from the school curriculum. There is no prima facie reason why teaching grammar should be inimical to the teaching of English Literature: the two

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[3] Collins clearly enjoyed writing this passage: it had already appeared almost verbatim in Collins 1887.

could quite happily be pursued side by side independently of each other (cf. Thouless 1969: 203). Nevertheless, with a series of progressively obscure arguments, grammar was made the target of attacks by teachers of literature. Since the chief aim of schooling in the early part of the century was to ensure literacy, and grammar could offer no empirical proof that it helped to improve skills in composition, it was taken to be of no practical value. (The fact that there was no empirical evidence to prove that the study of English literature promoted literacy, either, was apparently not an issue.) Out of Collins' ideal of turning out men 'with enlarged minds, with awakened literary sympathies, and with cultivated tastes' grew a 'progressive' 'humanist' campaign to preserve moral and aesthetic values in society as a whole. In the hands of Leavis, Thompson, Holbrook (e.g. Holbrook 1961) and their disciples the movement slowly turned itself into a crusade. By the 1960s, 'the study of literature [had become] of such importance in checking the decline of moral and aesthetic values that the English teacher [could not] afford to give up part of the school-time now devoted to the study of literature' (Thouless 1969: 203). Anyone who happened to think otherwise was subjected to abuse. Paul Roberts, for instance, author of *Modern grammar* (Roberts 1967) was singled out for criticism for suggesting that 'if a linguistically developed programme in English were begun at the elementary stage it would make a significant ... educational contribution'. This was dismissed as 'bigotry and ignorance' (Thompson 1969: 7).

The 'progressive' 'humanist' movement took every opportunity to deploy all the arguments it could find against grammar: most children disliked it; children below the age of about fifteen could not learn grammar, and even if they could, it was of no use to them (Whitehead 1966: 219): 'they [the pupils – R.A.H./J.W.] never confuse the "eager to please" and "easy to please" constructions; why, then, should they poke into the works, unless as individuals they chance to be interested?' (O'Malley 1966: 206f.). But even for children who did happen to be interested, language study would only become one more thing where there were already too many (*ibid.*); and, of course, at that time there were no examinations in the study of English Language at A-level which pupils could work for.

The illogicality of many of the arguments deployed against the teaching of grammar seems to have raised few eyebrows in the profession. The arguments outlined above were put forward as representing a consensus among teachers of English which was 'enlightened' (Whitehead 1966: 16) and 'progressive', as opposed to the 'bigotry' and 'ignorance' of anyone who thought that grammar should, or could, sensibly be taught. The chief mechanism used to secure this position was the insistence that 'English' as a subject was 'indivisible' (Anon 1964: 19). So long as English was accepted as being a single subject it could be represented by a single quasi-official voice. The postulate of the unity of the subject was ushered in with the Newbolt Report, and the assertion repeated like a mantra for decade

after decade. In reality, however, as Mittins pointed out, by the sixties there was scarcely a subject in the curriculum which had a broader range of activities going on under its name than English (Mittins 1959: 90). And some of these were also looking to set themselves up as independent departments in their own right (Drama, for instance, or Communication Studies). The underlying fear seems to have been that if work in language and literature were recognised as two different areas of expertise, as Halliday claimed, then they would require (as is actually the case in the modern world) different kinds of training and qualification. But this would entail each side relinquishing claims to control the other: the superperson who could speak with equal authority on both language and literature would be no more: 'the English teacher' as such would be dead. This, the literary faction was not prepared to contemplate. In 1966 a seminar on the future of English teaching was organised in Dartmouth College, New Hampshire, with representatives from both sides of the Atlantic (Dixon 1967). The debate following the seminar was conducted for the linguistic side largely by scholars engaged on the Nuffield Programme in Linguistics and English Teaching described in section 3.1 below – but Thompson and his disciples saw the debate as a threat to their control over the subject. In 1969 Thompson had located Paul Roberts 'at the extreme end of the take-over scale' (Thompson 1969: 7). In between the two extremes of Thompson and the linguists were a group of UK educationists who accepted the general relevance of linguistics, though they balked at teaching grammar systematically (Dixon 1967, Barnes, Thomson & Watson 1978).

The characterisation of linguists by Holbrook, Thompson et al. points AQ3 up another problem which, when the literature–linguistics debate began to gather momentum in the 1960s, became acute. There are probably not many linguists who *qua* linguists would claim to be experts in English literature. But the literature specialists, with no training or expertise in linguistic matters, shared no such compunction about passing judgment on English grammar or linguistics: since 'English' was one subject, anyone with a qualification in 'English' was *ipso facto* qualified to pronounce on any area of it. (The error of this conclusion is apparent, for instance, in Whitehead 1966, and Wilson (1969: *passim*)). A situation seems to have arisen in which sensible dialogue was barely possible: both sides were using the same words, but with no common foundation of understanding about what linguistics was, or grammar. Indeed, Halliday was condemned for saying that 'teaching the English language is a linguistically specialised task' (Allen 1980: 51).

A case could be made out for arguing that the four decades from the 1930s to the 1970s witnessed a growth of militant philistinism as a consequence of the essentially materialistic arguments put forward by the literature specialists – namely, that grammar could only be tolerated if it could empirically demonstrate that its teaching had a beneficial effect on pupils' language skills. The expulsion of grammar-teaching ushered in a period in

which an informed understanding of language and an appropriate meta-language to discuss it in were systematically eradicated from the state school system. Despite increased unease that standards of language were falling significantly and noticeably in the universities (Anon 1964: 2) and that the educational system was failing the children in its care (Schools Council 1968: *passim*), representatives of the new 'humane' culture were happy to go on record as knowing nothing whatsoever about the grammar of their native language. Confessions of ignorance about their own language which in any other European culture would be a matter for shame became a matter of pride in the UK, and English – unlike Gujerati, Hindi, Irish Gaelic, Welsh, Russian, Italian etc. 'or any other approved language' (of which, apparently, English was not one) – was not considered a suitable subject of study for English children to offer at A-level, even if they did happen to be interested in 'poking into the works'.

3. RECENT HISTORY

3.1 *Linguistics and descriptive grammar since the 1960s*

The 1960s are a convenient dividing point in this history because they mark the start of serious work on the grammar of modern English in British universities. In the next section we shall suggest that the tide started to turn in schools as well at about this time, though progress was much slower there than in university-level activity.

The intellectual context came mainly from the USA, where, as mentioned earlier, the 'modern' study of English grammar had already started (Fries 1951, Hill 1958 etc.). This work was modern in two senses: it studied modern English, taking a purely synchronic (and descriptive) approach; and it applied the ideas of the (then) modern linguistic theories. These theories were to some extent a conscious reaction against the weaknesses of traditional Latin-based theory which had led to the bizarre analyses in Nesfield's text-books and Sonnenschein's Parallel Grammar Series.

In the 1960s public disquiet came to a head, and the underlying misgivings which had occasionally been voiced from within the profession (e.g. Mittins 1948) began to be articulated more publicly. The first real sign of change came from UCL, where Quirk organised a series of public lectures which were later published as Quirk & Smith 1959. In this volume, Quirk surveyed the teaching of grammar over the previous decades, and while lamenting that 'the problems [of teaching English grammar] … have become more acute' (Quirk & Smith 1959: 2), he also noted a 'great new interest in the English language and … widespread need … for new directions in its teaching', including the teaching of English as a foreign language (Quirk & Smith 1959: 4). At the time this volume was in gestation Quirk had already begun work on the Survey of English Usage. This

project would help to fill the gap lamented by Funke, Zandvoort and others.

In the meantime Quirk published *The use of English* (1962), a tour-de-force in the sense that, with the assistance of Gimson and Warburg, it covered an impressive range of linguistic phenomena in a way which both showed the lay public that language is indeed a fascinating topic, and indicated to the potential teacher a wealth of ways in which it could be usefully and entertainingly taught. Through the exercises at the end of each chapter it even pointed the way in which a subject such as English Language could be treated in an examination, at A-level, for instance.

When Quirk set up the Survey of English Usage at UCL in 1959, he persuaded Halliday to join him from Edinburgh. By the early 1960s Halliday had already developed an original and ambitious outline of English grammar which he presented in lectures and then as an important series of articles on clause structure (Halliday 1967b, c; 1968) as 8 well as influential and ground-breaking books on intonation (Halliday 1967a) and cohesion, published after a long delay as Halliday & Hasan (1976).

The years around 1960 also saw important developments in the field of general linguistics in the UK. The Linguistics Association of Great Britain was founded in 1959 or 1960, and the first university department of linguistics (Firth's department in the Schhol of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)) was joined by others, including Halliday's department in UCL. In the USA, linguistic theory was already widely taught and for the first time accessible textbooks were available (Harris 1951, Hockett 1958, Gleason 1961). These textbooks were widely used in the UK and helped to establish linguistic theorising as an important part of the study of language; and they also defined a version of structural linguistics against which other theorizing could react. Around 1960 a number of alternative theories of grammatical structure emerged: in the USA Chomsky introduced transformational grammar (Chomsky 1957) and in the UK, Halliday started to develop his Firthian alternative (Halliday 1961).

Since then, research and teaching on English grammar have gone from strength to strength, and especially so in British universities. The main mover in this case was again Quirk, whose team produced the first two 'blockbuster' grammars of modern English (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik 1972, 1985); these have been followed by another two written and published in Britain (Cobuild 1990, the brainchild of one of Halliday's followers, John Sinclair, and Greenbaum 1996), one published in Britain and with a major UK contributor (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad & Finegan 1999) and one published in the UK and mainly written by two UK-born linguists who had both worked at UCL but are now living abroad (Huddleston & Pullum 2002). All of these gigantic grammars involved a heavy investment of capital, so the activity has largely been due to commercial decisions by publishers, driven exclusively by the vast EFL

(English as a Foreign Language) market, but by a happy coincidence first-language English teachers can benefit as well.

Another relevant development in academic research has been in the interface between language and literature, where a number of linguists have built strong bridges between these two previously antagonistic strands of research (Leech & Short 1981, Short 1996). This work has been particularly important for developing new combined A-level studies in language and literature.

This flurry of descriptive and theoretical work on English grammar around 1960 marked the start of a new era in UK universities. The main centre of activity was certainly UCL, but there were other centres in the UK such as Newcastle, where Strang published an influential introductory textbook (Strang 1962) and where Mittins (Mittins 1962) also worked, and Edinburgh. At last there was serious descriptive work on English grammar in the universities which, at least in principle, could underpin the teaching of grammar at school. This was certainly the intention of both the main movers, Quirk and Halliday. Quirk's justly popular book has been mentioned above (Quirk 1962) and Halliday co-authored a major book on applied linguistics (Halliday, McIntosh & Strevens 1964), which contained a chapter on teaching the mother-tongue ('Studying the native language', pp. 223–251).

However, Halliday and Quirk were not typical UK linguists. It would be fair to say that most UK linguists, including those working on English grammar, have tended to have very little interest in school teaching. There are outstanding exceptions, notably Perera (Perera 1984), Carter (Carter 1990), Crystal (e.g. Crystal 1995) and Stubbs (Stubbs 1986), but the over-whelming majority of linguists simply do not see any link between their research and school-level education. The history reviewed in the earlier sections provides the explanation. In the 1960s there was no university tra-dition of research on English grammar, so *a fortiori* there was no tradition of linking this research to school teaching, nor was there any tradition in schools of linking teaching to university-level research.

Paradoxically, another factor may have been the psychological orien-tation of most modern linguistics. If our aim is to discover the nature of competence, then the only relevant criterion is truth rather than (say) usefulness for language teaching. It is paradoxical that this assumption discourages practical applications, given that teaching is an attempt to change competence; but if most of language is innate, as Chomsky claims, then language teaching is largely irrelevant. Not surprisingly, Chomsky's view is that academic linguistics is not useful for school teachers (or anyone else): 'There are things I find intellectually interesting and there are other things I find humanly significant and those two sets have very little overlap' (Olson, Faigley & Chomsky 1991: 23). If the world's most influential linguist can see so little connection between grammar and

school teaching it is hardly surprising if most grammarians can't see much either.

To summarise the present state of affairs after four decades of research on English grammar, it is totally different from the situation in 1960. English grammar is a boom area of research and publishing, and the mega-grammars have been accompanied by a host of mini-grammars aimed at specific markets. English teachers are spoilt for choice, so one part of the bridge between university research and school teaching is now in place. Unfortunately other parts are still missing because most linguists cannot see school teachers as 'consumers' of their wares. This has two consequences: very little linguistic research engages directly with teaching problems (such as how children's grammars grow through the school years), and very few linguistics programmes encourage students to consider teaching as a career, with the result that we – still – have far too few teachers of English with an adequate grounding in the linguistics of English.

3.2 *Grammar in schools from the 1960s to 1988*

Section 2.2 above explained how and why grammar-teaching petered out in most schools around 1960. English teaching, both in primary schools and in secondary schools, was dominated by literature and the search for creativity in writing. Grammar was mere mechanics, which children could be taught as and when it was relevant, or which they could just be left to pick up for themselves. Worse still, there was a small body of research which claimed to show that grammar was too hard for children to learn (Macauley 1947, Cawley 1957), and this was soon to be supported by other projects which seemed to show that explicit attention to grammar did not improve children's writing (e.g. Elley, Barham, Lamb & Wyllie 1979). The research evidence is actually rather contradictory (Hudson 2001, 2005; Wyse 2001; Andrews, Beverton, Locke, Low, Robinson, Torgerson & Zhu 2004; and cf. Walmsley 1984), but in the early 1960s the case against grammar seemed to be overwhelming. The general view in education was that grammar could safely be ignored, though a minority of educationists recognised that it would be helpful for teachers to understand it, even though it was not suitable for systematic teaching to children.[4] However, the demise of grammar was part of a larger package of educational changes which eventually turned out to be a dead end as it left a significant number of school leavers with hardly any reading and writing skills at all; in 1999 it was calculated that seven million UK adults were functionally illiterate to the

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[4] '[T]eachers need to be familiar enough with modern linguistics to be able to draw from the subject a framework in which to understand the problems of language in class. But it would be folly for teachers of English to impose linguistic bodies of knowledge on pupils.' (Dixon 1967: 81).

extent that they could not, for example, find a plumber in the Yellow Pages (Anon 1999a). This section is the story of how subsequent changes have reinstated grammar in England's schools (Keith 1990).

The story starts in the academic world, with attempts by linguists to influence school teaching. The most important development was Halliday's large-scale project at UCL on linguistics and (first-language) English teaching which lasted from 1964 till 1971 (Pearce 1994).

This project focused on three main areas of teaching:

○ primary school
○ middle school (age 8–14)
○ sixth-form (post-16)

The primary material aimed at basic literacy, while the other two packages were concerned more generally with 'knowledge about language' (including grammar). The project produced a great deal of teaching material and provided a year-long training for a small number of teachers and teacher-trainers. Its immediate impact on grammar-teaching was limited because the mood in the sixties was so hostile to any kind of technicality, whether in ideas or in terminology. Grammar without technicality is very hard to sell either to teachers or to pupils, so the secondary teaching materials were not a permanent success; but the program's positive long-term effects are still with us. It undoubtedly sowed the seeds for the more recent developments which are documented in the next section. Perhaps the most general idea about grammar which has survived from the project is that grammar is a resource, not a limitation, and that the aim of teaching should be to expand that resource rather than to teach children to avoid errors. In short, grammar-teaching should be informed by descriptive rather than prescriptive grammar. This idea is now taken for granted by most UK educators.

Meanwhile, successive governments since the war have been aware of the weakness of English teaching and commissioned reports by eminent committees, starting with Bullock (1975). This was followed by a series of further reports in the 1980s (Anon 1984, Anon 1988, Anon 1989; for a summary see Carter 1994). These committees all recommended that English teaching should include explicit teaching about grammar, but they also agreed that the teaching should be different from the traditional grammar-teaching that had died out by 1960. Their recommendations tended to be similar to the definition given in the Cox Report of 1989:

[The grammar] should be:

(1) a form of grammar which can describe language in use;
(2) relevant to all levels from the syntax of sentences through to the organisation of substantial texts;

(3) able to describe the considerable differences between spoken and written English;

(4) part of a wider 'syllabus of language study'.

(Philp 1994: 1130, quoting Anon 1989)

The most important feature of this definition is the absence of the word *error*; the grammar was to be descriptive, not prescriptive. Moreover, it was to be a description of speech as well as writing, and applicable to 'language in use', i.e. sufficiently sophisticated to help children to understand how to use language like the experts – a far cry from the parsing and analysis exercises of the defunct grammar tradition. The definition clearly owes a great deal to the new tradition started by Halliday.

The first part of this definition refers to the idea of 'language in use', which in this context means specific written or spoken texts. One of the great strengths of Halliday's approach was to be able to throw light on the structure of almost any kind of text, in contrast with more traditional prescriptive grammars which reflected specific genres such as great literature, but said very little about more mundane texts such as weather forecasts. This aspect of Halliday's work provoked a great deal of interest among English teachers, who typically had a background in literature and could relate to texts much more easily than to the more abstract language-system. Teachers enjoyed comparing texts from different sources or genres, and found that pupils enjoyed it as well. The danger of this kind of work, of course, is that the comparison can rest at an entirely intuitive and global level, but in the right hands it can probe the grammatical structures in a significant and revealing way.

This interest in texts turned into an important grass-roots movement which gave rise to two institutional developments. One was a new examination subject for the last two years of secondary school (A-level or 'Advanced level') called 'English Language', in which academic linguists had very little part (with the notable exception of Katharine Perera). This proved a great success, with candidate numbers rising steadily through the 1990s to about 36,000 in 2003 taking a one-year course in language (with or without literature) and 26,000 taking a second-year course.[5] This course is relevant to grammar-teaching in as much as it offers the opportunity for students to study some grammar, though in many schools the course in fact contains very little grammar. However, the course also provides a significant proportion of the undergraduates in courses in linguistics and/or English language where they do learn serious grammar, so in that sense

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[5] The numbers are taken from the publications of the three main examination boards, and are summarised in a brief introduction to the A-level examination at <http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/dick/ec/gce.htm>.

Advanced Level English Language has in fact made an important contribution to English grammar.

The second development was a movement called 'Language Awareness'. The fourth part of the Cox definition relates to the idea that children should become 'aware of language', which stems directly from Halliday's programme on linguistics and English teaching. What children need to know about language goes well beyond grammar to include a much more general understanding of how language works, including pronunciation (phonetics), foreign languages, social and regional variation, language learning, its relation to animal communication, its history, and so on. The argument for this broad approach was partly that it was an important part of a liberal education, but it also rested on some practical benefits, notably in the learning of foreign languages. A general understanding of how language works, it was argued, is a sound basis for effectively learning a foreign language. This belief rests in turn on the controversial (but plausible) assumption that language learning at school is different from spontaneous language learning by an infant; whereas the latter learns without teaching and without understanding explicitly what it is doing, most school children benefit from explicit teaching and an understanding of content and process. This emphasis on understanding grammar (and other parts of language), rather than rote-learning, runs through all the reports and the strategies which have subsequently been adopted.

The idea of 'Language Awareness' was articulated most fully by Hawkins in an influential book (Hawkins 1987), and attracted a great deal of interest among teachers and educators. One of its attractions was precisely that it could be interpreted in such a general way that it excluded the technicalities of grammar, so it provided teachers who knew no grammar with an intellectual framework for teaching about language. Language Awareness has been a significant strand in education ever since, and now boasts an international association and a peer-reviewed journal. Unfortunately, however, it has suffered from the increased attention to grammar in recent years. It is much easier to argue that writing is improved by the study of grammar than by the study of language history (for example), so it is harder now than in the 1980s for a Language-Awareness enthusiast to find time to teach these things in school.

More recently the argument for Language Awareness has been strengthened by the crisis in foreign-language teaching, to which the government has reacted in part by encouraging foreign-language teachers to build on the ideas and terminology of first-language English. Rather than learning fixed phrases in the target language by rote, pupils should come to understand how the language works and, more generally, how language works. The ultimate aim is to 'create language learners' rather than to train children in elementary use of some particular language (Anon 2003a). It remains to be seen whether this stress on understanding and

cross-language comparison will be translated into more teaching of Language Awareness in schools.

3.3 *Grammar-teaching in schools since 1988*

The teaching of English grammar benefited from a major change in the education system of England and Wales. (Scotland has its own education system.) In 1988 the government brought in the first ever National Curriculum for all primary and secondary schools. This covered all subjects, including English, and defined in some detail what schools were to teach. This central control over the curriculum was unprecedented and radical. It can be seen as a reaction to the extremes of the earlier situation which was clearly failing to produce results. It allowed the government to intervene in areas where it considered that intellectual fashions rather than educational imperatives were driving the teaching agenda. The curriculum for English was based on the last of the committee reports listed above (the Cox Report), so it was reasonably enlightened, but English turned out to be more problematic than any other curriculum subject, and the current curriculum is the third attempt (Anon 1999c). Each revision has generally been accepted as an improvement on the previous one, so we now have a National Curriculum for English which defines a reasoned role for grammar.

The most striking characteristic of this curriculum is the absence of prescriptivism (for which linguists can claim some credit). Wherever there is a reference to non-standard grammar, this is described as 'dialect' or 'non-standard' rather than as an error. This is ironic since one of the main reasons why the Conservative government introduced the National Curriculum in 1988 was to eliminate 'bad grammar' – the only interpretation of grammar that they recognised. In fact one of the most important elements of the curriculum is the idea that English is not a single homogeneous whole, but a collection of many different varieties; for example, in the upper primary school (Key Stage 2) children 'should be taught how language varies: a. according to context and purpose, b. between standard and dialect forms and c. between spoken and written forms' (*ibid.*: 23).

However, this descriptive approach is combined with a requirement to teach standard English for use in formal contexts. The teaching of standard English has been a bone of contention for some decades since some linguists and teachers saw it as a prescriptive attack on children's native non-standard varieties and especially so in speaking (Trudgill 1975: 79, Honey 1997: 4). However, this debate is now over, at least in public, and it seems to be generally accepted that school-leavers should all be able to use standard English in situations that require it, even if they use non-standard natively. In other words, the official position is what linguists would call bi-dialectalism: those who speak non-standard at home should learn standard English in addition to their native variety, but the latter should be respected.

The official position on standard and non-standard English is relevant to grammar-teaching because it means that non-standard speakers need to be taught the facts of standard grammar; it is no longer sufficient to exhort them to pull their grammatical socks up. Some children will be able to induce the standard rules for themselves, but others will not; but those who cannot do this for themselves may benefit from explicit instruction. This logic leads to an even more radical innovation in grammar-teaching: that a teacher might start by considering the non-standard grammar system as a basis for comparison with the standard one. This seems to be encouraged by the National Curriculum, which contains notes like the following (from the same page as the previous quotation):

When teaching standard English it is helpful to bear in mind the most common non-standard usages in England:

○ subject–verb agreement (*they was*)
○ formation of past tense (*have fell*, *I done*)
○ formation of negatives (*ain't*)
○ formation of adverbs (*come quick*)
○ use of demonstrative pronouns (*them books*)

This passage is typical, and contrasts with the prescriptive tradition in which these forms would simply have been listed as 'common mistakes'.

Another major influence on the teaching of grammar has been the National Literacy Strategy, which was introduced by the Labour government soon after coming into power. After a year of trials, in 1999 it became (virtually) statutory for all primary schools in England. As its name suggests, the National Literacy Strategy is a strategy for achieving the goals defined by the National Curriculum at primary school level; it has been generally considered a success and in 1999 it was extended (as the Literacy Strand of the Key Stage 3 Strategy) to the first three years of secondary school, so it now applies to all school years up to Year 9. At each stage of education the Strategy is defined by a detailed document (called a Framework) which sets out topics that should be covered year by year, as well as recommended methods of teaching.

From our point of view, the most striking feature of the Literacy Strategy is the prominence it gives to explicit teaching about language structure. For a linguist, most of the listed topics would count as grammar, though the Strategy itself tends to reserve this term for the more traditional matters of sentence structure. Language is divided into three broad areas: word level, sentence level and text level. Word-level work includes 'phonological awareness' and spelling rules, but also more strictly grammatical matters such as morphology to the extent that this is relevant to spelling. Sentence-level work is called globally 'grammatical awareness', and includes any relevant aspects of syntax. Text-level work focuses on coherence and

other cross-sentence patterns, so it brings in grammatical patterns such as anaphora and tense choice.

This ambitious syllabus is paired with an equally ambitious stress on the importance of pupils understanding how language works and being able to talk about it, so the nettle of technical terminology has been grasped very firmly. Indeed, we now have, for the first time ever, an official government-sponsored glossary of metalanguage. This was prepared internally for the first launch of the National Literacy Strategy in primary schools, but a number of linguists were allowed to revise it to remove gross errors. The revised glossary is now included in the official definition of the Strategy (Anon 1998a) and has since been adopted for the teaching of foreign languages at secondary level (Anon 2003a). This glossary has thus in effect achieved what Sonnenschein and his colleagues aimed at: a single unified official grammatical terminology for the teaching of English and foreign languages in schools. This was not its original intention, of course. It was meant to be nothing but a supplement to the first Strategy document, but because this was a government document, the glossary inherited its official status as well. Linguists have helped to bring the glossary into line with modern linguistics (though we had to compromise on a number of issues), but its production was a happy chance beyond our control. On the other hand, linguists may be able to take some credit for the extension of the glossary to foreign languages.

The National Curriculum, the National Literacy Strategy and the English and Foreign-language strands of the Key Stage 3 strategy provide the official, top-down, context for what is beyond doubt a time of great change in all our schools. All the changes which we have mentioned have been positive, except perhaps for the tendency for the 'literacy' work to squeeze out work on language awareness (in the rather small number of schools where this was happening). The official attitude is that teachers should help children to understand their existing linguistic resources (including grammar in the broadest possible sense), so that the children can expand these resources more effectively and become better writers, readers, speakers and listeners not only in first language English but also in any foreign language they learn. (The documents address the learning of second-language English separately.) Prescription is dead – non-standard varieties are tolerated, as are informal registers; variety is accepted, but different varieties are suited to different occasions so the focus is now on the matching of variety to context. It has even been accepted that the teaching of foreign languages should build on what children have learned in English, including the technical terminology for grammar. All these principles are enshrined in the official documents and indicate a major revolution in British language education.

The reality in classrooms, of course, is different. To point this out is to detract neither from the work of dedicated teachers nor from the principles.

The principles presuppose teachers who have a really solid basis in descriptive grammar, because they are expected not only to present teaching on specific grammatical topics, but also to react sensitively to any grammatical issue that may arise unexpectedly. Unexpected issues are inherent in the idea of exploring children's own linguistic system because this puts the child rather than the teacher in control of the data; if the child offers an example, the teacher must be able to recognise whether or not it is relevant to the present issue, and – regardless – the teacher should know how to handle it. Similar problems arise in giving feedback on children's writing (or speech), where the teacher has to react to whatever the child writes, so once again it is the child, not the teacher, who controls the data. And of course a successful teacher will arouse curiosity and generate unpredictable questions from the class, but these may dry up if the teacher can never answer them.

Unfortunately, very few teachers in our schools have this kind of expertise. This is not because the expectations are inherently unrealistic – they are not qualitatively or quantitatively different from the demands on any specialist subject teacher, or on language teachers on the continent – but because we in England are emerging from a period of grammar-free education. Some older teachers were taught some grammar under the old system, but this knowledge is a mixed blessing as a preparation for teaching the new syllabus ('Older teachers did not see their school experience of traditional formal grammar as relevant to the present' Anon 1998b: 26.) Most younger teachers know very little grammar and are suspicious of explicit grammar-teaching. Not surprisingly, therefore, new recruits entering teacher-training courses typically either know very little grammar (Williamson & Hardman 1995) or have no confidence in their knowledge, presumably because they have picked it up in an unsystematic way (Cajkler & Hislam 2002). This situation raises obvious problems for the implementation of the official programme.

Government has reacted in different ways to this skills deficit among teachers. One reaction has been denial; for example, the (now abandoned) guidelines for the training of new primary teachers (Anon 1999b) recognised the possibility of 'gaps' in the trainees' knowledge about language structure, but suggested that these can be filled by self-study and guided reading. It is easy to criticise this suggestion, but hard to see how time could be found for the serious in-depth study of English grammar in the small amount of time available in a one-year postgraduate training course if, as at present, graduates with a degree in 'English' are entering the profession with no foundation in linguistics, as opposed to English Literature. The arrangements for training new teachers are still seriously unrealistic. The solution, therefore, has to lie in in-service training.

In-service training has been more realistic at least in the sense that it recognises the extent of the problem. Even in the early days of the National Curriculum, government accepted that the ideas put forward in the

committees that followed the Bullock Report were unfamiliar to most serving teachers, and would be hard to translate into classroom practice. This led initially to a large-scale project headed by Carter called 'Language in the National Curriculum' (LINC; cf. Carter 1996). LINC was funded by government on a grand scale from 1989 to 1992 in order to 'acquaint teachers with the model of language presented in the … Kingman Report' (one of the reports mentioned above), and produced 360 pages of photo-copiable material which were widely used in in-service training and in tele-vision and radio programmes by the BBC. Grammar looms quite large, and is explicitly linked to Halliday and to the study of text-level patterns as well as those at sentence-level. However, there is no systematic presentation of grammar (apart from a short glossary), so users were expected to pick it up from passing references to subordinate clauses, subjects, passives, modal verbs and so on. On the other hand, the grammar is closely related to classroom concerns about reading, writing, speaking and listening, so its relevance was not in doubt. Unfortunately, the Conservative government which commissioned this work did not like the product, and refused to publish it (or to allow anyone else to publish it), so it now exists only in photocopiable packs. Its main achievement was probably to establish, in the teaching community, the general principle that explicit knowledge about language, including grammar, is in fact relevant and important for English teaching.

The National Literacy Strategy brought in a much more top-down approach to training, in which central government produced packages of material for use in one-day courses for serving teachers, as well as some printed reference material. These packages are all pitched at an extremely elementary level in terms of linguistic knowledge, and have the great strength of combining a systematic presentation of grammatical content with helpful discussion of how these ideas can be applied in teaching. Perhaps the most successful example is a 200-page book called *Grammar for writing*, produced for primary teachers (Anon 2000). Every primary school received a copy of this book, which contains (among other things) 54 two-page units on specific points of grammar. Each unit explains the selected concept, and then suggests ways of teaching about it and using it to improve children's writing. The book was well received in schools and is generally considered a success. Other material includes clear and well-informed discussions of how spoken language differs from writing (Anon 2003b, Anon 2004).

Most school-teachers are still struggling to come to terms with the ideas and terminology of grammar, but there is little public resistance to the principle that grammar is useful. Even the main professional association for secondary English teachers, the National Association for the Teachers of English (NATE), has now accepted this and produced its own books about grammar (Bain & Bridgewood 1988; Bain & Bain 1996; 2003). It is hard to know how much this training has improved teachers' knowledge of

grammar, but it must have had some impact on the teachers, and through them, on the pupils. At the very least this means that the next generation of teachers will start from a higher level of knowledge and understanding.

4. CONCLUSIONS

What is grammar good for? Linguists looking to connect with the world outside their university will find that education is one field in which expertise is urgently needed. Progress has indeed been made over the last few decades, but there is still some way to go before we have a well-informed public to debate national issues, and a properly educated work-force.

This paper has traced in outline the fall and subsequent re-birth of grammar in the twentieth century British education system. It has highlighted gaps in this system and has, we hope, thrown light on how the situation we find ourselves in today came about. In particular, this story allows us by implication to draw conclusions as to what the system of education of pupils, students and teachers ought to look like, and the role which linguistics ought to play in it.

The story has in part been presented as a history of the debate as to how 'English' – in university studies as in schools – should be defined, with, in some instances, literary specialists steadily eroding the role played in their departments and syllabuses by the study of language. It is a mark of their success in establishing literature as the unique criterion by which the contents of an English course should be determined, that Leavis and his followers – by decreeing that linguists, philosophers of language etc. had nothing useful to offer to the study of English – could ensure that the study of language remained largely outside the syllabuses of schools and universities. It must also be remembered, though, that the language components they were trying to remove or keep at bay were not usually concerned with the description of contemporary English. By the mid-twentieth century the predominant perception of 'language' in these circles was that it was old ('dead'), and (largely) written (Daunt 1950). In reality there had never been a tradition in British universities of the study of English language, diachronic and synchronic, up to the present-day state of the language. Hence no research community existed which could absorb Palmer's ideas, provide feedback, or develop a dialogue with continental colleagues such as Jespersen or Zandvoort. It is not an accident, as we observed above, that Sonnenschein, who certainly engaged Jespersen in dialogue, was a professor of Classics, or that the most important British linguists remembered today did not work in departments of linguistics or English.

Seen from this perspective, Henry Sweet, with his emphasis on language as a contemporary, living, primarily spoken phenomenon was indeed a pioneer, ahead of his time. But one who, due to the lack of any infrastructure in this area, had no successors. It was only with the changes of perception

during the 1950s and 1960s that the climate changed sufficiently for it to be possible to propose that English, mother-tongue of most pupils in British schools, is just as worthy an object of study as German, French, Latin, Spanish etc.

In the education system, the quality of government documents, the quality of teaching about language, and specifically the training of future teachers of English are all areas where standards could be raised by improving the quality of input from linguistics.

In research, there are still many unanswered questions concerning the ways in which children's language, their linguistic skills and conceptions of language develop, particularly after the initial phases, just as there are questions concerning the role of linguistics in curricula and syllabuses. In this area, in particular, there is a far bigger mismatch between what experts think and what is purveyed in schools than there is in, say, mathematics, chemistry, or indeed any other science.

Linguists thus have an opportunity here to think more deeply about the input they can usefully provide on educational issues (Hudson 2004). As far as 'English' is concerned, we have pinpointed gaps in education which it will take some years to put right. We believe that the time has come to review what linguists can contribute to the study of English at all levels, not only in courses at universities, but also to our clients in the outside world. It is a debate which is long overdue, and one which linguists need to engage in.

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