GEOFFREY NEIL LEECH

Geoffrey Neil Leech
1936–2014

GEOFFREY LEECH (ALWAYS CALLED Geoff by colleagues and students) made major contributions to a broad range of topics in language research: the linguistic study of literature, the development of semantics and pragmatics, description of the grammar of English and the development of corpora, large computer-readable databases of language. Linguists reviewing his life tend naturally to focus on the areas closest to their own specialisms, and it can be difficult to get a sense of the full range of his work, especially since he never really dropped one of these topics when he focused on another. He left a detailed, engaging and reflective 'academic autobiography' for a collection compiled for The Philological Society.[1] I will draw on this autobiography to trace his career (all quotations from Leech without footnotes are from this source), but will note later the problems it presents for a biographer, especially because of his inveterate modesty.

Early years and University College London

Leech was born on 16 January 1936, in Gloucester. His parents were Richard and Dorothy Leech, and he had an older brother, Martin. The family moved to nearby Tewkesbury when his father, a bank clerk, got a job as a bank manager. Geoff went to Tewkesbury Grammar School; he

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[1] K. Brown and V. Law (eds.), *Linguistics in Britain: Personal Histories* (Oxford, 2002), 155–69. I have also drawn on his unpublished brief history of the Department of Linguistics at Lancaster: G. Leech, *Sketch of Departmental History, 1974–1997* (Lancaster, 1997).

notes that Roger Fowler, who would join him at University College London (UCL) and go on to become an influential scholar in stylistics and critical linguistics, was at the same school in a lower form. He was already devoted to the piano; he considered studying music further. He clearly learned a broad keyboard repertoire early on; he remarked in his later years that the music one learns before one is sixteen sticks permanently in one's memory. He says that in his National Service, from 1954 to 1956 in the RAF, 'I . . . spent most of my time shorthand typing in West Germany.'

In retrospect, it was a crucial factor in the direction of his career that he then went to UCL, which in the 1960s attracted many of the key figures in the study of the English Language. He attributes this important decision to chance:

> My father happened to drink in the same pub as Professor A. H. Smith, who was Quain Professor of English at University College London (UCL) and who happened to own a weekend cottage in a village near Tewkesbury. As a favour to my father, Professor Smith gave me an interview at his country cottage, but I must have offended him when I said I really wanted to study French! However, he offered me a place in his department.

There was no Linguistics Department at UCL from 1956 to 1959, when Leech did his BA in English Language and Literature, but there was a long-established Phonetics Department. He was taught by A. C. Gimson and J. D. O'Connor, and heard lectures by Daniel Jones (who had retired ten years earlier) and J. R. Firth, who had retired from the School of Oriental and African Studies just before Leech arrived at UCL. Leech chose a syllabus with a strong historical language component.[2] It included a course on detailed analysis of literary texts with Winifred Nowottny.[3] It also included 'Old English, Middle English, Old Norse, and English Philology'. Leech did not pursue these periods of English in his later work, but it could be argued that they shaped his approach to language, leading to his studies of comparative corpora and language change fifty years later. His studies probably also account for his lifelong interest in the study of place names; he always kept up with scholarship in this area even though he did not publish in it. And he was always ready to assume that anyone who had studied English must have a similar broad knowledge of

[2] David Crystal, who was an undergraduate at UCL a few years after Leech, describes the course in more detail in D. Crystal, *Just a Phrase I'm Going Through: My Life in Language* (London, 2009), Chs. 6–8.
[3] W. Nowottny, *The Language Poets Use* (London, 1962).

language history. Once, when I misspelled 'Windermere' on an invitation, he remarked that the mistake was easily made, but I would always get it right if I remembered that it was an Anglo-Saxon genitive.

Leech said his record as an undergraduate was 'undistinguished', but he seems to have impressed many people around him, and in 1959 he was awarded a scholarship to do an MA in English as a research degree, in the newly formed Communication Research Centre. He took up the study of the language of television commercials, as part of a group project (Eugene Winter, later an influential text linguist, was working on press advertisements). He made little progress, lacking methods for dealing with these texts, and for eighteen months he suspended his studies and taught in a London secondary school.

In 1961, he met and married Frances Anne Berman (Fanny). She was a Psychology graduate, also from UCL, with a strong mathematical turn. She would be closely involved with corpus work in the 1970s, and later at Lancaster completed an MPhil in Computing (1988) and a PhD in Linguistics (1999), both on probabilistic methods of parsing. They had two children, Thomas (born 1964), now a barrister in London, and Camilla (born 1967), now an interior designer in Oxford.

He was able to return to full-time study in 1962, with a research studentship funded by ATV, one of the then-new commercial television companies. This was the period of his first reading in linguistics, including books on structuralist (that is, pre-Chomsky) approaches to syntax then coming from the USA. It was a line of study suggested by Randolph Quirk, who had just returned to UCL from Durham. His MA thesis was submitted in 1963, and a version was published in 1966 as *English in Advertising*,[4] in a new Longman series edited by Quirk.

English in Advertising was the first book to take advertising language seriously. In a period when there were many popular attacks on advertising, Leech said, 'This book is written in a spirit of neutral inquiry, with the purely linguistic object of describing what British advertising language is *like*' (p. 3: his emphasis). The data are largely those of his MA thesis, 617 advertisements broadcast from December 1960 to May 1961, with additional press and poster advertisements. Most of the book is devoted to describing the grammatical and lexical characteristics of 'standard advertising English', but perhaps the most interesting chapter, entitled 'Creative Writing', deals with ways in which ads violate orthographic,

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[4] G. Leech, *English in Advertising: a Linguistic Study of Advertising in Great Britain* (London, 1966).

grammatical and semantic conventions, including the use of figurative language, setting the scene for much later linguistic study of advertising discourse. A section on 'rhyme and rhetoric' links to his next book, on poetic language. In this first work he already shows signs of the accessible style and broad systematic approach that would characterise his many later books.

Even before he finished his MA, Leech was offered an assistant lecturer's post in the English Department at UCL in 1962, which he described as 'another piece of immense good fortune'. He was assigned to teach Rhetoric, a course that was and is unusual in UK universities, though widespread in the USA. It had apparently previously focused on the classical tradition 'and had been reputedly the dullest course offered by the Department'. With his broader background in communications research, he set aside traditional rhetorical lists and taught instead 'literary language (especially the language of poetry) from the modern linguistic point of view'. Later he would return to rhetoric, broadly conceived, when he included 'The Rhetorical Principle' in his *Principles of Pragmatics*.

The course also led to another book, *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*.[5] It was presented as a textbook, with exercises for discussion at the end of each chapter. But it is also a broad scholarly attempt at synthesis between traditions of literary criticism (William Empson, I. A. Richards and a note in almost every chapter to Nowottny), linguistic analysis (Fowler, Halliday and the most recent books of Chomsky), rhetorical traditions (via Cleanth Brooks and R. P. Warren), and continental structuralism, including a useful introduction to the Prague School. The literary theory he was using as a context is now dated, with its basis in the New Criticism, but everything about stylistics, including such concepts as foregrounding, is still taught today. He was acutely aware of the likely scepticism of some literary scholars, but he was modest enough to acknowledge the assistance of *The Penguin Book of Quotations* to locate some illustrations. The acknowledgements, to Randolph Quirk, but also to Frank Kermode, Roger Fowler, Sidney Greenbaum and of course Winifred Nowottny, suggest that such a book could not have been written at that time anywhere but UCL. Like *English in Advertising*, the book was proofread by his father-in-law George Berman, indicating a network of family support for the young scholar.

From his early publications, one might have thought that he would base his research firmly in literary stylistics. It was on the advice of

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[5] G. Leech, *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry* (London, 1969).

M. A. K. Halliday that he took up studies in semantics. Halliday had recently arrived from Edinburgh, and was then Director of the Communication Research Centre with Leech as Assistant Director. But he did not follow the approach that Halliday was then developing into Systemic Functional Linguistics, a framework that has had huge international influence. Instead Leech pursued a semantic theory that was, in his words, 'based on autonomous semantic and syntactic representations, linked by mapping rules'.

Leech was awarded a Harkness Fellowship for 1964–5 (he recalls Isaiah Berlin grilling him as part of the selection panel) and chose to take it at MIT, then the centre of world linguistics. This experience did not lead him, as one might have expected, to become a missionary for generative linguistics in the UK. Chomsky was away, but he met the core of young linguists who would develop Generative Semantics. Leech did not follow this approach either, and the remark in his autobiography, 'I found the intensely intellectual atmosphere there somewhat uncomfortable', suggests he may not have enjoyed the rather rude, self-assertive and aggressive style of academic argument that seems to have been characteristic of these debates.[6] He noted that the most useful course he took there was Barbara Hall (Partee) lecturing on the mathematical and logical basis of linguistics, a course that may have been useful later in engaging with the work of his colleagues on corpus analysis. After these intensive studies, he, Fanny and the one-year-old Tom went tent-camping for three months, an exciting time exploring a nation then undergoing rapid change.

When he returned to the UK, he worked on a monograph on semantics. It is interesting, in terms of UK academic life in the 1960s, that he thought of it as a monograph first, and only later thought of turning it into a PhD thesis. He received a PhD in 1968, with the thesis entitled 'An Approach to the Semantics of Time, Place, and Modality in Modern English', and revised it as a book, again for Longman.[7] Characteristically, he dismissed it in his autobiography: 'This book was out of print in a very few years, and it is hardly read today.' It is probably true that work in formal semantics dates much more quickly than work in stylistics or pragmatics. But it is also true that from 1970 to 1975 it was cited by just about every major scholar

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[6] H. R. Harris, *The Linguistics Wars* (Oxford, 1993).
[7] G. N. Leech, *Towards a Semantic Description of English* (London, 1969, and Bloomington, IN, 1970).

in semantics, including, for instance, a long and approving quotation in a key paper by Arnold Zwicky and Jerrold Sadock.[8]

Two other closely interwoven strands of Leech's research began at UCL in the 1960s and continued in his career at Lancaster: the collection of data of language use and the development of an up-to-date academic descriptive grammar. He worked with the Survey of English Usage, a project founded by Quirk and involving David Crystal, Jan Svartvik and Sidney Greenbaum; part of this work was used in the London-Lund Corpus of spoken English, carefully transcribed for prosody using a system devised by Quirk and Crystal.[9]

For Leech, the most important outcome of this project was the work with Quirk, Svartvik and Greenbaum on *A Grammar of Contemporary English*,[10] which he said grew out of a 'need for a reconciliation between theory and practical pedagogy in the study of English grammar'. For the first but not the last time in his career, we see Leech's remarkable talent for collaboration with equals, even after he had moved to Lancaster and Svartvik to Lund. His own estimation of the result was characteristically modest:

> Largely because of Quirk's leadership, and in spite of countless arguments between members of the team, the collaboration was more successful than we had dared to suppose. The book, in spite of its weaknesses, became well known throughout the world as a source of descriptive information on English grammar.

John Sinclair (who did not always see eye to eye with Leech) said later that the *Grammar of Contemporary English* 'pensioned off the great European grammars because it was up to date, reasonably sensitive to modern ideas about language and language-teaching, and tried to say something about most things in grammar'.[11] This work and its successors meant that Leech remained in very regular contact with his UCL colleagues after he went to Lancaster. And even apart from his ongoing collaborations with them, much of his work over the next forty-five years would carry on practices and habits of mind that began at UCL. I will return to some of these practices and habits later.

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[8] A. M. Zwicky and J. M. Sadock, 'Ambiguity tests and how to fail them', in J. Kimball (ed.), *Syntax and Semantics 4* (New York, 1974), pp. 1–36; quotation p. 10n.

[9] R. Ilson, 'The Survey of English Usage: past, present—and future', *ELT Journal*, 36 (1982), 242–7.

[10] R. Quirk, J. Svartvik, G. Leech and S. Greenbaum, *A Grammar of Contemporary English* (London, 1972).

[11] J. Sinclair, 'Taxonomy of the tongue: review of *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*', *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 June 1985, p. 715.

Lancaster

In 1969, Geoff, Fanny, Tom and Camilla moved when he took up the post of Senior Lecturer at Lancaster University, which had been founded only four years before, and which was still something of a building site in Bailrigg. The English Department at Lancaster had been founded in 1965, by Professor Bill Murray, with the aim of linking language study and literary study, and all literature students took courses on both historical and contemporary studies of the language. There were then only four lecturers teaching linguistics in the department. At thirty-three, Leech was already a major figure in the field, with three books on three widely separated areas of analysis, and he was seen as a great catch (as shown by the fact that he was immediately promoted to Reader).

We have already seen that he did not let up his pace of work when he moved. But he must at some times have wondered what he had got himself into. In 1971, a controversy between Bill Murray and David Craig, one of the lecturers, caused a deep split in the department, leading to demonstrations, national news reports and the departure of some members of the department. It was clearly a very painful time for Leech, who had been thrust into a responsible role as leader of a section of the department, and who had a very strong sense of principle in academic practices. David Crystal, formerly one of his UCL colleagues, was also dragged into it as External Examiner. One of the results of the 'Craig Affair', as it was known, was the hiring of more linguistics lecturers, including Mick Short and Jim Hurford.

It also led eventually to the splitting of the English Department, and in 1974 what had been a Linguistics Section became the Department of Linguistics and Modern English Language, with Leech, now promoted to Professor, as its first Head. He also played an important role in the way the department developed as a community, in all its social activities; for instance, he was a keen player in staff–student and departmental cricket teams (I am told he was a medium-pace bowler and a strong batsman).

Despite many offers over the years, Leech spent the rest of his career at Lancaster. The prospectus from the first year of the department lists him as a specialist in semantics, but he would teach a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses on grammar and stylistics, and was in fact willing to teach on almost any language topic. From 1977 to 1985, he reduced his time at the university to 50 per cent so that he could work on his books and develop computer corpora. Christopher Candlin had set up the Institute for English Language Education in 1977, with Mike Breen as

Deputy Director, an independent unit that would offer in-sessional and pre-sessional courses in English and do teacher-training projects; it led to many international contacts for the department. Leech served as Chairman from 1985 to 1990, an unlikely role but one that shows his concern with the pedagogical applications of grammars. (He says in his departmental history that Charles Alderson, the Director, did all the work and devised the strategy in that period.) From 1997 to 2001 he was appointed Research Professor. Though he notes with relief that he only served as Head for one slightly extended term, he was always a quiet but energetic presence in the department. He never tried to construct the department in his image, and welcomed new colleagues in all areas, but we all looked up to him, whatever our specialisms.

One of the ways Leech contributed to the global standing of his department was in his visiting appointments at other universities. After the political tensions in the department, it was probably with some relief that in 1972 he took up a visiting professorship at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, and, as we will see, this turned out to be crucial to his work on corpus construction. In 1977, after his stint as Head of Department, he led one of the first teaching delegations to China, a country that then seemed remote and perhaps irrelevant to an English Department. One direct result was that Yueguo Gu came to the department as an MA and then as a PhD student, studying with Leech; he is now Head of the Contemporary Linguistics Department of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. An indirect result was a long line of contacts with Chinese universities. Leech later held visiting professorships in New Zealand, Australia, France and several times in Japan, a country with which he had a particular affinity.

Leech was elected to Fellowship of the British Academy in 1987, after *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* and the completion of the LOB (Lancaster–Oslo/Bergen) Corpus. Two years later, he was made an Honorary Fellow of UCL, a mark of respect of which he was particularly proud. He had honorary doctorates from the University of Lund (1987), the University of Wolverhampton (2002), Lancaster University (2002) and Charles University in Prague (2012).

The research projects he accomplished in his time at Lancaster were so varied, I will deal with them under separate headings: Reference Grammars, Stylistics, Semantics and Pragmatics, Corpora and the wide range of work he did after his formal retirement. I will then draw out some of the themes that run through these diverse areas of research.

Reference grammars

Though the authors of *A Grammar of Contemporary English* may have thought their ten-year task was more than enough for any team, the project kept developing after publication in 1972. Quirk and Greenbaum fulfilled the pedagogic remit of the project by publishing a student grammar based on the big grammar. In 1975, Leech and Svartvik published *A Communicative Grammar of English*,[12] which was in tune with the move to communicative language teaching at the time, 'relating forms and structures of language to their meaning and use'. (His colleagues Christopher Candlin and Mike Breen were among the main proponents of this approach.) Mick Short said that in writing this grammar, 'The authors took over a seminar room during the summer vacation and worked a series of 18-hour days.'[13] Though the popularity of the communicative approach has passed, we can see from online comments that *A Communicative Grammar*, in its third edition, augmented with corpus results, is still widely and gratefully used.

Much later, in 1985, what was planned as a second edition of the big grammar became a very different book, *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, which at 1,722 pages was twice as long as its already huge predecessor. In a review, Flor Aarts said:

> What distinguishes it from previous reference grammars of English (apart from breadth of coverage) is that it not only states the facts but attempts to provide explanations whenever it is possible to do so without involving readers in the intricacies and formalisms of modern linguistic theories.[14]

David Crystal has described the considerable efforts it took for four strong-minded and very well-informed grammarians to collaborate successfully; his own task was making sure that all the terminology of the separate sections was consistent. And Crystal also stressed, as Leech himself never would, the key role that Leech took in these working practices.

Even after this twenty-year and apparently definitive project, with its many spin-offs, Leech's work on descriptive grammars was not done. With Douglas Biber, Stig Johansson, Susan Conrad and Edward Finegan, he was part of the team that produced between 1992 and 1999 the *Longman*

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[12] G. Leech and J. Svartvik, *A Communicative Grammar of English* (London, 1975).
[13] M. Short, 'In memory of Geoffrey Leech (1936–2014)', *Language and Linguistics*, 23 (2014), 306.
[14] F. G. A. M. Aarts, '*A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*: the great tradition continued', *English Studies*, 2 (1988), 163–73.

Grammar of Spoken and Written English.[15] As this list of names would suggest, it is a grammar based on corpus data; it acknowledges that it borrows 'the grammatical framework of concepts and terminology' (p. viii) from that of the *Comprehensive Grammar*, but for the first time it could note, for instance, whether a usage was more common in one genre (such as face-to-face conversation) or another (such as news reports). While the other authors drafted chapters (four each by Biber and Johansson), Leech's role, with Biber, was 'primary editorial responsibility for the whole book' (p. vii). Quirk says in his Foreword that 'Biber was lucky in having as his partner in the massive task, both of general design and of implementing detailed insights, a scholar of Geoffrey Leech's stature in the fields of semantics, pragmatics, grammatology, and computational linguistics' (p. v). Because of its empirical base, its impact has gone beyond that of earlier reference grammars. One reviewer said that 'Amongst its many merits perhaps the highest distinction of this grammar lies not so much within the book itself but in the fresh methodological impetus that it gives to the disciplines of English linguistics and grammar writing more globally.'[16] One aspect of this impetus was in the way it showed the centrality of corpus research, not just to lexicography, but to a whole range of linguistic issues.

Stylistics

At Lancaster, as at UCL, Leech taught a course on literary stylistics, but at Lancaster he taught it jointly with Mick Short, who had been one of the first students in English at the new university. They taught it together until 1988, and Short would continue to revise the course, radically, over thirty years, often in collaboration with colleagues new to stylistics, finally developing an online course based on it. They worked on a companion to *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*, which would become *Style in Fiction*.[17] Like the earlier volume, it was presented as a textbook, with accessible introductions to linguistic approaches. It was more systematic than its predecessor in presenting a method of analysis, a checklist of features to analyse and suggestions on cautious quantitative approaches

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[15] D. Biber, S. Johansson, G. Leech, S. Conrad and E. Finegan, *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (London, 1999).

[16] M. Krug, 'The *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (review)', *English Language and Linguistics*, 6 (2002), 379–84.

[17] G. N. Leech and M. H. Short, *Style in Fiction: a Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose* (London, 1981, second edition 2007).

(one section is called, 'The Uses of Arithmetic'). But it too went far beyond textbook presentation; for instance, the chapters on fictionality and fictional worlds, on mind style (the way the prose suggests the state of mind and point of view of the narrator) and reported speech and thought were innovative then and have been enormously influential since. The acknowledgements suggest the range of the work, to Quirk again, and Roger Fowler again, to Lancaster literary colleagues Richard Dutton and Joan Lord Hall, and linguistic colleagues James Hurford and Willie van Peer.

Though he had worked on the large group project of the grammar, this was the first monograph on which he had collaborated, and he was working with a colleague who was also strong willed and who had his own ideas and literary tastes. (The eclectic range of examples is one of the delights of the book; no need for a book of quotations here.) The two authors themselves have different styles, but I for one do not see the joins in the text. Leech commented that (his emphases):

> Compared with other books, this book was particularly difficult *to write*, but also most satisfying *to have written*. . . . I was especially fortunate in having, in Mick, a co-author with whom I could work closely and well, though inevitably not without disagreements.

I will return to this talent for collaboration later. While Short continued research on stylistics, Leech was drawn away (rather regretfully) to other issues, returning to stylistics after he retired. In 2005, the book won the Silver Jubilee Prize of the Poetics and Linguistics Association (PALA) as the most influential book in the field since the organisation had been founded in 1980. A revised edition with an additional chapter appeared in 2007.

Semantics and pragmatics

The first book Leech published at Lancaster was *Meaning and the English Verb*, which would have two more revised editions.[18] It was an introduction to the area of semantics he had studied in his thesis and his first semantics monograph. He also wrote the advanced textbook *Semantics* for a Penguin series edited by David Crystal, which would also have a revised edition.[19] Most readers probably know his work on semantics

[18] G. N. Leech, *Meaning and the English Verb* (London 1971, second edition 1987, third edition 2004).
[19] G. N. Leech, *Semantics* (London, 1974) and the second edition *Semantics: the Study of Meaning* (London, 1981).

through these works, which are easily accessible to non-specialists and students.

Through the late 1970s, he published working papers, essays and talks working on the boundary between semantics, the study of meaning considered as part of the language system, and pragmatics, the study of meaning in use in specific contexts. As he noted (in the 1981 edition), 'Twenty years ago pragmatics, if it was mentioned at all, was regarded as a convenient dustbin to which to consign annoying facts which did not fit theories. Now it is one of the most vigorous areas of linguistic research.'[20]

The area is even more vigorous now, with more publications (and bigger conferences) than for any other level of linguistic analysis. It was already developing a broad, philosophical version based largely at European universities; Jacob Mey established the *Journal of Pragmatics* in 1977, and Herman Parret, Marina Sbisà and Jef Verschueren had organised in 1979 the first of the conferences that would lead in 1986 to the International Pragmatics Association (Leech spoke at that conference).[21] But part of the reason pragmatics established itself in the curriculum of linguistics was the publication in 1983 of Stephen Levinson's *Pragmatics* and Leech's *Principles of Pragmatics*.[22] Both are presented as textbooks (Levinson's in the Cambridge University Press red series, Leech's again in the Longman Linguistics Library, now co-edited by Leech). Both were accessible, at least in opening chapters, for beginners, but both also went on to substantial new contributions. As one might expect, they covered both Speech Act theory and Paul Grice's logic of conversation (Grice's 1968 lectures were then available only in part). But Levinson extended the field to Conversation Analysis (offering the best short summary) while Leech dealt with some of the same interactional issues by proposing a Politeness Principle to complement Grice's Cooperative Principle. Grice proposed that participants in conversation assumed such maxims as Quantity ('make your contribution as informative as is required for the purposes of the exchange'); Leech added such maxims as Tact ('(A) MINIMISE COST TO OTHER, (B) MAXIMISE BENEFIT TO OTHER.') and explained how they could be used to interpret utterances. Between Levinson's and Leech's textbooks, students and researchers had a wide range of

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[20] Leech, *Semantics: the Study of Meaning*, p. 319.
[21] J. Verschueren, 'IPrA, the International Pragmatics Association, at 25', *Semiotix*, 10 (2011) http://semioticon.com/semiotix/2011/10/ipra-the-international-pragmatics-association-at-25/ (accessed 10 January 2017).
[22] S. Levinson, *Pragmatics* (Cambridge, 1983) and G. N. Leech, *Principles of Pragmatics* (London, 1983).

approaches to key issues in analysis of language use. Leech's work was especially influential in formulating a line of work on 'linguistic politeness' that had been developing since a paper by Robin Lakoff in 1973, an approach that contrasted in many ways with that of Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson.[23] More broadly, he put 'Interpersonal Rhetoric' at the centre of linguistic analysis. As with stylistics, he largely set this line of work aside, while the citations and applications piled up, but he returned to politeness in his last book.[24] Lancaster has remained a centre for pragmatics research, with the work of Jenny Thomas and Jonathan Culpeper.

Corpora

In 1970, Leech had proposed to his Lancaster colleagues that the newly emerging group of linguists could 'make its mark in the world' by developing a corpus of British English. The project, founded as the 'Computer Archive of Modern English Texts' (CAMET), was modelled on the one-million word corpus of American English developed by Henry Kučera and W. Nelson Francis from 1961 to 1967 (usually called the Brown Corpus). The six months at Brown had given Leech a chance to learn more about the practicalities of corpus building.

A corpus is a machine-readable collection of written and/or spoken language use. (The Survey of English Usage was still a print-only resource.) Anyone who worked on computer corpora then will say how much easier it is now, with more usable interfaces and media and huge processing power; the process then meant compiling huge stacks of punch-cards or reels of paper tape, both of which were unforgiving of even the slightest errors inputting data or handling the media.

The new corpus of British English would be based on the same categories of written texts as the Brown Corpus (including, for instance, several press genres, several fiction genres, religion, learned and academic writing, skills and hobbies and humour). Each genre would be made up of sets of texts of 2,000 words. Mick Short recalled that in the early years

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[23] R. Lakoff, 'The logic of politeness; or, mind your p's and q's', *Papers from the Ninth Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistics Society* (Chicago, IL, 1973), pp. 292–305; and P. Brown and S. Levinson, 'Universals in language usage: politeness phenomena', in E. Goody (ed.), *Questions and Politeness: Strategies in Social Interaction* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 56–289.

[24] For a careful and even-handed assessment of Leech's contribution to pragmatics, see J. Culpeper, 'Geoffrey Leech, 1936–2014: the pragmatics legacy', in J.-O. Östman and J. Verschueren (eds.), *Handbook of Pragmatics* (Amsterdam, 2015), pp. 1–17, available at https://benjamins.com/online/hop2/ articles/lee1 (accessed 17 January 2017).

of the project, Geoff and Fanny would be in the department every weekend working on the corpus.[25] But it went very slowly, not only because of the technical challenges but also because of problems getting permission to use texts. Publishers, who had no idea what a 'computer corpus' might involve, insisted on full payment for copyright, even though they would only be used as part of a database, not used as a way around buying a copy of the book. The solution to this seemingly intractable problem came from an unexpected source. Stig Johansson was a Leverhulme Scholar in the department in 1976, working on the project (and apparently his wife, Faith Anne, was also drafted in to the work). When Johansson took up a post at Bergen, he 'offered to take the project to Norway'. In 1977, Randolph Quirk (UCL), Jan Svartvik (Oslo), W. Nelson Francis (Brown), Stig Johansson (Bergen) and Leech met in Oslo to found the International Computer Archive of Modern English (ICAME). Leech found that London publishers were much more likely to grant free rights when asked in a letter from the secretary (Johansson) of this impressive-sounding organisation based in Norway, than when asked by 'an inmate of a provincial northern university'. But of course ICAME was not just a source of letterhead stationery; forty years later it is a large learned society, with an important annual conference and a journal.

What was now the LOB Corpus was completed in 1978, but it was only the beginning of thirty years developing new corpora, annotating these corpora and, crucially, developing tools that would enable users to access these resources. This work was a collaboration with Roger Garside in Computing, in what in 1984 became the Unit for Computer Research on the English Language (UCREL). The next step was a project (1978–83), funded by the Social Science Research Council, in collaboration again with Stig Johansson, to tag the corpus with the part of speech of each word. (The categories are actually much more detailed than just verb or noun, so for instance JJR is a general comparative adjective and VVD is the past tense form of a lexical verb.) This would clearly make it much more useful in studying grammatical patterns, but it was too large a task to be done manually, finding each phrase and determining the role of that string in that phrase. The software developed relies on an algorithm similar to a Hidden Markov Model for assigning likely tags based on probabilities of transitions from one tag to the next. For the model to work, it needed to be trained on one corpus (in this case Brown), to learn

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[25] M. Short, 'In memory of Geoffrey Leech (1936–2014)', *Language and Linguistics*, 23 (2014), 307.

the frequencies of transitions, and then applied to another corpus (LOB), where the tags were unknown. The CLAWS (Constituent Likelihood Automatic Word-*tagging* System) tagger was developed by a team that included Eric Atwell (now in Computer Science at Leeds) and Ian Marshall (later in Information Science at East Anglia), as well as Roger Garside and Fanny Leech.[26] It has had a huge influence on later corpus projects, as has the idea of a training corpus and a test corpus.

A third stage of the project, funded by the Science and Engineering Research Council (1983–6), was an attempt to apply similar probabilistic methods to the parsing of the corpus—that is, labelling its grammatical structure (such as subject, predicate, noun phrase, subordinate clause). This is a much more difficult problem, and it was a major focus of Natural Language Processing in the 1980s and 1990s. The Lancaster team started with a 'Treebank' built up by Geoffrey Sampson over many hours of laboriously parsing a section of the corpus by hand, to provide a basis for training the probabilistic parser. The project continued from 1987 to 1991 as a collaboration with IBM. Unlike the tagger, it never did produce a practical tool that would process the whole corpus with reasonable accuracy, but it did pioneer methods that would be used by other teams on bigger projects (for instance the Penn Treebank).

The twenty years of work produced an enormously useful corpus and tools for using it, but it produced little in the way of scholarly publication to compare to the stream of outputs in Leech's other lines of work. Perhaps the greatest contribution of the CAMET/UCREL team was in developing new ways of working, and in focusing on key standards for the work. The Lancaster group developed a recognisable approach to corpora. As a comparison, the group led by John Sinclair at Birmingham gathered a very large corpus with any digital resources available, without worrying about the structure of the corpus, and preferred un-annotated texts in developing COBUILD and the Bank of English. Those choices were motivated by their aim of supporting lexicography. The Lancaster group, following Brown, developed carefully designed and balanced corpora, with annotation that would allow much more complex analysis of the data. One benefit of this approach was that the LOB Corpus could be compared to the Brown Corpus to find differences in British and American

[26] I. Marshall, 'Choice of grammatical word-class without global syntactic analysis: tagging words in the LOB corpus', *Computers and the Humanities*, 17 (1983), 139–50; see also R. Garside, G. Leech and G. Sampson, (eds.), *The Computational Analysis of English: a Corpus-Based Approach* (London, 1987).

English, because the corpora were designed to be comparable. Much later, comparable corpora of more recent English texts were developed at the University of Freiburg (Freiburg-Brown or FROWN and Freiburg-LOB or FLOB), and comparable corpora of earlier periods were constructed to allow for historical comparisons. None of this would have been possible if it had not been decided at the beginning to focus on careful specification of what the one-million word corpus contained, instead of just trying to get as many words as possible.

Leech worked on many different corpus projects in the 1990s, the most important of which was the British National Corpus (BNC). Produced by a consortium of Oxford and Lancaster Universities, with Longman and Oxford University Press, the BNC was two orders of magnitude larger than LOB, with 100 million words, 10 per cent of which were from hard-to-gather spoken sources. Funding included grants from the Science and Engineering Research Council, the Department of Trade and Industry, the British Academy, Longman, Chambers and Oxford University Press. The team at Lancaster included Tony McEnery in Linguistics, Paul Rayson in Computing and many other researchers. When the immediate work on that project was completed, Leech was involved in initiatives to establish standards for corpora in Europe, making them much more usable. Leech was less involved in corpus work after 2001; a series of projects led by Tony McEnery led finally to the ESRC-funded Centre for Corpus Applications to the Social Sciences (CASS). One of the many projects of this Centre is Spoken BNC2014, allowing comparisons across the twenty-five intervening years.

Computer corpus work involves careful coordination of teams and attention to detail; Leech said it has 'a tendency to monopolise the time of anyone who becomes seriously involved in it'. It also involves a great deal of time in frustrating pursuit of funding and apparently unproductive meetings. He often expressed regret at the work, particularly in pragmatics and stylistics, which he had to set aside while leading corpus projects. But corpus linguistics may be his broadest area of impact. In 2016, the university was given the Queen's Award to Higher Education for its corpus work over forty years.

Retirement

The Department of Linguistics and English Language at Lancaster (as it is now called) is a relatively young institution, and Leech was the first person to retire from it, in 2001. He had already reduced his teaching to complete some of his research projects. He noted in his autobiography, 'I have extricated myself gently from the pressures of running large-scale research projects and large-scale research teams.' As we will see, that does not mean that he stopped doing research. Nor did he stop being part of the department; he retained an office as Emeritus Professor, came in about once a week, met visitors, sometimes supervised research students and helped out the department in a number of tasks. He was a cheerful presence, and many colleagues turned to him for advice. But it was clearly a big transition both for him and for the department he had shaped.

He and Fanny had moved in 1987 from a modern house in Lancaster, where Tom and Camilla had grown up, to a manor house dating from 1700 in the market town of Kirkby Lonsdale. They had a great deal to do in their sympathetic restoration and decoration of the house, and Leech always took great pleasure in its interiors and gardens. They also became very actively involved in their new community. Leech offered his services as organist to the small, beautiful churches in the villages around the town (such as St Peter's, Leck), and over the years built up a church choir. This gave him a chance to play every week the music he loved, and it also brought energy to what would have been dwindling congregations. Fanny also sang in the choir, and it was part of what brought them into their new community.

Though he no longer led new projects, he kept up his energetic output of publications, with eight books and forty-seven articles after his retirement. The core of this work was in historical comparison of grammar between parallel corpora. With Paul Rayson and Nick Smith, he worked on a comparison of LOB and the Freiburg-LOB Corpus (FLOB) that sampled the same genres of texts thirty years apart. He also compared across the two matching corpora of Brown (US English) and LOB (British). And he worked on projects compiling matching corpora from 1931 to take the comparison back further (with Paul Baker compiling a corpus from 1901). This work was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Board, the British Academy and the Leverhulme Foundation, in smaller projects with less administration. The work led to major books with Smith, and with Christian Mair and Marianne Hundt, who had

developed the Freiburg corpora;[27] it also led to many articles and chapters and a series of conference talks. As he said, 'It enabled me to do what I think I do best – which is descriptive study of the English language, not leading-edge language technology.'

He also returned to the two lines of work, in stylistics and pragmatics, that had been sidelined by his all-consuming career in corpus analysis. He collected his earlier studies of literary language and, whenever he got the opportunity, did new ones; his last conference talk, at the Poetics and Linguistics Association in the month before he died, was 'Styles of (im) politeness: a comparison of Ishiguru's *Remains of the Day* and Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*'. He also completed one more major book on politeness, taking up some of the challenges that had been made to his work and that of Brown and Levinson in the thirty years since *Principles of Pragmatics*, developing new accounts of politeness in such speech acts as apologising and requesting and, again, looking at historical change.[28]

The publications from 2001 to 2015 would be impressive for any academic. As one would expect at this stage of a career, there were also many new editions, Festschriften to write for, interviews and plenary addresses. But he seems to have been able to focus, for the most part, on the work he enjoyed doing, and where he thought he had the greatest contribution to make.

Personal traits

I have listed as many of Leech's achievements as I could fit in this space. But the achievements do not explain why he was so much admired and loved by colleagues and by academics around the world. In looking over the many tributes after his death, in print, in person and online, I find repeated mention of some aspects of his personality recognisable to anyone who knew him.

Modesty

Every personal account of Geoff Leech mentions his modesty, and some go on to say how appropriate this trait was in someone who had written

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[27] G. Leech, M. Hundt, C. Mair and N. Smith, *Change in Contemporary English: a Grammatical Study* (Cambridge, 2009).
[28] G. N. Leech, *The Pragmatics of Politeness* (Oxford, 2014).

at length about the Maxim of Modesty as essential to interpreting interpersonal rhetoric: 'Minimize praise of self: Maximize dispraise of self.'[29] His history of the department manages to avoid much mention of his own central role in it, and his autobiography plays down any contribution or talent of his own, as Jonathan Culpeper noted:

> His own background and abilities come across [in his own account] as being 'small', even 'undistinguished' or with 'weaknesses', whilst any notable achievements in his career are by 'good fortune' or 'accident', and positive evaluations from others are clouded with modal expressions such as 'apparently' or 'seems'.[30]

Of course, such modesty is only noticeable when one has great achievements to play down.

The other side of this tendency to self-deprecation was a genuine interest in whomever he was talking to (what he called in the *Principles of Pragmatics* the 'Maxim of Tact'). Whether he met a famous scholar, a new junior colleague, a PhD student or a visitor from a foreign university, he would focus on what his interlocutor had done and was doing. This respect for others made an enormous impression, especially on people who might have felt uncertain about their status when they met him. I do not know whether he learned this modesty from his family, his school or from his early collaborators, but it struck everyone who met him, so it must not be very common among famous academics.

Collaboration

Leech had a gift for collaboration, which he must have learned from the apprenticeship he had with Randolph Quirk and others at UCL. There are not many accounts of the practices of the team working on the Survey of English Usage and on *A Grammar of Contemporary English*, but Quirk seems to have combined personal commitment to the project with acknowledgement of the abilities of the other participants, whatever their professional status, and enormous demands for hard work. The grammars, the corpora and the later historical studies were all collaborations, as were many edited collections. Mick Short has commented on their work together on *Style in Fiction*:

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[29] *Principles of Pragmatics*, p. 136.
[30] Culpeper, 'Geoffrey Leech, 1936–2014: the pragmatics legacy'. Obituaries by Mick Short and Christian Mair also help give a picture of how he was seen by colleagues: Short, 'In memory of Geoffrey Leech (1936–2014)'; and C. Mair, 'Geoffrey N. Leech (16 January 1936–19 August 2014)', *Corpora*, 10/1 (2015), 5–9.

> Perhaps not surprisingly, Geoff Leech managed to get by with less sleep than most. I can remember when he and I were writing *Style in Fiction* that, when we had agreed who would draft each of the next two chapters, at the end of my first night's work I would have, say four or five draft pages but would find a completed first draft of Geoff's next chapter in my pigeonhole the following morning.[31]

In the edited collection that I did with him and Jenny Thomas, I recall being flattered to be asked to participate, and then I recall very clear planning and deadlines, and his leading by example, nudging us to do our part of the work by doing his own part quickly and without any fuss or complaint.

Detail

Mick Short also said, 'He was more painstaking and careful of detail than anyone I have ever met.' Without an overall aim, such a painstaking approach could make someone pedantic, but in the big reference grammars, and the comparisons of corpora, it meant he could marshal a wide range of examples and leave room for the oddity or exception. It may be this attention to detail that made him constitutionally unable to convert to the linguistics he encountered at MIT.

Usefulness

Leech was not an applied linguist; he was primarily motivated by scholarship, not by the desire to improve language teaching or dictionaries. But he was always concerned to make the work useful. The most obvious example of this concern was the string of student versions of the grammars and the simpler handbooks and glossaries he produced, usually in collaboration, throughout his career. The first book, on advertising, would be useful to any practitioner, as his work on stylistics was useful to students of literature. He positively enjoyed teaching, and as soon as he retired he took up a part-time job at the University of Bangor teaching stylistics. Once when I sent around an e-mail asking if anyone in the department could cover a couple of lectures in sociolinguistics, he was the only one to respond, saying that it was not his subject, but he would work it up if I needed help. This is not what one expects of the most senior professor in a department, but it was precisely because he was the most senior professor that he felt he should take on such responsibilities.

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[31] Short, 'In memory of Geoffrey Leech (1936–2014)', 308.

Steel

Though Leech was always modest, though he avoided conflicts, had a quiet voice and seldom spoke first in a discussion, everyone who knew him recognised something steely in his personality. He had very strong principles about linguistics, education and the right way to treat people, and if these principles seemed to be violated he could be very angry. It was not a shouting, e-mailing, threatening kind of anger, but a very firm and definite response, and though it was rare, one remembered it.

Music

Leech loved music. He did not mention it in his academic autobiography (which was academic after all) and of course he never showed off his knowledge or talent (see Modesty, above). It was just part of his life and, as nearly as I can tell, it was always part of his life.[32] The one reference to music I have come across in his academic work is in an example of everyday linguistic creativity in his book on advertising:

> A friend saw me carrying a copy of Bach's *Klavierübung* ('keyboard exercise') and remarked (referring to the difficulty of the pieces) that they were 'not very *übungy*'.[33]

The point he is making is about his friend's wit and how it worked in the conversation, not about his music. The same division between his academic and musical lives seems to have applied at church, where he was seen as an organist and worshipper, and some members of the congregation were surprised to hear at his funeral about his academic renown. While he did not make a point of his musical skill in his academic life, he was always happy to play at departmental events, whether accompanying singing or

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[32] His wife Fanny adds that 'He came from an environment that was the "Three Choirs Festival", the three choirs being Gloucester, Worcester and Hereford. His father Richard had been chief chorister at Gloucester, his uncle had been the organist for Worcester and later for the most important church in Canada, and his nephew again was the chief chorister for Gloucester. From the age of twelve, he and his father shared the position of organist at Bredon parish church. In his late teens he was entered for a scholarship for the Royal Academy in piano. The great Herbert Howells told him his improvisation was not good enough and begrudgingly Geoff settled for the academic life. When I met him a little later he still had feelings of regret! … Nearly every day of our married life, Geoffrey would play a CD and demand that I guess what it was and who played what – he was so good. Geoff was at his best when he played chamber music when his nervousness would completely disappear, and he would shine as the marvellous pianist that he was!'

[33] Leech, *English in Advertising*, p. 176.

joining in sketches; he played at the department's fortieth anniversary celebrations, and he played at PALA in the month before his death.

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Geoffrey Leech died on 19 August 2014. He was in his office, meeting a PhD student, in the middle of a conversation. A funeral was held at St Peter's, Leck; the three eulogies were by Lord Shuttleworth, representing the church community, Tom Leech, representing the family, and David Crystal, representing the field of linguistics. The vicar said it was just the sort of service Geoff would have wanted: no sermon and lots of music. The Department of Linguistics and English Language also had an event celebrating his career, attended by colleagues, friends and admirers from around the world. For me, one of the most moving parts of the memorial held by the department were the songs offered with piano accompaniment by three of his colleagues. I can imagine Geoff fidgeting nervously at all the praise in the talks, but enjoying entirely the duet on Purcell's setting of Dryden's 'Let us wander'.

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GREG MYERS
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