



European Structuralism

The London School of Linguistics



J.R. Firth

Prof. Saliha Chelli



Learning objectives

In this lecture, students will be introduced to the London School of Linguistics :

- Its prominent members
- its major contribution to linguistics

Introduction

In 1944, John Rupert Firth acceded to the Chair of General Linguistics at the University of London. His installation saw the formal beginning of the “London school,” a body of linguistic thought important primarily for its contributions to phonology and semantics.





The London School of Linguistics is involved with the study of language on the descriptive plane (**synchrony**), the distinguishing of structural (**syntagmatics**) and systemic (**paradigmatics**) concepts, and the **social aspects of language**.



The contribution of the London School of Linguistics

- The school's primary contribution to linguistics has been **the situational theory of meaning in semantics** (the dependence of the meaning of a linguistic unit on its use in a standard context by a definite person).
- The London school rejects the concepts of the speech collective and social experience and studies the speech of the individual person.
- The theory was suggested by John. R. Firth. It believes that the meaning depends on both the linguistic and situational contexts.

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- Situational contexts refers to the environment, time, place in which the discourse occurs and also the relationship between the participants.
 - It deals with appropriate behaviours and actions associated with the situation.
 - Situational context influences communication.



J.R. Firth

The three main representative of London School are:

John Rupert Firth (1890 – 1960): English linguist. General linguistics in Britain really began with the work of J.R. Firth, who held the first chair in linguistics, in the University of London from 1944 to 1956.

Firth developed a particular view of linguistics that has given rise to the adjective 'Firthian'. Central to this view is the idea of poly systematism.

According to Firth, **meaning and linguistic structure** can't be fully explained by just one system (like syntax or phonology). Instead, **different linguistic levels**—such as **phonology, grammar, semantics,** and **context**—each form their own *system*, but these systems interact.

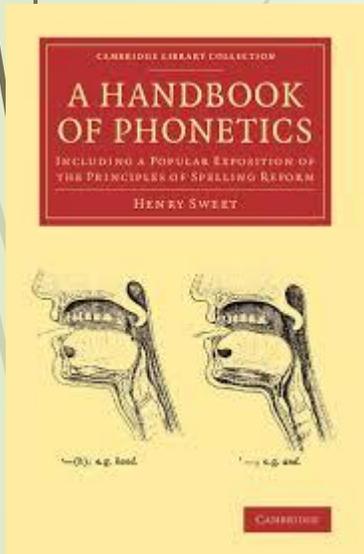
Firth is noted for drawing attention to the context-dependent nature of meaning with his notion of 'context of situation'.

Firth also greatly contributed to prosody, the study of rhythm, intonation, and related attributes in speech. He first set out his phonological ideas on prosody in his 'Sounds and Prosodies' an article published in 1948 .



Henry Sweet (1845-1912):

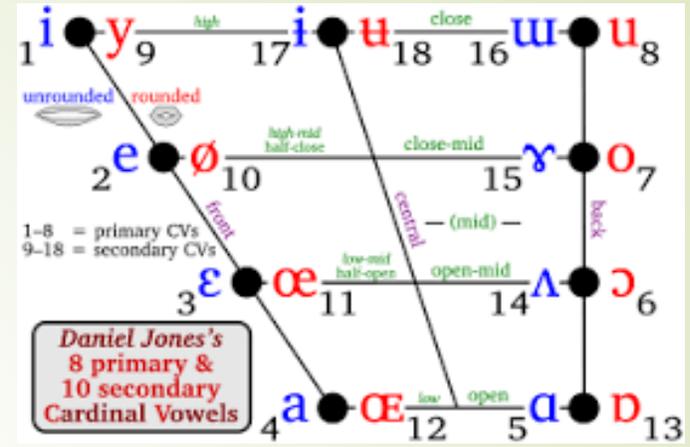
English philologist, phonetician and grammarian. Sweet published works on larger issues of **phonetics and grammar**. Many of his ideas have remained influential, and a number of his works continue to be in print, being used as course texts in colleges and universities. Sweet's mission was the promotion and establishment of the scientific study of linguistics, **particularly Old English**, in England. He is known as the father of the academic study of old English. He has an impressive list of publications among which, the student's **'Dictionary of Anglo-Saxon'**, **'the sounds of English'** and others.



Henry Sweet (1845 - 1912) –
"the man who taught Europe phonetics"



- 1877 – *A Handbook of Phonetics* (international attention in Europe)
- 1890 – *A Primer of Spoken English* (scientific description of educated London speech)
- 1899 – *The Practical Study of Languages*
- 1908 – *The Sounds of English*



Daniel Jones (1881-1967): British phonetician and considered the father of English phonetics. He was involved in the development of the International Phonetic Alphabet and went on to invent the system of cardinal vowels and produced the English Pronouncing Dictionary (1917). His work on English phonetics and phonology, including his book "An Outline of English Phonetics", was particularly influential and helped establish the study of phonetics as a distinct academic discipline.



References

- ▶ Firth on language and context: <https://slideplayer.com/slide/1382225/>
- ▶ London school of linguistics: <https://www.scribd.com/document/121983144/The-London-School>