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Palmer, Harold Edward

b. 1877, London; d. 1949, Felbridge, UK

Language teaching theorist, phonetician, grammarian, lexicologist, materials writer

Harold E. Palmer worked tirelessly between the two World Wars to establish a principled basis for English language teaching (ELT). Given the subsequent influence of his ideas, he deserves greater recognition as the 'founding father' of (British) ELT. However, it is in Japan (where he spent the years 1922–36) that he is best remembered today.

Palmer first taught in Belgium, in a language school run along Berlitz lines. He then began to develop his own more systematic, less dogmatically monolingual version of **DIRECT METHOD** teaching, which he later termed the 'Oral Method' (Palmer, 1921b; see also Palmer and Palmer, 1925). He joined the **INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ASSOCIATION** in 1907, and took on board the ideas of **REFORM MOVEMENT** theorists such as Henry **SWEET** and Otto **JESPERSEN**. In his subsequent work, Palmer brought together the direct method and Reform Movement traditions: his overall significance lies in the way he attempted systematically and consistently to relate practice to theory, thus foreshadowing **APPLIED LINGUISTICS** as constituted in the post-World War Two era (see in particular Palmer, 1917, 1921a, 1924a).

Palmer's best-known works on language teaching and learning theory were written during an extremely productive spell in Daniel Jones's

Department of Phonetics at University College London (1915–21). There, Palmer also developed wider interests in English intonation and grammar, as reflected in a classic **PEDAGOGICAL GRAMMAR** (Palmer, 1924b) which he completed following his move to **JAPAN** in 1922.

Outside Japan, few teachers are aware of Palmer's achievements as 'linguistic adviser' to the Department of Education and founder of the Institute for Research in English Teaching (**IRET**), the first such centre in the world. However, Palmer's legacy continues to be valued by Japanese members of the Institute (now known as **IRLT**).

Palmer's output was considerable, and he devoted great energy to the provision of guides for teachers and innovative textbook materials (see **IRLT**, 1995; Smith, 1999). In the 1930s, he increasingly focused on issues of **VOCABULARY** control and text simplification, and his collaborative lexicological work with Michael West is relatively well-known internationally. After returning to England in 1936, he seems to have suffered from the absence of an organisation comparable to **IRET**, and it was largely due to the mediation of **A.S. HORNBY** (his successor as leader of research in Tokyo) that Palmer's ideas became influential as **ELT** established a base in post-war Britain.

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Further reading

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RICHARD C. SMITH AND MOTOMICHI IMURA

Pedagogical grammar

Pedagogical grammar, which we may define as a grammar developed for learners of a foreign language, draws on two separate but interrelated areas of theory. First, there are descriptive models of grammar, which can be incorporated into pedagogical reference grammars and teaching **MATERIALS** and formulated in ways which make the description accessible to the learner. Second, there are theories of **SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION**, which will provide the basis for classroom methodology.

Pedagogical and linguistic grammars

There has been considerable discussion (see Dirven, 1990; Chalker, 1994) about the differences between pedagogical and linguistic grammar, variously termed 'theoretical' or 'scientific', in particular concerning the extent to which a pedagogical description should have a theoretical

basis and what this basis should be. Despite the large number of reference grammars on the market and the important role which grammar rules play in many classrooms, there appears to be relatively little coherent theory underlying rule formulation. This is somewhat surprising since, as Dirven (1990) points out, 'learners can be and are misled into all kinds of wrong generalisations by the inaccurate rule formulations in their **TEXTBOOKS**'. Some grammarians have attempted to give a theoretical basis to their rules: for example, Leech and Svartvik (1975) draw on the linguistic model of functional/systemic grammar; Swan (1994) outlines his 'design criteria' for rule formulation; Newby (1989a) derives his rules from his own 'notional grammar' model (1989b). Yet on the whole the area of rule formulation is one that is relatively unexplored (see Westney, 1994).

Of the two theoretical areas that comprise pedagogical grammar – description and methodology – it is the latter that has been the main focus of attention and which has, at recurrent periods in the history of language teaching, represented a highly contentious topic. The main bones of contention concern:

- the aims of grammar teaching (knowing about grammar or using grammar; manipulating sentences or free production);
- the categorisation of grammar (form, meaning, use) into units which will form a **SYLLABUS** or teaching **OBJECTIVES**;
- the extent to which grammar should be dealt with separately from other aspects of language;
- the use of rules, in particular in how far a cognitive focus on grammar rules assists acquisition;
- the type of grammatical **EXERCISES** and activities which will lead to automatization.

Types of pedagogical grammars

In modern grammar teaching the influences of the following approaches are most strongly discernible or influential.

Traditional grammar

Grammar is defined primarily as a set of forms and