

AN INTERVIEW WITH GEOFFREY LEECH¹
SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA, JUNE 9TH 2006

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I would like to start this conversation by welcoming you to the University of Santiago de Compostela, Professor Leech.

Thank you very much.

It is a great honour for us that you have so kindly accepted our invitation and agreed to being interviewed. Is this your first visit to Spain?

No, I've visited Spain several times and, actually, visited quite a number of Spanish universities before; for example, I've been to universities in Madrid, Barcelona, Seville, Salamanca, etc., but this visit to Santiago de Compostela is something I've looked forward to very much indeed.

If you have no objections, I would like to divide this interview into two parts, the former focusing on your teaching experience, and the latter concentrating on your investigation and research. So, to begin, could you tell us a little bit about your teaching profile? Are you still doing any teaching despite having retired?

Well, a little bit, but I have this position called in British universities 'Emeritus Professor', which is really a kind of euphemism for being retired, but it does have the great advantage that you can keep a little room in the department and you can have your own computer, your own books, you can use the photocopier and the library and so on, so you feel as if you're still a member of the academic community. This means I do my own research in the department, and from time to time I do a little bit of teaching, just to keep my hand in, and I still have one PhD student that I am supervising.

And whom would you consider as your TEACHER with capital letters?

¹ This interview was generously supported by the Autonomous Government of Galicia (grant no. PGIDIT05PXIC20401PN), and the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science and the European Regional Development Fund (grant no. HUM2004-00940).

Ah, yes. I'm not sure I can think of any particular person I would regard as my teacher in that sense, but I would point to two people who influenced me very much when I was first getting my foot in the academic door as it were. When I began as a junior lecturer, in the department at University College, London, there were two very influential people there at the time, for me, namely Michael Halliday, or M.A.K. Halliday, as he is known in his publications, and also Randolph Quirk. They are both great figures to have in one's department and, you know, I just wonder, if they hadn't been there, would I have developed in any way comparable to my present career? I don't know at all. Certainly, Randolph Quirk is probably the one I would most name as my mentor, the man who influenced my thinking most, and also encouraged me in my career.

I am sure that students at Lancaster University feel proud to be students of yours. What are the main problems that you have faced in the teaching of Linguistics?

I think, a lack of appreciation of grammar is the greatest problem I've had. I think, particularly in English-speaking countries, including Great Britain above all, grammar has been a rather unpopular subject, and students prefer to forget all about it if they can. Even my colleagues in the department are inclined to undervalue it, so I suppose when I've been teaching, it's a kind of uphill struggle, to teach an unpopular subject. That's probably my greatest difficulty. Other aspects of linguistics can be very popular for students, but not grammar, I think.

And do you feel it's the same all over the world, in other universities, or is it just British universities?

I have noticed it recently in other parts of the world, but I think on the whole, though, in countries where English is not the native language, then, grammar is seen to be an essential function. It's rather like teaching about the human body without a skeleton, if you like, if you don't teach the grammar... But if people have had English as their native language, then they naturally assume that grammar is not important, it's something there, but we don't need to worry about it, because we know it already.

That sounds very interesting. Over the years, what have you learnt from your students?

Like most people in academic life, I think I get most from the teaching of postgraduate students, not that I don't enjoy undergraduate teaching, but postgraduate students have more to teach me, I think, and particularly, of course, the PhD students whom I've supervised. Being an Englishman, I'm not very good as a practical linguist in terms of knowing a lot of languages, so it's very important for me when I am supervising to have students from other countries telling me about their own languages and how a particular theory or a particular description would apply to their own language. Just to take the example of politeness theory, you know, what kind of politeness theories are appropriate within different languages and cultures? Those can be very important contributions which I have benefited from.

In what ways do you believe linguistics and language teaching are connected?

This is the 64,000 dollar question, isn't it?, which we all should have an answer to. Yes, well, I suppose linguistics should provide a description of what it is we are learning when we are learning a language and, surely, that can't be a matter of irrelevance. The better our descriptions, and the better our accounts of languages, the better we are able to direct our energies towards the learning of various languages. But, of course, they need to be interpreted, for the learner and also even for the teacher. These linguistic, rather abstract descriptions, often need to be simplified, or at least made more practical when they are applied to the teaching situation. And I suppose that's what I've tried to contribute often in writing about English grammar. I've tried to write about grammar at a level where teachers can benefit and even learners can benefit from it.

Turning now to the second topic of this interview, which deals with research: if you had to describe or define yourself as a linguist, what would you say? What sort of description would you give us?

Well, first of all, I would say I am rather empirical in my orientation, I mean, the word *empirical*, particularly *empiricist*, can be regarded as a negative thing, a sort of 'dirty' word almost in some circles and, certainly, I wouldn't want to be seen as an extreme empiricist. But I always want to study language in terms of explaining what can be observed, so that as soon as one loses the connection with observable facts about language and language usage, I feel one is becoming too abstract, so to speak. I think that's probably been true of my whole career: I've always been rather oriented towards texts, towards data, that's one aspect of it. Another aspect is that I've always had this duality of interest in form-function, so whether one looks at grammar or corpus linguistics, or even stylistics, I've tried to approach language in terms of these two different sides of the same coin, if you like, form and function. I don't think one could study the function without the form, nor the form without the function, so that's where I stand, if you like.

What linguistic and grammatical theories have had most influence on your conception of things? I suppose there are many, but perhaps you could tell us about some of them.

In my earlier days, I was influenced quite a lot by Michael Halliday, who was a colleague, a senior colleague of mine at one stage, and I actually worked with him quite closely; and also, to some extent, the generative school of Chomsky, because I spent some time at MIT in the 1960s, so those are two big influences in my earlier career. More recently, I suppose, I've been influenced in pragmatics by natural language philosophers like Searle and Grice, and again more recently, probably by the cognitive school, and the usage-based school – research which is being done by people in cognitive linguistics, in California, for example.

Would you say that there has been a continuity in your line of thought, from the beginning up to the present?

Well, yes, I do see a continuity, it's the... really the one I've already mentioned, you know, this looking at language in terms of form and in terms of function or interpretation, so perhaps all areas where I've done research, in fact, have this kind of interest. We could take the field of stylistics, which is one of my earlier interests: it wasn't sufficient to just study the form of a poem, or the form of a novel, let's say, what kind of language that novelist chose, but to say why, what was the point of this choice, what kind of interpretation or appreciation came out of that particular set of linguistic choices. Or, if we consider corpus linguistics, there we get a great deal of formal information about how language is used in many different texts, in different situations, we can control the various variables and so on, but always we want to try to explain something. So, for example, when we observe in all corpuses of spoken language, of written language, the differences between the grammar of the language as it is used in speech and in writing, then again we want to try and explain: "well, what is the function of these differences?", "why does grammar have these particular forms in written texts, but these other forms—related, but maybe different forms—in spoken texts?" I think the same thing applies also even to pragmatics, where again I started by studying the contrast between semantics—the semantics of a language, the meaning as it appears through the form, and the pragmatics—how this is contextualised in society. Once again, we've got this kind of duality.

In what ways do you think linguistics in general and linguists in particular make a contribution to modern society? I am asking this because there seems to be a current feeling that linguists are not 'useful' people in the sense that linguists are not 'real' scientists and do not contribute to progress and development. Maybe this is different in British society, but I am afraid this is the situation here.

Oh really? Of course, there are many different academic disciplines which have the same problem of justifying their existence. On the one hand, I think you can give very practical answers which will satisfy some people, perhaps parents who are sending their kids to university, and say: "Well, look, it's very important for language teaching and language learning to understand language, and it's also important for translation, which is a very important activity as we all know in the European Union—why not study language to help all these different areas?" I mean, think about language disabilities, can we understand the matter through linguistics? Think about developing software, which can be useful for various purposes, like speech-recognition software, which can be helpful for people with speech difficulties, and so on and so on, you know, there are many practical benefits, I think. On the other hand, I think we can look at it in a much more abstract and general way, and think about language, how important it is to the human condition. I think we can hardly imagine anything which is more important to other human attributes and activities than the ability to use language. Again, all our social life and social structures have to depend heavily on language and the way that we communicate through language, so, you know, I think any society which ignores language is really ignoring one of the most important aspects of its condition.

So, do you think then that linguists are scientists? I mean can we call ourselves scientists or are we different?

I'm not sure I know how to answer that. I think it's, in any case, probably an English language question, you know. For people who speak English, a scientist is somebody who works in a laboratory, with a white coat on, and does all kinds of fancy experiments and that kind of thing. Not many linguists are actually like that. And I think we suppose the most typical scientist is the natural scientist, the scientist who investigates the natural world, whether biologists, or chemists, or physicists, or whatever they are. Linguists are not really like that; they are much more like, let's say, social scientists, such as psychologists and sociologists, so yes, we are scientists of a kind, but I think we have particular difficulties, in a way. I'm not suggesting it's easy to be a natural scientist, it's an extremely rarefied kind of study that people have to engage in, mathematically and so on. Perhaps we can be spared some of that, but we have this kind of circularity that we are linguists using language. All scientists use language, it's one of their most important pieces of equipment, I think, but linguists are in the peculiar position that we are actually trying to explain language through language. So it's a kind of circularity we suffer from, and I think that leads us to build models which necessarily cannot be easily proved or demonstrated. There are a lot of problems of justifying our arguments, justifying our models, our theories, and so on, which probably would not arise for other scientists. And there's also the fact that linguistics is necessarily interdisciplinary. I think if one goes back to the sixties, let's say, to the Chomskian revolution, there was a hope then that one could somehow isolate language from everything that had to do with meaning and society and context, and study it in a logical and mathematical way, in a way that defined your territory that you had to explain. In practice, I think that is not a realistic way to approach language, because language naturally spills over the boundaries between disciplines—so that's another way in which our difficulties are somewhat more problematic than perhaps are those to be found in the natural sciences.

Looking now into the future, what do you foresee in the field of linguistics?

Well, I suppose, you might expect me to use the word *corpus* here! Yes, I've been involved with corpus linguistics ever since, well, 1970, which is quite a long time. Even before the term *corpus linguistics* was invented, I was doing a kind of primitive corpus linguistics, so this 'corpus revolution', as sometimes people refer to it, has now begun to affect mainstream thinking in linguistics, which I think is a very important step. On the whole I would call it a step forward from previous research, and I think it will gradually become even more natural and obvious that we study language through the immense potential of data collection and data analysis that we have now through corpus linguistics. But perhaps in the future, we will not rely upon, let's say, the classical idea of a corpus like the *Brown Corpus* or the *British National Corpus*, which are finite, carefully designed to represent the language at a particular time, because as time goes on, the availability of linguistic data is growing and growing and growing through the Internet, through the World Wide Web, through other sources. I don't know if anybody can capture the language of text messaging and things of that sort, mobile phone messages, you know. There's an awful lot of language data floating around in digital form, if we could only capture it. I think it's an unprecedented situation really, it's almost as if we

live in a world where language is floating around surrounding us, almost like grass in a meadow. There's so much of it, we can't really handle it all, so this is a new area, an area where we have problems. On the other hand, we have the potential to develop new theories with greater observational power than we ever had before, and we can develop more probabilistic or mathematical understandings of language than had been possible before: this is my expectation. At a more theoretical level, I don't know where things are going to go, but I guess there's going to be a little bit more probabilistic thinking in the formulations that linguists make in the future. We're going to have to become statisticians more than we've been so far, I'm afraid.

Yes, well let's wait and see what happens. You've worked in different areas of linguistic research, grammar, literary stylistics, semantics, pragmatics and, of course, computational and corpus linguistics, among others. Could you tell us a little about how this diversity of interests arose?

It seems as if it must have been difficult to have so many interests, but somehow, it was natural in those days, you know, because in the sixties, when I began as a university lecturer doing research, there were very few linguistics departments in the UK. I think there were only one or two: linguistics wasn't really taught as an undergraduate subject. There were only very few journals, and if you compare that to the situation now, there are hundreds of universities all over the world teaching linguistics, and there are, I don't know, hundreds of journals, even quite a few journals dealing with particular areas like sociolinguistics or pragmatics or psycholinguistics. The field has really mushroomed tremendously, so it's difficult to imagine oneself back in the days of the 1960s where, in a sense, the world was one's oyster, intellectually speaking—one could develop new theories and do new things, “oh, let's do a little bit of semantics, nobody's been doing that recently”. So, that was really how things got underway with me.

Let's begin with stylistics, because when I got my very first job at University College, London, somebody said to me: “You have to teach this first-year course, which is on rhetoric”, and I thought, “Well, rhetoric, I think it's more or less similar to stylistics, so I'll try and make this rather traditional course on rhetoric more up-to-date and talk about linguistic style, using the methods of linguistics applied to literature.” Then, of course I was in a department with Randolph Quirk, and other people who were members of his team. I couldn't really ignore grammar in that situation, so I think I got involved with grammar through the work with them, and exchanging ideas with them. Even corpus linguistics began in a way at that very time because although I was not involved directly, Randolph Quirk was developing the first modern corpus of the English language, the *Survey of English Usage* corpus, but that began in 1959 I think it was, a long time ago—before computers. I mean, Randolph Quirk didn't think of putting these texts on computers, he just kept them in enormous metal filing cabinets—there was a lot of work involved with annotating those little pieces of paper in those days. So, that gave me one element of interest there.

Semantics began because, as I said, I was sharing the same department as Michael Halliday at one time, and again it was an exciting period, when people were trying to develop new ways of studying language, using Michael Halliday's theory, and I thought, “Well, nobody is doing very much on semantics, so I'll ask Michael Halliday himself”. I

thought morphology might be one area, or maybe semantics might be another area. I asked him and said: “Well, which of these areas do you think it would be better for me to develop?”, and he said, “Well, semantics I think would be more rewarding,” so that’s how I got started on semantics.

Pragmatics grew out of semantics because in the later seventies, let’s say around 1976, pragmatics evolved as a rather hot topic within the generative framework but also more generally. People had found semantics was a rather unsatisfactory field: it was difficult to demarcate semantics and say here we have linguistics treating meaning in terms of subcategories, structures, rather like grammatical structures. Then, on the other hand, meaning is a window onto the world, and onto social interaction through language–communication–and so there came this division between semantics—that is to say, meaning as defined in terms of the structure of language—and pragmatics, meaning defined in terms of the interaction between language and context. These became important topics just at that time and I got involved with them very much at a similar time, in the late sixties and seventies, so the late 1970s, I suppose, was the period when that developed most. What else?

Corpus linguistics, well, that, as I said, in a way, began back in the late 1950s, in the department where I was, at University College London. It didn’t really get under way for me, personally, until I moved from the University of London to Lancaster, which was a very new university in those days, just five years old. It had no particular reputation at all, we had no research profile, and so just a few of us sat around a table—just four or five of us, we’d just got these new jobs, and it was a very young university, even the staff were incredibly young—and so we thought “How can we put Lancaster on the map so that people know we’re here?” The answer was, I suggested, that we should possibly try to match a corpus which had already appeared in the USA, developed by Nelson Francis and his colleagues in Brown University. They had created this wonderful computer-corpus of one million words. Could we do the same thing for British English and make a matching corpus? And so that’s what we decided to do. It wasn’t an easy job, but at least it got us started in this area of corpus linguistics, which, as I said, had not really been defined as a field, it was just in a pioneering stage at that time.

Yes, but you certainly put Lancaster on the map! I think you’ve already answered my next question, but I’ll ask you anyway. Can we speak of linguistic research of any kind without the help of a corpus? Are theoretical studies fully reliable, if they don’t have a corpus?

I’m not sure I have yet answered it properly. Corpus linguists can be rather extreme in their addiction to computer corpora, so I might naturally want to stereotype myself as a corpus linguist, but actually, there are other ways of finding observations about language, aren’t there? I mean, we all rely on our intuitions, up to a point, although there are some defects in relying totally on the intuition of a native speaker. There’s another paradigm of research where we go ‘into the field’, the so-called field-work paradigm, where people go out to the area where the language is spoken and collect data of the speech of that linguistic community, not necessarily in the form of a corpus—it might be in the form of questionnaires, and so on. And then there is the model—which perhaps we associate with psycholinguists—of elicitation experiments: we elicit forms from people in rather laboratory-type conditions. Now, all of these are really

trying to do as I suggested linguistics should do, trying to account for the observational evidence that we can get about language. If we set up some sort of description or some sort of theory, we should ultimately be able to find some observational evidence to confirm it or to support it; if not, we change our theory and then we look for further support, which is the scientific paradigm as we have learnt it from natural sciences, really. So, yes, there must be some form of data. It happens that the corpus is a very handy, very rich source of data, nowadays, but of course it is not the only source of data, and some people would say it is an artificially-restricted form of data, because we don't get much contextual information very often from corpus linguistics. So, there are other paradigms—there's the paradigm which people refer to as 'the ethnographic method', which is to always collect linguistic data with rich contextual information. This is also a kind of observational evidence. So, yes, there are many ways of seeking evidence, not just a corpus. I think the corpus linguistic method is the method which has developed most significantly in the last couple of decades, let's say.

You've also compiled and annotated different corpora. What are the most difficult tasks you had to face in compiling and annotating those corpora?

Yes, the most difficult tasks are the ones I remember from the early days at Lancaster, when really the situation was quite primitive. We were a little university, with not very good computing facilities, and those computing facilities were automatically assumed to be important for the sciences, not for the humanities. We had problems of persuading people that it was a worthwhile idea at all: "What's the point of it?" people would say. We had problems of funding, persuading people to give us some money, because when you get into corpus linguistics, you soon discover you can't do it as a single researcher, you have to get together and have a team working with you, so you need money to pay research staff. And also the biggest nuisance for me has been copyright: trying to get permission from copyright holders to allow their material to be used in a corpus. So those difficulties all occurred in their most acute form when we were building the *Lancaster-Oslo-Bergen Corpus*, the one that is nowadays called the LOB Corpus, which was a matching corpus, intended to match the American Brown University Corpus for British English. That was a very difficult task and, eventually, I had to give it up, and some helpful people in Norway helped me out to finish it, particularly Stig Johansson at the University of Oslo. That's how it came to be called Lancaster-Oslo-Bergen.

We are fully aware that you've developed an interest in linguistic change, and you've done quite a lot of research on recent and ongoing changes in the English language. Could you briefly refer to some of the most outstanding and remarkable changes in present-day English?

Yes, I've been studying grammar mainly because we have these four matching corpora, Brown and LOB I've already mentioned, and the later corpora which were developed by Christian Mair and his team at Freiburg University, the so-called FLOB and Frown corpora. Anyway, these four corpora provide a very nice framework within which to study what's been happening to English grammar, although they can only answer the

questions with respect to written language, but we can also get some other evidence from spoken language. So what is happening? Well, on the whole, thirty years is not a very long time, so things are changing mainly in terms of frequency, but there are some quite remarkable changes if we consider frequency of use. I'll mention simply the class of modal auxiliaries in English, which have been declining over that period of thirty years, declining in their use. And particularly some of the less frequent of those modal auxiliaries, *may*, *must* and *shall*, for example—some of these have actually decreased in their use by about 40%, so that's quite a remarkable change. Then, on the other hand, we find the so-called semi-modals, like *have to* and *need to*, *want to*—or to give them their popular American pronunciation, *hafta*, *wanna* or *gonna*, etc.—these have been increasing, and perhaps this is not too surprising, because people suspected that this is a new wave of grammaticalization in English, almost a paradigm case of grammaticalization. I think other fields where grammaticalization plays a role include the increasing use of the progressive form of the verb, particularly the present progressive. On the other hand, the genitive, the apostrophe *s* (*'s*) genitive form is increasing and there has been a corresponding decline in the *of*-genitive. So, these are all examples of the types of changes that are taking place, and when we try to explain them, we get into using words ending in *-isation*, so various *-isations* which I've already mentioned: 'grammaticalisation', and also 'colloquialisation', which Christian Mair himself has written quite a lot about. Many of these changes can be tentatively related to the hypothesis that the written language has been influenced by the norms of speech, so written language is becoming more speech-like in certain respects—not in all respects, though. Another one of course we use is 'Americanisation'. It is clear that in these changes American English tends to be in the forefront, and be moving more quickly in a particular direction than British English is, for example. Yes, there are other *-isations*—'democratisation'—one of the reasons why *must* is declining is possibly that it has too authoritative an air. It's less face-threatening to say *You need to submit your paper tomorrow* rather than *You must*. And also democratisation applies to, yes, reducing differences between groups of people and, of course, this applies also to gender distinctions. We find that there is a decrease in the use of *he* as a so-called generic third person pronoun, in utterances like...—let me think of an example, *A teacher must make up his own mind about this*—that kind of *his/he* is declining. Instead of that, there is a tendency to use the singular *they*: *A teacher must make up their own mind*. Not that the singular *they* is a terribly new thing in English, I mean, it's been in the language at least since Shakespeare, but it's been increasingly in use. Although it's considered ungrammatical by many people, it nevertheless does avoid this discrimination on the basis of gender. So these are the kinds of things which are happening. Some of them are almost expected, but some of them are happening without people being aware of them. I think people have been aware of things like the decline of the generic *he*, but as for the decline of the modals, as for the increase of the genitive, I don't think anybody has been aware of these things. In fact, native speakers at least tend to think that grammar is more or less immutable, that it's going to stay the same through the centuries—but it's certainly not going to do that. Yes, don't get me wrong, I mean, the modal auxiliaries are still amongst the most frequent words in English. I don't want you to think that everybody has got to stop teaching *can*, *will* and *would* or words like that!

You participated in the production of a corpus-based grammar of English, which is called The Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English, focusing on American English and British English, and on the four registers of conversation, fiction writing, news writing and academic writing. Would you say it was the first grammar of this type? Would you consider it as a landmark in itself? I say this because I think this is a very different kind of grammar.

Yes, it has been accepted by quite a few people as an important break-through in corpus-based grammar. If you go back in time, you could say that people like Otto Jespersen in the early decades of the twentieth century were writing corpus-based grammar, because they based their grammar on examples from real language. Also, the so-called ‘Quirk’ grammars, like the *Grammar of Contemporary English*, 1972, were based in part upon the *Survey of English Usage*, so the idea of a corpus-based grammar or a corpus-informed grammar was not new. I think it was in 1990 that John Sinclair and his team in Birmingham published a book called *The Collins COBUILD English Grammar*, and a key feature of that was that corpus examples were used throughout. That was also a kind of landmark. So there are various ways in which you can interpret corpus-based grammar. I think that this *Longman Grammar* (1999) by Doug Biber et al was a new venture, because we were able to use corpus data not only for all the examples—and there’s several thousand examples in the grammar—but also to base all our descriptive statements upon analysis of the corpus data. That was probably the most important respect in which it could be considered a landmark, but it was a flawed experiment, I think, in some respects, although it does inform us a great deal about how English grammar varies between speech and writing, between different types of written genres of texts and so on. It tells us a great deal about that, which hasn’t been known before, or has only been guessed at before, so in that respect it’s increased our knowledge considerably. But if we had done the job thoroughly, it would have taken more time. I think it took us seven years to write that grammar. It would have probably taken us forty years if we really had done the job as thoroughly as it could be done, so there are some gaps and I even might say there are one or two errors in that book.

Could you tell us a little bit more about the compilation of that new corpus of British English comprising the period 1926-1931, is that right?

I think the dates are 1928 to 1934, I think so.

Yes, that’s right, thank you.

Well, the reason for these dates is this: we wanted to build another corpus from the twentieth century on the same model of the *Brown Corpus*, so that we could analyse, we could make comparisons between matching corpora, not only between 1961 and 1991, but going back further to between 1961 and 1931. But, it is a difficult job to tackle, to try and get the texts from that period, lots of visiting of libraries and scouring various archives and so on. It’s not an easy job, and to make our job slightly less problematic, we decided to stretch the period, so that it contains three years before 1931 and three

years after 1931. I think all the newspapers are actually from 1931, that was a sort of key date, and then we allowed data a little bit from both sides of 1931, thinking that that would not seriously flaw the corpus from the point of view of this thirty-year comparison that we were interested in, so yes, that corpus is now reaching completion, and we are getting the first findings from it...

Yes, well that's good to know.

And in line perhaps with much of what I've said already, certain of the changes we observed in the 1961-1991 corpus comparison are also found in the earlier periods, so, for example, the modal auxiliaries declined between 1931 and 1961, and again between 1961 and 1991. There is a continuation of the trend, but the trend accelerates in the later period—that's also of some interest. So those are the sorts of results we are finding, and there's also a decline in the passive, similar to the modals, some decline between 1931 and 1961, and then a much increased decline in the period from 1961 to 1991. So what this research enables us to do is to be much more confident in talking about short-term diachronic trends in the language: it's a type of precise diachronic study that hasn't really been possible before. Although it's limited, obviously, in terms of the size of the corpora, and the fact that it's only dealing with written language, it has provided some very fascinating information about diachronic change. It also tells us about the rate of change: not just what's happening, but how fast it's happening.

*Going back in time and talking about your MA Thesis, *The Language of Commercial Television Advertising*, I think this was later published as a book entitled *English in Advertising. A Linguistic Study of Advertising in Great Britain* (1966). Would you do research of such an 'applied' kind nowadays? If the answer is 'yes', which topic would you choose and why? Could you imagine yourself doing something like this now, at this moment?*

No... (laughter). Well, I'll try to answer that with a bit more than perhaps a blank negative. In 19... what was it? 1962, right, I started that MA Thesis—it was a kind of corpus linguistics, actually, although I didn't know it at that time, because I collected a corpus of over six hundred commercial television advertisements, which was a kind of new genre in those days. I think it was twenty-nine thousand words, I know it was not an enormous corpus, but it was quite difficult for me to analyse. I did analyse it, but I had no computers to do it, so I just used a set of home-made pigeonholes made out of cardboard for sorting the data and it was quite a difficult job to do. But I've not regretted it in retrospect, because it gave me my first job, my first piece of research, and I discovered how to do things. Yes, it was a corpus, and in a way, that research followed the same pattern that I've mentioned: it was a matter of studying the formal characteristics of advertising language, and then trying to answer the question: "Well, why is advertising language like this and not like it could be? Why does advertising language use certain forms but not others?..." So, yes, it was an interesting piece of work of a kind which, in a way, has been developed considerably since then: the study of different varieties of language, you know. Today one might even call it a kind of

sociolinguistics, I suppose, but there have been many studies of advertising language since then, and one thing I was more or less determined on when I finished was that I would not go back to advertising language, I would not study it again.

*Another book of yours which has become a sort of best-seller, *Meaning and the English Verb*, is already into its third edition (2004). Could you tell us what is new about this third edition, in comparison with the first (1971) and the second (1987) editions?*

Yes, the first edition was published long ago, in 1971 actually, and then the second edition in 1987, and the third edition in 2004, so that book has been going a long time. In both cases the new editions had to alter the later chapters more than the earlier chapters. As you may remember or not, the first three chapters deal with things like tense and aspect, and then we go into the future in chapter four, and then chapters five, six and seven deal with modals and various other developments of past modals, hypothetical and indirect speech usage, and that sort of thing. Because the modals themselves have been so much studied and there has been so much new thinking, those are the areas where I found it necessary to change a great deal. Comparatively speaking, the earlier chapters have been much less changed, and in this last edition, I thought it necessary to split chapter five, which is the first main chapter on modal auxiliaries, into two halves—into two chapters—so now the book has eight chapters, not seven. That was one of the most noticeable changes to the third edition.

Finally, what do you think your main contribution to the world of linguistics has been? Of course, it's common knowledge that you have contributed so much, but what would you point out as being your main contribution?

Thank you, it's very kind of you to say that. I feel, you know, I can't give any one answer. If I have contributed, it's been in a lot of little bits, rather than in one particular, obvious way, let's say. Yes, so, if people have followed corpus linguistics in detail, they might look on me as one of the pioneers, perhaps even one of the founders of corpus linguistics in the UK. I developed the field through that very small beginning at Lancaster in 1970 and, at the same time, John Sinclair was also working in the corpus area in a very different way, so I wouldn't say I am somehow *the* pioneer exactly, but I'm *one* of them. I think it was especially in Great Britain that corpus linguistics flourished, because in the United States, the other most populous English-speaking country, there was a kind of intellectual difficulty about corpus linguistics, you know, it went contrary to the mainstream of the generative school. Somehow we were able to develop in a way that the Americans were not, and then corpus work was taken up by the publishers of dictionaries, who certainly found that was a good way to develop their lexicographical publications. I suppose that's one area where I might be looked back on as contributing.

I'll just mention one other area, which I think personally gives more satisfaction to me than anything else, and that is the field of stylistics, although I haven't really done much research in that field for many, well, quite a few years. This year the organisation of the *Poetics and Linguistics Association* called PALA, which is an international

organisation covering the area of stylistics, offered a prize for the most influential publication in that area over the twenty-five years of PALA's existence and, much to my surprise, they awarded this prize to Mick Short and myself. We were the two authors of a book called *Style in Fiction. A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*, I think that was the subtitle. Anyway, it was published in 1981, and I wouldn't have thought that it was one of the top-ranking books, but I was really delighted that we won this prize, and we are now doing a second edition of the book, so I'm getting seriously interested once again in that field. Yes, I suppose these kind of things give the most satisfaction.

I think you are being very modest.

Oh, yes, and I must mention we had a conference this year in Lancaster to celebrate that prize, we called this the *Style in Fiction Symposium*. And the proceedings of that symposium will be published in a special number of the journal *Style*, hopefully next year. I'm boasting now, you see!

Well, Professor Leech, thank you very much for such a rewarding and fruitful conversation and thank you for coming to Santiago. You know that you are very welcome here and always will be. Thank you so much.

Well, it's my job to thank you because you've been wonderful hosts. Thank you very much indeed.

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Received 21 September 2006

Revised version received 12 December 2006