Learning from the Past: Researching ELT History

Richard Smith
University of Warwick

Getting to know you ...

Please write a number in the 'chat box':

Are you a(n) ...

- 1. English teacher
- 2. MA or PhD student
- 3. Other university-based researcher 4. Other (if so, what?!)



Aims

 Introduce some of the whys, whats and hows of researching ELT history

Share ideas for some possible topics / areas for research

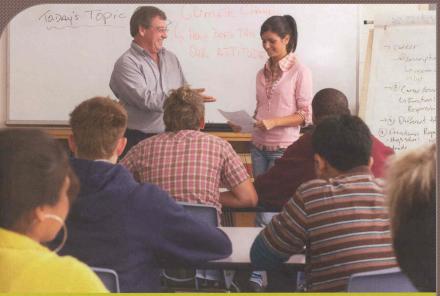
• Increase interest in this field (I hope!)

Background: my own research

I'll share practical insights based on my own research into 150 years of ELT history:

- * Innovators and Reformers (mid-19th century to WWI)
- * Precursors of ELT (interwar period)
- * Establishment and rise of ELT (1950s onwards)

Continuity, not just a series of revolutions



An international journal for teachers of English to speakers of other languages

Volume 66/1 January 2012 ELTjournal

Articles

A.S. Hornby and the Hornby Trust Learning of routine formulae The myth of the natural-born linguist Developing speaking Developing multiliteracies in ELT Learner negotiation of L2 form Culture in ELT Transnational peer review of teaching Improving teacher talk

Point and counterpoint ELF

Technology for the language teacher

Readers respond CLIL and immersion

Reviews

The Bilingual Reform Teaching and Learning Pragmatics The NNEST Lens: Non-native English Speakers

The Construction of English: Culture, Consumerism and Promotion in the ELT Global Coursebook Shakespeare on Toast

Provoking Thought: Memory and Thinking in ELT Towards Multilingual Education

Service, Satisfaction and Climate: Perspectives on

Management in English Language Teaching

The Language and Intercultural Communication Reader Developing Courses in English for Specific Purposes

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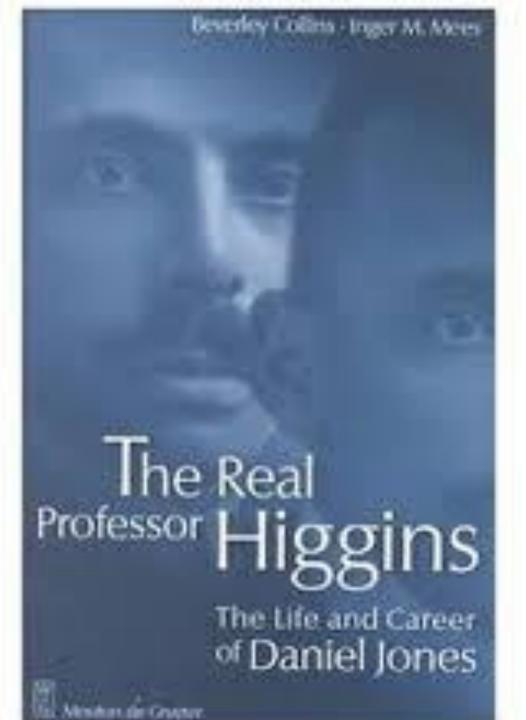
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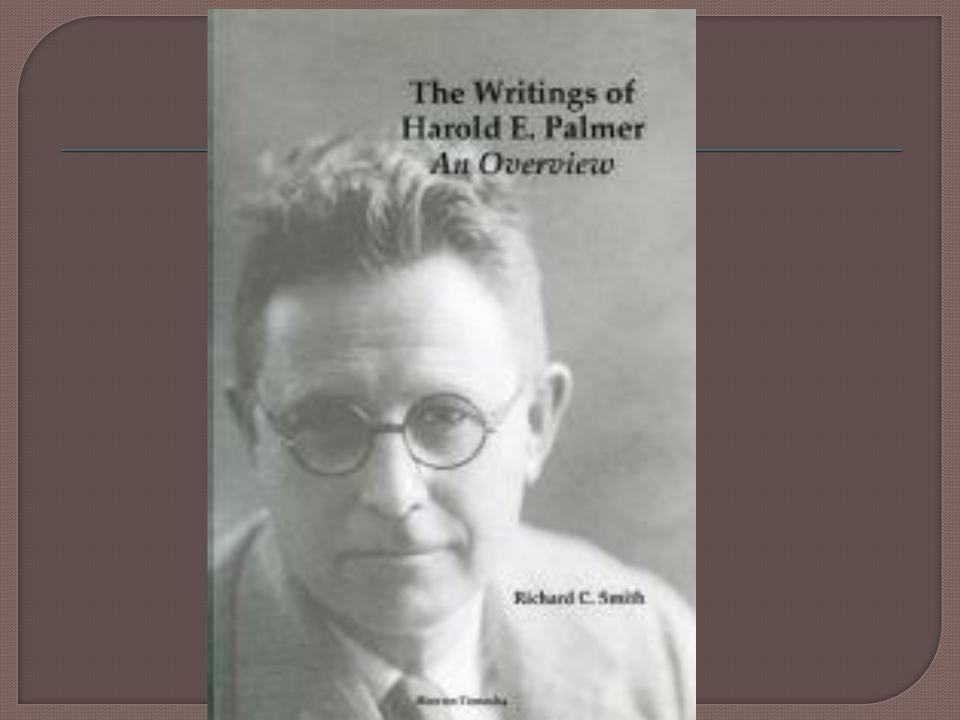
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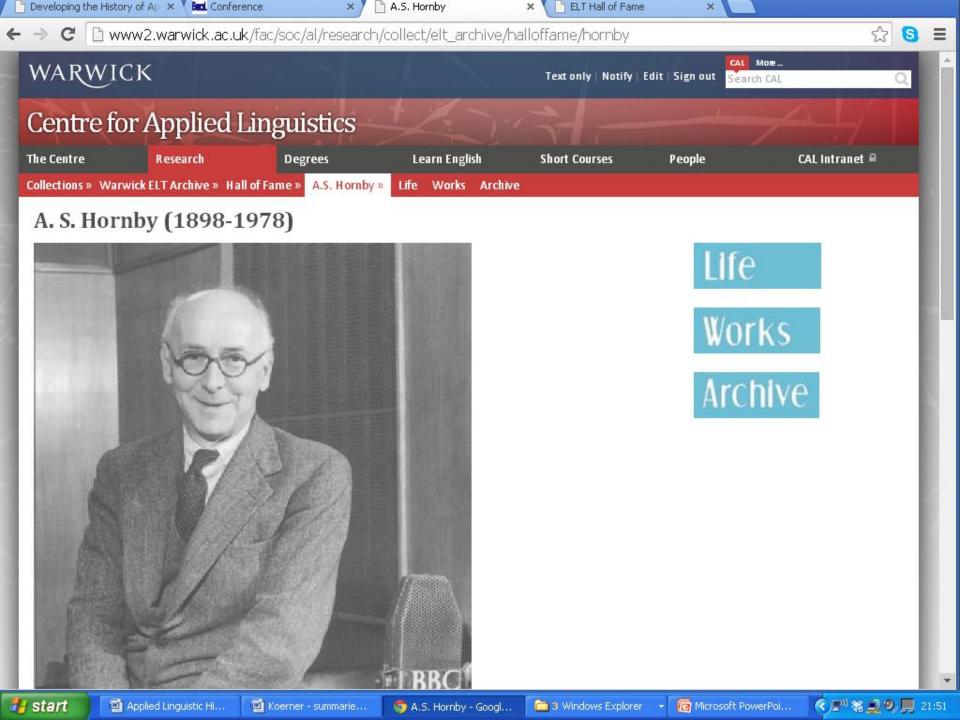
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ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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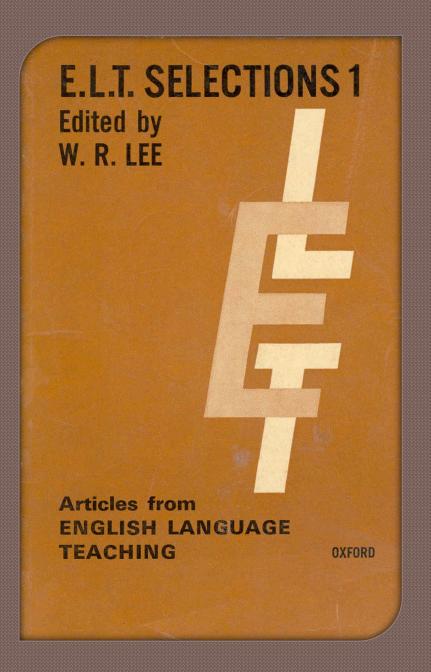
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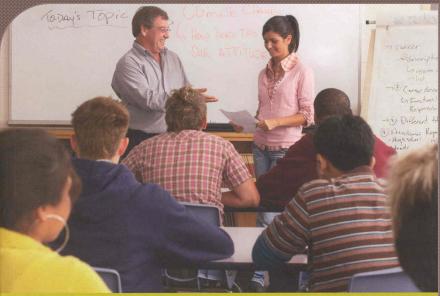
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My current work:

- history of British Council involvement in ELT (1934 - present) – why?
- history of IATEFL (1967 present) why?
- 'Aspirations' -- two books on:
- the roots and rise of ELT (up to 1970) why?
- the Reform Movement (1880s-1914) why?

Aims

 Introduce some of the whys, whats and hows of researching ELT history

Share some ideas for possible topics / areas for research

• Increase interest in this field (I hope!)

Preliminaries

The main focus today is on *how* to research – historical research methods – but we first need to establish:

- why historical research is needed (rationale)
- what to focus on (scope)

Why research ELT history?

A continuing 'paucity of studies' (Stern 1983)

History of ELT

Howatt (1984) A History of English Language Teaching; 2nd ed. 2004.

Since then:

Howatt and Smith (2000-2005) – 26 volumes of facsimile reprints (Routledge)

Warwick ELT Archive (2002 onwards)

History of ELT: recent work

Phd theses –Evans (2003); Smith (2005); Hunter (2009)

Histories of English language testing (Spolsky, 1995; Weir et al., 2013)

A history of EFL learner dictionaries (Cowie, 1999)

A history of ESOL in the UK (Rosenberg, 2007)

History of ELT

ELT in Germany (in German) - since 1984

Klippel, 1994; Lehberger, 1986, 1990; and Macht, 1986, 1987, 1990.

Recent PhDs by Doff 2002, 2008; Franz, 2005; Kolb, 2013; Ruisz, 2014

ELT in Japan (in Japanese):

Nihon eigakushi gakkai (The Historical Society of English Studies in Japan)

Nihon eigokyoikushi gakkai (The Historical Society of English Teaching in Japan).

HoLLT (History of Language Learning and Teaching)

- SIHFLES (Société internationale pour l'histoire du français langue étrangère ou seconde) – 25-year history
- CIRSIL (Centro Interuniversitario di Ricerca sulla Storia degli Insegnamenti Linguistici)
- <u>APHELLE</u> (Associação Portuguesa para a História do Ensino das Línguas e Literaturas Extranjeras)
- PHG (Peeter Heynsgenootschap)
- SEHEL (Sociedad Española para la Historia de las Enseñanzas Lingüísticas)
- Three pan-European conferences: Granada (2008), Gargnano (2011), Nottingham (2014)

Joining up HoLLT researchers

Dec. 2012 – Nottingham workshop (special issue of *Language and History* – 2014)

June 2013 – Warwick workshop (special issue of *Language Learning Journal* – in process)

July 2014 – Nottingham conference (3 volumes of proceedings projected – in process)

January 2015 – AILA Research Network on HoLLT – http://hollt.net

Why research ELT history?

- A continuing 'paucity of studies' (Stern 1983)
- Help to build a relatively new field
- Fill the many gaps (e.g. geographical)
- Correct wrong or over-simplistic accounts (e.g. Direct method)
- Counter dominant myths (e.g. AL influence) / develop critical accounts
- Develop teacher autonomy
- Affirm and celebrate!

What to research?

'Fill the many gaps'. I.e.?

Need for 'studies of particular aspects' (Stern 1983)

... in different contexts

... looking at practices not just theories of language learning and teaching

What to research?

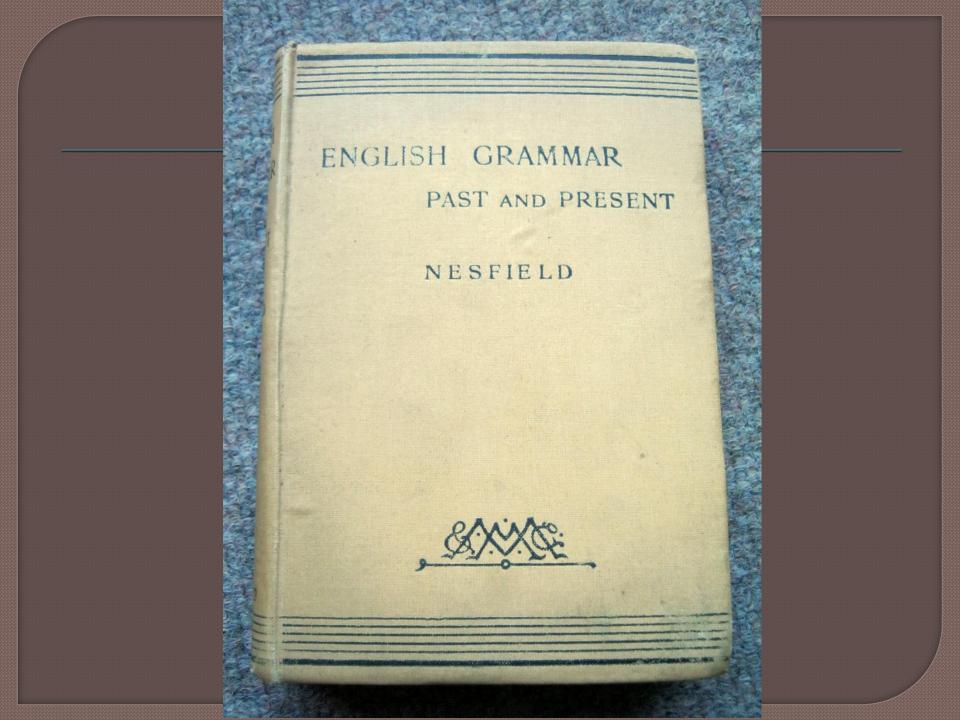
'studies of particular aspects' (Stern 1983)

E.g.?

- Individuals
- Particular institutions
- Particular methods or techniques
- Materials
- ... in different contexts
- ... practices, not just ideas

The Warwick ELT Archive: www.warwick.ac.uk/elt_archive





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An Elementary Manual

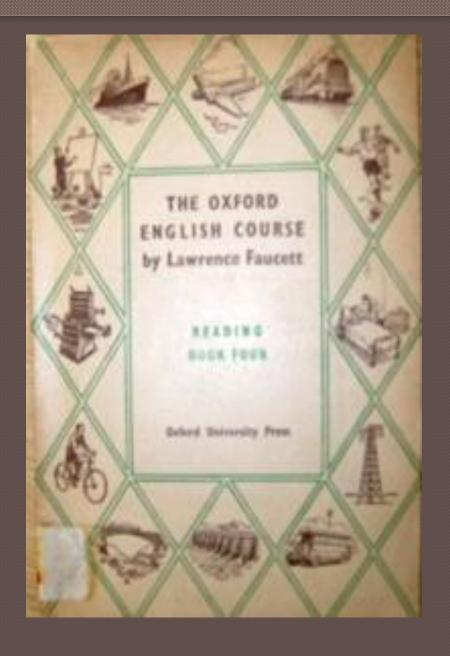
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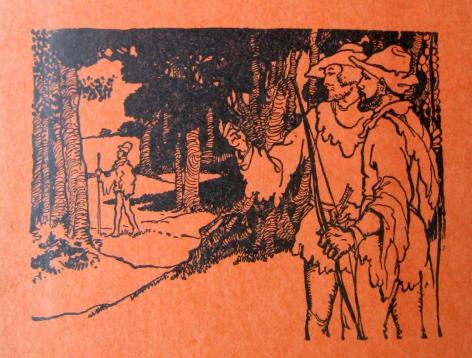
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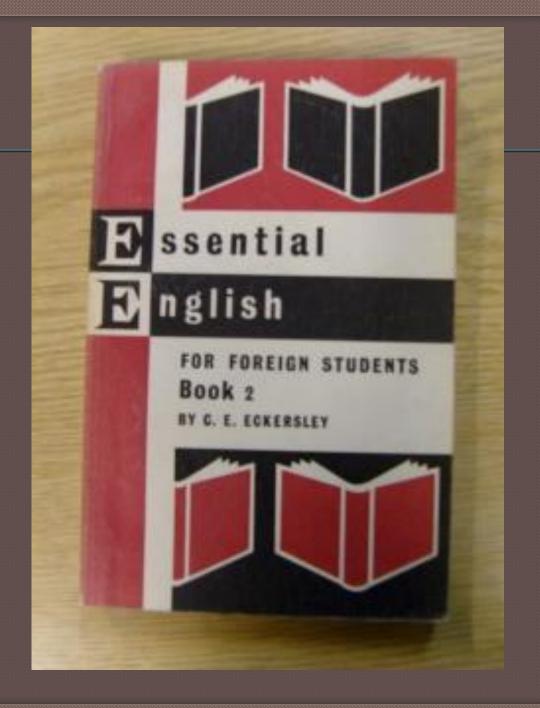
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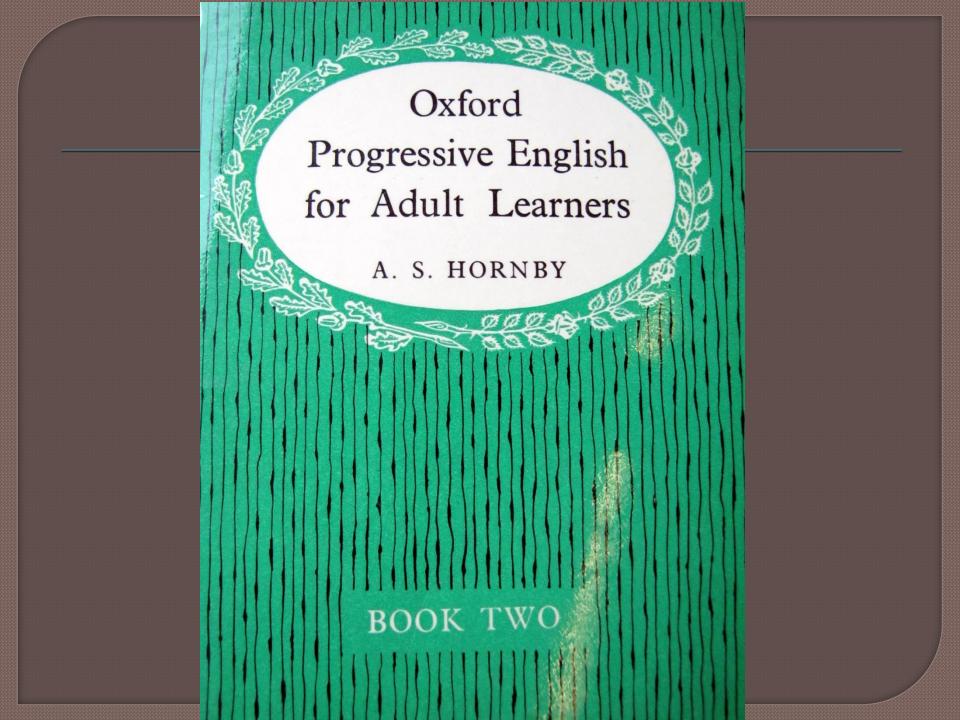
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Students' Book







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Sample aspects of change that can be usefully researched

- Process & economics of materials development
- Architecture of 'course package' / 'series'
- Absence/presence/nature of storyline / 'characters'
- Approach to grammar / vocabulary presentation
- Nature of suggested activities
- 'Realism' / 'Authenticity' of dialogues/texts

- Representations (gender, culture etc.)
- Visual / Design aspects
- Nature of syllabus
- Inclusion/Exclusion of topics / 'issues'
- Unit architecture

etc.

• J. Nunan – MA dissertation - 'What has changed in English language teaching textbooks between 1930 and the present?' Why?

To develop teacher autonomy with regard to published materials – to 'analyse', understand and evaluate them, so that teachers are not 'governed' by them.

'Making the familiar strange'

Are there any historical topics you've thought of that you'd like to research / that you'd like to see researched?

How to research ELT history?

Many existing overviews are not 'methodologically informed'. Dangers to avoid:

- over-reliance on other secondary sources
- over-literalness (e.g. 'activity')
- anachronism (e.g. 'Reader')
- being over-celebratory or excessively partisan in other ways (e.g. Berlitz history)

Some basic 'rules'

- Use but be critical of existing secondary accounts
- Refer to primary sources (do 'original' research)
- Attempt to make only evidence-based assertions
- Explicitly state sources of evidence

Where to start?

- What do you already 'know'?
- what are your preconceptions?
- What secondary accounts are there?
- what contradictions do they reveal?
- what are their sources?
- what questions still need to be answered?
- what other sources can we imagine?
- Start to make a chronology, bibliography and primary source list

Consult primary sources

'Primary sources' =

'Documents or artifacts closest to the topic of investigation. Often they are created during the time period which is being studied (correspondence, diaries, newspapers, government documents, art) but they can also be produced later by eyewitnesses or participants (memoirs, oral histories)'

http://research.library.gsu.edu/primaryhistory

Examples of primary sources (1)

• History of ideas: Theoretical and polemical writings – treatises, prefaces of and advertisements for textbooks, professional journal articles (late 19th century onwards), lecture notes, unpublished writings.

Examples of primary sources (2)

Contextualization of ideas: written memoirs or reports, published or unpublished; oral accounts; university course descriptions; letters; photographs; newspaper advertisements, articles, cuttings.

Examples of primary sources (3)

- Policy and curriculum: Government papers; policy documents; curricula; syllabus documents.
- Learning materials: Manuals / textbooks for learning languages; pedagogic grammars and dictionaries; audio-visual materials (20th century).

Examples of primary sources (4)

Teaching and learning practices: Reports of public commissions; published or unpublished memoirs; eyewitness accounts and observation reports; teachers' reports on their own practice; project evaluation reports; minutes/ reports of exam boards; minutes of meetings; videos of classroom events (late 20th century onwards); lesson plans; exercise books; marginalia in textbooks.

Scoping and 'immersing yourself' in sources

- Scope available sources / seek out further relevant sources
- Immerse yourself in primary sources, and secondary sources beyond AL
- Keep asking questions what still needs to be answered? What further sources do I need? Proactively seek them out, but ...
- Know when to stop!

Being critical of sources

- Triangulate (compare and contrast)
 different sources (e.g. IATEFL birthdate)
- Become aware of sources' biases and limitations (e.g. Lee re. idea for IATEFL)
- Select in a principled way from available sources (e.g. for textbook analysis)

But ...

Imaginatively reconstructing the past

• '[immersing] myself in the past until I know it well enough for my judgment of what is or is not representative to seem acceptable without undue epistemological debate' (Thomas 2010)

Over to you!

Do you have any questions / comments / ideas / feedback you'd like to share?

Thank you!

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www.warwick.ac.uk/elt archive

A challenge: reconstructing practices, not just history of ideas

- Situate ideas in contexts of practice
- Attempt to ascertain the impact of ideas on practice
- [Also] chart developments in practice on their own terms

A challenge: possible 'applied linguistic' techniques

- (critical) discourse analysis applied diachronically
- corpus linguistics for example, keyword analysis
- techniques from forensic linguistics (for 'source criticism')
- analysis of spoken discourse within oral history

Particularities of 'recent history'

- Good possibilities of oral history, and access to other sources
- Closeness to events difficult of selecting what's 'important'
- Selection of participants / events to mention -> possible dissatisfaction
- As a participant in events, own partiality re. selection
- Balance between affirmation (celebration) and criticality

Some particular considerations re. recent history