SIDNEY ALLEN

William Sidney Allen
1918–2004

I. Early life and family background

WILLIAM SIDNEY ALLEN WAS BORN ON 18 MARCH 1918 in north London, where his father worked as a maintenance engineer in a printing works, and it was there that he spent his early childhood. He was always known in the family (though not at school) as Sidney, in order to distinguish him from his father, William Percy Allen. Later he chose for professional purposes 'W. Sidney Allen', primarily to avoid confusion with another author in the related field of what was coming to be called in the 1950s applied linguistics: William S[tannard] Allen. The name by which he was known to most of his friends and then more widely when fashions began to change, socially and to some extent bibliographically, in the 1960s was Sidney. Throughout this memoir I will call him Sidney.

His father had been orphaned at an early age and was brought up, initially by his paternal grandfather, a carpenter in Bermondsey, and then by a widowed aunt, a laundress in Lambeth. At the age of ten he was sent to a boarding school for poor children in Oxfordshire, endowed by a philanthropist MP, where he received a sound elementary education and subsequently was apprenticed to the printing trade. Sidney's mother, Ethel Pearce, who was born in Camden Town, was the daughter of a compositor and one of seven children. Printing was thus part of his family background on both sides. Sidney's father taught him to read by the age of three and did what he could to provide him with a good primary education, as well as instructing him at home in such practical skills as carpentry and what would nowadays be called DIY. He sent him to a private school for one year when he was five. Sidney then went on to the local

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London County Council elementary school, from where, at the age of eleven, he won a scholarship to Christ's Hospital.

It was at Christ's Hospital, as he was to recount later, that he received the kind of education that could be seen with hindsight as having had a major if not wholly determinative influence on his future career. Having come from a school where, as was of course normal at that time, no foreign languages were taught, he immediately started to learn Latin and two years later Greek. From the outset his interests were linguistic rather than literary. Particularly influential was his form master Derrick Macnutt, a demanding but inspiring teacher, who taught his pupils Latin and Greek composition, both prose and verse, and in the sixth form made them read large portions of the main classical authors. It was Macnutt who encouraged him to sit for an entrance scholarship to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he obtained in 1937 a major award. When supplemented with a matching award from the local council and an exhibition from Christ's Hospital, this enabled him, as an undergraduate, to be financially independent of his parents. In later life he was always ready to acknowledge the debt he owed both to the school and to Derrick Macnutt. Macnutt, incidentally, was the person who under the pen name of Ximenes set the notoriously difficult *Observer* weekly crosswords. Sidney himself continued to do *The Times* crossword regularly for the rest of his life and prided himself on the rapidity with which he completed it.

II. Undergraduate at Cambridge, 1937–9

When he arrived in Cambridge for the Michaelmas Term of 1937–8 he found that he had already done most of the work required for the two-year Part 1 of the Classical Tripos as it was then constituted and 'was able to devote most of [his] time (when not rowing) to attending the classes and doing the reading for the Group-E option of Part 2, which [he] was due to take in his third and final year'.[1]

Given his interest in language and languages, it was perhaps predictable that he should have chosen this particular option, which as it was

[1] This quotation is taken from Sidney's own autobiographical contribution to K. Brown and V. Law (eds.), *Linguistics in Britain: Personal histories* (Publications of the Philological Society, 36) (Oxford, 2002), 14–27. As to his rowing, he said that being able to take up rowing, an expensive sport, from scratch (he was a good sportsman and at school had played rugby) was but one of the advantages of being at Trinity, a wealthy college, and coincidentally of having the Senior Treasurer of the Boat Club, (Sir) James Butler as his tutor.

then taught (under the rubric of 'Comparative Philology'), had as its core the study of the phonology and morphology of the Indo-European languages from a historical and comparative point of view, with particular reference to Greek and Latin. It also included a certain amount of what was coming to be called general and descriptive, or synchronic, linguistics, and, given the importance of Sanskrit in the reconstruction of earlier stages of the Indo-European languages by means of 'the comparative method', enough of the grammar of both Vedic and Classical Sanskrit for students to be able to construe selected texts. In addition to doing the Group-E reading, Sidney also attended the relevant lectures, in particular those given by Harold W. Bailey and N. B. Jopson ('Joppie'), the Professors respectively of Sanskrit and Comparative Philology. Both of these, very different from one another in manner and personality, were inspiring teachers who communicated to their students the enthusiasm that they themselves had for their subject. And as far as the youthful Sidney Allen was concerned the content of teaching was admirably complementary. Sir Harold (as he later became) was by then one of the world's greatest authorities over the whole field of the older Indo-Iranian languages. He was also conversant with the more theoretically innovative work in what was still generally seen as the reconstruction of the earliest form of the Indo-European 'parent-language', Proto-Indo-European (PIE). These newer trends could subsequently be seen as originating with Ferdinand de Saussure's *Mémoire sur le système primitif des voyelles dans les langues indo-européennes* (Leipzig, 1879); they had still not come to exert any appreciable influence on the standard textbooks and works of reference. In particular, Sir Harold was thoroughly familiar with the so-called 'laryngeal theory' (relating to the pre-history of the PIE vowel-system). Apart from learning more Sanskrit at his feet than did the average Group-E student, Sidney thus acquired earlier than most an interest in the laryngeal theory and some knowledge of its structuralist underpinnings. If Jopson had any knowledge of the laryngeal theory or of the general principles of structural linguistics, this had no effect on the content of his lectures. On the other hand, his presentation of what was still the generally accepted version of the phonological and morphological structure of PIE and of the prehistoric stages of Greek, Latin and Sanskrit and of the other Indo-European languages (Slavonic, Celtic, etc.) was greatly enlivened by his humorous anecdotes of one kind and another and his own facility in a wide range of modern languages upon which he could draw relevantly at the drop of a hat. In later years, Sidney frequently referred favourably to this aspect of Joppie's teaching.

Predictably at the end of his second year as an undergraduate, he got a first in Part 1, and in the normal course of events he would have come back to Cambridge for Part 2 of the Classical Tripos in October 1939.

III. War service 1939–45

Sidney's career was interrupted by war service, as was that of so many young men of his generation, including several of his future colleagues in London or in Cambridge. In his case the circumstances were unusual. In the summer of 1939 he had gone to Iceland with two college friends. He himself was motivated, in part, by what he was to describe later as a 'marginal interest' in Icelandic which in the 'Group-E' reading he had been doing was reputed to 'have remained virtually unchanged for a millennium'. While they were exploring one of the remoter parts of the island, war was declared. It was with great difficulty that they managed to get back to Britain, via Norway, just in time for the beginning of the Michaelmas Term.

Sidney was already a member of the Officers' Training Corps (OTC) and within a month or so he was called up. In May 1940 he was commissioned and posted to a battalion of the Royal Tank Regiment. It was at this point that his trip to Iceland the previous year proved, in retrospect, to be a decisive factor, not only for the rest of his time in the army, but also, indirectly, for part of his academic career after the war.

As someone with a knowledge of the country and also to a certain degree of the language, he was interviewed about this at the War Office and after a period of training in London was sent as an intelligence officer to Iceland, which had been occupied by the British after their defeat in Norway. He spent the next year travelling around the island on reconnaissance and then, after a further period of special training, as an instructor in 'winter warfare'. In later years he could be quite amusing about his experiences in these two roles. (He could also be critical, whether justifiably or not, of what he regarded as incompetence in some of his superiors.) What is relevant in the present context about this part of his war service is that it confirmed what subsequently became a lifelong interest in Iceland and Icelandic: it initiated what I will call the 'Icelandic connection'. It also provided him with some considerable practical knowledge of map reading and cartography.

His knowledge of the principles of cartography was further refined when, having returned to Britain in the spring of 1942, he was given com-

mand of a photographic intelligence unit involved in the planning of the Normandy landing. Shortly after D-day he himself joined the British Second Army as it advanced through Northern France, Belgium and Holland and, after the hard-fought and critically important 'Battle of the Bulge' in the Ardennes, crossed the Rhine and moved on in the spring of 1945 as far as Lüneburg Heath, where the 'armistice in north-west Europe was signed' and '[his] active war came to an end'. He was demobilised, after six years of war service, just in time for the beginning of the academic year.[2]

IV. Ph.D. research student at Cambridge 1945–8

Back in Cambridge, he was disinclined to resume his undergraduate studies for Part 2 of the Classical Tripos. Instead, with a 'War BA' he registered for a Ph.D. and, with an eye to the future, deliberately chose for his doctoral research a topic 'conveniently on the borders of linguistics/phonetics and the classical languages [including Sanskrit]'. He did so because, at a time when university posts were few and far between, this kept open for him, as a topic in the field of Group-E comparative philology would not have done, two, if not three, possible points of entry for his preferred future career. At that time a Ph.D., far from being a necessary, or even a desirable, condition for appointment as a university teacher in this country, especially in a non-scientific subject, was widely regarded as un-British (smacking perhaps of German and American professionalism and premature specialisation). He registered as a Ph.D. student because being officially registered for some degree or other was a condition for his obtaining an ex-service maintenance grant. He also had to have an official supervisor. This was A. J. Beattie, a specialist in Ancient Greek dialects, who had little interest in Sidney's research topic and left him largely to his own devices. Beattie, who later became Professor of Greek in Edinburgh, came to be known to the world of classical scholarship, and even to a much wider public, for his rejection of the decipherment by Ventris and Chadwick in the early-to-mid 1950s of the inscriptions on the Mycenaean clay tablets and the discovery that they were written, using

[2] 'One of the more interesting of the jobs' that Sidney was given while he was awaiting demobilisation 'was to organise the escorting of sixteen German generals to London for interrogation.' These included, most notably, Hasso von Manteuffel, the charismatic young commander of the 5th Panzer Army in the Ardennes, who had previously distinguished himself in North Africa and on the Eastern Front and then surrendered to the British with all his men.

the syllabic script called Linear B, in an early pre-Homeric form of Greek, and for his obdurate maintenance of his own view, over the years, despite increasing evidence to the contrary.

It may be added at this point that Sidney was from the outset convinced that the Ventris-and-Chadwick hypothesis was, in its main lines at least, correct although their work was peripheral to his own fields of interest. He had, however, enough knowledge of non-alphabetic, syllabic or quasi-syllabic, scripts and of the problems that they pose for the encoding or decoding of languages whose phonological, and morphophonological, structure is typologically different from that of the languages for which they had originally developed to realise that the hypothesis was from this point of view plausible. (He also had the kind of mind—witness his skill with crossword puzzles—which delighted in the cryptographic detail.) When Sidney came back to Cambridge in 1955, he and John Chadwick were colleagues in the Classical Faculty and shared much of the Group-E teaching.

Sidney's thesis, which he submitted in 1948 and for which he was awarded the degree in 1949, was entitled 'Linguistic problems and their treatment in antiquity'. It was examined jointly by the Professors of Sanskrit at the School of Oriental Studies (SOAS) in London and of Humanity (i.e., Latin) in Aberdeen: John Brough and (Sir) Peter Noble. He justifiably took pride in the fact that at the oral examination they had no searching questions to put to him, but congratulated him on the quality of his scholarship. Two of his books had their origins in his Ph.D. research, as did his first major article.

V. University Lecturer at London (SOAS) 1948–55

Meanwhile, he had been appointed to a Lectureship in Phonetics, with effect from September 1948, at SOAS, in the Department of Phonetics and Linguistics, the Head of which was Professor J. R. Firth. It may be noted in passing that Sidney's knowledge of Sanskrit cannot have been irrelevant to his appointment, even though he was to have no responsibility for teaching it. One of those who interviewed him was John Brough, who had co-examined his Ph.D. thesis. And the Director of the School was (Sir) Ralph Turner. What may be called the 'Indian connection' was to be influential at several points in Sidney's career and, like the 'Icelandic connection', was important to him for the rest of his life.

Firth's department was the first university department in Britain to include the term 'linguistics' in its title. The fact that it also included the term 'phonetics' is significant. It reflected the view that linguistics, as an academic discipline, should be associated with, and indeed include, phonetics, since language, it could be said, is necessarily associated with, and indeed inseparable from, speech. This view, though debatable, is one that not only Firth, but most self-proclaimed linguists at the time would have taken for granted. It is a view that Sidney himself explicitly adopted throughout his career.

The importance of phonetics in historical and comparative linguistics had been clearly demonstrated by nineteenth-century comparative philologists, especially in the formulation and explication of the so-called sound-laws which were held to account for wholesale changes, in the course of time, in the pronunciation of languages and dialects and, coupled with changes in grammar and vocabulary, the differentiation of what subsequently came to be identified as separate languages. The importance of phonetics for the study of modern spoken languages taught at school and also, on another level, for investigating and describing previously unrecorded languages had also been increasingly recognised in several countries in the period preceding the Second World War.

In the local context, the fact that the title of Firth's department explicitly conjoined the terms 'phonetics' and 'linguistics' was especially significant. There was already in existence at University College London (UCL) a world-famous centre for the study and teaching of phonetics, headed by Daniel Jones, who had held the Chair of Phonetics (the first and for long the only chair of phonetics in Britain) since 1921. Firth himself had been at UCL in an earlier period of his career. But his views, on phonology perhaps rather than phonetics, had come to differ from those of Daniel Jones. When Firth set up the new department in 1944 he wanted SOAS students to be taught phonetics and phonology by lecturers based there and appointed for the purpose. In this respect, as in others, he was by all accounts a controversially autocratic head of department. It was characteristic of his *modus operandi* that he insisted that all newly appointed lecturers should serve their apprenticeship, as it were, by attending his weekly professorial lecture on general linguistics and also the phonetics classes, including the practical exercises, provided primarily for SOAS students. Although Sidney knew quite a lot about phonetics when he was appointed to his lectureship, he had had no practical training in the subject, and he would have been the first to admit that he was not qualified to teach it at the level required without such training. In the

event, and this must have been evident when he was interviewed for the post, he had a very considerable aptitude for both the production and the identification of the subtlest of phonetic distinctions and could hold his own with his colleagues, most of whom were also good phoneticians.

One of Sidney's colleagues at SOAS was Robert H. ('Bobby') Robins, who had also just joined the department.[3] For seven years they shared an office and they became close friends. They were very different in personality, but they had many interests in common, non-academic as well as academic, and they used to spend part of the summer vacations together hill walking in Wales or Scotland. The fact that they had both spent time in the United States (Robins, unusually for a British-based linguist, had done fieldwork on an American-Indian language) meant that they were not as immediately dismissive of the dominant school of American-style structural linguistics as Firth and most of the other members of his department at that time were. For these and other reasons, whilst being then and subsequently always ready to acknowledge the support that Firth had given them and the influence that his ideas had on their own thinking, to outside observers at least they were, and especially perhaps Sidney, less typically 'Firthian' than their colleagues.

Both of them had interests in the history of linguistics, partly overlapping and partly complementary, which they were encouraged by Firth to pursue. This was at a time when the history of linguistics was not generally seen as being relevant to an understanding of contemporary linguistics. Not only was it not taught in university courses or included in textbooks of general linguistics, but also it was far from being a popular research area. It had of course been the area in which Sidney had done his Ph.D. research. One of his earliest articles, 'Ancient ideas on the origin and development of language' (*Transactions of the Philological Society*,

[3] Robins, three years younger than Sidney, read Classics at Oxford rather than Cambridge. So too did Frank Palmer (FBA 1975), who joined Firth's department in 1950. This meant that the second part of their undergraduate degree ('Greats') included, in addition to Ancient (Greco-Roman) History and Ancient (Greco-Roman) Philosophy, Modern (i.e. Post-Cartesian) Philosophy. This was taught in many cases by representatives of the then emergent school of Oxford-based 'ordinary-language philosophy' (which over the last thirty years or so, reinterpreted and reformulated, has been assimilated within one or more of the branches of linguistics). I will come back in a later section to Sidney's attitude to this philosophical movement (and more generally to his lack of interest in the philosophy of language). During the three years (1942–5) that Robins spent in the RAF between the first and second period of his undergraduate studies, after a short training course, he was commissioned and became an instructor in military Japanese at SOAS. After taking his degree in 1948, he returned to SOAS as a Lecturer in Linguistics. For supplementary information and bibliographical references see *Proceedings of the British Academy* 115 (2002), 357–64, and Brown and Law, *Linguistics in Britain*, pp. 228–38 and 249–61.

1948, 35–60), derived directly from his doctoral research and, being published in the major British journal of philology and linguistics, did much to kindle (or re-kindle) an informed interest in the topic. His first book, published three years later, on *Phonetics in Ancient India* (London, 1953), also drew on part of his Ph.D. dissertation, but, expanded and revised in the light of his by then increased knowledge of and practical competence in articulatory phonetics. It made readily available to interested scholars and students a reliable and comprehensible account of the highly sophisticated system of phonetics developed by Indian scholars, with particular reference to Sanskrit, over two thousand years ago. Sidney, unlike Robins, had no responsibility for teaching the history of linguistics at SOAS and did not continue actively with research and publication in this field. But he may certainly be given credit for the impetus that he and Robins gave jointly at that time to the revival of interest in what subsequently became a flourishing interdisciplinary area of research and scholarship in which Robins, throughout his career, continued to play a major role both nationally and internationally.

Something else from their SOAS days that united Sidney and Robins was their involvement in the Philological Society. Regular attendance at meetings (held seven times a year and based in London) and publication in its journal, *Transactions of the Philological Society*, were strongly encouraged by Firth. From the 1930s he himself had played an active part in the Society and in particular had helped to make it the major British forum for the discussion and promotion of what was by then coming to be called structural linguistics, with a variety of characteristically distinct schools. Several of Sidney's most influential articles of the 1950s were published in *Transactions*. In due course both he and Robins were to serve as Presidents of the Society. In later years Sidney and Robins were no longer as close as they had been at SOAS. This was in part a consequence of Sidney's move to Cambridge in 1955. Also, by then they had both married and therefore did not spend as much of their free time together as they had done previously.

In 1951 Sidney's post at SOAS had been converted into a Lectureship in Comparative Linguistics at his own request. Until that time Sir Ralph Turner had taught this subject to the students in both his own department and Firth's. He had done so presumably with particular reference to the Indo-Aryan languages (and, as Jopson was still doing at Cambridge, without emphasising the more recent developments in historical-comparative linguistics). In view of the heavy administrative load he was carrying as Director of the School and in other roles, combined with his

other teaching and research, he was no doubt only too pleased to be able to hand over this part of his teaching to someone who had his full confidence as a properly qualified comparativist (and also as an Indianist): someone whom by then he knew well personally and whose competence he had had every opportunity of assessing for himself.

Among the perquisites of a tenured post at SOAS at that time were the associated research facilities, including the right to fully funded study leave abroad. Sidney took full advantage of these and spent 1952 in India carrying out fieldwork on the dialects of Rajasthan. He was somewhat disappointed that, as he put it later, they provided 'very few really exciting descriptive features beyond what one might expect in a modern Indo-Aryan language'. But he proved to have a talent for extracting from his native-speaker informants reliable and descriptively relevant data. He was able to draw upon the results of his research in the article on prosodic analysis that he contributed to a special volume of the Philological Society, 'Aspiration in the Hāṛautī nominal', *Studies in Linguistic Analysis*, (Oxford, 1957, 68–86); also in the article he wrote in the same year for the Festschrift for Sir Ralph Turner published by SOAS ('Some phonological characteristics of Rājasthānī', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 20, 5–12). He had also made use of his Rajasthani material in the long and important theoretical article, 'Relationship in comparative linguistics', which he published in 1953 (*Transactions of the Philological Society*, 52–108). His year 'in the cities and deserts of "Indian-India" [were for the rest of his life] a source of indelible memories', supplied him with many enduring friendships and confirmed him in his love of the country and its Sanskrit cultural inheritance.

It had the more immediate effect of his receiving an invitation from the Rockefeller Foundation to visit America in the summer of 1957, and, as part of an attempt to encourage American scholars to move into the field of Indian studies, to travel to several of the major universities and meet some of the most influential representatives of American-style, pre-Chomskyan, structural linguistics. Sidney came to know many of these well and kept in touch with them when he returned to Britain. Though he maintained his own 'Firthian', or 'London School', principles, as far as phonology was concerned, he appreciated their emphasis on fieldwork and their descriptive expertise. He also found congenial the link between linguistics and what the Americans called cultural anthropology, which was institutionalised in many universities and was part of the legacy of, most notably, Franz Boas and Edward Sapir. There was a similar link in Britain, going back to the mid-nineteenth century and beyond, between

linguistics and what the British called social anthropology, though it did not as yet manifest itself to the same degree either in teaching or in research and publication. What is especially relevant here is the characteristically 'Firthian' notion of 'context of situation', which J. R. Firth borrowed from the great Polish-born anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski who was based at the LSE in London in the 1930s, and incorporated in his somewhat idiosyncratic theory of semantics. Sidney, unlike some of his SOAS colleagues, did not contribute directly to the development of 'Firthian' semantics (except possibly by his participation in departmental seminars). But certain aspects of it were absorbed into his own version of structuralism and are revealed by the terminology he employs, usually without explication or commentary, in several of his post-SOAS publications, including his Cambridge professorial inaugural lecture.

More challenging, from a linguistic point of view, than his dialect research in India was the 'fieldwork' he did in London with a native speaker of Abaza, Major Huseyin Kumuz, which 'tested one's eliciting and analytic techniques to the limit'. Abaza is one of a group of languages of the North-West Caucasus renowned for (*inter alia*) their phonological and phonetic complexity. Several Indo-Europeanists, including Sidney's mentor and patron Sir Harold Bailey, had expressed an interest in these languages because they were reported to have a very high number of consonantal phonemes, and very few vowels. And this had been hypothesised to have been a feature of Proto-Indo-European by proponents of one or other of the by then different variants of 'laryngeal theory'. The question was how phonetically realistic was the reconstruction of a phonological system of this kind and how plausible was its hypothesised subsequent development into a system with a smaller ratio of consonants to vowels. The answer that Sidney gave to both parts of this question was positive, and was made explicit in a later article 'On one-vowel systems' (*Lingua*, 13 (1965), 111–24). Abaza, as he analysed it, 'turned out to have 64 distinct consonant phonemes, many of them of great phonetic complexity (e.g. glottalised labialised uvular plosives), but only two vowels or by an alternative analysis one'. These results were not universally accepted: some linguists objected to them because of their a priori theoretical commitment to a particular set of typological constraints; others because they themselves lacked the kind of phonetic expertise that he had by virtue of his SOAS training. He was greatly encouraged, and relieved, when his analysis (published in a long article, 'Structure and system in Abaza', *Transactions of the Philological Society,*

1956, 127–76). 'was particularly well received in Moscow and Tbilisi' and 'turned out to agree even in some minute details' with that of the Soviet linguist, A. N. Genko in his *Abazinskij Jazyk: grammatičeskij očerk narečija Tapanta* (Moscow, 1955). Sidney's analysis was based on a hundred hours work with a single expatriate informant. Genko's had been carried out in the 1930s but was not published until 1955. (It was reviewed by Sidney in *Phonetica*, 5 (1960), 212–17). Some years later Sidney published a traditional Caucasian folk-tale, in Abaza, phonetically transcribed and furnished with a grammatical commentary and translation (*Bedi Kartlisa*, 19–20 (1965), 159–72).

Sidney's article on 'structure' and 'system' in Abaza, which uses both of these terms in what by then could be described as their 'Firthian' or 'London School' sense, can rightly be described as epoch-making. Not only was the phonological structure of Abaza, in the broader and more generally accepted sense of the term 'structure', meticulously described. So too was a major part of its grammatical structure, which in various respects is, though by no means unique among the languages of the world, typologically different from the languages with which most linguists, including the majority of Indo-Europeanists, are familiar. Sidney's account is a masterpiece of expository clarity and methodological coherence and consistency. It may be added that Sidney had also done research and published on the phonetics of Ossetic, an Indo-European language spoken in the Caucasus, and knew enough about Georgian, one of the major Caucasian languages unrelated to the sub-family to which Abaza belongs, for him to be able to refer to it in some of his typologically relevant articles in general and descriptive linguistics (notably in his influential article on 'Transitivity and possession', *Language*, 40 (1964), 337–43). Sidney did no further original research on Abaza or any of the other Caucasian languages, but he drew on his own analysis in his Cambridge teaching to illustrate relevant phonological and grammatical features from the standpoint of general linguistics, and in so doing was also able to demonstrate the reality of the phonetic distinctions. It gave him great pleasure that one of his Cambridge students, George Hewitt (FBA 1997), subsequently went to Tbilisi to study Georgian and other Caucasian languages and is currently Professor of Caucasian languages at SOAS.

VI. Professor of Comparative Philology at Cambridge, 1955–82 and Retirement

In late 1954, Sidney was encouraged by Sir Ralph Turner to put in a late application for the Cambridge Chair of Comparative Philology, which was to fall vacant in October 1955 (Professor Jopson having decided to take early retirement). Somewhat to his surprise, given his age at the time, he was elected. Sir Ralph himself was one of the electors, as also was John Brough, who together with Sir Ralph had supported Sidney's SOAS appointment. It may be assumed that Harold Bailey once again strongly recommended his erstwhile student.

It was not until the end of the Lent Term in 1957 when he delivered his Inaugural Lecture (on 8 March) that Sidney proclaimed more widely, *ex cathedra* and *urbi et orbi*, the way in which he interpreted his professorial remit (*On the Linguistic Study of Languages* (Cambridge, 1957)). But he had from the outset adopted a different approach from that of his predecessor. As had been the case for some time, the Professor of Comparative Philology was responsible (together with John Chadwick), not only for the teaching of comparative (Indo-European) philology as such, to the Group-E classicists, but also for the teaching of a certain amount of general linguistics both to them and also to students in three other Faculties (Modern and Medieval Languages, Archaeology and Anthropology, and Oriental Languages) who were taking the optional paper, 'Principles of Language' for Part 2 of the Tripos. Sidney started by giving the basic lectures himself and by including (as Jopson had not) what he judged to be the necessary minimum of phonetics. It was not until much later that it was possible for undergraduates to study linguistics in either the English or the Social and Political Sciences Faculties. It was only a minority of undergraduates that took this particular option, because they were generally not encouraged to do so by their directors of studies, just as classicists were generally not encouraged to opt for Group E: since its several components involved a lot of completely new work which did not follow on from Part 1, it was held to be a more demanding option than others, and there was, additionally, a good deal of anti-linguistics prejudice, even among classicists whose interest in language was primarily literary. Nevertheless, Sidney's lectures were reasonably well attended and had as 'auditors', to use the convenient American term, a few postgraduate students and occasionally members of staff. They were well prepared, well illustrated and well presented and, it is reported, ran perfectly to time. He had a gift for the production of

memorable *obiter dicta*, which he used to good effect both in his lectures and in some of his writings. His style was different from Jopson's, but he was no less 'inspirational'.

Meanwhile, Sidney had set his sights on providing for the teaching of general linguistics and phonetics by securing for them two additional university posts. This took some time. He readily admitted later that one of the main reasons why he agreed to serve a term of office (as an elected professorial representative) on the university's General Board was because it gave him an insight into how things were done in Cambridge and perhaps also an opportunity of influencing policy decisions relating to his own ambitions regarding the establishment of linguistics in Cambridge. (One must not forget that he had seen Firth in operation at SOAS: a different kind of operator in a different kind of institution, but one from whom lessons could be learned.) The first of the two new posts was a Lectureship in Phonetics, based in the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages (MML), to which John Trim was appointed in 1958. This immediately relieved Sidney of part of his teaching responsibility: the need for such teaching, it is fair to say, had not been seen as existing until he had himself created it by persuading a sufficient number of supporters among his colleagues in MML that the subject must be taught and that he could not be expected to continue giving the lectures himself. He was similarly successful with the establishment of a Lectureship in General Linguistics, to which I was appointed, in 1961, as a member of the Classical Faculty.[4] My appointment had the effect of further lightening Sidney's lecturing load; and he was able to devote more of his time to research and publication. There was still no department of linguistics. But one was eventually created, in 1965, with strong support from an inter-faculty committee (a particularly influential and highly supportive member of which was the anthropologist Edmund Leach), and was established in the MML Faculty. John Trim was appointed as Head: he had been appointed to the Lectureship in General Linguistics when I moved to Edinburgh in 1964 and the Lectureship in Phonetics was kept in being. It had been generally assumed that Sidney himself would take on the headship of the new Department. But he decided not to. One of the reasons, no doubt, was that he was reluctant to assume administrative responsibility for either the language laboratory or the Linguistic Computer

[4] For the preceding four years I had held the Lectureship in Comparative Linguistics at SOAS that Sidney had held, but I, unlike John Trim, was, in Cambridge terms, a classicist: as an undergraduate I had done Part 2 Group E, under Jopson and my Ph.D. thesis had just been examined by examiners appointed by the Faculty of Classics.

Centre which had been established in MML (with two tenured posts). He was not interested in running either of what were, at least in origin, two service departments. As to the Chair in General Linguistics, for which Sidney had also been lobbying for some time, once again with support from the special interfaculty committee, as he himself put it later, 'this was long in coming'. He added: 'I suppose I was my worst enemy in this connection, since I had been teaching the subject ever since my return to Cambridge, and it was difficult to persuade the General Board of the difference between traditional comparative philology and modern linguistics (including phonetics)' ('Personal history', 21 ff.). He might also have mentioned that, under the Cambridge collegiate system, much of the teaching of linguistics, and to some extent philology, to Part-2 undergraduates was carried out by supervisors appointed by the colleges who might or might not be university 'teaching officers' (UTOs) and did not necessarily have a college fellowship. John Trim supervised for a large number of colleges for 'The principles of language' option. From 1962 he was elected as a Fellow of Selwyn, not because he was a linguist and phonetician, but because he could also supervise and act as a director of studies in German. Someone else who should be mentioned in this connection is Joseph Cremona, University Lecturer in Romance Philology and Fellow of Trinity Hall. These two between them, and there were others, did at least as much of the teaching of linguistics as did Sidney himself (who, as a professor, was in any case not allowed to do any college teaching).

I have gone into all this explanatory detail because it is relevant to my assessment of Sidney's role in the establishment of linguistics in Cambridge. In the Cambridge context, it is hardly surprising that, independently of a certain amount of deeply entrenched hostility to linguistics, the General Board was not all that enthusiastic about taking on the cost of establishing a new chair. In the event, the Chair of General Linguistics was established in 1980, fairly late in Sidney's tenure of the Chair of Comparative Philology, and its first incumbent was Peter Matthews, who also became the Head of Department.[5] Sidney no longer had even formal professorial responsibility for the teaching of general linguistics in the university, not to mention any associated administrative responsibility. There is little doubt that this suited him. Later, he was

[5] John Trim had meanwhile moved from Cambridge to become Director of the Centre for Information on Language Teaching in London, which enabled him to pursue more effectively than he could in Cambridge, and on a wider front, one of his major interests, applied linguistics.

content to note that since the creation of the Chair of General Linguistics, and the appointment to it of one of his own students, 'the subject and the department have flourished' ('Personal history', 22). He was probably right in claiming much of the credit for the eventual achievement of what he had been aiming for when he came back to Cambridge in 1955.

From what has been said above, it will be clear that there were differences of kind and degree in which one might have been taught linguistics or (comparative) philology by Sidney, and this makes it difficult to assess his influence as a 'teacher' of these subjects. Those of us, a relatively small number, who were privileged to have been his students in the fullest sense of this term and to have been befriended by him (I choose the verb with care) can testify to the quality and effectiveness of his teaching and subsequently of his friendship and patronage. Towards the end of his career, he claimed as his 'students' or 'pupils', without distinguishing between these terms or drawing attention to the differences of kind or degree that I have just noted, several who had by then become prominent in the field, nationally and internationally.[6] Among them, he was especially pleased to be able to list, in addition to Peter Matthews and George Hewitt, and the current holder of the Chair in Comparative Philology in Cambridge, Geoffrey Horrocks (whom Sidney identifies as having also been a 'pupil' of both himself and Robert Coleman, who was to succeed him).

Sidney took early retirement in 1982, having been in post for twenty-seven years. The Chair of Comparative Philology was 'put on ice' (Sidney's own expression) until 1985, when he reached the normal retirement age, but, in contrast with other chairs in related 'minority subjects' at Cambridge and elsewhere, it was not suppressed. Robert Coleman, who was appointed to it, had been one of Jopson's students in the early 1950s. Regrettably, he died in 2001 after a very distinguished career as one

[6] About one-third of the current members of Section H4 of the British Academy were, in one sense or another, students in Cambridge during Sidney's time. Of the twenty-three contributors to Brown and Law, *Linguistics in Britain*, those who were at one time either students of linguistics or colleagues of Sidney's (or both) in Cambridge include the following: listed in alphabetical order and by family name only, they are Aitchison, Cremona, Gazdar, Hudson, Lyons, Matthews, Smith, Trim, Trudgill. Their 'personal histories' are all relevant to what I have said in this section and are occasionally different in the emphasis they give to certain developments. Also relevant are those of Michael Halliday (who was not at Cambridge but acknowedges Sidney's influence) and of Gillian Brown (for her account of 'English at Cambridge' in the late 1950s and, though this is outside the period in question, for her own role as Director of the Research Centre for English and Applied Linguistics from 1988).

of this country's leading philologists. But once again the Chair was kept in being.

During his time as Professor of Comparative Philology, Sidney published three important books and a number of articles and reviews in the fields of both comparative philology and general linguistics, 'with occasional excursions' into such more 'marginal' fields as 'Aegean cartography and Icelandic bibles'. His publications will be discussed in a separate section. Here I have been concerned with the part he played in the institutional establishment of linguistics in Cambridge and his teaching of both philology and linguistics. During the period in question Cambridge became one of the principal centres in Britain for the study of linguistics in all its branches. As I have made clear, there were many others involved in this process, and many other institutions, some of which I have not mentioned, in addition to the Department of Linguistics. But Sidney's role especially in the earlier years was crucial. I consider this to be undeniable, and it is a point that I will pick up in the final section on his academic 'legacy'. In retirement, he did no teaching, but he kept some of his research interests going and maintained contact with colleagues in Britain and abroad working in the same fields, including some of his Cambridge students.

VII. Personality and personal life

At this point I will say something about Sidney's personality and character and about his personal life from the time that he moved from SOAS to Cambridge in 1955. He was a very private person and did not readily share with others his more intimate thoughts and feelings. He had a somewhat boyish sense of humour, which he retained throughout life, though he had of course long ago abandoned the practical jokes for which he had been notorious as an undergraduate. There could be a sharp edge to his humour, mischievous rather than malicious, and he was not averse from poking fun, in the appropriate company, at the foibles and pretensions of certain well-known Cambridge figures with whom he came into contact. His close friends were few, but those who counted as such valued his friendship and he theirs.

Even as an undergraduate, and possibly at school, he was well aware of his own intellectual gifts; and he knew that he had it in him to have a successful academic career, provided of course that he could gain entry to it in the first place. He did not suffer fools gladly and he could be quite

sharp in his rejection of what he judged to be uninformed or uncomprehending criticism of his academic work. But he was equally ready to recognise what he identified as the high-quality work of others. His reviews were constructively critical and very often helped to establish or bring to the attention of other linguists books whose relevance or importance might otherwise have escaped them. He was also quick to recognise promise in students that he met, even when he himself had not been closely concerned with the supervision of their work.

As I mentioned in the first section of this memoir, in later life if not as an undergraduate or in the earlier part of his career, he made a point of emphasising his working-class provenance. Few, if any, of those who met him could have detected evidence of this in his speech or manner, and several of those who knew him have been surprised to learn of it. It is clear from what he has written that he was conscious of what he owed to his parents for his upbringing and early education and that he was proud for their sake, and his own, of having successfully established himself in his chosen career and perhaps also socially. His father died in 1948 before he could appreciate the extent of his son's success. His mother died in 1982, aged 89. His brother David, younger by nine years, who had been educated at Christ's College, Finchley, and after national service in the Navy become a local government officer with the Greater London Council, is now retired: his wife, was a school-teacher, and they have four sons. Sidney has no other close family.

Sidney delighted in unexpected coincidences which linked his personal life with his professional expertise and interests. Several of these he explicitly referred to in the material to which I have had access and at times in conversation with friends. Two such may be mentioned. One concerns his first wife Aenea; the other, his second wife Diana; and both may be seen as continuing and perpetuating the 'Icelandic connection'. One of the most striking features of the pronunciation of English in the north-west Highlands of Scotland, where Aenea was born, is the devoicing and pre-aspiration of stop consonants (a feature which is readily perceived and imitated by non-phoneticians who might not be able to describe it in these terms) and this too, as it happens, is a well recognised typological feature of Icelandic. One of the things, together with some aspects of the landscape, that made Aenea feel at home when Sidney first took her to Iceland in 1986 was the Icelanders' pronunciation of English. As to the coincidence that concerns his second wife Diana, this is that (as Sidney, ever the amateur vulcanologist, realised immediately) the island of St Helena, where Diana was born, is at almost the extreme other end

of the volcanic mid-Atlantic ridge from Iceland, several thousand miles away.

It was at SOAS that Sidney met his first wife, Aenea McCallum. She had recently become the editorial secretary of the School's own journal, the *Bulletin* (*BSOAS*), in which he published three of his early articles. She used to say that when it came to questions of typography and layout he was one of the most demanding, but also one of the most knowledgeable, of her authors. She was 'a daughter of the manse' (as she herself used to put it), her father being a minister of the Church of Scotland in Rosskeen on the Cromarty Firth. Both her parents came from the West and spoke Gaelic as their first language. But she herself was brought up speaking English. She studied English and Modern Languages at the University of Aberdeen and during the Second World War served with a counter-espionage unit. At the end of the war she served with the Control Commission in Vienna. Before coming to SOAS, she had worked on the subtitling of foreign films and in publishing.

Sidney and Aenea got married in 1955, when he was about to take up the Chair of Comparative Philology. They were to be married for forty years. From the outset, they had many interests in common, including hill-walking and alpine skiing. Another, from the 1960s, was travel in Greece. During the summer vacations, they used to spend as much time as possible exploring the smaller Aegean islands, preferably the remoter and less accessible ones, and Aenea, according to Sidney, eventually acquired a greater fluency in Modern Greek than he himself.

For the first few years of their marriage, they lived first of all in one of a block of University-owned flats and then for a few years in a flat that they had purchased. Later on, they bought a house about two miles from the centre of Cambridge, just off the Huntingdon Road, which being on a corner site gave them a sufficiently large garden for them to be able to indulge another of their joint interests and, in the summer, to hold their annual garden-party. On this occasion, to which they invited mainly Cambridge-based friends, not all of them academics, they operated well together and were the perfect hosts, attentive and amusing and successfully bringing together those of their guests who did not previously know one another.

In 1995, while Sidney and Aenea were on holiday in a remote part of Crete 'it became increasingly evident', as Sidney himself was to put it a few years later, that '[he] needed a new hip'. This was duly fitted in Cambridge and he came out of hospital to be cared for by Aenea. For many years, she had been a familiar figure cycling along the Huntingdon

Road between their house and the centre of town and, to judge from the way she coped with Castle Hill, appeared to be in perfect health. In January 1996 she suddenly collapsed and died a few hours later.

Sidney married for the second time in 2002. He first met Diana Stroud in 1996, three months after Aenea's death. She was one of the part-time carers who looked after him whilst, still on crutches, he gradually recovered his mobility after his hip-replacement operation. Shortly after their meeting he had sold the house (and arranged for the cat, a Russian Blue, to which he was devoted, to be adopted) and moved into a splendid set of rooms in Trinity (G2 Nevile's Court), conveniently situated for the Hall and Fellows' Parlour. Over the next few years, Diana came regularly to visit him as his carer and, with the passage of time, as an increasingly close friend. They both had a love of the countryside and, after a while, Sidney had recovered sufficiently for them to drive out of town and go for long walks in Suffolk and even as far away as Wales. They also spent a lot of time reading poetry and listening to music. When they got married, Sidney's health was failing and he moved out of College. He was taken into hospital, where he recovered sufficiently for Diana to look after him at home, with some assistance from professional carers, until he had to be taken back into hospital**,** where he died on 22 April 2004. Sidney's friends in Trinity, several of whom became friends of Diana, knew how much he owed to her: they had expressed their pleasure when she and Sidney had decided to get married two years earlier and sent her moving letters of condolence after the very simple, secular, funeral service at the Crematorium, which Sidney himself, together with Diana had had arranged calmly and dispassionately in advance.

Much of Sidney's personal life was based in College. He was intensely loyal to Trinity and grateful for what it had given him as an undergraduate and postgraduate student. As a professorial fellow he was not permitted to engage in college-based undergraduate teaching. Nor could he be a tutor or hold any other college office. It was primarily on the social, rather than the administrative or educational, level that his loyalty and involvement were manifest. He was a staunch supporter of the Boat Club. He lunched regularly in College and was a familiar and popular figure in the Fellows' Parlour after lunch. He did a certain amount of his entertaining in College. He particularly enjoyed taking to College feasts, as his personal guests, visiting scholars, as well as Cambridge-based friends and colleagues and some of the friends with whom he had kept in touch from earlier days. He was in his element at College Reunions presiding at one of the tables in Hall. He knew a lot about the history

of Trinity and enjoyed showing visitors the Wren Library and other gems of Trinity's material patrimony. He was proud, too, to be a senior member of the college that could lay claim to both Bentley and Porson, the two great eighteenth-century classicists. Incidentally, he was also proud to have been, as an undergraduate, the holder of the university's Porson Prize for Greek-verse composition, and in later life it pleased him that some of his original work on Greek metre and accent had the subsidiary effect (this was not its primary intention) of explaining away some of the many exceptions to 'Porson's Law' in Greek poets of the classical period. This could be seen as another of the coincidences, in which he delighted.

VIII. Publications, theory and methodology

It is convenient to deal with Sidney's publications and with his views on linguistic theory and methodology in the same section. The former provide us with the best evidence that we have for our knowledge of the latter; and some understanding of his theoretical and methodological principles is a prerequisite for our interpretation and evaluation of his published works

By the standards of many of his contemporaries, Sidney was not a prolific writer: his written *oeuvre* comprises six books, some forty articles and rather fewer reviews. But the range of more or less distinct areas of research and scholarship in which he worked is certainly greater than that of many of those who have published more than he did. These areas include general and descriptive linguistics, historical/comparative linguistics (and philology), phonetics, metrics, Classical Latin and Ancient Greek, Indian and Caucasian languages and Aegean cartography. I have referred to these as 'more or less distinct' areas because the boundaries between them are not always clearcut and also because, in so far as they are distinct, several of Sidney's works may be assigned to more than one 'area'. It should also be mentioned that the titles of many of his articles ('Notes on . . .', 'Some aspects of . . .', 'Some phonological characteristics of . . .', 'Some observations on . . .', 'Some problems . . .', etc.), which might imply a narrowness of focus and coverage, frequently deal with topics of more general theoretical or typological interest than is immediately apparent. The most important and influential of his publications, some of which have been mentioned in earlier sections, are included in a select bibliography below.

Sidney did not leave behind him an identifiable 'school' of linguistics or group of 'followers' and would probably have been horrified at the thought that he might have done. There is no single 'big idea' in general linguistics that one can associate with him as its inventor or creator, as one can, with due qualification, associate the notion of structuralism with Saussure or, in a later period, generativism with Chomsky. Nor is there in comparative philology (to use the traditional term) any major revolutionary hypothesis, such as the so-called laryngeal theory, that can be seen as his invention or creation.

His approach to linguistics was essentially non-philosophical.[7] He was not really interested in either the philosophy of linguistics, as part of the philosophy of science, or the philosophy of language. He was a theoretically minded descriptivist rather than a theoretician. By this I mean that he was not interested in theory-construction as such, still less in what, in the later part of his career, had come to be called theoretical linguistics: the elaboration of highly formalised models of the structure of languages with at times, he would have said, little empirical control. His role in the promotion of particular theoretical concepts, in so far as he did espouse and promote these, was by demonstrating their utility in the practical business of describing or analysing languages.

The nearest he came to giving an outline of his views on linguistic theory, and it was no more than an outline, was in the professorial Inaugural Lecture that he delivered in Cambridge in March 1957. Inaugural lectures are of course occasional pieces, composed at a particular time in a particular local context, for oral delivery (in the first instance), and with a particular audience in mind. It is not uncommon for the new professor to

[7] In his Inaugural Lecture he was rather (amusingly) disparaging about the Oxford-based movement known as 'linguistic analysis' or the 'ordinary-language' movement (referred to in Section V). In that specific context and at that time, this was perhaps understandable, and what he said will have shocked very few of those who heard it. It was doubtful whether any of the Cambridge philosophers who were present (or read the published version of the Lecture later) would have been able to make the connection between the work in the volume to which he referred specifically and what J. R. Firth and his followers (including Sidney himself) classified under the concept of 'the context of situation'. It is possible that Sidney's ex-colleagues, Frank Palmer and 'Bobby' Robins, who had done philosophy as undergraduates at Oxford saw the connection: they were certainly more ready than Sidney was to see the relevance of contemporary philosophy to linguistics (see above, n. 3). Without going further into this question, it may be mentioned that some of the most theoretically productive research that has been carried out since the 1970s in what is now a recognised sub-branch of linguistics, under the rubric of 'pragmatics', has been inspired by the work of the 'ordinary-language' philosophers, John Austin, Paul Grice and Peter Strawson. (Strawson, incidentally, was a member of the Linguistics Section of the Academy from its establishment, and regularly attended its meetings: see below, n. 18).

use the occasion in order to reveal his own personal agenda. This is what Sidney did. What he had to say surprised and shocked many, perhaps most, of those who heard it.

The title itself, 'On the linguistic study of languages', was initially puzzling. It soon became clear, however, that the epithet 'linguistic' was to be interpreted, as meaning 'from the point of view of [a particular approach to] linguistics', and also that the use of the plural, 'languages', rather than the singular, 'language', was significant. The term 'linguistics' itself was defined, implicitly, in the very first sentence, as '[twentieth-century] linguistic science' and contrasted with a variety of non-linguistic approaches to the study of language: on the one hand, philological and, on the other, literary, psychological, logico-philosophical, etc. The new Professor of Comparative Philology turned out to have little to say, on this occasion at least, about the subject for which he was by title responsible (which he referred to as a characteristically nineteenth-century discipline). The whole lecture was a missionary *apologia* for a particular version of Saussurean autonomous linguistics.

The Lecture was published, with notes and references, shortly after it was delivered. It was re-published some years later in two volumes of 'readings', which were widely used for postgraduate courses in some of the principal centres for the study of linguistics (especially, and somewhat surprisingly, of applied linguistics) in Britain and the United States. It therefore had a much wider influence than it might otherwise have done. For that reason, it may be regarded as one of his major publications. There is no evidence in his later publications to suggest that he changed his mind significantly on any of the points of theory or methodology that he revealed in the Lecture.

Like many of the best descriptivists, Sidney had a mathematical turn of mind. By this I mean that his analysis of the structure of particular languages (i.e. of what are referred to pre-theoretically as natural languages and theoretically in Saussurean terms as *langues* or language-systems) was determined by a perhaps intuitive sense of what mathematicians and mathematically minded scientists call elegance: an aesthetic quality that convinces those who have this sense that a conjecture or hypothesis is, if not correct, better than any current alternative, in advance of or independently of its proof or empirical confirmation. Saussure's speculative analysis of the (Proto-)Indo-European vowel system had this quality of elegance, as did Emile Benveniste's *Origines de la formation des noms en indo-européen* (Paris, 1935), to which Sidney was introduced by Sir Harold Bailey as an undergraduate. Of course,

linguistics, like the 'hard' sciences, has, or aspires to have, its empirical underpinnings; and it was not until the Polish scholar, Jerzy Kuryłowicz showed, in 1927, that Hittite had some previously unknown consonants where Saussure's *Mémoire* had 'predicted' them to be that the so-called laryngeal theory came to be more widely accepted by Indo-Europeanists.[8] When Sidney himself formulated, in his Inaugural Lecture, the criteria which in descriptive linguistics control the evaluation of a particular (partial) description of a particular language, he listed exhaustiveness, self-consistency and simplicity, noting that these criteria are sometimes in conflict. But the point that I wish to emphasise here is that the aesthetic criterion of elegance, which can perhaps be seen as subsuming self-consistency and simplicity, is probably the one that the best descriptivists implicitly apply. Several of Sidney's descriptive articles, most notably perhaps his article on Abaza (1956), have the quality of elegance (see Section V).

As I have mentioned, Sidney had a gift for the production of memorable *obiter dicta*, which he used to good effect in teaching and lectures, and in some of his writings. One of these, which comes from his Inaugural Lecture, achieved a certain notoriety. It runs as follows: 'There are no facts in linguistics until the linguist has made them; they are ultimately, like all scientific facts, the products of imagination and invention.' As he noted many years later the 'polemical tone of the Lecture [as a whole] was not to everyone's liking' and '[this] one sentence in particular seemed scandalous in some quarters' ('Personal history', 24). Properly understood, however, it should not have appeared to be even controversial. The general context in which the sentence occurred is one in which he had rejected the outmoded positivist ('natural-history') view of science as a theory-neutral observational activity. He may not have been interested in the philosophy of science as such, but he was well aware that by then it was generally accepted that even in the physical sciences, not to mention the social sciences, there is no such thing as theory-neutral observation: that so-called data are selected from, not 'given' in, the phenomena and that their selection by the practising scientist is always determined, to a greater or less degree, by some controlling theory or hypothesis. For him, as I mentioned above, the controlling theory in the case of linguistics, was that of (a particular version of) Saussurean struc-

[8] J. Kuryłowicz, '*ə* indoeuropéen et *ḫ* hittite', *Symbolae grammaticae in honorem Joannis Rozwadowski* (Cracow, 1927), 95–104. Sidney met Kuryłowicz after the war and they became personal friends, he came to stay with the Allens in Cambridge on several occasions, and they kept in touch until Kuryłowicz died in 1977.

turalism. Quoting Firth, he glossed this as 'a *general linguistic theory*' applicable to '*particular linguistic descriptions*, not a *theory of universals* for *general linguistic description*'. This immediately put him on the side of those linguists who reject the notion of 'universal grammar', as this term has been interpreted over the centuries or in any of its modern interpretations, including its Chomskyan post-1960s interpretation.

For Sidney, mid-twentieth-century linguistics was by definition structuralist. As he said elsewhere, in another of his highly quotable apothegms: 'It is as anachronistic to refer to structural linguistics these days as it would be to refer to the talking pictures.' This was by then an eminently defensible view. But there were very many different kinds of structuralism, not only in linguistics, but also in other disciplines, including anthropology. The differences between one version of structuralism and another are quite complex, as also are their historical interconnections. We need not be concerned with these here.[9] For present purposes, it suffices to emphasise just two points. The first is that Sidney (like Saussure in the interpretation of the *Cours* that he adopts) classifies linguistics as one of the social sciences. The second is that, in his view, linguistics can take as its data phenomena which are readily identifiable pre-theoretically as such—spoken utterances (Saussure's *parole*)—and are distinguishable from other phenomena (behavioural and situational) which other social sciences take as their data. It is arguable that in his formulation of this second point he fails to distinguish between the ('behavioural') activity of speaking and the (acoustically recordable, transcribable and analysable) products of that activity. But this does not invalidate the substantial point that he is making. It is the fact that spoken utterances are, within acceptable limits and in normal circumstances, pre-theoretically identifiable as such that justifies the acceptance of the 'autonomy' of linguistics.[10]

[9] For a convenient and reliable account of structuralism in linguistics during this period, reference may be made to Peter Matthews, *A Short History of Structural Linguistics* (Cambridge, 2001). This sets the whole movement in its historical context and will clarify what is said in this section about Sidney Allen's adherence to Saussurean (autonomous) linguistics.

[10] To the best of my knowedge, Sidney himself nowhere makes explicit the (more or less Popperian) view of 'the scientific method' that I have attributed to him here, but the passage in his Inaugural Lecture from which I have quoted the 'particularly scandalous' sentence is certainly consistent with the interpretation I have given it. Nor does he seek to justify his affirmation of the pre-theoretical identifiability of what have often been referred to as the primary data of (descriptive) linguistics. In his 2002 'Personal history' (p. 24) he does not dissent from what I say with reference to the 'scandalous' sentence about the ontological status of so-called natural languages and where I claim to 'share [his] view'. Nor does he there, or elsewhere, dissociate

Another of his pronouncements, also taken from the Inaugural Lecture, runs as follows: 'Whatever the informant volunteers about his language (as opposed to in it) must be assumed to be wrong—he is after all not a linguist (or if he is he will be a quite useless informant!).' The methodological principle that this maxim encapsulates was taken for granted by most descriptive linguists in the 1950s. Once again, it is a principle that can be pushed to excess. But it had proved its worth in the description not only of 'exotic' languages, for which 'fieldwork' and 'native informants' were required, but also of familiar well-studied languages, for which grammarians and lexicographers were tempted to use themselves as 'informants'. From the mid-1960s it was explicitly rejected by Chomsky and his followers and lively debate ensued as to the reliability and accessibility of the so-called 'intuitions' of native speakers. Sidney did not engage in this debate, but there is no doubt that he would have rejected, in principle as he did in practice, this kind of 'intuitionism' and the self-validating judgements of 'grammaticality' to which it tended to give rise.

The two books for which Sidney was undoubtedly best known are *Vox Latina: a guide to the pronunciation of classical Latin* (Cambridge, 1965) and *Vox Graeca: a guide to the pronunciation of classical Greek* (Cambridge, 1968), which, incidentally, he was encouraged to write by Michael Black of Cambridge University Press. These were the fruits of his lifelong interest in Ancient Greek and Classical Latin as spoken languages. The obituary published in *The Times* (3 June 2004) commented in this connection: 'It is no exaggeration to say that the pronunciation [of Greek and Latin] that learners are now taught in English-speaking lands has been reformed by Allen's influence.' The two books were unusual in that they combined clarity of exposition with evident authority and meticulous scholarship and were written in a style which made them accessible, not only to those involved in teaching the classical languages at university level, but also to schoolteachers and some of their more highly motivated sixth-form pupils. Sidney took pride in the fact that '[in] subsequent editions both seem to have established themselves as the standard reading on these matters in schools and universities' ('Personal history', 24).

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himself from my defence of '(so-called) autonomous linguistics' in *Natural Language and Universal Grammar* (Cambridge, 1991). On the other hand, as I have said in the text, Sidney was not really interested in either the philosophy of language, and mind, or the philosophy of linguistics as a branch of the philosophy of science. But very few linguists of his generation were.

Over the years, Sidney had published several articles on the metrical ('prosodic' in the more traditional sense) structure of Greek and Latin in particular. This 'had . . . always had a prominent part in [his] thinking'. When it was suggested to him that he might 'bring together reprints of his "prosodic" writings in both senses of the term into a single volume', he preferred (for reasons explained in detail in the preface) to write a completely new and substantial book, *Accent and Rhythm* (Cambridge, 1973). This work is universally acknowledged for his authoritative treatment of all the interconnected topics that he brings within its purview and might well be rated by fellow-specialists in the relevant disciplines as the most significant part of his scholarly *Nachlass*. *Vox Latina* and *Vox Graeca* were themselves furnished with comprehensive bibliographies, notes and appendices for the benefit of fellow-specialists and those who wished to go further into the topics dealt with. Sidney kept abreast of all the relevant research and made critical reference to this in successive editions. *Vox Graeca* is notable for its inclusion, in Appendix A, of a section in which he gives his own view on the vexed question of the accentuation of words in Ancient (mainly Classical, but also Homeric) Greek: whether it was primarily a matter of tone ('melodic') or of stress; what degree of dialectal variation there was; what changes took place diachronically, etc. This was based on previously published articles, especially the Presidential Address that he gave to the Philological Society in 1966, ('Prosody and prosodies in Greek', *Transactions of the Philological Society*, 107–48), but adjusted to its new context. He developed further the hypothesis he had earlier proposed, reviewed the evidence and provided enough information for interested non-specialists to be able to follow the argument. He himself was to say later that his hypothesis 'provides, if correct, an immediate and simple solution to a number of apparently unconnected restrictions on word-boundaries ("bridges") in a variety of spoken Greek metres' ('Personal history', 25). As to its correctness, not surprisingly, the experts disagree (*Grammatici certant* . . . !). But none of them would challenge its revolutionary nature or the quality of the argument that supports it. Its (incidental) explanation of 'Porson's Law', which was especially gratifying to Sidney, has been mentioned in the preceding Section.

Of Sidney's several articles in the field of comparative philology (to use the traditional term), it is perhaps fair to say that they were, not only not revolutionary, but on the whole rather conservative. In particular, there is very little evidence in them of a characteristically structuralist point of view: this is consistent with his acceptance of the Saussurean

view (noted above) that diachronic and synchronic linguistics are two distinct disciplines. The most original feature of his work as a comparativist, as he saw it himself, appears to have been his use of evidence from later stages of related dialects, mainly in the Indian branch of the Indo-European languages, to 'reconstruct' the attested 'parent-language(s)'—rather as one can use the evidence of the Romance languages to 'reconstruct' (non-Classical) Latin—and thus test the validity of 'the comparative method'. This is something which he did in his 1953 paper on 'Relationship in comparative linguistics', and later in his contribution to the Philological Society's special 'Neogrammarian Volume' (1978).[11]

With one exception, nothing further need be said here in detail, in addition to what has been said in general above, about Sidney's publications in the other 'more or less distinct' fields in which he worked. The exception has to do with one of his research projects which engaged several of his interests and specialised knowledge and skills, in his retirement, and was close to his heart. These interests and skills included cartography, vulcanology and the ability to read the relevant ancient, medieval and Renaissance documents in several languages. This project yielded unexpected results and, in due course issued in publication. During one of his visits to Greece, he had been trying to identify various of the smaller islands in the Eastern Aegean referred to on old maps and itineraries with their modern names. One of these, referred to as Kalóyeros, 'allegedly the seat of a small monastic retreat, persisted in eluding identification'. Eventually, he was able to link it with 'a group of volcanic rocks between Andros and Chios, bearing no resemblance to the descriptions or drawings in the early accounts'. What he judged to be 'the probable solution was provided in a report by a 17th-century English traveller of a disastrous eruption there about the middle of the century'. Sidney's 'probable solution' was published in 1977 in *Imago Mundi*, a specialist journal of cartography, a fuller version in Greek having been published the previous year in the *Annual of the Society for Cycladic*

[11] 'The PIE velar series: neogrammarian and other solutions in the light of attested parallels', *Transactions of the Philological Society*, 1978, 87–110. There was a sense in which his attitude to (synchronic) descriptive phonology also became more 'conservative' (less 'Firthian') in later stages of his career, when he reformulated some of his earlier analyses in phonemic, rather than 'prosodic' terms. Ironically, perhaps, this was at a time when so-called 'metrical' phonology was giving theoretical recognition to phenomena that had been handled by 'Firthians' in terms of 'prosodies' and some of its proponents were referring to Sidney's earlier work and that of his SOAS colleagues.

Studies. In both cases Kalóyeros was described in the title (interrogatively) as 'an Atlantis in microcosm'.[12]

It suffices, in concluding this Section of the Memoir, to emphasise the points that were made immediately above and in earlier sections relating to the quality of his scholarship in all the (intersecting) fields in which he worked and the enduring value of the contribution he made, not only to the phonetics and phonology of prosody and metre, but also, in 'Transitivity and possession', to the typological study of such grammatical categories as 'possession' (to use the arguably unsatisfactory traditional term), tense and aspect.

IX. His academic and scholarly 'legacy'

It now remains to bring together a few of the points that have been touched on in the preceding sections of this memoir and in so doing to make a brief assessment of Sidney Allen's contribution nationally and internationally to the advance of scholarship, in teaching, research and publication and otherwise, in the various positions that he occupied during his active career (and up to a point in retirement). I will pay particular attention to the role that he played in the establishment of linguistics as a more or less independent and autonomous academic discipline and to what may be referred to as its institutionalisation as such in Britain. Any such assessment is necessarily partial and personal, despite the assistance that the author may have had from friends and colleagues, and will be influenced by a variety of factors, including his own views on the current state of linguistics and also no doubt *pietas*.

Sidney did not, as has been said already, leave a 'school' behind him. Also, the fact that there were differences of kind and degree in which one might have been one of his 'students' makes it difficult to assess the effect that his teaching of linguistics and philology has had on the development of these subjects. This is something that I have emphasised in Section VI. But he was certainly an effective and charismatic teacher, and a significant number of those who attended his lectures or came into contact with him when they were students in Cambridge have made major contributions to

[12] 'Kalóyeros; an Atlantis in microcosm?' *Imago Mundi*, 29 (1978), 54–71. See also 'An addendum to Kalóyeros', *Imago Mundi*, 31 (1979), 94–6. He was made an Honorary Fellow of the Society for Cycladic Studies (Athens) in 1977.

the development of linguistics in the last thirty years or so. Some part of the credit for this can be attributed to the influence, directly or indirectly, of his teaching. But, as I have explained in Section VI, the principal contribution that he made to the promotion of linguistics in Cambridge was not as a teacher, but as someone who skilfully used his professorial authority and (in the early part of his tenure of his chair) his membership of the relevant university committees to get the Department of Linguistics established there and eventually a Chair of General Linguistics, separate from his own Chair of Comparative Philology. It should also be mentioned here that in the 1960s, when new departments of linguistics were being created in several British universities, his advice was regularly sought, and on several occasions he served on the appointing committee or acted as an assessor for lectureships and chairs.

The importance and enduring influence of his books and several of his articles has been noted in Section VII. Nothing further need be said here. But no assessment of Sidney's influence on the development of linguistics nationally and internationally could fail to mention his association with the monograph series 'Cambridge Studies in Linguistics', which was very much his 'brainchild'. It was founded by him and Michael Black of Cambridge University Press in 1969, and he served as chairman of the editorial board until 1982. In this role he was energetic and pro-active and assembled an international team of highly competent and committed co-editors representative of most branches of the subject. The series rapidly established itself as one of the major and most prestigious outlets for the publication of duly refereed, revised and edited Ph.D. dissertations and of other book-length works reporting the results of up-to-date research. By the time that Sidney retired from the editorial board, thirty-seven volumes had appeared (his own *Accent and Rhythm* being volume 12) and two further, equally successful, series (with the same editorial board) had been established: 'Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics' and 'Cambridge Language Surveys'. The three series have played a major part in the development of linguistics, in Britain and abroad, and continue to do so. In many cases, apart from making accessible to students and teachers of linguistics reliable, up-to-date textbooks and works of reference, they have helped to establish their authors in their careers as university teachers and leaders of research groups in Britain and abroad. From 1963 until 1985, Sidney also served, with Anton Reichling and E. M. Uhlenbeck, as a co-editor of the international journal *Lingua* (based in Holland), which especially in the earlier period published a number of important articles written from a theoretical viewpoint which made them less readily

publishable in some of the other major journals associated with national organisations or particular 'schools' and also published from time to time specially commissioned, *hors série*, volumes on particular topics.

Special attention must clearly be paid in the present context to the role that the British Academy has played in the establishment of linguistics as a recognised academic subject and to Sidney's involvement as a Fellow of the Academy, in this process.[13] This is the aspect of his academic 'legacy' with which I will bring this memoir to a conclusion.

Sidney was elected as a Fellow in 1973, as a member of Section 5, which at that time covered, 'Literature and Philology: Classical'. That this should have been his section of primary allegiance is natural enough, since his Chair of Comparative Philology was established in the Classical Faculty at Cambridge. There can be no doubt, however, that his election would have been strongly supported, not only by existing members of Section 5 with interests in historical and comparative linguistics, but also by many Indianists and anthropologists in Sections 4 ('Oriental and African Studies') and 12 ('Social and Political Studies') who were familiar with his work or were well disposed to linguistics. His supporters may also have included one or two members of Section 7 ('Philosophy').[14] Very soon thereafter, if not before, the process began which led eventually to the creation by Council, in May 1982, of Section 16 ('Linguistics'). This was part of a more general policy, the purpose of which was to give recognition to several subjects, including some of the social sciences, which, it was felt, were 'under-represented' in the Academy. As far as

[13] I am grateful to the Secretary of the Academy, Peter Brown, for having gone through the Archives and supplying me with much of the historical information that I have incorporated in this part of Section IX, especially in the footnotes.

[14] When I was elected as a Fellow in 1973 I was made a member of Sections 4, 5, 7 and 12. This clearly reflected the support that there was in all four sections for the promotion of linguistics, whether it was taken broadly to include philology or more narrowly (as was undoubtedly the case for some of its supporters) to refer to one or other of the contemporary schools of ('autonomous' synchronic) structural linguistics. My election took place under the special procedure of the then Bye-law 14(b), which empowered the Council 'to add to the list of candidates [put forward by the Sections] the names of persons whose qualifications do not come sufficiently within the purview of any particular Section'. By that time, by virtue of my responsibilities as Head of the Department of Linguistics (and Professor of General Linguistics) at Edinburgh, I had acquired an interest, not only in general, theoretical and descriptive linguistics, but also in psycholinguististics, sociolinguistics and anthropological (ethno-)linguistics, and I already had a background, and had taught and published, in classics and comparative linguistics and certain areas of the philosophy of language (see my 'Personal history' in Brown and Law, *Linguistics in Britain*). As will be clear from Sections VI and VII above, Sidney Allen's interests, and professorial responsibilities, were narrower.

linguistics is concerned, Sidney was involved from an early stage.[15] The inaugural meeting of Section 16 took place on 11 July 1984 and it held its first 'normal' meeting in January 1985. The Chairman was Frank Palmer (FBA 1975), at the time of his election a member of Section 4.[16] The first two Fellows to be elected as members of Section 16 were Anna Morpurgo Davies, Professor of Comparative Philology at Oxford, and Peter Matthews, Professor of General Linguistics at Cambridge. Their election can be seen as giving effect to the decision, that, under the rubric 'linguistics', the new Section would from the outset include 'philology', which had long been recognised in several sections of the Academy and which some Fellows including Sidney Allen (but neither Anna Davies nor Peter Matthews, nor I myself) would have seen as a different discipline from 'modern' linguistics (see Section VI above). The other twenty-three original members of Section 16 had exercised the option to join that they were given when it was set up, twenty of them also opting to maintain their existing sectional allegiance.[17]

In 2002, when Sidney Allen wrote (very briefly) of his election as a Fellow in 1973 and of the role that he himself had played in the setting up (eleven or twelve years later) of the Linguistics Section, he noted '[it] now numbers thirty-one members (plus seven "secondary" members from

[15] Others who should be mentioned specifically as having been especially supportive of linguistics (in the broadest sense) at that time were John Chadwick, Robin Matthews and Edward Ullendorff. I myself was involved from shortly after my election in 1973 and Frank Palmer from his election in 1975 (see the following footnote).

[16] Frank Palmer was Professor and Head of the Department of Linguistic Science at the University of Reading (and had previously held the Chair of Linguistics at Bangor, 1950–60). He had been a colleague of Sidney's at SOAS, where his research interests included Ethiopian languages (see Section VI above). He had been asked by Council in May 1982 to convene a specially appointed sub-committee 'to explore further the proposal . . . to create a new Section covering Linguistics in the broadest sense'. The other members of the sub-committee were Sidney Allen, Edward Ullendorff and myself. The sub-committee met on 1 July 1982 and reported to Council in October of the same year. (Sir Kenneth Dover, PBA 1978–81, was also a member, but did not attend the meeting.) The report was then sent to sections for comment (as were proposals for the division of some of the existing sections, including Section 12). Section 16 was set up by Council in May 1984.Without going further into the details, it may be said that when the new Section was established it operated, essentially, according to the recommendations of this sub-committee, as minuted and deposited in the Archives, and has continued to do so. In particular, it has as its members those 'who are primarily interested in language from a historical, descriptive, comparative, theoretical philosophical or psychological point of view'.

[17] More recently, the Academy has considerably restricted the possibility of multiple membership. But the 'hybrid' status of linguistics, straddling different areas of the 'humanities' and different social sciences, is officially recognised by granting to H4 a larger quota (25 per cent) of Fellows of 'secondary allegiance', in addition to its 'primary-allegiance' Fellows.

the sections of their "primary allegiance"'.[18] He was well aware, as were all of those who supported the setting up of the Linguistics Section, how important for the academic standing of the subject, nationally and internationally, had been its 'recognition' by the Academy, and he rightly took credit for the role that he himself had played in bringing this about.

SIR JOHN LYONS
Fellow of the Academy

Note. In preparing this memoir I have been greatly assisted by Anna Morpurgo Davies, Peter Matthews and Frank Palmer. I have had the benefit of conversations and correspondence with Mrs Diana Allen, who has answered some of my queries and shown me certain documents in her possession, of correspondence with Michèle Mittner, and, for Sidney Allen's time as a Fellow of Trinity, of conversations with Sir Andrew Huxley and Nicholas Denyer. George Hewitt has kindly checked certain sections of the memoir for me in draft. Since this is not only a formal memoir, but also a personal tribute, I wish to emphasise that the opinions and judgements expressed in it are mine alone (although they have been to some degree modulated and at times corrected after consultation with those named above who have helped me). I have drawn freely on the autobiographical materials that Sidney Allen deposited with the Academy, and incorporated some quotations from it in my text.

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[18] 'Personal history', 26. Sidney Allen did not have the benefit of the assistance that I have been given as far as the archival record is concerned and his account is not wholly accurate. Nothing that he says, however, seriously affects what I have recorded here. (The account that I have given in my own 'Personal history', in the same volume, also turns out to be inaccurate in one or two details, though once again not in any way that invalidates the substance of what is said above in the text or in the footnotes.

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