

The Department of Linguistic Science and Its Successors

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It is appropriate that the 50th anniversary of the Department of Linguistic Science (DOLS) has been marked at an event hosted by its successor departments. In their different ways, they reflect Frank Palmer's leadership qualities of intellectual inquiry, fearless honesty, down-to-earth temperament, and pragmatic outlook. In an age when Professors were still customarily addressed by their staff with their title, Frank insisted on being called 'Frank'. He had the confidence to let colleagues 'get on with it', and expected them to do so. In the Department that he led, it was a joy to come to work.¹

1. The background

Frank Palmer's linguistic training was in the British tradition of linguistics, in the School of Oriental & African Studies at London University, where he was a lecturer for ten years in the Department of Phonetics & Linguistics, with Professor J.R. Firth as Head. However, he was not to be simply classified as a 'Firthian linguist'. He combined theoretical strength with practical fieldwork experience in East Africa. When the influence of Chomsky was at its height, Frank's quick and commanding insight into it was tempered by an understanding of its position in the development of the subject; he was not to be constrained by any one approach, however dominant or influential it might be. He was always alive to the development of new approaches with new insights into language, and the possibility that what we thought we knew about language could change.

Linguists of his generation came to the new discipline of Linguistics from other areas, including English, Classics, Modern Languages, and Maths. While this diversity of recruitment gave it strength in breadth, a major challenge for the future of the discipline was to know how far it could provide for the needs of undergraduate education. Frank was able to take up this challenge at Reading.

In the expanding world of UK University education in the 1960s, the University of Reading wanted to have Linguistics. There were a handful of established centres by that time in the UK, of which one of the largest and most active was at the University College of North Wales, Bangor, from where Frank's reputation as Head of Department reached Harry Pitt, the Vice Chancellor at Reading (originally a mathematician like Frank). He persuaded Frank to move to Reading and allowed him to bring two colleagues, Peter Barnes and David Crystal. Others came later, from Bangor (including Peter Matthews) and elsewhere, and either stayed or moved on to develop their careers.

2. The department

By the time I joined in 1970, the Department was well-established and several comings and goings had occurred. The stable nucleus was recognised as the triumvirate of Palmer,

¹ My thanks to Frank for his comments on an earlier draft, and apologies for any remaining errors of mine.

Matthews and Crystal (the latter two being made professors in 1975), with the Departmental Secretary Hazel Bell at the centre, holding everything together and making it all work.

New staff expected no induction – you were shown to your office and you got on with it – but you knew that Hazel knew everything there was to know and would put you right. As junior staff, we were left in no doubt of her loyalty to Frank – we thought of her as Frank’s secretary, and approached her with due deference; but since Frank WAS the Department, that was fine.

In those pre-desktop computer times, equipment was found only in the extremely well-endowed Phonetics Lab, which constituted its own fiefdom with technical staff and maintenance workshop. By contrast, the standard office provision, as throughout the Faculty, was basic – the only electronic device was an internal telephone. There was no word processing yet, only typing with carbon copies. Later, when desk calculators from firms like Texas Instruments dropped in price, we might boldly ask for one on the Phonetics Lab budget, and be asked ‘Well, what do you want it for?’.

3. Major developments

The Department that Frank set up in the Sixties ran through the decades up to the turn of the century. An early indication of Frank’s happy knack of leadership came when Harry Pitt retired: the next Vice-Chancellor, Ewan Page, visited every Department to speak individually with ‘junior’ staff, and told Frank that his was the only one where no one had any complaint. More formal indications of esteem came with five members of the Department – Frank, Peter Matthews, David Crystal, Peter Trudgill and Bill Hardcastle – being made Fellows of the British Academy, and Frank also being honoured with the degree of Doctor of Letters. But arguably the two most significant developments, because of their structural impact, occurred in the Seventies, directly as a result of Frank’s empowering style of leadership which encouraged colleagues to ‘Get on with it!’.

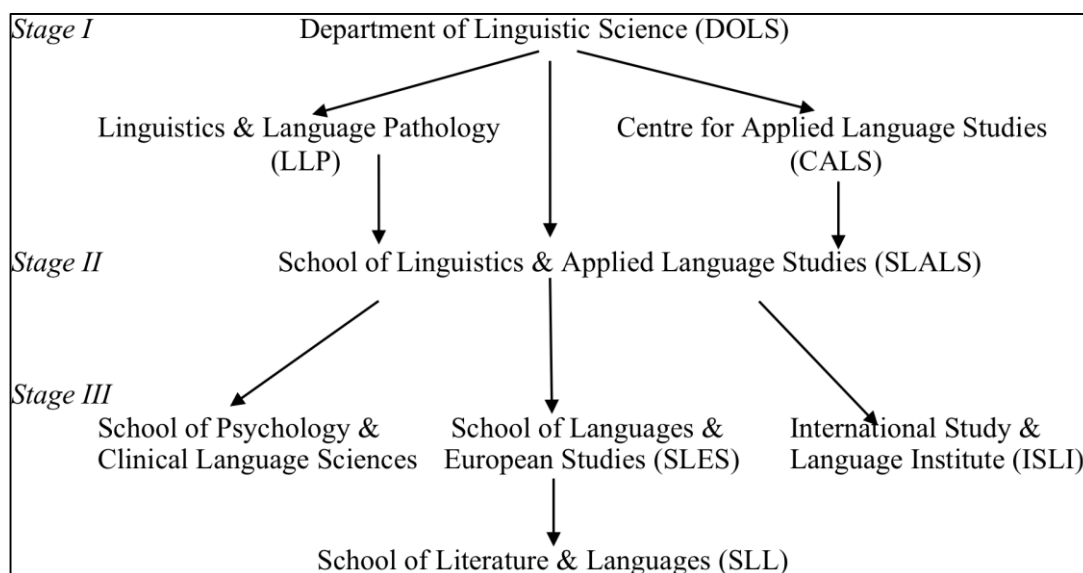


Fig. 1. The Department of Linguistic Science and later developments.

One of these was the Centre for Applied Language Studies (CALS), established by David Wilkins and based in new rooms converted from the under-used ground floor cloakroom area of the Tower Building. It subsequently moved into its own building, funded by Longmans, and located (in a phrase that was to become much used in discussion of CALS-DOLS relations over the years) ‘across the car park’ – the former Car Park 2, where the Business

School now stands. CALS further enhanced the reputation of Reading as a centre for Applied Linguistics, nationally and internationally, in research, materials production, and practice.

The other development was due to the work of David Crystal in building on his extensive contacts with the Battle and Royal Berkshire Hospitals, and with individual Audiologists, Speech Therapists (as they were then called) and other clinicians, to establish Linguistics & Language Pathology (LLP). This put Reading in the forefront for educating Speech Therapists at degree level in the UK, and for research into language impairment in children and adults. LLP made use of the same Tower ground floor rooms that CALS had vacated, further developed them, and subsequently extended to the Faculty New Wing for a purpose-built clinic suite which functioned as a community clinic, and also as a specialised Language Assessment Clinic for research and advice in challenging cases.

Figure 1 shows these developments, in an outline of the situation from 1965 to the present. I will focus on the Department (Stage I), and then the emergence of the School of Language & Linguistic Studies (SLALS: Stage II), which set the pattern for subsequent developments that are with us today (Stage III).

4. Undergraduate teaching

First, we can get a sense of how the Department operated, in terms of its innovatory undergraduate linguistics degree courses; see Figure 2.

Single subject: Linguistics with French/German/Italian/Japanese - 4 years, with Year Abroad
Combined subject: __ & Linguistics English, (Latin), Philosophy, Psychology - 3 years French, German, Italian, Japanese - 4 years, with Year Abroad
Linguistics & Language Pathology - 4 years (Linguistics + Psychology + Medicine + Clinical)

Fig. 2. The range of BA degree courses in the Department.

Frank's influence can be seen in the requirement that a language be studied alongside linguistics, even as a single subject. We recruited and taught these courses with input from colleagues in the independent and separate Language Studies Departments.

Because Linguistics was not studied at school, we relied on 'interviewing to attract' in the admissions procedure, and Reading's admirably flexible First University Examination (FUE) in the first two terms of the first year afforded a further opportunity to swell the numbers we recruited directly through admissions. Students were required to take three pre-degree subjects at FUE: the first one or two were nominated by their choice of degree, but in the third they were encouraged to study something new and self-contained. Great thought went into our FUE offering, not only to prepare our own students for degree work in Linguistics, but also to attract students who had registered for other single and joint degrees, so they could switch their original degree choice to either single- or joint-subject with us.

A feature of our single and joint degrees with a language was the Year Abroad, the first part of which was spent in a country where the language was spoken, typically in Europe; the second part could be either continued there or, as long as their language skills were good enough, in any part of the world where the student wanted and could afford to go. We got letters in the dead of Reading winter from largely happy students in places like Kingston Jamaica, South India, Mosul, or the Quechua-speaking area of South America.

For combined courses, the longer-standing departments were named first in the degree title and were responsible for recruitment and administration, including the Year Abroad where applicable.

Among the three-year combinations, only Latin did not survive, from the Department of Classical Studies. But another combination, Psychology & Linguistics, provided an essential platform for the new degree in LLP – we used to advise students who applied to come on this course that we would give them three years' worth of Psychology & Linguistics, plus at least a year's worth of Medical Foundation courses in General Medicine, Anatomy & Physiology, ENT, Paediatrics, Orthodontics and Neurology, and more than that of Clinical Training and Practice, all within four years. In spite of such a daunting prospect, still they wanted to come, and succeeded in making it work, for them and for us.

Figure 3 gives a flavour of the range of teaching to single-subject BA students:

Phonetics/Phonology; Syntax/Semantics
Structure of English – Phonology, Grammar
Phonetics Practical
Language Practical
Structure of French/German/Italian/Japanese
Options: CLA, DA, EP, PL, SD, SLLT
Theoretical Linguistics
Development of Linguistic Thought
Dissertation

Fig. 3. BA Single Linguistics lectures and practicals.

The core theoretical elements are flanked by descriptive linguistics in Structure of English, practical sessions and by applied areas offered in options which allowed students to tailor the course to their own interests. The Phonetics Practical small group classes were pretty challenging to non-phoneticians like myself, but at least they were highly structured by the mechanics of the human vocal tract.

Language Practicals, on the other hand, could throw up anything. They were essentially fieldwork sessions in the classroom, with speakers of languages such as Turkish, Iranian, Hindi, Portuguese, etc., drawn mainly from postgraduate students in the University. Students in these classes had to learn to ask the right questions in systematic fashion to arrive at a partial linguistic description. But responsibility for the success or failure of the exercise rested ultimately with the member of staff. It was rumoured that one former colleague, an esteemed English grammarian, had left the Department to escape the dreaded 'Lang Prac'.

Options like Child Language Acquisition, Discourse Analysis, Experimental Phonetics, Psycholinguistics, Sociolinguistics & Dialectology, and Second Language Learning & Teaching were established early on and added to over the years as staff and subject expertise developed. Structure of Language courses were taught partly in the Department and partly in the relevant Department of Language Studies.

So students got their grammar, for example, in many ways – in theory, in descriptive analysis of their own language, in their chosen foreign language, in Language Practicals, and in their chosen options.

The course that I most regret not having sat in on is Frank's Development of Linguistic Thought, which was legendary – not just for the content, but the way he delivered it, with lively commentary on classic linguistic texts chosen for their role in the developing history of the subject. He could be seen returning along the corridor from these lectures, his books under his arm and still muttering his commentary, with his heroes and villains still battling on.

5. Postgraduate teaching

The running of postgraduate courses remained an important Departmental activity, as a continuing conversion route into Linguistics for graduates in other disciplines. Figure 4 outlines the range that the Department offered.

In Applied Linguistics, it allowed for in-service training for experienced language teachers, from the UK and overseas. A version developed for Speech & Language Therapists, Teachers of the Deaf, Teachers in Special Education, etc., was called ‘L1’. In LLP, the two-year MA provided an accelerated route to qualify graduates for practice in Speech & Language Therapy, from selected first degrees in Psychology, Linguistics or Medicine.

An important purpose in all these programmes was to lay the basis for our students to engage in research, for which, in the early days, individual supervision might largely consist of giving guidance of where to start and responding to what the student produced; in other words, ‘Get on with it!’

In the Applied Linguistics area, however, a more structured approach to research training came to be developed, which proved so attractive to all research students that it was generalised as a Departmental Doctoral Training Programme.

In the Nineties, generic training and provision was gradually developed at Faculty and University level for research students, but our students found that their needs had already been more than adequately catered for within The Department, on a subject-specific basis.

MAL, MAAL and L1:	one year taught courses Foundation + Core + Options + Dissertation
MA LLP:	2-year taught courses + clinical + Dissertation
PhD, MPhil research degrees	by Dissertation
MA could be taken as	Year 1 of Research. Early guidance: “Get on with it”
Later: The Doctoral Training Programme	(developed for Applied Linguistics)
Year 1:	taught courses including statistics, research methods, ethics procedures, and Proposal to Research Committee
Years 1+:	implementing the Proposal

Fig. 4. Postgraduate teaching in the Department.

6. Continuity and change

When Frank retired, the Vice Chancellor came to the Department to interview each member of staff about the succession. He left shaking his head in amazement at the unanimity of the advice he had received – a testament to the cohesion that Frank’s leadership had fostered. It was simply not an issue that David Wilkins, as an Applied Linguist, should take over as Head of Linguistic Science. The post of Chair of Linguistic Science was preserved, and filled by Erik Fudge.

However, many challenges were to come from external forces. As some will recall, the Eighties and Nineties were times in universities when we were invited to embrace Change, which, once admitted, became a way of life.

We were fortunate that when the irreplaceable Hazel Bell retired, she was succeeded by the indispensable Lesley Owen – a new face for new times, where students increasingly took the centre of our activities.

Degree courses were restructured, in two distinct waves of Modularisation, and documented for the first time, in the process of which we thought all over again about how to teach Linguistics, and learned to distinguish our Aims from our Objectives.

The unitary Examination system was overhauled, into Second- and Final-Year Parts. Subsequently the FUE course was extended from the first two terms to the whole of the first year and became Part 1; as a result, we lost the first Summer Term's teaching on the degree course.

There was pressure to show 'Added Value', and the proportion of 1st class degrees went up. Instead of new staff being told to 'Get on with it', they were actually trained to teach.

As 'home' undergraduate student funding per capita became increasingly crucial to the survival of whole areas of academic activity, the Faculty and the University were held to account for either overshooting or undershooting our externally imposed target, depending on what year it was.

But LLP found blessedly calmer waters in having its funding finally transferred from the Department of Education & Science to the deeper coffers of the Department of Health, a move which had been a long time coming, and which had been suddenly sorted out overnight, it seemed, in the new Labour Government.

With student grant funding issues coming to the fore, three-year courses were becoming the norm. There was a growing issue too, of student recruitment to four-year language-based degree programmes. Student numbers became harder to sustain in the new climate of a perceived 'value for money' approach to time spent at university.

In response to continuing funding restrictions, the University started its push to establish School structures between former Departments and Faculties, with increased devolved responsibility for budgets.

7. The School of Linguistics & Applied Language Studies

The process began with The CALS Review, which was to prove fundamental to the future shape of the Department. The outcome was not just to link DOLS and CALS, but to split CALS in the process into its degree-awarding and service-providing constituent parts (see Figure 5).

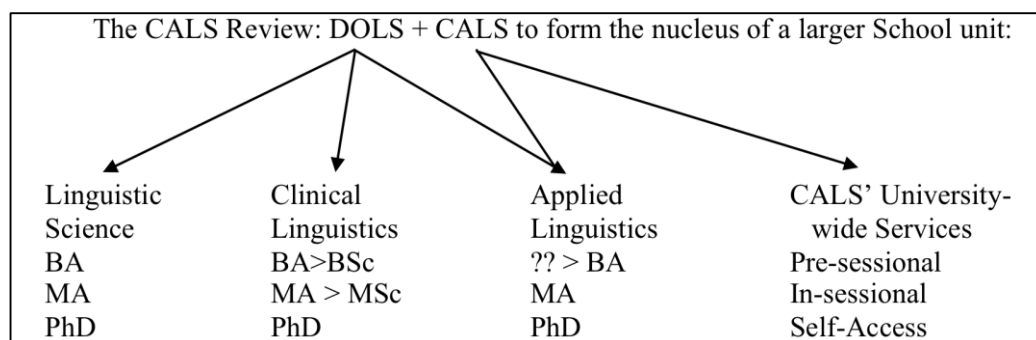


Fig. 5: From the Department to the School of Linguistics & Language Studies.

Linguistic Science continued; Language Pathology was recognised as a distinct and coordinate area, called Clinical Linguistics, with its degrees independently re-designated as BSc and MSc in recognition of their content; CALS was free to focus on developing its service provision; and Applied Linguistics was re-formed by staff from the Department and CALS. Having worked in different cultures for so long, it was crucial that they succeeded in rapidly developing a team approach. Its identity was marked by the fact that, as David Wilkins retired from his Personal Chair in Applied Linguistics, his successor Guy Cook was appointed to an established Chair. But an urgent requirement for this new area was to balance

its strong postgraduate activities with an applied BA degree programme, to give it a presence in the undergraduate student stakes.

And so SLALS was formed, mainly by the last Heads of DOLS and CALS, Peter Roach and Ron White, and after Ron's retirement by Pauline Robinson. Peter Roach from the Department was the first Head; Pauline from CALS, School Administrator. I remember thinking how huge the School seemed to us then, in those early meetings, but in truth it was a comparatively small School in the University, although extremely well formed.

The development of the BA in Applied English Language Studies was the first focus and success of the AL Section, under the leadership of Guy Cook and Alison Sealey. This was to become the flagship BA in the future, and the basis for further variants.

At postgraduate level, the School was particularly effective in harnessing the varied talents of a substantial combined PhD student community – one of the largest in the University.

In deference to the term 'Department' being out of favour in the University at the time, the School called its constituent elements 'Sections', and this was part of its organising philosophy: the School was Infrastructure rather than Superstructure, promoting synergies between its Sections that were areas of activity already well-known outside the university. Thus, the new BA in Applied English Language Studies could draw upon existing English Grammar and Phonology and Option Modules from Linguistic Science, and could in turn contribute new modules to BA Linguistics. Linguistic Science was able to develop new programmes such the BA and MA in Contemporary English Language and Linguistics, with teaching input from Applied Linguistics. At Part 1, the module 'Language & the Individual', designed for Clinical Linguistics with its emphasis on normal and impaired aspects of language, was also required teaching for students in Linguistic Science; and at Part 3 students in Linguistic Science were also offered an option in 'Language Pathology' jointly taught from Clinical Linguistics and Linguistic Science. Students in Linguistic Science were offered a three-year BA grounding in Clinical Language Studies, without the requirement to qualify as a Clinician.

8. After SLALS

Around the turn of the millennium, at the same time as some other universities, Reading decided to close what it referred to as 'Linguistics'. But when it came to the process, the matter was not so straightforward, because Linguistics had already developed beyond its core origins.

Linguistic Science was wound down, and staff were retained to teach existing students out at all levels. Clinical Linguistics was seen as highly desirable, as a strongly-recruiting area, and ideally placed to fit in the University's new Health Sciences initiative; accordingly it was relocated within the new enlarged School of Psychology & Clinical Language Sciences (see Figure 6). CALS likewise was seen as a gold standard of student provision, perfectly positioned to meet the demands of the University's growing intake for Student Study Skills and Language Support.

David Robey of the School of Languages and European Studies (SLES) led discussions with SLALS for setting up a University Language Centre. This long-felt need was eventually realised as the International Studies & Language Institute.

While all these developments were proceeding, Applied Linguistics by contrast was left in an extremely precarious situation, part of the problem being that University administrators struggled to know exactly what Applied Linguistics was – how did it differ from Linguistics?

While these deliberations went on, we lost many staff: Guy Cook and Alison Sealey went to other institutions, as did crucial staff in the field of Language Testing, but we retained some of our own home-grown staff, many of whom had been DOLS MA students.

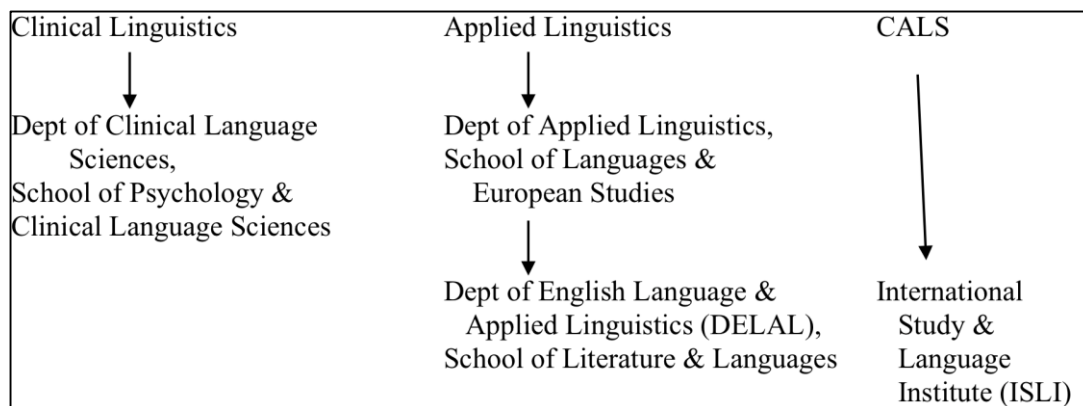


Fig. 6. Developments after SLALS.

With wise and considerate support from our Dean of Faculty, Cedric Brown, the University decided to place Applied Linguistics, with Alan Tonkyn as Head, as a Department in the newly formed SLES, under the patient and accommodating Hugo Tucker, to await events.

For the University authorities, the bottom line was performance: Applied Linguistics gave them performance by the spadeful.

9. In the end is our beginning

Finally, we have the current situation: after Jane Setter took over as Head after Alan's retirement, we now have the Department of English Language & Applied Linguistics, sitting alongside former SLES colleagues, in the even larger current School of Literature & Languages, and with maintained links with Clinical colleagues in the School of Psychology & Clinical Language Sciences.

It will be apparent that much has changed, but I do find here many achievements that Frank would commend, not least the healthy undergraduate student numbers. And, above all, the fact that so many colleagues in different branches of Linguistics, in different parts of the University, are still working with each other, and getting on with it.

Mike Garman studied English at Oxford, and discovered Linguistics while on VSO in Karnatak University in South India. He was a postgraduate student in John Lyons' Department of General Linguistics at Edinburgh, and a research associate of Roger Wales at the Cognition Project in the Psychology Department there, before joining Frank Palmer's Department in Reading in 1970. Email: m.a.g.garman@reading.ac.uk.