

Linguistics in the UK: past, present and future

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Outline of talk

- A bit of history
- Silver Jubilee Lectures 1984
- Developments in linguistics post 1984
- UK involvement in these developments
- RAE 1992-2008
- The future and the REF

History

- early days (Firth, Jones, etc)
- expansion: new departments in 1960's & 70's
- contraction (e.g. Hull, Durham)
- refocussing (e.g. Reading, Sussex)
- amalgamation (with English Lang, with Modern Languages, with Psychology, etc)

The Silver Jubilee Lectures 1984

- R.H. Robins 'Linguistics in 1984: retrospect and prospect'
- Victoria Fromkin 'Evidence in Linguistics'
- contrasts between
 - internal and external evidence (Fromkin)
 - internal and external standpoints (Robins)

“I look forward to the lectures of the Golden Jubilee in 2009 when I hope a comparable publication will provide answers to the questions which are being raised today.”

[Neil Smith, LAGB President 1984, Preface to Silver Jubilee lectures]

Formalism vs Functionalism

- partly a matter of philosophy: what do we take to constitute an explanation?
- partly a matter of sociology: who reads and cites who?

“I hope that Aarts will succeed in bringing this fact [sc. that there is variation in grammatical categorization: NV] to greater prominence in the **formalist research tradition**. However, the audience of this journal [= *Studies in Language*: NV] is largely **functionalist** ...”

(Croft 2007: 411)

“Precisely constructed models for linguistic structure can play an important role, both negative and positive, in the process of discovery itself.”

(Chomsky 1957: 5)

“We insist on being explicit ... This does not mean that the empirical hypotheses must be rendered in a formal logic as long as their content can be made clear and unambiguous in natural language, but in principle they must be capable of being so rendered. ... Thus we emphatically reject the currently widespread view which holds that linguistic theory need not be formalized.”

(Pollard & Sag 1994: 7)

- Formalism: a tool for good theory construction
- Functionalism: a search for explanation beyond the system as modelled

	Formal	Functional
LFG	+	– (?)
Minimalism	+ (?)	–
Usage-based	–	+
Dynamic Syntax	+	+
SBCG	+	+
Word Grammar	+	+
Trad grammar	–	–

UK linguistics societies

- LAGB
- BAAL
- The Philological Society

“... we [=LAGB] distinguish ourselves from PhilSoc by organizing conferences and from BAAL by discussing language structure.”

(Hudson 2009: 25)

Is there an LAGB kind of linguistics?

“The LAGB’s present identity is a rather messy product of our history ... we should ask whether the outcome is good for individual linguists, for the LAGB and our subject. These trends in the UK have distinguished several kinds of linguistics — LAGB linguistics, PhilSoc linguistics and BAAL linguistics, as well as the various kinds of linguistics that are discussed by the UK Cognitive Linguistics Association, the UK Language Variation and Change conference and so on.”

(Hudson 2009: 25)

A possible answer

LAGB linguistics is characterised by a commitment to formalism of one kind or another without any particular stance on functional (externally motivated) or non-functional (internally motivated) styles of explanation.

Developments in linguistics post 1984

- new formalisms
- morphology
- typology
- pragmatics
- corpus linguistics
- language endangerment & documentation
- language evolution
- resurgence of historical linguistics

New journals since 1984

- *Linguistic Typology* 1997
- *Yearbook of Morphology* 1988 (now *Morphology*)
- *Natural Language Semantics* 1993
- *Phonology Yearbook* 1984, later *Phonology* 1988
- *Word Structure* 2008
- *Forensic Linguistics* 1994, later *The International Journal of Speech, Language and the Law* 2003
- *Clinical Linguistics & Phonetics* 1991

Conference series since 1984

- DIGS 1990
- LFG 1996
- ALT conferences 1995
- International Pragmatics Conference 1985
- HPSG Conferences 1994
- Evolution of Language 1996
- MMM 1997
- LabPhon 1987
- Forensic Linguistics 1993

UK linguistics in a global context

“If anything is international by sheer internal motivation it is surely scholarship in all its forms. The Association [= LAGB], like its older sister the Philological Society, though centred in Britain and administered in Britain, is international in its membership and its outlook, and in the authorship of its publications.” (Robins 1984: 1)

- international excellence as an RAE criterion
- British ‘schools’ of linguistics
 - Firth
 - Halliday
 - Gazdar & GPSG
 - Hudson & Word Grammar
- British involvement in models that originate elsewhere (LFG, Minimalism, etc)

UK-hosted conferences

- LFG 1999 (Manchester), 2009 (Cambridge)
- HPSG 1999 (Edinburgh)
- DIGS 1990, 1998 (York)
- IPra 2011 (Manchester)
- GLOW 1990 (Cambridge), Newcastle (2008)
- IASCL 2008 (Edinburgh)
- ICHL 1995 (Manchester)
- LabPhon 1989 (Edinburgh), 1993 (Oxford), 1998 (York)
- Evolang 1996 (Edinburgh), 1998 (London)
- IAFL 1999 (Birmingham), 2005 (Cardiff)

Linguistics & the RAE

- proto-RAE in 1989
- Full-fledged RAEs 1992, 1996, 2001, 2008
- Linguistics has always had its own panel
- Supplemented in 1996 and 2001 by a sub-panel for Phonetics
- Panel membership approved via subject associations (LAGB, PhilSoc, BAAL, BAAP)

- There are many linguists who aren't in Linguistics departments and aren't returned to the RAE through the Linguistics panel.
- There are submissions to the RAE Linguistics panels that might have gone elsewhere (e.g. to English or Speech Sciences).

Definition RAE 1992

Theoretical linguistics, semantics and pragmatics, phonetics, applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, historical linguistics, computational linguistics. Including, where appropriate, theoretically oriented work on the English language.

Definition RAE 2008

The UOA covers all areas of theoretical, descriptive and applied linguistics. This includes, but is not limited to: clinical linguistics, computational linguistics, conversation and discourse analysis, educational linguistics, first and second language acquisition, forensic linguistics, historical linguistics, the history of linguistics, language evolution, morphology, neurolinguistics, philology, phonetics, phonology, pragmatics, psycholinguistics, semantics, sociolinguistics, speech and language technology, stylistics, syntax, text linguistics, and typology.

RAE	No of HEIs	No of Staff
2008	25	267
2001	24	210.3
1996	27	242
1992	30	257.6

Linguistics and the REF

- REF will have fewer sub-panels
(approx 30 instead of 67 in 2008)
- REF will have fewer main panels
(approx 4-6 instead of 15 in 2008)
- Where should Linguistics go?