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This is an author's accepted manuscript of an article published in the *Histoire Epistemologie Langage* 33 (1) 15-27 2011. The final definitive version is available online at: http://www.persee.fr/issue/hel_0750-8069_2011_num_33_1

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Published in:

Linn, Andrew, Danielle Candell & Jacqueline Léon (eds) 2011.

***Linguistique appliquée et disciplinarisation = Histoire Epistémologie Langage* 33:1, 15-27.**

Impact: Linguistics in the Real World

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Abstract

There is currently an emphasis in the funding of universities in the UK on the demonstrable *impact* of research. In this article we explore the work of the second generation of the Anglo-Scandinavian School, those linguists who were amongst the first to take the formal study of modern languages at university level out into the schools. We argue that their work is an excellent historical example of research into language having an impact in the real world, and we go on to argue that it was able to do so because the desire to make a difference was built into their research from the outset.

Keywords

Impact; Anglo-Scandinavian School; phonetics; applied linguistics; language teaching; Norway; Realism; 19th-20th century

Impact

University research in the UK is subject to periodic review via a process which has up to now been known as the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). The process is carried out on behalf of the higher education funding councils to determine the level of so-called 'quality-related' research funding each higher education institution is allocated. The principal measure of the quality of research has been and remains the 'output'. Panels of assessors consider the quality of the books, journal articles etc. submitted by university researchers as part of the process. Other RAE factors have included 'esteem' (evidence that the research in question is highly regarded by the academic

community) and 'environment' (evidence of the mechanisms in place to support researchers and research activity in a given university department). The next national assessment of research quality in the UK will take place in 2014 and will be styled the Research Excellence Framework (REF). The major change to the process compared with earlier assessments is likely to be the prominence given to the *impact* of research. Impact in this context is defined in various ways, and indeed the lack of a clear universal definition is one of several problems concerning its introduction as a factor in assessing research quality. Proposals for the REF state that "significant additional recognition will be given where researchers build on excellent research *to deliver demonstrable benefits to the economy, society, public policy, culture and quality of life*" (<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/impact/>), but what this means in practice is currently the subject of vigorous debate, with researchers across the Arts and Humanities and the Sciences uniting in their scepticism.

Historical research is one area which faces serious challenges in demonstrating its impact, but researching the history of our disciplines does help enrich the debate by providing case studies of what might or might not be regarded as research impact. Primary research can take a long time for its impact to be felt, so discipline history can be particularly helpful in this regard. It is my contention that the work of the Anglo-Scandinavian School in linguistics around the turn of the 20th century provides a particularly instructive example of research impact, and indeed that the history of applied linguistics provides a particularly good example of how research carried out in universities moves beyond the ivory tower and 'delivers impact' in a range of situations. We maintain that it is not anachronistic to discuss research from a century ago in terms of 21st-century criteria for evaluating research, but rather that applied linguistics has simply been demonstrating this sort of impact since its earliest days because of the very nature of the discipline.

The Anglo-Scandinavian School

In a recent article (Linn 2008) I put forward the view that applied linguistics as we understand it today emerged rather earlier than is often suggested (e.g. Davies & Elder 2004, p. 6—8), from the work of the "Anglo-Scandinavian School, as Sweet and Storm and their followers have been called [...]" (Jespersen 1897—1899, p. 55). The label 'Anglo-Scandinavian School' was in general use amongst members of that School, suggesting a coherence of vision and a commonality of approach to the study of language. Others of those associated with the group used alternative labels to announce their common purpose. Paul Passy (1887, p. 5) implies that "jeunes phonéticiens (en allemand *jungfonetiker*, sans doute par analogie avec le mot junggrammatiker...)" was another descriptor in general use. Whatever the label, the

point is that we are witnessing a united front in the development of linguistics as a discipline, and one which took the findings of contemporary linguistics and applied them to real-world language problems. The work of the School's pioneers, linguists such as Henry Sweet (1845—1912), Johan Storm (1836—1920) and Otto Jespersen (1860—1943), coincided with the institutionalisation of foreign language study in the universities of Europe (see, for example, Engler & Haas 2000), and indeed key members of the School (e.g. Jespersen, Storm, and the Swede J. A. Lundell (1851—1940)) were among the first to occupy university chairs in modern languages. So the emergence of modern foreign languages as proper objects of teaching and research at university level goes hand-in-hand with a new and widely held view of the legitimate object of study in linguistics and how it should be addressed. Although Jespersen endorsed the label 'Anglo-Scandinavian', it must be pointed out that those involved were not all from England or Scandinavia. We have already mentioned Paul Passy (1859—1940), Professor in General and Comparative Phonetics at the École des Hautes Études in Paris from 1894, who wrote in an 1886 letter to Lundell:

Auch bin ich damit beschäftigt, ein referat über den Stockholmerverein [= the Third Scandinavian Philologists' Meeting, held in Stockholm in 1886] für unser departement zu bereiten. Ich mach daraus eine föllige geschichte des "Jungfonetismus", u. endige mit dem wunsch, 1° dass die Lautlehre auch auf der Pariser universität studirt sei; 2°, dass Ihre fier tesen im neusprächlichen unterricht befolgt seien. (Uncatalogued letter, Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek NC 680)

And Jespersen goes on in his book *Fonetik* to note that the School "found strong support in the German Sievers and soon influenced research in other countries too" (Jespersen 1897—1899, p. 55). So we have a genuinely international movement here, one comprising scholars who knew each other, visited each other and, most crucially, corresponded actively with each other, in short constituted a *discourse community* (see Linn 2008, p. 346—348; 377—379; Borg 2003 for a more general summary of the concept).¹

At the heart of all they did lay the new science of *phonetics*. After a century of book-based, historical philological research, phonetics was like a religious revelation to these linguists, providing the means to study and discuss the *spoken* language scientifically. Their enthusiasm for what phonetics could achieve, what problems it could solve, knew no bounds. Sweet famously regarded phonetics as the "indispensable foundation of all study of language" in that much quoted phrase from the opening of the preface to his *Handbook of Phonetics* (Sweet 1877, p. v), and Lundell, in the first article of the first

¹ Watts (1999: 43) defines a discourse community as

... a set of individuals who can be interpreted as constituting a community on the basis of the ways in which their oral or written discourse practices reveal common interests, goals and beliefs, i.e. on the degree of institutionalisation that their discourse displays. The members of the community may or may not be conscious of sharing those discourse practices.

issue of the first journal dedicated to the new science, *Phonetische studien*, penned a manifesto for all the wonderful things he believed phonetics could achieve (Linn 2008, p. 365—368). Phonetics was merely the starting point, however, the “foundation”. In short, this group of linguists turned their attention to applying the insights provided by phonetics to a range of practical real-world linguistic issues. They were all committed to reform in language teaching methods, and their theory of language teaching was institutionalised via the short-lived *Quousque Tandem* society (Linn 2002). Many of these linguists were committed to recording dialects and other non-standard varieties and to developing bespoke phonetic notation systems for those purposes, because their watchword was “the living language”, a discourse feature which permeates their writings like a mantra. In several cases (e.g. Storm, Jespersen, Lundell) their commitment to the living language led members of the Anglo-Scandinavian School to a practical concern for orthographic reform and for spelling systems which more accurately reflected the living, i.e. spoken, language. Lundell’s enthusiasm for the possible impact that phonetics could have is summed up as follows:

It is seldom that linguistics is in a position, like the natural sciences, to intervene in practical life. However, it now offers its assistance in two directions: in support of a sensible revision of the orthography and improvement in language-teaching methods. (Lundell 1887, p. 2)

In summary, then, the Anglo-Scandinavian School represents a marked break with the linguistics of the previous decades, which culminated in the work of the Neogrammarians (Jankowsky 1972). Inspired by phonetics, the Anglo-Scandinavians turned their attentions instead to the application of linguistic research to practical language problems. They felt themselves that they were doing something new and reflected this in labelling themselves as a new group, setting up associations and devising a new technical jargon and a new set of technical tools around the notion of the living language, not least phonetic notation systems. Most members of the School worked at different stages of their careers in both university and school sectors. Although responsible on the one hand for the establishment of the modern languages as university disciplines, these linguists felt equally responsible for how languages were taught and studied in the schools, so they stood at the interface of research and its application in teaching.

It is one thing to demonstrate that the high-profile pioneers constituted a discourse community or a School, and that they worked together for a common cause in the development of modern linguistics, but one group does not make a discipline. There are various distinctive features by which an independent discipline can be recognised: journals, conferences, university posts, textbooks etc. One such feature is surely breadth and depth, research questions and methods passing from the pioneer generation to the next and and out to new domains. Only then, I suggest, can we refer

to a discipline being established. At the end of my 2008 article I wrote the following (p. 379):

What we need now is: [1] better knowledge of other members of these two first generations of applied linguists; [2] a more nuanced understanding of the inter-personal dynamics of the community; [3] focused studies of the individual topics on which they worked; and [4] a thorough investigation of the subsequent development of applied linguistics, both locally and internationally.

This volume of papers as a whole goes some way towards achieving desideratum 4. We still lack complete histories of the subdisciplines which grew out of the work of the Anglo-Scandinavian School (3), e.g. phonetics (Asher & Henderson 1981 was only a move in that direction) and dialectology (cf. the partial account as chapter XXIII of Auroux et al. 2001). In the rest of the present paper I will focus on the first (and to a lesser extent the second) of these desiderata. Johan Storm was the pioneer in Norway, the first person to occupy a chair in modern languages in that country and single-handedly responsible for training the first generation of language teachers in Norway, but what was his legacy and, if it was applied linguistics, how did it apply to the 'real world'? To help answer this question I will focus on the work of three Norwegian linguists, all of whom gained a significant reputation, but who worked in schools rather than universities, who practised their linguistics outside the university context: August Western (1856—1940), Knud Brekke (1855—1938) and Hans Ross (1833—1914). In terms of his life dates Ross was of the generation of Storm and Sweet, but in terms of the context in which he worked, he represents that group of Norwegian linguists who took their work out of the ivory tower and into the field. We begin with Western, whose link with the first generation, with Storm and Sweet, was the strongest, before moving on to the other two, who were less tightly linked to the academic study of language and more to its applications.

August Western

Western had a typical bourgeois upbringing in Norway's capital city, attending the Cathedral School, and progressed from there to the University where he studied for the newly established (1871) linguistic historical teachers' exam, opting for the subjects offered in groups two and four: Norwegian and German; English and French (see Sandved 1998, p. 41—49). He was therefore very much Storm's student, but note also how the institutional structures of the University now allowed students to study modern foreign languages in the context of a teaching career. Storm provided all the teaching in English and Romance languages at the University, and, at least before 1886 when Moltke Moe (1859—1913) was appointed Professor of the Norwegian folk language, teaching in Norwegian language too. It is not surprising that Storm's disciple should go

on to write his doctoral thesis on *The Subordinate Clause in English. A Historical-Syntactic Study* [*De engelske bisætninger. En historisk-syntaktisk studie*]. This can hardly be characterised as a contribution to applied linguistics, but it must be remembered that the focus on the living language was new, even daring, and a budding linguist looking to gain his apprenticeship would need to work on a more traditional and acceptable topic. The sort of impact that Western would later make was not supported by the discipline context from which he emerged. Western maintained an interest in English historical grammar, presenting a paper on the progressive aspect to the Norwegian Academy of Science in 1895, but only, it seems, as a professional expedient. The worthy and rather dull paper on the progressive (Western 1896) was his entry ticket to the Norwegian Academy to which he had been elected a year earlier. Traditional philology was a hoop through which to jump, but when he moved outside the university environment and it became clear that a university career was not possible, he turned his attention to rather different language issues. Modern foreign languages were in their infancy as university disciplines, and so there were very few posts available in the 1880s. This fact certainly helped drive forward the application of linguistics to new contexts. Those who might otherwise have become scholars were compelled to find work in the schools and often some considerable distance away from the university cities. As Trygve Knudsen wrote in his obituary of Western:

When Western took a school position in Fredrikstad in 1881, he thought of it as a transitional post; his goal was to be a teacher-researcher at the University. Instead he ended up in a continuous career of 45 years in the service of the schools. It is understandable that he speaks with a degree of sadness, of broken dreams, when he looks back at his life. (Knudsen 1948, p. 61)

So Western took the living language ideal in language study out into the context of school teaching, and his first publication was a pedagogical English phonology (Western 1882). The value of this work, the first such study in Scandinavia, was recognised immediately, and Western published a German translation in 1885 (Western 1885a), thus helping to make the methods of the Anglo-Scandinavian School known internationally. The success of this volume is attested by the fact that it entered four editions, the fourth appearing in 1923. Western's method is to combine recent insights from phonetics with an objective attitude to the data and a keen interest in the practical usability of the volume. He uses a phonetic notation system based on that adopted in the pages of *Le Maître Phonétique*, and he seeks to present a realistic impression of British English as actually spoken by native speakers:

Die vorliegende Arbeit ist ein Versuch, das heutige englische Lautsystem nach streng phonetischen Principien darzustellen, d.h. in der Weise, wie es faktisch ist, nicht wie es nach der Meinung einzelner sein sollte. (Western 1885a, p. iii)

To this end he aims to reproduce the educated pronunciation of south-eastern England, which he would have experienced first-hand during his visit to England to study with Henry Sweet in 1880—1881, but tempers this with an awareness of other accents, particularly those of northern England as described in the work of Richard Lloyd (1846—1906) (see MacMahon 2007). Parts of this description, especially the appendix on proper names, remain valuable today as detailed guides to the pronunciation of British English in the mid-nineteenth century. The book makes few concessions to the learner and, as in the pedagogical writings of his mentor Storm, makes plenty of reference to the scholarly literature (see too the criticism of Ross below). The boundary between university teaching and school teaching was a very porous one for the members of the Anglo-Scandinavian School, and so was the boundary between scholarly, pedagogical and popular writing. *Engelsk Lydlære* may have been steeped in the linguistic research of the time, but the third edition which I saw is bound with blank pages every other leaf since this was fundamentally a practical work, allowing readers to make their own notes, and it appeared in an alternative German version for schools and for self-instruction the same year (Western 1885b), which also entered four editions, and sales to non-academic audiences are an indicator of the impact of a publication beyond learned circles.

Even more successful was Western's *Outlines of English Institutions for the Use of Schools* (Western 1911), which became a foundation stone of English teaching in Norway for generations, entering its 12th edition in 1961. It is unusual for a text to survive so long in the fast-changing market of teaching materials, and the success of Western's materials has to be admired. Western describes this slim volume as "essentially a translation of my little book „Omrids av engelske institutioner”, with such corrections and additions as have been found necessary" (Preface), and it is a description of the workings of the major British institutions ranging from Parliament, through The British Empire to "The English People". Western also notes, as a further example of what we might now regard as impact of scholarship, that this hugely popular school-book was an expanded and revised version of two radio lectures he had given a few years earlier. The members of the *Quousque Tandem* society had a clear vision of what education should be like and the necessary reforms to achieve that vision. Educational reform was not just about better language learning materials, although this was at the top of the agenda, but also about making education more accessible and more relevant. A sense of social responsibility cannot be said to characterise all university researchers at the start of the 21st century, which is one reason why the impact of research has to be treated as an extra, an add-on, something to be applauded but not taken for granted. Lundell, for example, was involved in setting up summer schools in Uppsala (see papers in Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek NC 684), a reformed school with fewer hours and a more practical curriculum (with Adolf Noreen), and a Home-Economics college (with Ida Norrby). I have argued elsewhere that the passion

for educational reform evidenced by the Anglo-Scandinavian School was born of the emancipatory force phonetics had on its young members. It is also reasonable to suggest (as Knudsen (1948, p. 56) does) that what we are witnessing here is the impact in linguistics of the wider cultural movement of *Realism*. Ibsen (“the creator of the new realist drama” (Johnston 1989, p. 3)) had begun what would later become recognised as his twelve-play “Realist Cycle” with *Samfundets støtter* [*Pillars of Society*] in 1877, and the 1880s saw the flowering of Realism in Norwegian art as a backlash to the Romanticism of previous generations. It is easy to treat the history of linguistics purely as a strand of ‘faghistorie’ [discipline history], but there are important insights to be gained from considering the history of ideas and attitudes towards language as part of cultural history more broadly. How we have thought about language is far from being some sort of hermetically sealed set of objective insights, but rather a history of people constantly responding to the wider currents of their time, and impact as a factor in cultural production will ebb and flow with those currents.

Western wrote a series of other practical language materials in the course of his long and active life, for German teaching as well as English (e.g. the German exercises (Western 1903), which entered its 15th edition in 1940), and he contributed to debates on language teaching from a theoretical angle as well (e.g. Western 1888, 1894). Another area of language study in which he made an impact, indeed where he is better remembered in Norwegian linguistic circles, is Norwegian grammar. The major work here was the 1921 grammar of Norwegian Riksmål (Western 1921), the conservative variety of Norwegian he championed throughout his life, and which he had studied theoretically and practically with his teacher Storm.² *Norsk riksmåls-grammatikk* was described as late as 1983 as “to date the most imposing work in Norwegian grammatical literature” (Lundeby 1983, 68).

He engaged with the language-political debates of his own day, for example arguing strenuously that Riksmål, despite its Danish genes, because it was understood throughout Norway could not in real terms be regarded as a foreign language (see Western 1907). We need to move on, but before summarising the role of Western in the development of applied linguistics, we should note his practical guides to the use of Norwegian (Western 1915; 1931). In *Om sprogriktighet og sprogfeil* [*On language correctness and language errors*] he notes the rise of the Anglo-Scandinavian School, which he calls “den nye filologiske skole” [the new philological school] (p. 10) and states

² The names for the various official and unofficial varieties of Norwegian can be confusing, even to Norwegians. When Western wrote his Norwegian grammar there were two written varieties: *Riksmål* (a Norwegianised form of Danish) and *Landsmål* (a written standard based on the spoken dialects). *Riksmål* was subsequently renamed *Bokmål*, and *Landsmål* was renamed *Nynorsk*. The name *Riksmål* was retained by some writers to refer to a form of Bokmål which did not accept the various official reforms to which written Norwegian was subject throughout the 20th century.

that this School “set up language use as the highest authority in questions pertaining to correctness” (p. 10).

Western lived a long life and was indeed “a prolific scholar” (Hovdhaugen et al. 2000, p. 396). From our point of view, seeking to understand the history of applied linguistics, as a leading light in the second generation, he was one of the first literally to take linguistics out into the real world, into schools and into a forum where the living language was the object of study and ultimate authority. Western was not a lone voice or unique in this regard. As Knudsen notes, the names of Western and Knud Brekke are inseparable in the annals of Norwegian language teaching:

the two were fellow students and graduated in the same year. One can probably call the Brekke—Western company an institution in Norwegian schools; for nearly half a century their selection of English authors has been in use in the sixth form [...] (Knudsen 1948, p. 57).

Their *Udvalg af engelske forfattere* appeared in its 19th and final version in 1966 under the title *Utvalg av engelske og amerikanske forfattere* [*Selection of English and American authors*].

Knud Brekke

Brekke grew up on the opposite side of the country to Western in the county of Møre og Romsdal, and it was to western Norway that he would return following his studies and several posts in and around the capital. Like Western he spent much of his career as a headmaster (in Brekke’s case of Bergen Cathedral School) and like Western he was actively engaged in school politics, and he pursued these interests at national as well as local level. As his biographer notes, “Knud Brekke was a pioneer in the modernisation of foreign language teaching in Norwegian schools around 1900. He distinguished himself as a textbook writer, a practical teacher and in educational politics” (http://www.snl.no/nbl_biografi/Knud_Brekke/utdypning).

Although Brekke studied foreign languages at the University, his first publication was a phonology of the conservative Norwegian of the capital, earning him his apprenticeship in the linguistics business of Storm. He follows Sweet explicitly and pays due respect to other leading phonetic authorities of his day, and he is coy about his study being “kun et ‘bidrag’”, just a contribution (Brekke 1881, p. 4), but it remains a pioneering study and indicates the Anglo-Scandinavian School’s willingness to strike out into new areas of language study armed only with a belief in what phonetics could achieve:

While not being particularly a Norwegian philologist, I have believed it possible, on the basis of general phonetic studies, to make a small contribution to the illumination of certain aspects of the formal structure of our spoken language [...]. (Brekke 1881, p. 3)

The majority of Brekke's publications hereafter were practical teaching materials for English, covering all areas of the curriculum. Informed as they are by a strong background in phonetics, many of these also remain valuable to historians of English pronunciation, but their primary impact as useful teaching materials is born out by their extraordinary popularity. All Brekke's books entered several editions, and his textbook based on reading passages (Brekke 1887) entered its 21st edition in 1959. Brekke was very firmly an Anglo-Scandinavian, and Sweet's letters suggest that the two men knew each other (see Linn 2004, p. 123), and his application of the linguistics he had studied in the University, the linguistics of Sweet and Storm and indeed his own researches, to enhance the experience of others, to solve real-world language problems, is surely just the sort of case study that would fulfil the criteria of the REF.

Hans Ross

The path from Norway to Oxford was a well-trodden one in the final decades of the 19th century, when the principal attraction for phonetic tourists was Sweet. Marius Hægstad (1850—1927), Professor of "Landsmål and its dialects" from 1899, was reportedly "at Sweet's almost every evening for several months" (Venås 1992, p. 31) when he visited in 1872. Hans Ross is reported to have studied phonetics when he visited Britain somewhat earlier, spending most of the period from 1859 to 1860 in Edinburgh (Seip 1952, p. 588), and it is suggested that he chose Scotland over England because of his possible Scottish ancestry (see Venås 2009, p. 13—26 for a detailed discussion of Ross's lineage). Although Ross, like Western and Brekke, dedicated his energies to the teaching of modern foreign languages and the scholarly study of Norwegian, his background and circumstances were rather different, and it is important for us to realise that applied linguistics did not just emerge as a result of the enforced exile of university linguists in the school system; the ground was already fertile .

Ross, like Storm, was born into a clergy family, and he received a privileged education at Kristiansand Cathedral School. When Ross entered the University there was no opportunity for him to study modern languages, and he trained for the church ministry as would have been expected of someone with his background. However, he was never ordained priest, and, on graduation from the University, he worked as a language teacher, initially in his home town of Mandal, and, after his return from Britain, in the capital and from 1866 at the prestigious Kristiania Cathedral School. It was in this context that Ross wrote "the first Norwegian textbook on a foreign language to provide first-hand knowledge of the living language and take examples from it" (Grønvik 1989, p. 95). Although it can't be said that Ross was part of the Anglo-Scandinavian School discourse community, he nonetheless shared their ethos, improving language teaching methods by applying knowledge of the living language and of the burgeoning subject of

phonetics. (In a speech on his 70th birthday he did describe himself to an audience which included the prime minister as having been an “angloskandinav” (Seip 1952, p. 588.)) Grønvik also notes that “Ross was himself primarily concerned with phonetics as a resource [...] and he developed an interest in the theoretical and methodological aspect of the subject rather slowly” (p. 96). His commitment to another key principle of the *Quousque Tandem* movement is emphasised by another of those who in recent years has written about Ross:

He published a grammar of English in 1871—1873 (2 volumes). The book represented a completely new view of how to teach. It was no longer artificial sample sentences which were to be learned. In Ross it was the language of living day-to-day life which was presented, in a fresh and natural fashion. (Sjekkeland 2005, p. 47)

It is true to say that attention has come to focus on Ross primarily as a Norwegian linguist and lexicographer (Ross 1895), and indeed Venås’s 2009 biography is part of a series on leading figures in the history of Nynorsk. However, for Ross, like Storm, Western, Jespersen and others, there was simply the living language which as a concept transcended boundaries between languages, between school and university, between the study and the field, and all their various language projects were an extension of this philosophy

Ross made his first foray into teaching materials with his incomplete English grammar of 1871, containing the sections on pronunciation and some morphology (Venås 2009, p. 68—71). This was intended as a trial version on which Ross would get feedback before producing the complete version over the course of the next two years. The living language ethos suffuses both versions which are full of examples of natural (albeit written) English from genres ranging from proverbs to literary excerpts. Johan Storm, who worked tirelessly himself to promote teaching materials which were based on the living language and not on artificial sentences, praised Ross’s ground-breaking work, writing that Ross’s examples are “so rich in content and to the point [...] that they can’t help but have an engaging and enlivening effect” (Storm 1879, p. 114). Marius Hægstad made much the same point (1915, p. 386) and went so far as to suggest that Ross had caused a revolution in school teaching methods (Venås 2009, p. 73), and for those who have written about Ross “living language” has become part of the standard discourse (e.g. Koht 1903, p. 146; Larsen 1914, p.180).

In the 1871 trial book Ross adopts an interesting phonetic notation system (Venås 2009, p. 69—70) where each vowel of English is assigned a number from 1 to 11 which are then used in transcription. Length is signalled by the use of bold typeface. This is an effort to use developments in phonetics to bring the language to life and help learners appreciate the true character of the spoken language. The notation system doesn’t carry through to the final version of the book, although the tendency to go into

great philological detail does. Venås regards this scholarly content as “out of place in a textbook for pupils” (p. 70), but this is also characteristic of Storm’s and Western’s popular writings and is indicative of those porous boundaries in language study in the early days of applied linguistics. Interestingly, although Ross and Western had much in common in how they saw the study and teaching of foreign languages in the schools, they came to blows in 1908 in the pages of the national newspapers on the subject of the use of different forms of Norwegian (Venås 2009, 203—208).

Concluding remarks

While I have argued previously that the apparently empty space in the canonical history of linguistics between the Neogrammarians and the emergence of Structuralism was in fact where applied linguistics was born, this article investigates how this approach to language in Norway was put into practice in the context of language teaching in the schools. It is true that Storm, Jespersen, Lundell and their peers all worked as schoolteachers at some point, but they developed their ideas about phonetics and its potential applications from within the ivory tower. Linguistics crossed the threshold thanks to the porous boundary between the University and the world beyond. Courses in modern languages were set up in Kristiania precisely to educate future schoolteachers. Even the very best students (like Western) had little opportunity to remain within the university context, and for the pioneers there was no limit to the range of contexts which they believed could benefit from the new science of phonetics, whether we treat applied linguistics in the narrow pedagogical sense or more broadly.

It was quite natural for linguists in the universities and beyond to engage in debate with each other and with society more generally, whether that was in the columns of the newspapers or in the associations set up for the purpose, and it was quite natural for them to want to use their research findings to improve society. ‘Impact’ was not something added on to research; it was part of it. Applied linguistics developed in the Anglo-Scandinavian School because of the practitioners’ unforced view of the relationship between research into language and the nature of language itself. The lesson from the history of applied linguistics is that research makes a difference when the desire to make a difference is built into the research from the outset and where the boundary between university research and the world where language is actually used and experienced is a thin and porous one.

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