

# Lesson 4: Introduction to the London School of Linguistics

Second year (L2) - Linguistics and Phonetics - Term 3

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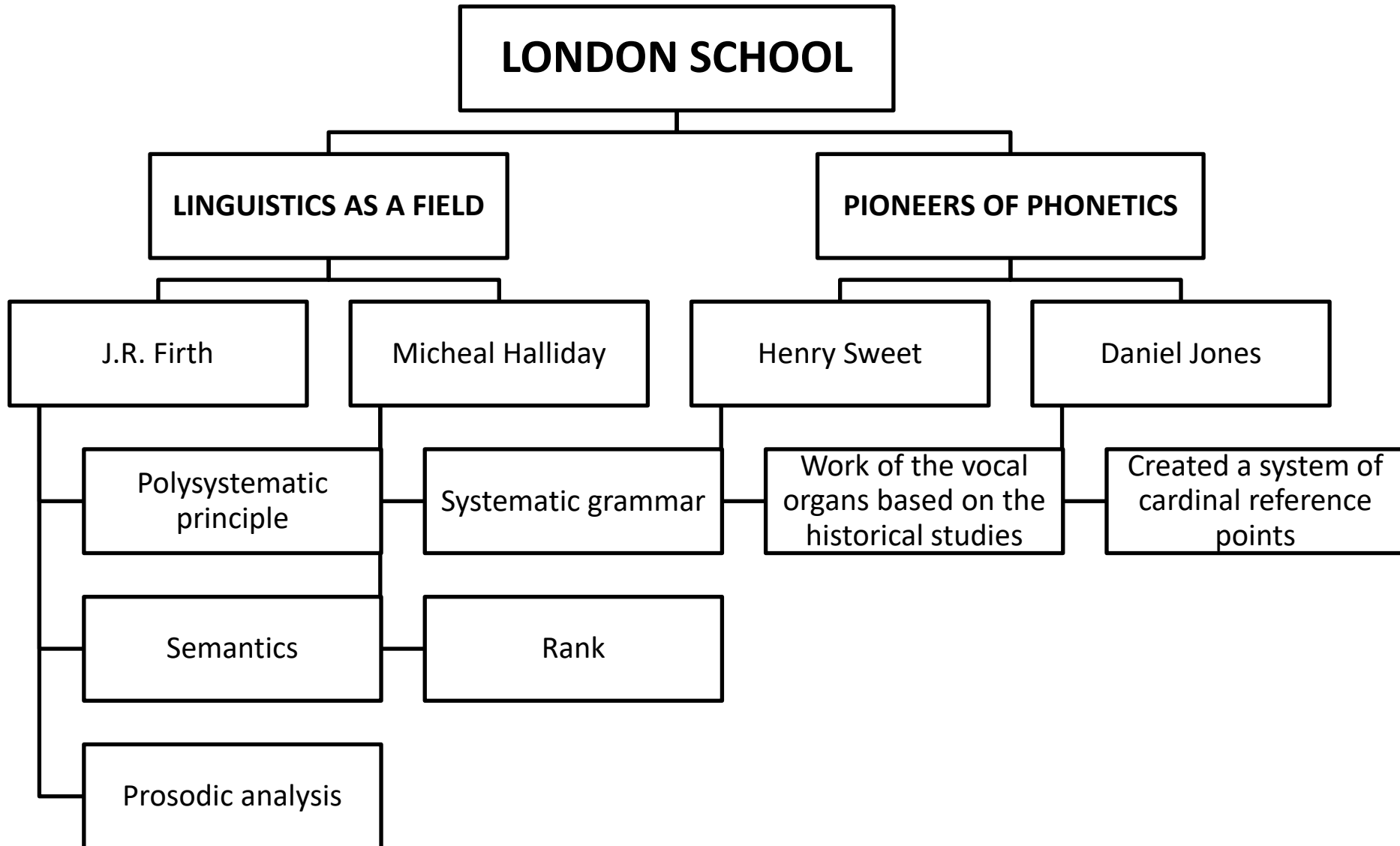
# The London School

- A British school in linguistics that was led by J.R Firth in the 1950's.
- The main focus of the London School was on **phonology** and the **semantic** aspect of language.



John Rupert Firth  
1890 – 1960  
London, UK

# Key Figures in the London School



# The London School

- The London School played a major role to play to establish linguistics as an academic discipline.
- They particularly helped establish the **phonology, semantics, pragmatics, and discourse analysis.**

# Principles of the London School

## **1- Primary Focus:**

- Phonology and semantics
- Studies individual speech, not collective experience

## **2- J.R. Firth's Influence:**

- Stressed the importance of Context of Situation in meaning
- Suggested meaning is context-dependent, involving social and personal attitudes

**LONDON SCHOOL**

**Establishing Linguistics as  
a field**



**J.R. Firth**



**Micheal  
Halliday**

Polysystematic  
principle

Individual vs  
collective speech

Meaning and  
Prosody

Systematic  
grammar

Rank

# 1. Polysystematic principle

- The idea that language operates through multiple interconnected systems.

## **\*\*Example**

“I *never* said she stole my money”

“I never said *she* stole my money”

In this example phonology (pronunciation) is interconnected with syntax (sentence structure).

## 2. Individual vs collective speech

- The London School rejected the concepts of the speech collective and social experience and studies the speech of the individual person.

### Example

- The individual use of **“I’m fine”**
- Individual speaker's choice of **“home”** over **“house”**



## 2. Individual vs collective speech

- Meaning in language is inherently context-dependent (context is essential)
- To understand a statement, consider **who is speaking, how they speak**, and the situation

# 3. Firth's Theory of Meaning and Prosody

- Firth's Theory focused on how sounds, especially aspects like **stress** and **intonation** function within a spoken context to convey meaning.

# 3. Firth's Theory of Meaning and Prosody

## Example 1

He **was** at home when I left.

He was **at home** when I left.

He was at home when **I** left.

# **3. Firth's Theory of Meaning and Prosody**

## **Example 2**

**You bought three tickets. (falling intonation)**

**You bought three tickets?! (rising intonation)**

## 4. Systematic grammar

- Instead of seeing grammar as isolated rules, the London school sees it as a systems of choices that a speaker makes.

### Examples

1. “John finally solved the problem.”
2. “The problem was finally solved by John.”

# 5. Rank

- Systematic grammar ranks the different grammatical levels from smaller units to larger ones.

## Example

1. Morpheme: the smallest unit of meaning (like “un-” in “undo”)
2. Word: a unit of meaning on its own (like “dog”)
3. Phrase: a group of words that functions as a single unit (like “the big dog”)
4. Sentence: a complete thought made up of clauses (like “The dog ran”)

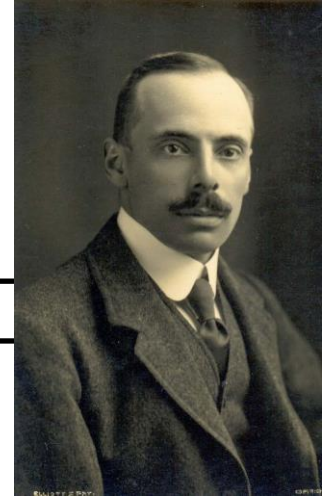
# LONDON SCHOOL

## Pioneers of Phonetics



**Henry Sweet**

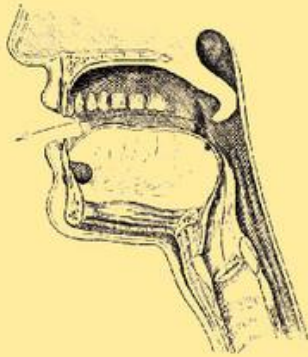
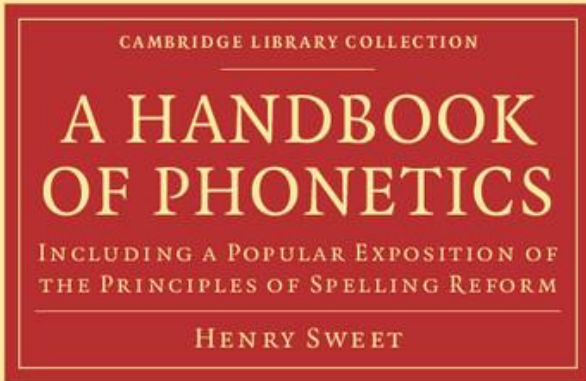
Work of the vocal organs based on the historical studies



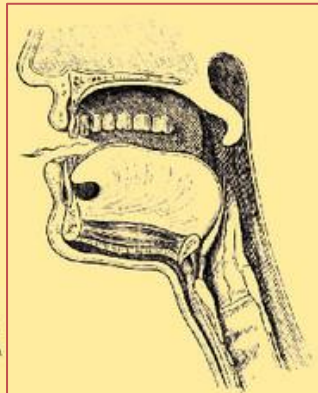
**Daniel Jones**

Created a system of cardinal reference points

# The vocal tract

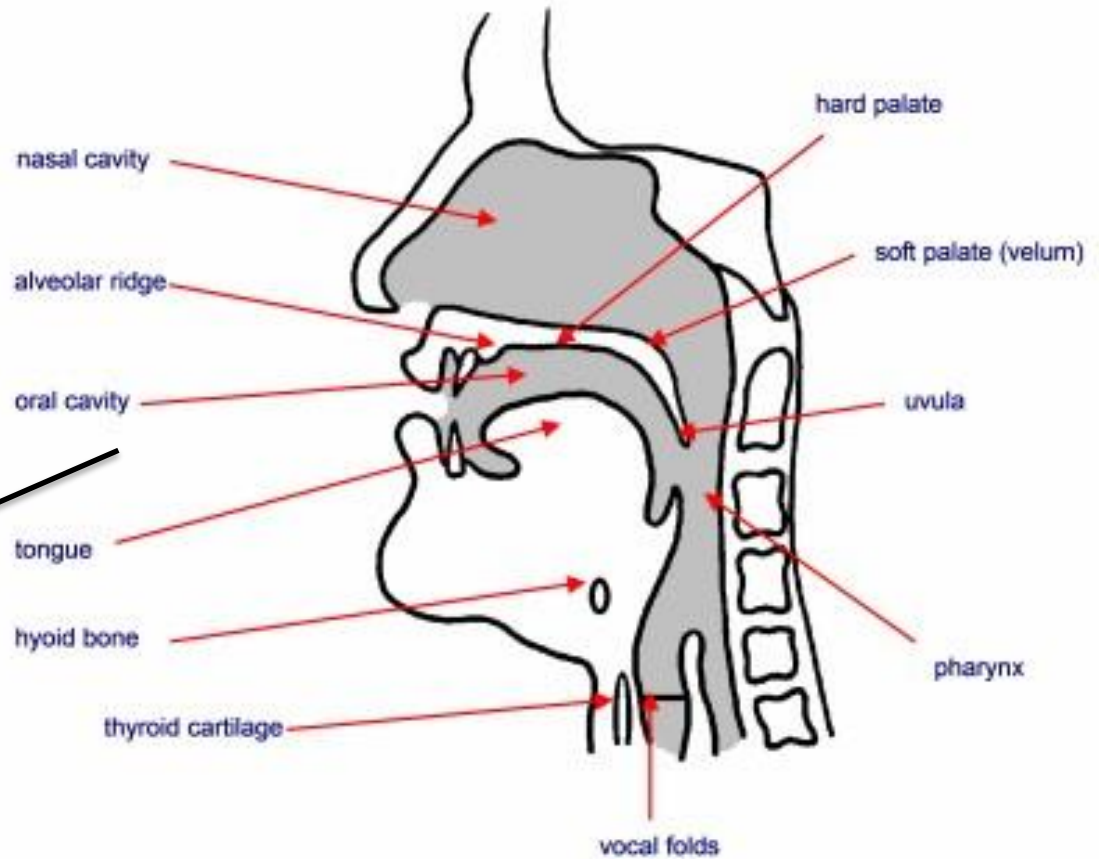


←(h); e.g. *hand*.



'—; e.g. *and*.

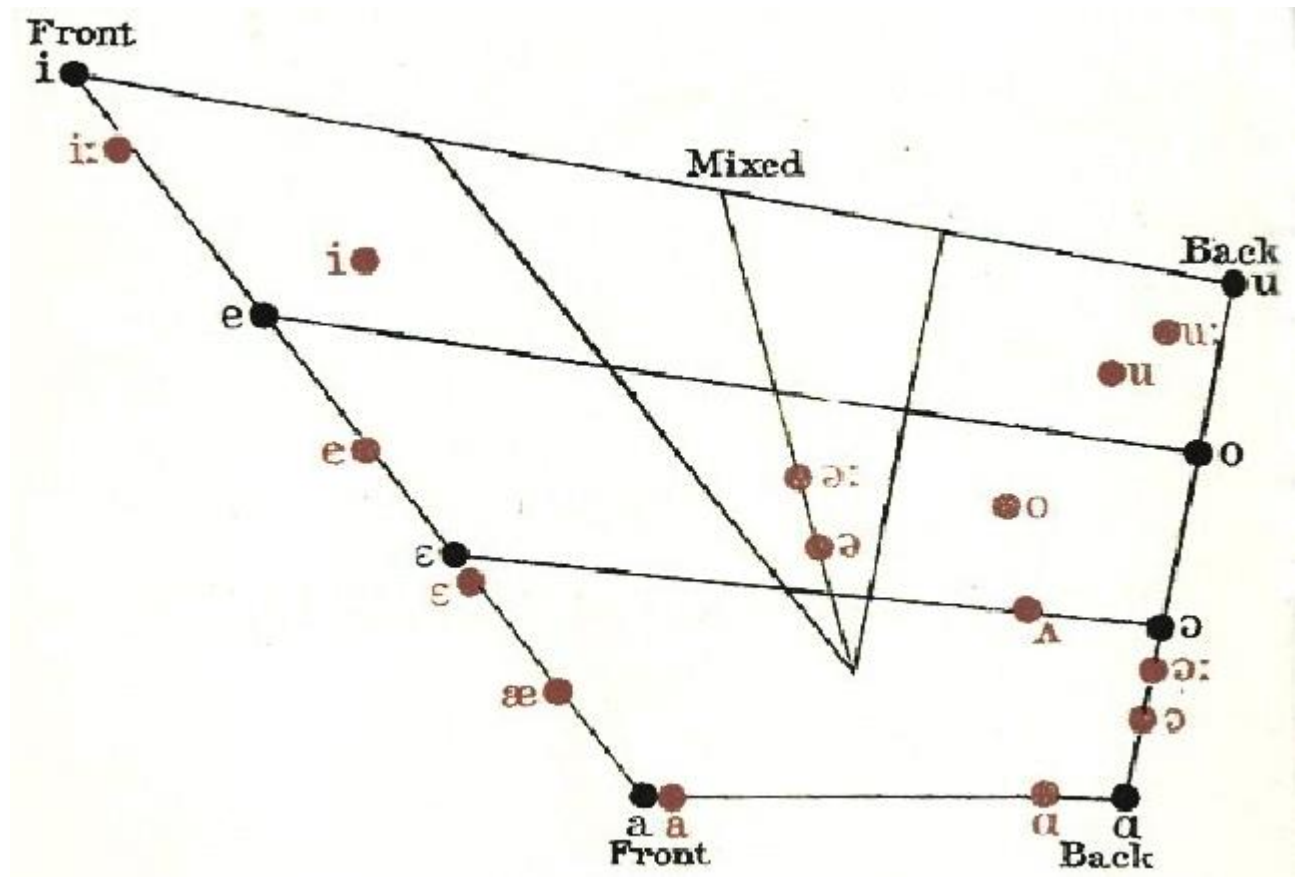
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# Cardinal reference points

A method in phonetics, developed by linguist Daniel Jones, for describing vowel sounds in a consistent and precise way.



# Conclusion

- The London School advanced linguistic study through a focus on phonology, semantics, and context-based meaning.
- Its principles of individual speech analysis, prosodic theory, and situational semantics continue to influence linguistics today.

Questions?