Liaison

Magazine   Issue 2 : January 2009

All aboard
how residence abroad
enhances employability

features:
the value of languages

students:
the experiences of
international students

viewpoint:
languages for the few?

teaching:
early-modern and
medieval culture

teaching:
digital storytelling

700 words:
on e-learning

Liaison Magazine is published twice a year by the Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies (LLAS), part of the Subject Network of the Higher Education Academy. We are a publicly funded service, providing UK-wide support and services for higher education in languages, linguistics and area studies. Details of all our activities are available on our website: **www.llas.ac.uk**

As well as updates on LLAS work, *Liaison* features a wide range of articles on topics relating to languages, linguistics and area studies. The next issue will appear in July 2009. We welcome contributions. If you would like to submit an article (of between 300 and 3,000 words), propose a book review or respond in a letter to an article published in *Liaison*, please contact the editor, Paula Davis (**pd2@soton.ac.uk**).

Views expressed in *Liaison* are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of LLAS.

Website links are active at the time of going to press.

You can keep in touch with LLAS by joining our mailing list (**www.llas.ac.uk/mailinglist**), coming to our workshops, seminars and other events (**www.llas.ac.uk/events**) or exploring our website. *Liaison* is distributed to languages, linguistics and area studies departments across the UK and is available at **www.llas.as.uk/liaison**. If you would like extra copies, please email **llas@soton.ac.uk**

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Welcome

Issue 2 : January 2009

As we put the Christmas break behind us and contemplate the forthcoming cold winter months, what better to rouse the spirits and sally forth to spring than Issue 2 of *Liaison*? We were delighted to receive such positive feedback on Issue 1 and our "difficult second album" has been a joy to edit, thanks to our excellent contributors and the sheer wealth of work within languages, linguistics and area studies on which to report.

Student employability remains a key priority for the Higher Education Academy, and is explored in a number of ways in this issue. Having participated in an employability panel at the CILT/LLAS Languages in Higher Education conference in July 2008, languages graduate Louise Foster offers a reflection on her career to date and the value of languages to graduate employability. Elsewhere, Diane Appleton discusses practical strategies to maximise the employability skills gained from residence abroad, which reflects a stepping-up of LLAS activity in both these areas. And the CETL dissemination workshop on employability that we ran in April 2008 forms the background to an interview with two ambitious international students.

A number of articles here have been inspired by recent and forthcoming Subject Centre events. For her piece on teaching medieval and early modern culture, Claire Honess draws upon an LLAS-funded "workshop-to-go" she co-organised on this topic last year. January 2009 sees the fourth annual LLAS e-Learning Symposium, and so it is only fitting that our regular "700 words" are penned this time by Gráinne Conole on working in e-learning as a teacher and researcher. And following the success of the Languages of the Wider World: Valuing Diversity conference in September 2008 (an LLAS and Languages of the Wider World CETL collaboration), Hanne-Ruth Thompson serves a particularly delectable taste of Bengali in the closing pages.

You will find a number of pieces in this issue that are sure to spark debate: Dick Hudson and Hilary Footitt, for example, offer their opinions on the current status of languages in UK education; Matthias Oppermann describes a multimedia alternative to the essay as a means of assessment; and Judith Baxter explores the disciplinary nature of English Language. We look forward to hearing your reactions!

The Subject Centre is entering a new and particularly exciting phase, as Mike Kelly explains on page 4, and we hope that *Liaison* serves to keep you in touch with activity in our subject communities. As ever, we welcome comments, suggestions and contributions so if you would like to get involved in Issue 3, please see the contact details on the inside front cover.

Liaison is printed on FSC Mixed Sources grade paper containing 50% recovered waste, and printed using vegetable inks.

Shoshannah Holdom, Editor

recycle
When you have finished with the magazine please recycle it.

Русский: Russian

Q1: What is the currency used in Russia?
Q2: What is the name of the...

Мaй
May

Kernewek: Cornish

Q1: ...pasties were lunch for miners of which metal?
Q2: ...of England counties.

Deutsch: German

Q1: How many native speakers of German...
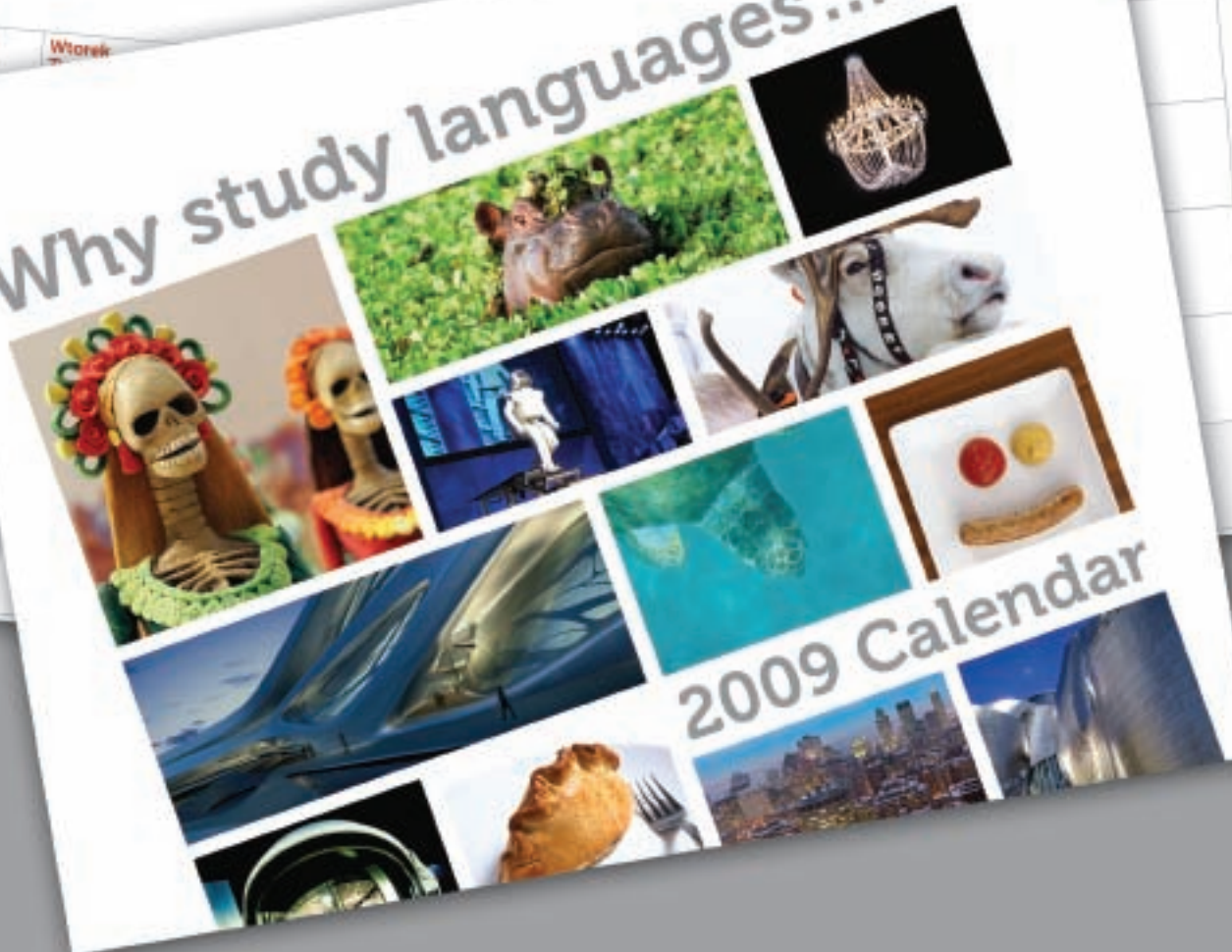Q2: ...
Find...

Mis Ebryl
April

Język polski: Polish

Q1: What is the capital of Poland?
Q2: Barszcz (Borscht) is a traditional Polish soup. What is its main ingredient and what day of the year is it traditionally served?
Find the answers at: www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/calendar

février
February

Stycz...

Poniedziałek
Monday

Wtorek

Why study languages…?
2009 Calendar

This calendar was produced by the Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies (LLAS) with funding from the Routes into Languages programme, and distributed to schools via the Routes regional network. The aim of this calendar is to introduce pupils to languages they may not be familiar with.

Schools wishing to receive a copy can contact their regional network:
www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/calendar

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Joining up the
world of education

For a long time, we have been well aware that higher education exists in a wider educational context. But recently the academic community has been drawn to engage more closely with the other sectors. From this engagement, we are beginning to appreciate better what we can usefully offer to our colleagues in schools and what we can learn from them.

At a general level, many university staff have a direct link with schools through their own children and through friends and family. Many of us have served as school governors, taking a direct role in the leadership of local schools. More recently, this role has been offered to our institutions, drawing them into local education partnerships. Currently English universities are under increasing government pressure to take an active role in establishing and managing schools, under the new initiative on secondary academies.

Within our own subject areas, we have traditionally taken an interest in the upper secondary sector, because most of our students come to us from it. And as our subjects have come under pressure to sustain the recruitment of students, we have been increasingly active in building up relationships with schools. We understand that institutions have an interest in encouraging students to study our subjects regardless of their eventual university choices. All of us benefit from maintaining and increasing take up.

This has been developed systematically in the Routes into Languages programme, now entering its third year, managed by LLAS in partnership with CILT, the National Centre for Languages. Thanks to significant funding from HEFCE and DCSF, it has built effective partnerships between universities and schools in each of the nine English regions. The model is now being actively explored by policy makers in the other home countries.

The Routes infrastructure provides the platform for a new programme, called Links into Languages, which will deepen the collaboration between schools and universities. Managed by LLAS in partnership with the Association for Language Learning and the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, Links will establish regional support centres in nine universities across England and will develop a network of participating schools and universities, offering a substantial programme of CPD and support for staff in schools.

At the same time, higher education is being drawn into consultation about the new 14-19 Diploma proposals in England. Colleagues are particularly engaging in detailed discussion of the proposed Languages Diploma, which is likely to incorporate strands of linguistics and area studies. We are also exploring the incorporation of languages in the other Diploma programmes.

Across Europe, similar concerns are being addressed as the effect of the Bologna process is to compel universities to reflect on the learning outcomes and career prospects of their students. In many countries, the expectation is that most students in languages, linguistics or area studies will embark on teaching careers. And in some countries, it is still common for university staff to begin their career teaching in schools. The UK is unusual in the extent to which different sectors of education have been segregated.

As our universities expand and become a more central part of economic and social life, our relations with other sectors of education are likely to become closer and more explicit. Contact between our subject areas and our colleagues in Education departments will no doubt need to be developed further. Similarly, our involvement in adult education and lifelong learning may grow, especially in the area of languages. Not the least of our challenges will be to connect more intensively with the internationalisation agenda, which is a high priority for our universities, but has similar importance for schools.

Undoubtedly we have a great deal to offer schools and, as we are discovering, we also have a great deal to learn from them. Joining up the world of education is not specific to our subject areas, but we will undertake it in ways specific to us. LLAS is committed to offering support where we can to enable the academic community to take full advantage of the new opportunities that are emerging.

Professor Michael Kelly,
Director of the Subject Centre for Languages,
Linguistics and Area Studies

news

Teresa Birks, Kate Borthwick, John Canning, Angela Gallagher Brett and Shoshannah Holdom highlight just some of the activity from the past six months within languages, linguistics and area studies.

Major conference is a great success

In September, a conference on Languages of the Wider World: Valuing Diversity took place at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London. Organised jointly by LLAS and the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning for Languages of the Wider World (LWW-CETL), the conference brought together over 150 teachers, researchers, educational developers and policy makers to discuss practical and strategic issues relating to languages of the wider world in UK higher education.

The first day was very much a practitioner event, with parallel sessions running in the morning and the afternoon on the following themes: curriculum and materials development; outreach and course recognition; staff training and accreditation; translation and interpreting; and provision in a multilingual world. 33 presentations in all were given on this day, together with two rousing plenary speeches by Dr Richard Clément of the University of Ottawa, and Dr Jim Anderson of Goldsmiths College, resulting in a very rich and diverse programme. The second day was a strategic event and featured papers from invited leading

figures. Each speaker offered powerful arguments for increased HE provision of languages of the wider world and against English being accepted as the global language. The day closed with a productive roundtable discussion – involving invited panel members and the whole audience – chaired by Professor Michael Worton.

As a result of the conference, a special issue of the Language Learning Journal, the official journal of the Association for Language Learning (ALL), has been commissioned on languages of the wider world in HE. The call for papers is available here www.llas.ac.uk/news/3089 (deadline 1st February 2009).

Support for teachers of community languages

In December, the National Conference on Mentoring for teachers in both mainstream and complementary school sectors - organised jointly by CILT, the National Centre for Languages and London Metropolitan University - explored good practice in school-based mentoring for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and sought to identify and create opportunities to support ITE in community languages.

This event built on the success of a TDA-funded five-day course on ITE for community language teachers held in June and July. This was organised as part of the Our Languages project, which aims to promote the benefits of multilingualism and support mainstream and supplementary schools working together.

Led by CILT in partnership with the Specialist Schools Academies Trust, the National Resource Centre and the Leicester-focused SDSA, Our Languages also provided training in eight English cities in September and October to support upskilling in pedagogy and hosted workshops on obtaining qualified

teacher status (QTS).

The project has also developed a downloadable "Toolkit for Partnership" with a number of case studies to promote collaboration between mainstream and complementary schools, and a searchable database of schools teaching community languages. For more information go to: www.ourlanguages.org.uk

ICT training opportunities

With support from Capital L, the London Routes into Languages Consortium, Goldsmiths College is offering a series of ICT workshops for teachers of community languages. A one-day workshop for teachers of Panjabi and Urdu will be held on 28th February, followed by workshops for all community language teachers on 25th April and 20th June. For more information contact: **l.cattell@ gold.ac.uk**

As part of the COLT (Community and Lesser Taught Languages) project, Routes into Languages North West launched a series of teacher training courses in the summer term which were specially designed for teachers of Arabic, Mandarin Chinese and Urdu. These included:

• two training days in teaching method-ology at the Institute of Education at Manchester Metropolitan University
• a visit to partner schools to observe MFL teaching in action
• an observation visit by teacher trainers to course participants in their own schools.

Further courses will be provided during 08/09 and will be posted on the Upcoming Events list as soon as they are announced: **www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/ northwest**

The COLT launch, 8th May 2008
Manchester Metropolitan University
Photos: Adrian Hunter

Digital island-hopping

The Faroes project launched the beta version of its EdShare Language Box, on 15th October 2008 at the University of Portsmouth. The Language Box (**http://languagebox. eprints.org**) is an innovative online space for language teachers to store, manage and share their teaching resources, which uses the best-practice principles of Web 2.0 sites - that they are social, interlinked, evolving, flexible, and easy to use. This JISC-funded project is a collaboration between the Learning Societies Lab, Modern Languages and LLAS, at the University of Southampton, and the University of Portsmouth. Feedback from the community is shaping the design of the Language Box – look out for a final version in March 2009.

faroes

LOC online

The LLAS Learning Object Creator (LOC) goes from strength to strength! This simple tool and training package, designed to give teachers a head start in creating their own effective online learning materials is based on a tried-and-tested pedagogical design. Following a number of workshops over the past year, the tool is now in use across the UK, and our fledgling LOC community is rapidly producing excellent online learning materials to add to the LLAS materials bank. The LOC tool and training workshop is currently being put online to become a blended short course, ready for use in April 2009.

New languages strategy for Northern Ireland

A team from the University of Ulster and Queen's University Belfast are about to submit the Northern Ireland Languages Strategy (NILS) to the Department of Education, which commissioned the LLAS - North Ireland partnership to develop the strategy in 2006. The strategy covers all aspects of language learning including modern foreign languages, English as a Foreign Language, British and Irish Sign Languages, Irish, Ulster Scots and languages of immigrant communities. A programme of events in Northern Ireland is also being planned for 2009 including a student study day on globalisation in Jordanstown. For further information see:

www.llas.ac.uk/northernireland

Cross-sector activities in Scotland

A study has been carried out by Dr Hannah Doughty of Scottish CILT on behalf of LLAS, whose aim was to identity and encourage the sharing of good practice in cross-sector collaboration in languages in Scottish schools, universities and FE colleges. Information for the study was obtained from universities, colleges and schools by means of questionnaires, interviews and web-based background research.

This was a small study but as with an earlier report in England (Davis 2006), schools, colleges and universities were found to be engaged in a varied range of activities to promote modern languages. Key findings included:

• The most common aim of cross-sector work is to promote languages.
• Presentations to school pupils and informal exchange of information are the most frequent activities.
• Language and cultural festivals are perceived to be particularly useful activities.
• The most common barriers to working collaboratively across sectors are lack of time and lack of interest in languages.
• Many outreach activities are informal and dependent upon enthusiastic staff.
• There is a role for a dedicated member of staff in colleges and HE institutions to coordinate language outreach activities.
• Further investigation is needed to establish what kind of outreach activities are valued by schools.

The full report is available from the LLAS website:
www.llas.ac.uk/scotland

Swansea compares the Americas

In October 2008, the University of Swansea hosted "Borders and traffic: comparative approaches to teaching the Americas", a one-day conference organised jointly by LLAS, Swansea's Department of American Studies and the Centre for Latin American Studies at Swansea (CLASS). The event was based on the premise that the study of the Americas in UK higher education is often focused either on North America (usually the USA) or Latin America (usually through the study of Spanish).

This partial focus not only leads to a neglect of either North or South America, but often leads to the exclusion of certain geographical areas of the Americas including Canada, Brazil and the Caribbean. Seeking to address this division, the event brought together scholars from across the UK to discuss opportunities for comparative and interdisciplinary teaching across the Americas, and to share current practice, at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

Various themes that facilitate comparative study were explored on the day, including race and ethnicity, cultural traffic across borders, and comparative politics. A full event report is now available:
www.llas.ac.uk/events/archive/3055

Around the UK

Diploma consultation continues

Following initial consultation on the content of the new 14-19 Diploma in Languages during September and October 2008, a draft Line of Learning Statement is being produced for final consultation in January 2009. Six regional consultation events are taking place for the Diploma in Languages alongside the Diplomas in Science and Humanities, all of which will be available from 2011.

The consultations will take place as follows: London (9th February); Leeds (11th February); Newcastle (13th February); and Birmingham (23rd February). If you would like to take part, you can register on the QCA website at: www.qca.org.uk/qca_19767.aspx

Places are limited, but you can register for updates and invitations to other consultation events at: www.qca.org.uk/diplomaphase4

UK

Lost without translation

An online portal which facilitates links between employers and postgraduate translation students was launched on 5th November at an event celebrating the one year anniversary of the Routes into Languages National Network for Translation. The portal is an essential tool for students and course providers on translation masters courses, enabling students to leave university with vital industry experience.

Part of a Graduate Placement Scheme, the portal is the latest development in Gateways into Languages, a government-funded project managed by CILT, aimed at increasing the number of people training to become professional translators and interpreters. It includes a facility allowing employers to advertise their work placements to students, and many more employers are expected to add to this in the coming months. For more information visit: **www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/translation/placement**

E is for…?

Employability, Enterprise and Employer Engagement

LLAS has set up an advisory group for Employability, Enterprise and Employer Engagement (known as the 3Es). The 3Es group will share existing good practice and resources in these areas, as well as advise LLAS staff on developing resources. The group, which is based around institutions in the North of England and Scotland, first met in Sheffield in November 2008. If the group is successful we intend to set up similar advisory groups based around institutions in other parts of the UK.

Routes into Languages

Judi Clark reports on an initiative by the South Consortium of Routes into Languages to encourage uptake of languages beyond GCSE – e-mentoring.

In the light of decreasing student numbers, how do you sustain motivation and encourage language study beyond GCSE? One solution, which is being piloted by the South Consortium of Routes into Languages, is using undergraduate language students as peer-mentors. Targeting over 100 young people, "My Unispace" is an e-mentoring scheme taking place between November 2008 and June 2009, which builds on the success the project experienced last year with a smaller pilot group.

Mentoring is the process by which one person assists another to grow and learn in a safe and supportive relationship. E-mentoring is a term typically used to describe an email-based relationship between a learner and another individual who acts as a mentor. In this scheme, mentors offer mentees linguistic support and language practice, as well as help during exam periods and an insight into university life. Mentors can offer guidance and information on choosing courses or universities and act as a sounding board and an encouraging voice. This element of relationship

building, above and beyond pure linguistic support, not only increases the mentees' confidence as they prepare for exams but also encourages young people – who may have very little prior knowledge about university life – to consider continuing their studies into higher education.

The scheme is open to any language student at the participating universities and they are paired with a mentee according to their language ability. Native speakers who may be studying subjects other than languages at university also act as mentors. While some undergraduates may have qualms about making errors in their communications, the message that you don't have to have perfect language skills to study a language at university. This therefore broadens the horizons of some pupils who may otherwise have felt that they were "no good" at languages. By using a mix of native speakers and undergraduates, the scheme promotes the idea that you can carry on with your language learning beyond secondary education, and offers genuine role models to whom mentees can relate and aspire.

Both mentors and mentees receive training at their school or university on how to use the e-mentoring software and what e-mentoring is all about. Their subsequent e-conversations are filtered by the software, and any inappropriate language or personal information (such

as email addresses or phone numbers) are removed. The coordinator is also able to monitor how frequently participants communicate, and can prompt pairs to get back in touch with each other if everything seems to go quiet. Participants are encouraged to aim for one correspondence per week, with the understanding that this will vary at different stages of the academic year.

Despite being allowed to use English, the vast majority of communication has thus far been in the foreign language. In some schools, mentees are given specific tasks to undertake with their mentors; other schools prefer to have a hands-off approach, whereby mentors and mentees are allowed to develop their own communication without teacher interference. Both approaches have their merits, but arguably some of the more holistic elements of e-mentoring can get lost with too much teacher interference.

All participants in the 2007-2008 scheme felt they had benefited from e-mentoring, and had met their aims of improving fluency, confidence and finding out about university. Teachers also commented that contact with the foreign language in a realistic scenario was very beneficial to students as it emphasised the value of clear and good communication. The word has spread to other schools in the region too, with new schools asking to be included and last year's mentees wishing to continue with

the project in the next academic year.

Mentors have also benefited from the scheme, with undergraduate mentors commenting that, for example: "it has helped me to keep on top of my subject in order to answer my mentee's questions"; "it has made me revise points on grammar and essay structures especially". While the long-term impact of the scheme is yet to be understood, it is clear that all participants have enjoyed and benefited from being involved.

The success of e-mentoring as a way to enthuse learners about languages has spread to other consortia within the Routes network. It is, potentially, a particularly powerful tool for regions with low population densities and large distances between universities and schools, which otherwise can struggle to connect. With the growth of e-learning technologies, e-mentoring is just one more way in which young people are being encouraged to engage with languages.

The e-mentoring project is run by Dr Ian McCall (**idm@soton.ac.uk**) and Kirsten Pantry (**k.pantry@ soton.ac.uk**) as part of the Routes South consortium. For further information about Routes into Languages, and the Routes South consortium, visit **www.routesinto languages.ac.uk/south**

Routes into Language activities taking place around the country

Languages
of the
Wider World

Call for papers

Papers are invited for a forthcoming special issue of the Language Learning Journal, the official journal of the Association for Language Learning (ALL), on Languages of the Wider World: Valuing Diversity.

Languages of the Wider World are defined as less-commonly taught languages that do not have a large presence in UK Higher Education. These include the languages of the Middle East, Africa and Asia, Russian and other Slavonic and East European languages, Hebrew, Yiddish, Dutch and Scandinavian languages. Among these are many minority and community languages in the UK as well as languages considered to be of strategic importance.

We particularly welcome papers that address aspects of the teaching and learning of these languages in terms of (i) practitioner perspectives (e.g. curriculum and materials development, course recognition and accreditation, widening participation, staff training, and translation and interpreting); (ii) policy and other responses to the challenges of linguistic hyperdiversity found in nation states today.

Deadline: 1st February 2009

For more information, www.llas.ac.uk/news/3089

Association *for* Language Learning

The language crisis: HE to the rescue!

Higher education is responsible for producing the next generation of good language teachers but **Dick Hudson** questions whether this is possible without a shake-up of the HE curriculum.

Everyone agrees that school-level language teaching is in crisis. According to the Nuffield Inquiry:

At the moment, by any reliable measure, we are doing badly. [...] There is enthusiasm for languages, but it is patchy. Educational provision is fragmented, achievement poorly measured, continuity not very evident. In the language of our time, there is a lack of joined-up thinking. (2000: 5)

What was found in 2000 is still true eight years later, but in some ways more so because the uptake of languages at both GCSE and A-level is even lower now than it was then. And of course the crisis in secondary education has had serious consequences for higher education, with a third of all the BA courses in French and German that were available in 2000 having closed for lack of students by 2007 (Kelly et al. 2006). The crisis is beyond doubt, and serious.

There is less agreement about the reasons for this sad state of affairs, and about possible solutions. Some people blame the government for making languages optional at GCSE, but this only happened in 2004, long after the crisis had been recognised in other areas such as A-level languages. It was presumably only the rather weak element of compulsion that had concealed the problem at GCSE until 2004. Others blame the insularity and arrogance of British culture, but why did this same culture not have a similar

effect earlier? Figure 1 shows that A-level numbers have declined steadily from a high in 1992. [1] If the present fall is due to British culture, how can we explain the earlier success stories? The reasons matter because the correct remedy must follow from a correct diagnosis of the problem.
An alternative explanation is the poor quality of teaching:

OFSTED's analyses show that the quality of teaching and pupil achievement in Modern Foreign Languages between the ages of 11 and 14 needs to be raised in comparison with other subjects. (DfES 2002: 11)
In the course of consultation we have had the comment from pupils who have dropped languages that they are demanding ("difficult") and lacking in cognitive interest and challenge ("boring"). These were the main reasons. (Dearing and King 2006: 17)

No wonder 14 year olds tend not to choose languages for GCSE.

Why should the learning experience be so poor? Good lessons need two things: a good syllabus and a good teacher. It is true that the syllabus for languages at school has been problematic, but since the 1999 revisions it has been much more enlightened. What about teachers? This is where the spotlight shifts towards HE as the supplier of teachers.

The fact is that the flow of language graduates into school teaching is dwindling. Figure 2 shows an alarming downward trend without any of the signs of bottoming out that are evident in the A-level figures. What is the reason for this decline?

One possibility is that it reflects a decline in the number of language graduates, but there has actually been no such decline. Indeed, the numbers in Figure 3 are remarkably stable in view of the decline in the number of language departments; one wonders to what extent these numbers depend on the exceptional buoyancy of languages in independent schools. We
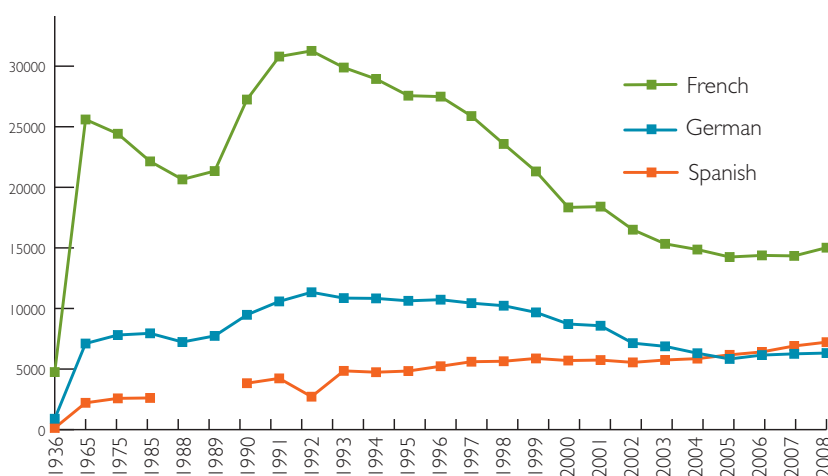

Figure 1: A-level entries for French, German and Spanish 1938 - 2008

[1] The figures in this paper can be found, with their sources, at **www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/dick/ec/stats.htm#fl**

must look for other possible diagnoses and solutions.

My observation is that in languages there is a growing mismatch between what is taught at school and at university, and my suspicion is that this has a great deal to do with teacher recruitment. Language and language structure loom large in the new school syllabus but have low status in many university departments. Although these departments do teach about the target language, the teaching is less than inspiring:

Even as I write, a typical scenario is being played out in major UK universities. Academic staff in the Modern Languages Department are highly rated for their world-class research in literature, and derive a not insubstantial RAE income as a result. They have never been trained as language teachers, are contentedly unaware of the extensive research literature on advanced level language teaching, and resent spending time teaching language: it distracts them from research [...] Yet they will not relinquish it to the trained professional staff in the very competent language centre because they need the income which derives from having all the students' credits registered in the department. [...] they rely on the resources derived from teaching literature to ever fewer and more recalcitrant students, and from teaching language resentfully and perhaps ineffectively. (Coleman 2004: 9-10)

Why would school teaching hold any attractions for an undergraduate in this typical department? In the past it was an opportunity for passing on a love of literature, but literature hardly
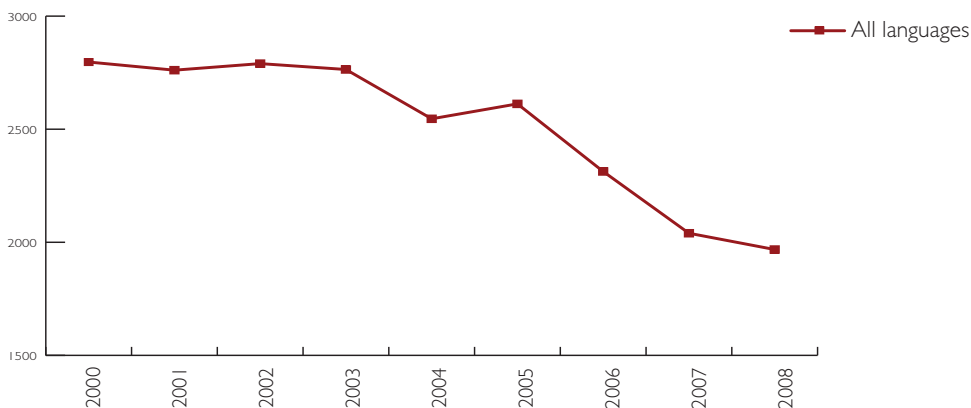
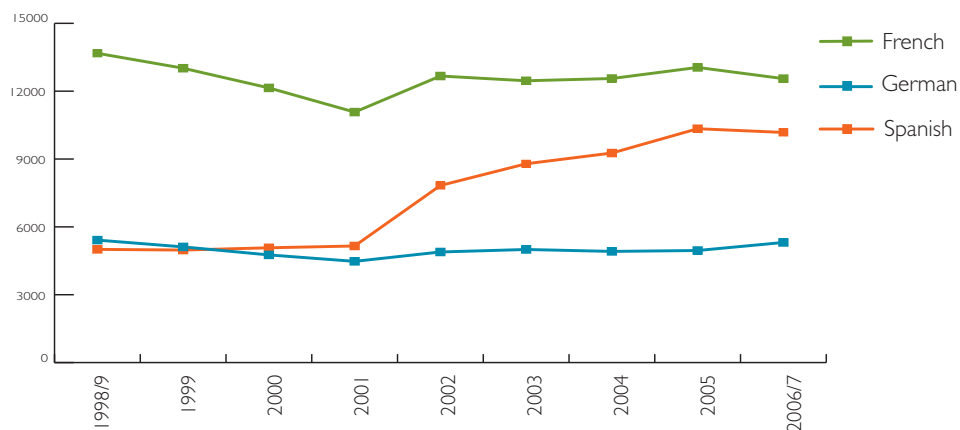Figure 2: Applications for PGCE in modern languages, 2000-2008

Figure 3: Undergraduates on French, German and Spanish programmes, 1998-2006

features at all in school languages.

And the remedy? HE language departments could do a great deal more to encourage their graduates – and especially their high-flying graduates – into school teaching: more courses on the language (whether pronunciation, grammar, history or sociolinguistics); more courses on language learning and teaching; and more awareness and discussion of the school syllabus. HE can't easily change the nation's culture, but it could change its own culture.

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What do you think?
Email us at llas@soton.ac.uk, or continue the discussion on the LLAS forum: www.llas.ac.uk/forum

Professor Dick Hudson is Emeritus Professor of Linguistics at University College London.

Languages for the few?

As the decreasing number of language students continues to cause concern, Hilary Footitt points to a further problem – discrepancies in provision and uptake between state and independent schools.

Over the last few years, widening participation in higher education (HE) has been a key government policy, encouraging a higher proportion of state school pupils to go on to HE, and trying to ensure that young people from more modest backgrounds have an opportunity to study at university. How do languages as a subject stack up in the widening participation debate? By two of the key measures used – proportions of state/non-state school pupils accepted for degrees (Table 1), and socio-economic background of children accepted in HE (Table 2) – it appears not terribly well.

Table 1: Percentage of young entrants to full-time first degree courses from independent schools, 2006/7

Subject	% of entrants from independent schools
Medicine/Dentistry	32.2%
Historical and Philosophical Studies	22%
Languages	19.9%
Social Studies	16.1%
Architecture/Building/Planning	15.2%
Agriculture	13.8%
Physical Sciences	15.1%
Engineering/Technology	12.8%
Mathematical Sciences	12.1%
Business/Administrative	11.1%
Law	10.2%
Subjects allied to Medicine	9.7%
Biological Sciences	9.7%
Combined Subjects	9.2%
Creative Arts/Design	5.8%
Mass Communications/Documentation	5.2%
Computer Science	4.6%
Education	3.8%

(Source: compiled from HESA Table on % of young entrants to full-time first degree courses from state schools)

Table 2: Percentage of participation from lower socio-economic groups (as a % of those with known backgrounds)

Subject	Percentage of participation from lower socio-economic groups (semi-routine/routine)
Medicine	10%
European Languages/Literatures and Related Group	11%
Non-European Languages and Related Group	11%
History and Philosophical studies	13%
Physical Sciences	15%
Architecture. Building and Planning	15%
Linguistics, Classics and Related Group	15%
Social Studies combined with Arts	17%
Combined Arts	19%
Vet. Science, Ag.	19%
Engineering	19%
Biological Sciences	20%
Combined Social Sciences	20%
Combined Sciences	20%
General, other, combined/unknown	20%
Technologies	20%
Law	20%
Sciences combined with Social Sciences or Arts	20%
Social Studies	21%
Business and Admin. Studies	21%
Mass Communications and Doc.	21%
Creative Arts/Design	22%
Mathematical and Comp. Science.	23%
Subjects Allied to medicine	25%
Education	27%

(Source: UCAS 2007)

By both measures (proportion of students from non-maintained schools, and class of parent), languages appear to be riding high at the wrong end of the tables, close to Medicine and Dentistry. Relative to other subjects, languages are more elitist. Can we expect that the National Languages Strategy will help us in universities to redress the situation? In the immediate term at least, the prognosis is not good. To begin with, the numbers of young people taking GCSE languages has fallen sharply, coinciding with the removal of the subject from the compulsory part of the Key Stage 4 curriculum. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) points to a decline in the proportion of pupils taking languages at GCSE from 71% in 1997 to 46% in 2007 (DCSF data, released 18th October 2007), with a suggestion that the decline may now be "bottoming out", or "stabilising". Even in the DCSF's most

"In independent schools, the overwhelming majority of young people take languages. In the state sector, the majority do not."

optimistic scenario however ("Since 2003 a great deal has been achieved") it is clear that, "take-up of languages post14 has remained a challenge" (DCSF Languages website). The former Education Secretary, Estelle Morris, has admitted that removing languages from the compulsory curriculum was premature:

With the benefit of hindsight […] I would have done it differently and delayed the lifting of compulsion until we'd made sure that more resources had been put in and languages had become embedded in primary schools. (The Observer, 3rd August 2008)

The problem, however, is not just that fewer youngsters are opting to do languages. Much more worryingly from our point of view, the whole secondary school map of languages has been redrawn in the past few years. In maintained schools, languages are tending to fade away. In independent schools, they survive robustly. The 2007 "Language Trends Secondary Survey" (conducted by CILT, ALL, and ISMLA) found that whereas languages were reported as compulsory in 83% of independent schools, 77% of state schools responding had made languages optional at Key Stage 4. The difference in the numbers of students taking languages in the two sectors was brought into even sharper focus when schools indicated what proportion of their Year 11s were actually studying languages (Table 3). In independent schools, the overwhelming majority of young people take languages. In the state sector, the majority do not.

Table 3
Proportion of pupils studying languages in Year 11, 2007

	% 2007 Maintained schools	% 2007 Independent schools
All or more than 75%	26%	88%
50% to 75%	18%	6%
25% to 49%	27%	3%
Less than 25%	29%	3%

(Source: Language Trends Secondary Survey, CILT / ALL / ISMLA ,p.6, CILT website)

Two other worrying indicators support this growing class-basis of language learning at secondary level. Firstly, within the maintained sector, there appears to be a correlation between schools that have low proportions of language learners, and those in the lower quartile of educational achievement. Secondly, we find that schools with an average or higher proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals also tend to have low proportions of students doing languages. Basically, you are more likely to be learning a language at school if you are a) in the independent sector, b) not in a low achieving school or c) not in a school which has an average or above average level of social deprivation.

If you feed this in to predictions for the profile of languages in HE, the scenario looks pretty bleak. Of course university language departments can do, and are doing, all they can to widen participation in languages. The excellent Routes into Languages programme is developing imaginative ways for institutions to work together across educational sectors in order to inspire young people from all backgrounds to take up languages. Of course, we can look again, as Dick Hudson has suggested, at whether the overall profile of research in HE is likely to produce the inspired and inspiring school teachers of the future. But – and it's a big but – however much HE tries to do itself, the framework in which language learning is placed nationally, the curriculum Hokey Cokey of "in, out, shake it all about" (in at primary, in for two years at secondary, then out again) is a context which is profoundly unlikely to challenge the growing no-go language areas of many of our most needy schools and social groups. It could all change with the full primary entitlement in 2009/10, but for some time at least, the National Languages Strategy of "Languages for All. Languages for Life" looks depressingly like "languages just for a chosen few".

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Mind the gap
– how the year abroad impacts on graduate employability

Skills gained during residence abroad can greatly improve employability but we need to help students understand and articulate these skills effectively, says Diane Appleton.

As a Careers Adviser working with language students it has always interested me to see how students view their year abroad both before and after they go. Do they see it as just one more year of their degree; a gap year; a way to improve their language skills; or an opportunity to travel, meet new people and do something a bit different? Is their view likely to depend on whether they go abroad to study, work as a language assistant, or take up an internship in a company? And once they have returned from their year abroad, do they recognise the value of that year in terms of their employability apart from having gained a pass in their year abroad module?

If we want students to gain maximum benefit from their time abroad then it is important for them to understand what they can gain before they go, develop a strategy for their development while away, and then reflect on their achievements when they return.

What are these skills?

The QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for languages and related studies has a strong emphasis on the skills gained during the residence abroad element of a degree:

The period of residence abroad makes a significant, and often essential, contribution to the development and enhancement of knowledge, understanding and skills in linguistic and sociocultural studies. It also encourages intercultural awareness and capability, qualities of self-reliance and other generic skills.

- *a critical understanding of a culture and practices other than one's own*
- *an ability to function in another culture*
- *an appreciation of the uniqueness of the other culture(s)*
- *an ability and willingness to engage with other cultures*
- *an ability to appreciate and evaluate critically one's own culture.*

These skills have huge value in a global job market and are valued by employers as much as language skills. However, students tend to overlook cultural awareness in favour of marketing their language proficiency but most employers would not want one without the other.

While the QAA concentrates on academic characteristics and standards, residence abroad naturally develops or enhances many more skills upon which it is important to reflect. Looking at the list of graduate skills required by employers, generated from numerous surveys by the Association of Graduate Recruiters (www.agr.org.uk), we can see how they map onto skills gained during the year abroad, regardless of the activity undertaken.

Below are just some examples.

General graduate skills	Examples of skills gained on year abroad
Self-reliance	Resourceful and independent through: finding a placement; seeking accommodation; making own decisions; gaining confidence.
Team worker	Working with/building relationships with others; sharing accommodation with new people; contributing to seminars.
Good communication	Communicating in a foreign language; listening skills; overcoming language barriers; making presentations in a foreign language.
Flexible and adaptable	Adaptable to different environments; coping with change; adapting to different customs.
Problem solving	Dealing with unexpected crises; living on a budget; planning travel itineraries.
Motivation	Motivation and perseverance when away from home or on own; coping with homesickness or feelings of isolation.
Initiative	Thinking of news ways to do something; making own decisions; finding ways to meet people.
Willingness to learn	Inquisitiveness; learning different strategies for language development; reflecting on experience and personal development.

> " Residence aboard makes a significant, and often essential, contribution to the development of knowledge, understanding and skills in linguistic and sociocultural studies. "

These are in addition to language skills, cultural awareness and any work placement-related skills that students also gain.

Our challenge is to help students understand the skills valued by employers, and how to give evidence of these skills from their year abroad (and of course other areas of their lives). So what may seem to a student to be just part of everyday life and work – finding accommodation; opening a bank account; meeting people from different backgrounds; planning travel; budgeting; keeping motivated; dealing with homesickness; coming up with new ideas on a placement; or planning a creative English lesson – can in fact be evidence of the skills that employers want.

The University of Liverpool approach

At the University of Liverpool I have an excellent partnership with colleagues in the School of Cultures, Languages and Area Studies, and work closely with Dr Pollie Bromilow who is a lecturer in the School with responsibility for employability. This has helped to develop a programme for language students where they learn how the year abroad can fit into their career planning. My role in this programme starts in year 2 with a session entitled "Making your year abroad count", where we look at the skills sought by graduate employers and then examine how these skills are developed during the year abroad. I show the students typical competency-based application form questions from a range of employers to highlight how skills development will have an impact when they compete for jobs as a graduate. I give students a questionnaire with about 70 skills and achievements that they might gain (based on a card-sort exercise that the University of Leeds developed in the early 1990s) and they have to identify and record the top ten skills that they want to achieve. I keep a copy of this and mid-way through their year abroad, I send them a reminder of their personal objectives. There is also an online learning log where students on their year abroad carry out skill audits to help identify strengths, weaknesses and objectives. Students are also encouraged to use our website, **www.liverpoolyearabroad.org.uk**, which is a skills and career planning site for students before, during and after their year abroad. Students can share experiences on this site as a way to help the next cohort. For returning finalists I run a session on how to make the best of their final year and how to apply effectively for jobs and courses, again encouraging them to consider the year abroad in terms of their personal and career development skills.

Marketing the year abroad to employers through CVs and applications

However well students understand how the year abroad has developed skills, communicating the impact and

> **Reflecting on a year abroad experience is not enough, we need to help students translate this into 'application speak'.**

value of their experience to potential employers is essential. Employers are always telling us that they get too many applications from candidates who have not highlighted the relevant areas of their experience. For example, it is very common for careers advisers to see CVs from students who describe a short-term summer job in great detail but will simply have one line about their degree, which took four years to achieve. Even if there is a longer description of the degree, the year abroad is often reduced to one sentence: "spent my third year working as a Language Assistant in Paris''. So, reflecting on a year abroad experience is not enough; we need to help students translate this into "application speak''. An application form or CV should demonstrate to the reader what the applicant has done and what they have to offer because they have done it! I like the STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result) approach to this as it can be used in CVs, application forms

and interviews. This process gives a focused structure to answers or descriptions as it tells the employer what the applicant did (e.g. year abroad in Spain), what their role was (student, assistant or intern), what they were doing, what responsibilities they had and crucially what they achieved and what skills were developed or demonstrated. A simple approach but very effective.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that residence abroad enhances students' skills - whether these are academic, work-related or personal. The HESA Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) surveys over the past few years have shown that language graduates compete very well in the graduate job market and I strongly believe that the year abroad has a major part to play in this. Encouraging students to articulate what they have gained from their particular experiences (whether this is

through learning logs, personal development planning or simply through CVs and application forms) can only have a positive impact on their employability.

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A success story?
A personal take on the value of languages

What do language graduates do? Describing her career to date, Louise Foster explains why her choice of degree was one of the best decisions she ever made.

I believe that when it comes to languages, you either have it or you don't: a natural aptitude, as genetically endowed as perfect pitch or the eye of an artist. If you're born with that skill, studying languages at degree level is a sure-fire route to success. Don't get me wrong, I'm not suggesting it's a walk in the park, but after four years of hard work and my fair share of fun, my degree in Modern Languages has since proven to be worth its weight in gold.

For a lot of undergraduates, thinking about your future career can be stressful, but it can also be very exciting. So, what would be the ideal job? Sealing million pound deals, meeting glamorous people, partying, earning loads of money and driving an Audi TT? Or maybe working from home as a freelance translator, picking and choosing your hours and your jobs? Not for me. A career with communication at its heart, in which you're challenged, stimulated, rewarded and inspired – now that's more like it!

As a linguist, there's no single, set career path to follow but, for me, that was the best position I could have found myself in. The skills that I had as a graduate of French, German and Spanish meant that I could follow almost any dream.

How about journalism? I'd always loved writing and with my languages enhancing my employability, the idea of foreign correspondent for Reuters or the BBC had quite a draw. So I went to Mexico with Teaching and Projects Abroad where I worked as a newspaper and TV journalist in Spanish. Not only was it one of the most amazing life experiences I could ever hope for, it also gave me fantastic insight into the world of work and a whole range of skills that would end up putting me in good stead for my eventual career.

So, I knew I loved writing, I enjoyed working as a journalist, but as a career, would it really live up to all of my expectations? After careful consideration, I realised I wanted more.

And, after all, the world was my oyster…or so everyone kept telling me. So I set my sights high. I wanted a profession that would teach me business skills, allow me to be creative, work in a team, gain management experience, practise and develop my passion for writing and use my languages on a daily basis. Was that really too much to ask?

Then reality hit and trawling through graduate employment websites, I quickly began to doubt that a job offering all or even a few of those things really existed. Was I going to have to lower my expectations? With hindsight I realise that, as a linguist, that's something you rarely have to do.

Three years on, I'm an account manager for an international marketing communications consultancy and, so far, my job has fulfilled all of those apparently unrealistic expectations, and, surprisingly, a lot more. I began as an account executive having been given the job largely based on my flair for writing, language abilities and

> ## "The skills that I had as a languages graduate meant that I could follow almost any dream."

communication skills. Since then, I have had two promotions and now run five accounts, managing four people and am constantly stimulated, challenged and rewarded by the job.

My company, BDB, is a specialist trade and technical consultancy and is highly respected for its business-to-business marketing, particularly in the food industry. As a full service consultancy, BDB handles PR, advertising, media planning, exhibition and event management, branding, web design, direct mail, market research and literature production. Throughout my short career, I have gained experience in all of those fields and now oversee large co-ordinated campaigns for a number of key clients.

I have the opportunity to travel regularly, taking on average eight to ten foreign trips per year. I plan and attend large exhibitions, which I find incredibly rewarding when months of planning and hard work come together. This aspect of the job has also given me great project management experience – a fundamental business skill.

The elements that I enjoy most are the writing and the management experience. I write many different styles of copy on behalf of my clients from press releases, interviews and technical features, to opinion pieces, podcast scripts, adverts, websites and brochure copy. As an account manager, I thrive on the responsibility of ensuring valuable results are delivered to my clients in a creative, innovative, professional and proactive manner.

As a consultant, in essence a specialist in my field, I love being in a position to advise my clients on how best to achieve their communications goals and make the most of their budget. Managing people, although daunting at first can also reap many rewards. When the people who work with me perform well, feel empowered and enjoy what they're doing, I'm happy.

During my year abroad, a lot of European students and graduates that I met not only spoke two or three languages, they also had a degree in law,

business, management or accountancy. In the UK, most linguists leave university with languages "alone". So when I was offered the opportunity to gain a postgraduate diploma in marketing – paid for by my company – I jumped at the chance to enhance my qualifications. The course put the day to day work I do into a wider context and made me understand and appreciate the bigger picture by relating marketing and communications to business success.

So with a few letters after my name, a rewarding, enjoyable, well-paid job with the opportunity to travel, meet interesting people and spread the word about the benefits of studying languages, my decision to opt for a modern languages degree was probably the best I ever made.

Louise Foster is an Account Manager at Barrett Dixon Bell Ltd, **www.bdb.co.uk**, based in Manchester.

What can we see?

London's museums and galleries and the international visitor experience

Paul Robertson describes the development of the Museum and Galleries International Visitor Experience (MGIVE) project and asks what lessons can be learned for knowledge transfer and consultancy work in languages and the humanities.

In 2005 staff from the Department of Modern and Applied Languages at the University of Westminster began a knowledge transfer project to evaluate the experience of international visitors to London's museums and galleries, and discuss the results of their research with marketing and information professionals working in the sector.

Initially funded by WestmARC, the business development unit at the University, the Museums and Galleries and International Visitor Experience (MGIVE) project subsequently received support for a series of workshops from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

Setting the scene

Imagine that you are visiting a museum or gallery in a foreign country, you do not speak the language and the culture is unfamiliar. Your motivations for the visit are uncertain but, for the purposes of this article, we will assume that you are not driven by a pursuit of high culture, that you have no narrowly academic interest in the collection and that you could find, and pay for, other ways to spend the time. We will also assume that you have been exposed to some form of initial promotional literature, such as a paragraph in a guidebook or leaflet from a hotel, which helped you to decide to make the visit.

What happens next will depend partly on your level of linguistic and intercultural competence and partly on that of the institution you are visiting. The chances of you encountering anyone at the entrance who speaks your language will vary according to what that language is and the political dominance of those that speak it. But that initial threshold encounter will leave its mark.

As you begin to move around the institution, any maps or leaflets you pick up may distract rather than orientate. This is not necessarily because they have been drawn badly or designed cheaply; it may just be that you are unfamiliar with the conventions by which the host culture reads maps and other kinds of diagrams. It may even be that you are given a very good map, but are more accustomed to asking for directions in person and find it difficult to use the tools of a different visual culture.

Additionally, you may be given printed material specific to your language or culture, where you will find culturally inadequate translations.

For example, the name of an artist may be phonetically transliterated into the script of your language without clarification that this jumble of strange sounds is, in fact, someone's name. References to history may identify periods or movements in terms of categories that are familiar to the host culture, but these need much greater contextualisation for you because you have a different experience of history.

As you proceed further, you will probably realise that the information on offer, whether in your language or not, is not really provided for you at all. The captions contextualising an artefact may assume knowledge that you do not have or patronise you with already familiar, unnecessary detail, and the instructions intended to help you make the most of your time may violate the politeness conventions to which you are accustomed.

In short, these encounters with the practices and knowledge of the host culture during the visit will affect your overall experience for better or for worse. How you respond will depend very much on how you understand your place in the international arenas of the modern world. Most significant is that your experience could be so diminished by the institution's

assumptions about you that it will compromise your ability to engage with and navigate this linguistically and culturally defined space.

The challenge

Our project began with a simple observation: London's museums and galleries attract a large number of international visitors every year but make very little specific provision for their needs – cultural, educational and practical. In the summer months, international visitors can account for as much as 60% of the audience in some of the capital's cultural institutions, yet the welcome, information and context they receive are often unfocused, uncoordinated and unplanned.

The initially tentative dimensions of the project developed through a series of observational visits to a selection of museums and galleries, which quickly revealed that there was no systematic attempt to differentiate between international visitors as an audience. A rudimentary comparison of information provided for them revealed that attitudes towards international visitors are often shaped by the unspoken assumption that they are no different to their British counterparts, notwithstanding the language barriers they may have to negotiate. Informal discussions with staff in the marketing and educational departments of museums and galleries suggested that there was little understanding of this assumption's significance to their educational and commercial agendas.

The social and institutional context of these observations underlined the commercial applications of further research. Britain's visitor attractions are operating in an increasingly competitive market, and London's museums and galleries are well aware of the need to make Britain what the UK Government has called a

"generous host" and a "cultural inspiration" ahead of the 2012 Olympic Games. Moreover, through the work currently undertaken by their educational departments to engage and address different kinds of domestic audiences, cultural institutions are conceptually well-equipped to differentiate between different kinds of visitors.

The approach

WestmARC, the Business Development office at the University of Westminster, funded a pilot project to look at the information available to non-English speaking visitors to London's museums and galleries. Focus group studies, led by native speakers, were carried out in France, Spain, Germany, Russia, the Arab Gulf States, Hong Kong and mainland China.

The focus group members were asked to imagine themselves as potential visitors to London's museums and galleries. The outcome of each discussion was a redesigned information leaflet or brochure that the group felt would satisfy the needs of visitors from their country or language area. The contrast between

this approach, and that of the museums and galleries who typically conduct exit surveys of all visitors on site in English after their visit, could not have been sharper.

The results of the pilot study clearly showed the importance of being culturally informed when creating information material for visitors. The foreign language leaflets from London's museums and galleries examined by the focus groups were simply not conceived with them in mind. As texts, they transferred the content of an English original into other codes to satisfy the institution's perception of a linguistic need. But they also carried over the cultural norms of an Anglophone audience in terms of what information was included, how it was organised and how a museum and gallery audience should be addressed. In contrast, the leaflets and brochures designed by the members of each focus group had a very different look and feel, with significant variations in what content was deemed relevant for the speakers of different languages and how it was expressed.

A roundtable discussion was organised in November 2006 gathering Heads of Marketing and Communication Departments from six different London museums: Tate Britain, National Gallery, V&A, Westminster Abbey Museum, National Portrait Gallery and the British Museum. All participants were receptive to the findings of the pilot and motivated to improve the quality of their materials. In discussing what might be done, participants agreed that an online toolkit for designing information materials would probably be the most useful product the academic team could provide at that stage.

Following this discussion, a successful bid to the AHRC was made to run three workshops to redesign the museum and gallery partners' leaflets and to establish new principles of best practice. The workshops aimed to provide a readily applicable, accessible and adaptable model for the development of culturally-informed, high value, customised information for international visitors. The process by which this information would be constructed and published was motivated by a desire to convey positive messages and engage in effective forms of intercultural communication that would meet their cultural and linguistic expectations. The workshops were also intended to further the exchange of knowledge, experience and views on the international visitor experience between the two sectors, and to develop and use theoretically informed research and fieldwork in intercultural communication in an effective and widely applicable way.

The process

It was clear from the start that London's museums and galleries were well aware of the need to provide an appropriate experience for international visitors in the increasingly competitive global market, but were not doing this in the most effective way. It also became clear from the workshops that, while museums and galleries had conflicting budgetary priorities and constraints that affected their ability to develop visitor information, little thought had gone into overall strategy and policy. A key finding of the initial discussions was that while some museums and galleries believed they had developed

On working with museums and galleries

Gerda Wielander

In the MGIVE workshops I was paired with the National Gallery to provide Chinese language and culture expertise. While the National Gallery provides sophisticated printed material in several languages for its visitors, the information in Chinese is limited, which has proved to be highly frustrating for Chinese visitors.

As the research developed, it became clear how little knowledge there was about "the Chinese visitor" within the institution. After reviewing the existing material, the Chinese project team made a number of suggestions, and the readiness with which these were taken on board was one of the many positive experiences of working in the role of consultant.

In the humanities, we are used to imparting knowledge and sharing our insights with students and colleagues; the outcome of our work tends to accumulate over months or years and results in either a good degree classification for a student or an academic publication. The much more immediate outcome of this consultancy work was a new and initially almost alarming experience. Not all arguments could be weighed against one another; not all sources could be consulted; and not all references could be made in the few hours the project afforded us. However, this concern soon gave way to genuine appreciation of the respect and trust in our expertise that was extended to us.

We also realised that museums and galleries suffer from the same range of conflicting priorities and agendas that we often face in HE. Budgets and differing priorities of departments not directly involved in the project meant that decisions could not be taken as quickly or even in the form we desired.

That said, the experience left me thinking that museums and universities are natural partners in knowledge transfer activities. In many ways, we speak a common language and we also approach one another's work with equal doses of respect and interest, which is surely a basis for the success of any collaboration.

a global brand, this did not necessarily transfer into other cultural and social arenas.

From the academic perspective, there was a consensus that meeting the needs of an international visitor would involve producing something free of the cultural practices and assumptions present in materials produced for an Anglophone audience. The simplest way to do this would probably be to remove Anglophones from the process of producing them. However, the very different ways in which members of the team worked with their partner institutions quickly revealed that this theoretically pure perspective was unlikely to lead to any change in institutional practice. There were simply too many overlapping institutional interests and agendas for that kind of approach to work.

This pragmatism reflected the concerns of workshop participants from the museums and galleries and derived partly from the conflicting priorities and agendas driving their sector. The ways in which the museums and galleries approached their provision for international visitors varied from the ruthlessly financial to the culturally inspirational. But these approaches were also caught between the educational and marketing agendas of different departments and budgets within particular institutions. Linguistic awareness and levels of intercultural competence varied considerably and, in this respect, the sector's ideas about audience were a useful way of relating the museum and gallery staff to the different disciplinary perspectives of the Department.

Underlying the complexities of developing a shared discourse was a general uncertainty about the workshop outcomes. The idea of the toolkit from the initial roundtable discussion floundered as it was difficult to see how anything more

sophisticated than a long list of dos and don'ts could be delivered in this format. What subsequently emerged was a rather more complex process of discussion, drafting, transfer, testing and review, a process in which both partners had an equal role.

The model (see Fig. 1) raises a host of theoretical and commercial considerations. However, the act of breaking down the process of intercultural communication into a series of smaller and more measured steps did allow the museums' and galleries' assumptions to be properly questioned. It also enabled them to select from, and combine, the different steps in the process to reflect budgetary constraints and judgements of value.

The outcome

As a result of the workshops, a number of museums and galleries are re-evaluating their communication strategies. The National Gallery in particular is producing new literature written with the needs and expectations of international visitors in mind. For its part, the Department is working on how best to adapt the model developed during the workshops to a range of communication requirements that will allow international visitors to make the most of their visit.

The institutional relationships fostered by the project also provide a foundation for the implementation of a more ambitious interpretative programme for cultural attractions. This multilingual material would, it is hoped, extend far beyond the traditional printed guide to the provision of culturally specific resources for a range of international audiences. The project's long-term goal is to package this information in different forms and across different media, allowing international visitors to navigate richer and more relevant journeys

through the museums and galleries.

As a final point, it may be useful to locate the project in terms of two overlapping agendas in higher education: first, the external funding drive to transfer and apply knowledge and generate social impact, which raises questions for languages and the humanities; and second, the internal imperatives of enterprise and sustainability that increasingly drive the business agenda of the modern university are often perceived to compromise traditional academic values. Looked at in these terms, the project illustrates the positive role language departments can play in society simply by integrating the linguistic and cultural expertise of their staff. In so far as it created a market for our product whilst it was still under development, the project also provides a useful model of a process by which academics can translate their ideas into realistic commercial applications.

Further information
More detailed information about the project and participants is available at: **www.westminster.ac.uk/mgive**

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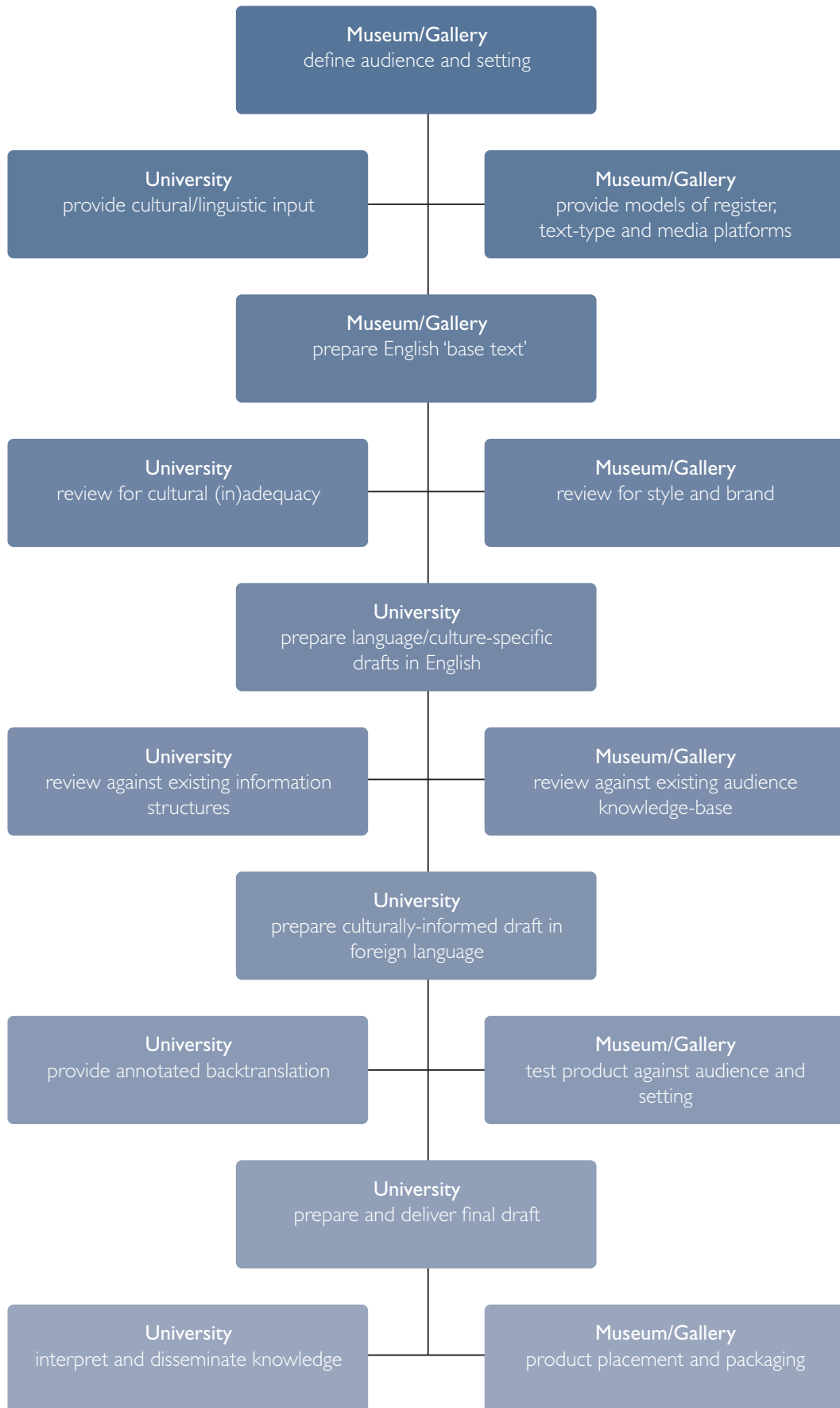|		
	Museum/Gallery define audience and setting	
University provide cultural/linguistic input		**Museum/Gallery** provide models of register, text-type and media platforms
	Museum/Gallery prepare English 'base text'	
University review for cultural (in)adequacy		**Museum/Gallery** review for style and brand
	University prepare language/culture-specific drafts in English	
University review against existing information structures		**Museum/Gallery** review against existing audience knowledge-base
	University prepare culturally-informed draft in foreign language	
University provide annotated backtranslation		**Museum/Gallery** test product against audience and setting
	University prepare and deliver final draft	
University interpret and disseminate knowledge		**Museum/Gallery** product placement and packaging

Fig. 1 Overview of Partnership and Process

Teaching medieval and early-modern culture to students of modern languages

Following two LLAS-funded "workshops to go", **Claire Honess** reflects on ways to sustain an area of modern languages felt to be in decline.

"Modern languages as a discipline has seen a quite dramatic shift towards the 20th century and contemporary periods over the last 15-20 years. It has accelerated in the last five years, possibly with the embedding of cultural studies."
(LLAS Subject Centre 2007: 26)

In the last two decades modern language studies in UK higher education have undergone something of a revolution. Abandoning their traditional, almost exclusive focus on canonical literary texts, modern languages departments have moved to embrace very contemporary texts, popular cultures, history, politics, and more practical topics, such as languages for business. These changes are, to some extent, a direct consequence of those at work in secondary schools, and particularly at A-level, since the early 1980s, which have led to an increased focus on project work and on cultural and area studies at the expense of literature. Many students embarking on degree programmes in modern languages in the 21st century have only patchy experience of reading and studying literary texts and may have had little or no exposure to texts produced before the second half of the twentieth century (Gallagher-Brett 2006).

Lack of exposure to literary texts generally, and to pre-20th century texts in particular, conditions students' module choices at university level, frequently leading them to avoid those modules which are perceived as "difficult" because of their focus on text-based study and/or on the less familiar earlier periods. And these choices can, in turn, lead to a reconfiguring of departmental profiles, with new appointments being made in those areas which prove most popular with students and consequently with fewer medieval and early-modern literary modules on offer to students. There is a clear danger that, in time, a vicious circle may be established: as students are exposed to less and less material from the earlier periods at undergraduate level, fewer and fewer of them choose to go on to study medieval and early-modern topics at postgraduate level, leading to a lack of potential new colleagues with expertise in these areas and therefore to an ever more limited range of modules being offered.

This tendency is borne out by the findings of the review into research in UK modern languages departments carried out in 2007 by the LLAS Subject Centre on behalf of the AHRC. This report confirms that, while high quality research continues to be produced on medieval and early-modern topics, it is being undertaken by a shrinking (and aging) body of researchers, concentrated in a limited number of (mostly pre-1992)
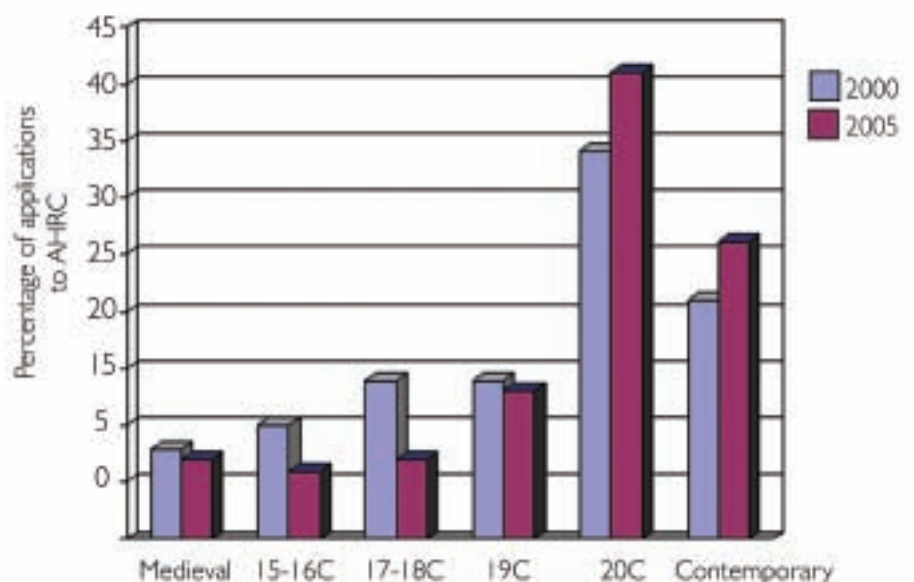

Figure 1: Decline in applications in pre-19th century studies as a percentage of all AHRC applications (M. Treherne, based on statistics in LLAS Subject Centre 2007: 26)

institutions (pp. 26-29). It also provides evidence for the increasing trend towards cultural studies and social-historical research among early-career researchers in particular (p. 23), and for the dramatic shift in applications to the AHRC for research funding towards the modern and contemporary periods.

Figure 1 shows the distribution across the various historical periods of applications for funding received by the AHRC in 2000 and 2005, and shows a decline in the percentage of applications for research in all periods between the Middle Ages and the 19th century, with a particularly sharp fall in applications for projects focusing on the period between the 15th and the 18th centuries.

The challenge, then, for teachers and researchers in modern languages departments working in – and, crucially, enthusiastic about – medieval and early-modern studies, is to find a way to reverse this destructive spiral. We need to transform the vicious circle into a virtuous one, whereby student expectations are managed and

medieval and early-modern modules successfully "sold", thus ensuring that the best graduates are retained as postgraduate researchers in these areas, renewing the research and teaching base, and guaranteeing the survival of a broad and varied modern languages curriculum for the undergraduates of the future.

It was this challenge, and the determination to rise to it, that prompted the Leeds Centre for Dante Studies, together with Abigail Brundin (Department of Italian, University of Cambridge), to organise two workshops, under the auspices of the LLAS Subject Centre's "workshops to go" scheme. The aim was to bring together researchers and teachers in the field to share best practice, identify practical ways to engage and inspire students, and to preserve the integrity and life of the discipline. The first of these workshops took place in Cambridge in May 2008; the second in Leeds in November 2008. Taking as their starting-point the premise that

the study of medieval and early-modern culture is pedagogically important and intellectually valuable, the perspective of the workshops was avowedly positive, not lamenting the changes that have occurred but rather seeking to define the roles and possibilities of medieval and early-modern culture within a renewed and expanded modern languages syllabus.

Some of the ways in which medieval and early-modern studies have already benefited from the most recent developments within the modern languages research context and teaching curriculum are already hinted at in the LLAS report for the AHRC. New ICT applications have boosted aspects of research in the medieval period and have facilitated collaborative research, while new critical approaches – in particular Gender and Postcolonial Studies – have provided new perspectives on old problems (see LLAS Subject Centre 2007: 26-29).

Other key factors in generating interest in medieval and early-modern studies, however, are as

old as the periods under consideration themselves. Work done with focus groups at the University of Leeds has shown that inspiring and passionate teachers create inspired and enthusiastic students, and that students are more than willing to choose apparently "difficult" options if they believe that they will be well taught by highly qualified staff who enjoy communicating and sharing their

with less well-known texts, or with a focus on historical and social issues or the figurative arts. Alternative approaches might allow students not only to study but also to see, touch and explore real artefacts, manuscripts, paintings and so on, using these objects to open students' minds to a new area of study or new way of thinking about the past. Successful examples of this approach from the Department of

"solution" to the recent decline in medieval and early-modern studies in the modern languages context is readily available, nor should we deny the challenges that face those academics working in the earlier periods who would wish to engage and enthuse undergraduates and to train the next generation of researchers. Nonetheless, they do suggest that we should adopt a more positive perspective on the subject than has sometimes been put forward – a perspective that accepts that it is right and proper that the discipline evolve and expand, but which sees an important and continuing role for the study of the earlier periods alongside, and complementary to, modern and contemporary studies as part of a well-rounded modern languages curriculum.

> "Students are more than willing to choose 'difficult' options if they believe they will be well taught by highly qualified staff who enjoy communicating and sharing their specialist knowledge."

specialist knowledge in an accessible way.

Careful thought must also be given to the way in which modules are advertised and promoted to students. 21st century undergraduates are unlikely to choose to study the canon simply because it is canonical. Rather, they need to be presented with enough information about the subjects on offer to understand why certain authors are considered to hold a special importance within a particular national culture and to make informed choices. Given the students' likely previous exposure to the culture of the language being studied at university, this explanatory process should certainly not be seen as a symptom of "dumbing down" but as essential contextualisation, a way of overcoming the lack of knowledge which can make medieval and early-modern topics appear remote (not only in time) and stuffy.

Likewise, imaginative course design can move the study of medieval and early-modern culture away from an exclusive focus on "Great Men". Modules focusing on the earlier period may perhaps combine canonical works

Italian at the University of Leeds include Matthew Treherne's final-year module, "Experiencing Art in the Italian Renaissance" and modules on book history taught by Rhiannon Daniels and Brian Richardson.

Finally, the myth of "relevance" (often used to justify an exclusive focus on practical language skills and contemporary culture with a focus on political and social issues) needs to be both undermined and redefined, emphasising that – with the exception of practical language skills – few elements taught within modern languages degree programmes can be considered strictly vocational. Thus, while on the one hand a focus on the cinema of the 1940s and 1950s is no more "relevant" than the study of the poetry of the 14th century, on the other students can be reassured that by choosing a module on either of these areas they will be gaining both valuable (if non language-specific) transferable intellectual skills and keys to help them understand and appreciate the present-day culture of the country in question.

As the programmes for the workshops suggest, no one-size-fits-all

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Further information
For information on the workshops, see: **www.llas.ac.uk/events/2951**

Presentations from the workshops are available online at: **www.leeds.ac.uk/italian** and **www.llas.ac.uk/events/2951**

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Multimedia authoring in the new humanities: a view from the United States

Multimedia projects are an intriguing alternative to the traditional academic essay, offering new ways in which humanities students can produce knowledge. Matthias Oppermann explains.

As a senior in college, Pablo Judkins created his first multimedia project. For the past three years he had written dozens of research papers on a vast array of subjects, primarily by "reading a chapter from a book and then regurgitating what you just read in your paper" (Coventry and Oppermann 2006). He felt comfortable enough with this strategy, and the good grades he received for his papers indicated that he was beginning to master a means of knowledge production used by expert scholars. Even though he felt strongly about some of the topics, he was careful not to let his own voice or opinion surface in his academic papers.

Instead, he learned how to cleverly "take [his] voice out, to mask it" so it would not interfere with the expert arguments he was summarizing (Coventry and Oppermann 2006).

In spring 2005, Pablo took a class on autobiographical narratives by US Latinas with Professor Rina Benmayor at California State University, Monterey Bay. In this class, students undertook a multimedia-authoring project, combining texts, images, and audio files to produce a short film clip. After creating a storyboard, they produced and showcased these "digital stories" in class, and were then asked to theorise their own multimedia pieces in a traditional paper (Benmayor 2005). After the

process of compressing and re-stating their ideas in the "new" language of the digital story, the final papers that Pablo and his peers produced engaged with discourses of expert knowledge in ways that were quite remarkable, and quite different from usual student writing. Through the creation of digital stories, they had become aware of their own voice and perspective, and were in turn able to argue more effectively. In this article, I want to focus on the potential of these student multimedia projects both to challenge and support the ways in which students traditionally produce knowledge in the humanities classroom. I argue that digital storytelling is not opposed to

academic writing, but makes expert strategies of knowledge production visible to novice learners.

In my own field, American Studies, the traditional essay has been the primary way for teachers to assess their students' learning for quite a long time. It seems ironic that American Studies came into existence due to frustration with "what seemed arbitrary limitations on teaching" (Mechling et al. 1973: 364) in traditional English or History departments, yet course structures and activities for nascent American literature courses were more or less "borrowed" from courses in these disciplines. When professors of English literature began teaching courses in American literature in the United States in the early 20th century, they assigned the same seminar papers they always had, albeit now on American authors. For the past 100 years, essay assignments have remained the mark of expertise in most American Studies classrooms. They have become ritualised to a degree that they feel like a natural form, a stable pedagogy.

In contrast, the disciplinary design of American Studies has changed considerably. Especially since the 1970s, new interdisciplinary programs and curricula like Women's Studies, Gender Studies, African American Studies, Native American Studies, Chicano/a Studies and Postcolonial Studies broadened – or fragmented – the research agenda in the humanities in general and in American Studies in particular. The textual basis for objects of study now reflects the racial, ethnic, gender, and class diversity more adequately. Counter-hegemonic readings of literary texts aim to expose strategies of domination and to give voice to previously marginalised groups and subject positions. However, even after the cultural and visual turn and the

integration of new technologies, the field has remained largely textual. Scholarly research deals predominantly with literary texts, and academic papers are the privileged medium for the distribution of findings. Thus, experts employ a form that seems overtly abstract, formalised, and distant to students who spend their lives

"Digital storytelling has turned many university classrooms in the United States into spaces of creative, critical production."

immersed in digital environments like Facebook and YouTube. The academic essay is the place for experts, not for them.

As a result, many students perceive essay assignments as a dull rearranging of pre-existing bits of expert knowledge. Sharon M. Leon, director of Public Projects at the George Mason University's Center for History and New Media (CHNM), has argued that this "highlights the dramatic breach that opens up between novice learners and experts – the space between regurgitating knowledge created by others and creating original, critical work" (2008: 221). In recent years, digital storytelling has emerged as an alternative medium of knowledge production for students. We are just beginning to get glimpses of the ways in which these multimedia-authoring projects transform their learning experience, but they potentially offer a space for students to bridge the gap that Leon describes.

Digital storytelling has turned many college and university classrooms in the United States into spaces of creative critical production. Topics and learning goals for the respective courses vary greatly, and digital stories exist in a range of genres. At the University of Wisconsin Stout, the

historian Peter Burkholder introduced History Music Video Projects to better engage his students in history classes. Students in James Stevens' and Kevin Leander's Master's level course for pre-service teachers at Vanderbilt University explore facets of their own identity in a "parallel production" approach, composing digital stories

and print texts alongside one another. Under the guidance of Liz Ianotti, ESL students at LaGuardia Community College in New York City produce digital stories on US/Mexico border crossings or Hurricane Katrina to improve their oral and written language skills. A section of American Civilization III, taught by Dean Bernard Cook at Georgetown University since autumn 2004, requires students to produce digital stories resembling short documentary videos about the cultural and social history of the United States from 1890 to 1945. At the same school, graduate students in Michael Coventry's American Popular Culture course produce theoretical video narratives – digital stories that engage with critical theory (Coventry 2006).

In spring 2006, Michael Coventry and I watched hundreds of digital stories, collected storyboards and analysed reflective papers for an online Digital Storytelling Archive we are currently creating. We also interviewed 35 selected students (Pablo was one of them) and staff on three campuses about their experiences with digital storytelling and traditional writing. I want to highlight just two of our findings. First, the editing process for a digital story shows students the importance of

revision in traditional writing. Second, the digital story creates a space where students can engage with theoretical concepts on multiple levels.

For expert academic writers, genuine revision is a process of discovery and clarification. In traditional writing instruction, editing is usually associated with cleaning up spelling mistakes, re-arranging sentence structures, or improving paragraph transitions. Composition research suggests that novice writers often think they are revising when they are in fact merely editing (Bean 2001). Bean suggests "what our students need to understand is that for expert writers, the actual act of writing causes further discovery, development, and clarification of ideas" (29). In this sense, the editing process students go through when they create their digital stories is a genuine process of revision through remediation. By the time they have developed their storyboards, the stories have already gone through multiple drafts: from pre-writing exercises to pitching the idea for the story to a two-page text for the voiceover. In the case of Michael Coventry's class, they even write a 20-page research paper as the basis for their digital story. Yet editing their digital stories marks a moment of clarification and discovery for many of the students we interviewed. In addition, staff described the editing process as an opportunity for students to show and critique one another's work as central to overall learning in the project.

Many digital stories deal with the students' personal experience. Pablo Judkins' three-minute digital story *My Father, My Family* (2005) describes how he was raised by his father while his mother was working her way up the ranks of the medical profession. When his parents separated, the divorce courts described his father as a "jobless bum" because he chose to raise his son as a stay-at-home dad. Building on the work of writer Gloria Anzaldúa, who is best known for her concepts of "borderlands" and "mestizaje" that challenge binary subject positions, Pablo's story explores how socially constructed gender roles are institutionalised through the courts. Through his digital story, Pablo is able to express how theory is not external to, but embedded in, personal experience. No doubt he could have achieved this in a traditional essay. But the digital medium forces him not just to regurgitate but to mobilize the theory on several levels, through voice, visuals and sound. Thus, he translates and expands the concept of "borderlands" into a digital story that speaks to the discourse around male parenting. In other words, he is taking first steps to expert strategies of knowledge production.

Freed from the ritualised formalities of the academic essay, the digital story gives students a space where they can assume a position of personal narrative authority and engage in cultural critique and theoretical conversations. For almost all students we interviewed, the discovery that they actually have a voice and can argue effectively in a digital medium has changed the way they wrote and argued in traditional paper assignments. While we need harder evidence than student self-reporting, potential benefits of an emerging pedagogy for the humanities are clearly beginning to surface.

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Undergraduate English Language: a subject in search of an identity?

Currently enjoying a boom at undergraduate level, English Language is nonetheless difficult to define as a discipline. Judith Baxter investigates.

Mirroring its popularity as a subject at A-level, English Language has become one of the most sought-after degrees at undergraduate level. Within the last ten years, the number of applicants has grown rapidly, perhaps at the expense of more established disciplines such as Linguistics and English Literature. This reflects a surge of interest in studying a subject that helps to prepare students for careers in journalism, speech therapy, advertising, marketing, the business world, teaching, publishing, event management and public relations. But as yet there is little agreement among higher education (HE) teachers of English Language about what constitutes the identity of the subject. What is English Language? What is its relation to more traditional subjects in the field such as Linguistics, Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), and English Literature?

As a BA English Language programme director, I have noted over the years how recruitment to our own programme has exponentially increased. From our first intake of 10 students in 2003, we have expanded to around 60 students in 2008. This is in marked contrast to the demise of Reading's once famous Linguistics programme, which finally said farewell to its last cohort this year. Reading's increase in English Language recruitment reflects national trends. UCAS course overview data (2007) suggest that "courses with applications" have grown by 33% between 2002 and 2006; and numbers of student "total acceptances" have grown by 24% in the same period.

Yet undergraduate English is still a subject without any official recognition. At present, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education does not provide a benchmark statement for English Language, but subsumes aspects of the subject across two other disciplines: Linguistics and English (Literature). The QAA has recently carried out a consultation with the subject community in order to revise its benchmark statement for Linguistics. No radical amendments have emerged in terms of broadening the scope of Linguistics to reflect the wider and more applied interests of English Language. The subsidiary and provisional character of English Language is also reflected in the subject's current allegiance to Higher Education Academy Subject Centres for English and Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies (LLAS). It follows that this rapidly growing subject has no official identity, and there is a considerable diversity in terms of what the subject "means".

The LLAS study

In the absence of official guidelines, what do we understand by English Language? As part of our quest to design an English Language programme at Reading to meet the needs of our rapidly increasing undergraduate cohort, Denise Santos and I undertook a small-scale research study sponsored by LLAS (Baxter and Santos 2008).

Our aim was to get a sense of the subject's identity in terms of its core elements, and its relationships with other disciplines. We identified 49 institutions nationwide that provided single honours English Language, but chose not to include the considerable number of combined courses as it has been estimated that there are at least 692 of these (Goddard and Beard 2007). Our research, based mainly on websites and printed literature publicising English Language programmes, produced some

> "The study of English language is considered highly relevant to real life today."

interesting insights and left a few further questions unanswered.

Insights

First, we can glean some understanding of why students choose to do English Language from the rationales provided by different UK programmes. While the reasons vary, the common theme seems to be that English Language is highly relevant to real life today. Thus, English Language is considered a good subject to study by HEIs around the UK because:

- language is a defining human trait that sets people apart from animals;
- knowledge about language in social contexts can give people power over their lives;
- students can become highly effective communicators;
- they can learn how language works as a structure and therefore manipulate it;

- they can learn how their identities are shaped by the way the English language varies historically, geographically and socially;
- they can study how the global dominance of English will impinge upon their own and other people's lives, today and in the future.

Second, it was no real surprise to learn that English Language is a highly interdisciplinary subject area. For at least 22 of the 49 programmes reviewed, English Language retains a strong relationship with the field of Linguistics, often because Linguistics departments have evolved their provision in order to teach the new English Language degrees. At Aberdeen, for example, English Language is conceptualised as the subject area, but Linguistics is the theoretical tool by which the subject is studied:

Language is at the heart of human interaction. Linguistics teaches us how to analyse, discuss and model this singularly human attribute. In studying Linguistics you will learn to understand yourself and human societies more fully (*www.abdn.ac.uk/prospectus/ ugrad/study/subject.php?code= language_linguistics&prog=arts*).

For at least a further 11 programmes, English Language is closely associated with English Literature. In the case of Nottingham, English Language is part of a more integrated programme entitled English Studies. Here, students are introduced to "a range of disciplines, including language, literature, medieval studies

and drama", which are perceived as the four key components of the degree programme (**www.nottingham. ac.uk/ugstudy/course.php?inc=course &code=000600**).

However, there are only four cases (of the 49) where single degrees in English Language are also associated with TESOL. Bedfordshire, for example, describes its programmes as suitable for "native and non-native speakers of English", its classes as "normally multi-national", and suggests to the potential applicant that "if you see your future in language teaching, we have a dedicated programme for you" (**www.beds.ac.uk/courses/bysubject/la ncom/ba-englanstu**). However, the association of "English Language" with "English to speakers of other languages" seems to be an exception, and we would thus argue that the discipline is primarily conceptualised in terms of the first language rather than the second language experience. Certainly at Reading we attract very few speakers of English as a second language on our programme, and we are very careful to explain in publicity literature that the degree is not primarily concerned with improving skills in the use of English or the teaching of English, even though the former is an important underlying objective, and modules in ELT related topics are provided for the latter.

While we were unable to identify any kind of common core across English Language programmes, it seems that there is a shared understanding of the various
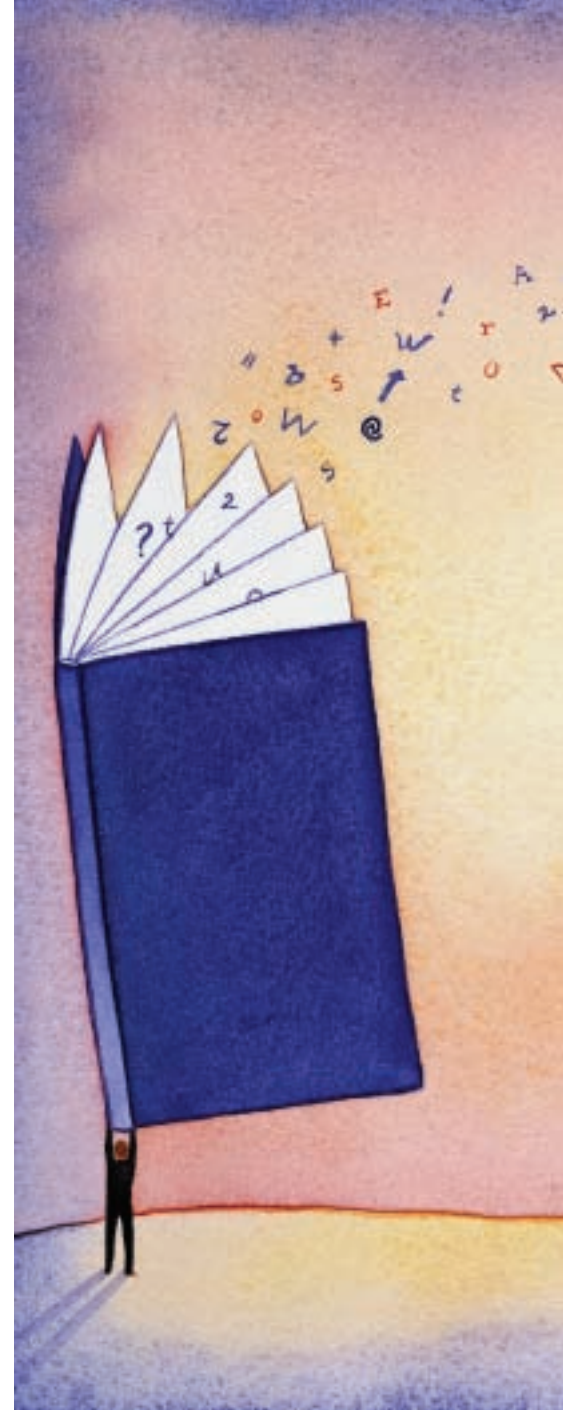
components that might make up an English Language degree, even if there are different emphases in terms of levels of knowledge, understanding and skill. These comprise:

- *Descriptive linguistics*: e.g. phonetics; phonology; grammar; syntax; lexis; semantics; morphology.
- *Historical linguistics*: e.g. the history of the English Language in the British Isles; the globalisation of English.
- *Sociolinguistics*: e.g. language variation and change; dialectology; world Englishes; languages in contact; language planning and policy; intercultural communication;

"Given the interdisciplinary nature of English Language, this rapidly evolving discipline remains a site of contestation."

language and gender.
- *Real world applications*: e.g. information technology; the media; workplace communication; education; interpersonal and family; play; public institutions; clinical settings; forensics.
- *Psycholinguistics*: e.g. language and the mind; language and meaning; cognitive linguistics.
- *Discourse analysis*: e.g. theories of spoken and written discourse; paralinguistics.
- *First and second language acquisition*: e.g. child language acquisition and development; theories of TESOL.

- *Independent research inquiry*: research methods; linguistic ethnography; dissertation.

Further questions

Is it possible to characterise English Language easily to a prospective student? The short answer is no. Given the interdisciplinary nature of English Language, this rapidly evolving discipline remains a site of contestation, with different versions of the subject competing for ascendancy, sometimes within the scope of a single programme. It seems that diverse theoretical paradigms inform English Language; for example, Linguistic Science traditionally adopts more deductive, positivist, empiricist approaches to research inquiry and teaching methods, whereas English Literature and media-related areas offer more inductive, hermeneutic, interpretivist and social constructionist approaches. This implies that students' approach to extended research inquiry is likely to vary considerably according to the theoretical leaning of staff or a department.

How much does it matter that English Language does not have an official identity? It is currently the case that stakeholders (staff, students, parents and examiners) have few reference points in order to make comparisons and evaluations of English Language degree programmes. On the one hand, the multiple versions of English Language across the UK are of potential benefit to students since with careful guidance, they are able to choose a programme that engages

their primary interests and skills. On the other hand, the lack of a clearly articulated set of benchmark statements for English Language means that stakeholders will struggle to engage in principled planning and decision-making.

Later this year, LLAS and the University of Reading plan to hold a workshop for HE teachers of English Language to discuss some of these critical matters. Currently our plan is to consider the scope of the subject's identity, and to discuss whether or not it makes sense to put a proposal to QAA to formalise our discipline. We also hope to offer a practice-sharing seminar in the afternoon. We look forward to meeting you there to take the conversation forward!

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Employability and studying in the UK:
an interview with international students

At the LLAS "Employability and professional learning" event in April 2008, students Nicola Molitor and Stephen Song Lu took part in a presentation entitled "Employability - what does it mean for us? The view of the international student". Here, Shoshannah Holdom speaks to them both about their experience of studying in the UK, their thoughts on employability, and their future plans.

Nicola has now completed an MSc in International Business and Management in the UK and is currently home in Germany looking for her first job. She took her undergraduate degree in International Business in the Netherlands: "as English is the international language of business, I wanted to do a course that was taught in English and this is what is offered in the Netherlands," she says. Nicola also took Dutch language classes during her degree – "it's important to know the language of the country you're living in, even just for simple things like shopping" – and spent one semester in Madrid, where she also took Spanish classes. She then spent one year between her undergraduate and postgraduate degrees on work placements for three different companies in Germany and London, which enabled her to experience diverse aspects of the business world.

Stephen is from Shanghai and took his undergraduate degree in Tourism in China: "tourism is a very popular course in China as the industry is booming," he says. When I spoke to Stephen, he was completing the dissertation for his MSc in International Hospitality and Tourism Management. Stephen arrived in the UK for the first time just before he was due to start his course. He is currently working for a telemarketing company in Sheffield, having worked for two years in China as a hotel sales executive.

Why did you choose to study for a Master's in the UK, and how did you choose your institution?

NM: Studying for an MSc prepares you for work in the future. And many multinational companies offer trainee programmes but you must already have an MSc to do them. And for me, it was important to do a course in English in a country where English is the mother tongue. The UK has a good reputation academically, and it's still very affordable compared to somewhere like the US.

I looked at many courses in the UK and emailed different places for more information. Then, the course leader from one particular university called me back to talk to me about the course and that was my decision made.

SL: It was my parents who had ideas about me studying abroad and I had several options. The first was to study in Singapore as it's an Asian country and the tuition fees are less than in Europe. But my dad thought it was important for me to study western culture so we started to think about Holland and England. There were two things that I needed to consider. The first was to study in an English-speaking environment – for me, the most important thing was to learn the language. Secondly, I thought about the quality of education. I got a lot of information and learnt a lot about studying in these two countries. Then in 2006 I went to the China International Education Exhibition and met representatives from universities there. I had studied tourism at university and wanted to continue with this, and I found out that one university offered internships as part of the degree. This seemed really good and actually, as a result, I got nine job offers from different hotels this year. And I knew that the quality of education was good in the UK so that's why I decided to come.

"Studying here is really flexible, creative and independent."

Have your experiences of studying in the UK matched your expectations? Have there been any surprises?

NM: I expected it would be tough coming from a different country and postgraduate work is so different to undergraduate work, in particular you learn how to apply theory. I was also surprised at the number of foreign students on my course. There was only one British student! This was not what I expected at all. I'd come to the UK to improve my English so it was almost disappointing to find that all my colleagues were not native speakers. But in the end this worked out really well. It gave me the opportunity to learn about different cultures and practices, especially how people from different cultures act in a business context. I learnt even simple things like knowing how to greet people. This was very interesting, particularly for working in international business.

SL: Chinese students are given talks about British culture from people in international development departments so I had some idea of what it would be like. I think studying here is really flexible, creative and independent - that's cool! This is the way you can really learn. The course was very good and we learned a lot.

Education in the UK makes you do the research. You have to find the knowledge by yourself; you're not given the knowledge. It's not like China. The tutors in China are very good but they give you the knowledge. They say things like, "this is the theory, please remember it" but you can't always just remember it! In the UK, you find out as much as you can on your own and I think this is the best way to understand. At first, I thought that the tutors didn't care because they don't always check your work. But then I realised that they give you the way to learn knowledge, and I liked that. The tutors have been very kind.

Most students on my course were Chinese but some were from India as well and there was one student from the UK. To be honest, I didn't want to study with so many Chinese students. It's very easy for us to just speak to each other in Chinese and stay together but that's not the reason I came to the UK. I've lived with English students in student accommodation. Some don't always want to talk to you but others are very patient and listen. And you need to try. You can't just stay at home all the time and only speak Chinese. But I think English people do most of their talking in the pub, with a

pint. People keep saying to me "Hi Stephen, come to the pub, have a pint!" but then they will sleep all day!

What have you enjoyed about studying in the UK, and what have been some of the challenges?

NM: They teach in a very distant way in the Netherlands but studying in the UK feels really personal. I wasn't used to calling tutors by their first name but when I got used to it, I liked it. It makes you feel comfortable. I enjoyed the way my course was taught. We learned to apply theory and discussed cases thoroughly rather than just learn theory by heart.

The challenges have been mainly with things like the banking and medical sector, which are different from what I'm used to. For example, I already had a bank account from when I worked in London but changing my address was so difficult that I never received a bank statement! And a money transfer got lost so I couldn't pay my tuition fees. There seems to be a lot of bureaucracy.

SL: Studying has just been one part of my life here. I've done a lot of work organising activities for international students and I'm Vice President of the Chinese Students Scholars Society. I've

made a lot of friends and learned how to work with English people. I organised a big party for the Lunar Chinese New Year at Sheffield City Hall, which was a very interesting experience. We sold about 700 or 800 tickets!

I think it's important to learn how to manage your time. Studying comes first – I always finish my studying before I do extra activities. You sometimes have to squeeze your time though.

The language barrier is a challenge for all international students and you sometimes have misunderstandings. I know some students are afraid of speaking because they think people will misunderstand them, but you have to try. I would like to improve my English but people think it's rude to correct you when you're speaking. But I would like to be corrected!

Is employability an important issue for you? What do you understand by "employability"? What do you think are the employability skills you've gained from your course?

NM: I'd always thought I wanted to work hard and get a good job but I don't think I knew what "employability" meant. Before the presentation last April I wasn't sure what to say, but actually preparing for it made me understand employability more.

I perceive employability as my skills and capabilities to do a particular job, like team work. Being able to work in a team was really important in my course. You had to get used to dealing with different people. There are some who don't participate and others who just dominate. And people from different cultures have different approaches to discussions and different points of view. You have to learn how to work with all of them. From my course, I have also learned about

myself, which has helped me to explore and make better use of my personal skills.

SL: Before I came to the UK, I thought "employability" just meant "a job". At university in China, they allocate a job for each student. You get a guaranteed job; even if it's not very interesting, at least it's a job. At university here, we learned about opportunities for jobs; we weren't given a job itself. So, I've had a lot of practice at interviews, for example. I now think that "employability" is the "ability to get a job" and then to stay in that job. Employability is more and more important, particularly in the current economic climate.

One of my main skills is that I've learned how to present myself to employers, which is very important. I had a long interview for Peninsular Hotels where we visited a two-storey building. Then we were put into groups and had five hours to make a plan to turn the building into a Peninsular Hotel. We had to work as a group and then present our ideas. I passed this interview but everyone else in my group went home. Maybe it was because I insisted on my idea. I argued against the criticisms because I thought my idea was good. I learned this skill from my course and from English people too.

Do you think you need further training or are there more skills you think you need to acquire?

NM: Training never stops! I don't think you can finish your undergraduate degree and say, "OK, now I have employability skills!" This just isn't going to happen. You always continue learning – it's a process rather than a fixed state.

SL: In my new job, I have to set myself aspirations. I need to set efficient work goals, develop plans for projects,

identify and analyse problems, and know how to respond to these. These are all new skills that I'll learn in my job.

Tell me a little about your future plans.

NM: I'm looking for a job but it must fit my needs and capabilities. I'm open to the kind of company I work for. I wouldn't mind going abroad again but I think I would like to find a job in Germany first. I want to take my time and find the right job, not the first one that comes along. Some of my friends have done that and now they're not very happy. But I would like a job soon. I'm 24, and while it's nice to be home near my family and friends, I'm ready to start work now, live in my own place and be independent.

SL: I'm not feeling ready yet to develop my career in hospitality so I'm taking a break from it for now. I'm going to take a year maybe to figure out what I want to do. It's been a tough decision to make and I had to turn down those nine job offers, but it's what I want to do. My parents and friends didn't understand at first but now I've got a job in the UK, they're happier. I'm the only Chinese person in the company; everyone else is English. I'm proud of this!

I like my job – it's challenging work – but if I realise I've learned everything I can here I think I'll look for something new. After maybe three months I'll ask for more responsibility and challenges. I've had a good start with this job; it's great to work with English people. I would like to stay in the UK for a while, maybe two years, and then think about doing another Master's course.

Academic Writing and Plagiarism: A Linguistic Analysis

Review by Elizabeth Hauge

This thoughtful and informative book on academic writing and plagiarism will be of interest to all who teach or supervise students in Higher Education. The author makes clear from the beginning that her purpose is "to examine plagiarism as a linguistic phenomenon, rather than as a violation of rules or ethical principles", and notes that while native speaker students' writing can reveal plagiarism, she is concerned here with the writing of international students.

Pecorari makes the distinction between what she calls "prototypical plagiarism" (p.4), which involves the intention to deceive, and "patchwriting", a term coined by Howard (1995) to imply no intention to deceive. She notes that "patchwriting" – or recycling sections of source texts patched together with the student's own words – may occur for a number of reasons. Students may have poor reading skills and not fully understand the source texts; they may have poor writing skills, perhaps because they have never had to write at any length in English; or they may have had little or no instruction or practice in citation skills or in academic writing more generally.

One chapter examines the citation skills that novice student writers need to learn and Pecorari considers the best way to learn these. This could include explicit teaching with time for practice, and learning by doing (as many postgraduate research students have to do when researching and writing their dissertations or theses). Learning by doing, however, requires a good working relationship, good communication and a degree of collaboration between students and supervisors. It also relies on students' clear understanding of how sources have been cited in other texts.

The book then provides an account of Pecorari's doctoral research in which she scrutinised the use of sources in the writing of seventeen international postgraduate students: nine taught postgraduate from a range of disciplines and eight PhD students. Pecorari identifies three factors present in plagiarised texts: repetition of sentences or ideas from a source text; repetition to such an extent that coincidence would not be possible; and lack of source text citation. Although Pecorari found many instances where all three factors were present, on interviewing some of the Master's students and their supervisors she concluded that these were examples of patchworking rather than deliberate plagiarism. The students had some understanding of plagiarism but did not feel that what they had done could be considered as such. They had dedicated many hours to writing and were concerned to avoid any charge of plagiarism. However, some of them had copied exact extracts from their supervisors' published work, and more or less exactly from other sources. The supervisors too, even if they had concerns about the quality of the research, did not express concerns that their students may have plagiarised the published work of others. What is more, when the plagiarism was pointed out to them,

Diane Pecorari
London: Continuum
ISBN: 978-08264-9166-4 (hbk)

only some were concerned – there was clearly a lack of consensus about acceptable practice.

Pecorari concludes that students need to be taught to write from sources, and that there needs to be "a conversation in the academy and its disciplines about what academic writers are really expected to do – and why" (p.140). She expresses her concern that that those students whose work she studied could move on to work in HE, continue to write in the way to which they had become accustomed (and which had never been criticised), and at some point be accused of plagiarism. The possibility that their academic careers could thus be jeopardised is a sombre thought.

This book should be read by academics and EAP practitioners alike. The academics should engage in the "conversation", reach a consensus on how to proceed, and address the problem with the support of experienced EAP practitioners in their university language centres. Until this is done, this problem will not go away.

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Dr Elizabeth Hauge is Deputy Director of the Centre for Applied Language Research at the University of Southampton.

The Linguists

An Ironbound Films presentation sponsored by the National Science Foundation, Nonprofit Media Group. Produced and directed by Seth Kramer, Daniel A. Miller, Jeremy Newberger. Written by Miller. With Gregory Anderson, David Harrison.

Review by **Peter K. Austin**

The Linguists, produced by Ironbound Films and first screened at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival, is, as the title suggests, about linguists. Not the type who speak lots of languages, but the type who are interested in recording and analysing languages, often those spoken in distant and exotic locations. It is this second type of linguist who is concerned with the loss of the world's linguistic diversity and the fact that over half of the 7,000 languages currently spoken on earth are under threat. Smaller minority languages are under pressure around the globe from larger, more economically and politically powerful tongues as speakers shift from their heritage languages to those of their stronger neighbours. Languages thus become endangered as children no longer learn them, and after a period of time they become moribund – spoken only by a few old people – and then extinct. This process has been going on for some time but has speeded up immensely over the past 60 years as a result of the post-war development of independent nation states in former colonies, often with a one-nation one-language ideology. More recently, the shift has intensified with increasing urbanisation and the globalisation of trade, commerce and communications.

The film follows two young American researchers, David Harrison and Gregory Anderson, as they travel to Siberia, India, Arizona and Peru in search of speakers of threatened and undocumented languages. The first half of the film sets a frenetic pace, with a kind of "Indiana Jones" feel, as the pair rush to central Siberia in search of speakers of the Chulym language, a Turkic tongue recorded by Russian scholars in the 1950s but now virtually lost. In Siberia, we sense David and Greg's frustration as the only Chulym speakers they can locate are very old and either hard of hearing or unable to concentrate on the task of passing on their knowledge. Suddenly, after several fruitless attempts to interview potential language speakers, they realise that their middle-aged driver is in fact a fluent Chulym speaker who learnt it from his monolingual grandmother. Something of the serendipity of fieldwork in remote locations is conveyed in this vignette. The toughness of the local conditions also comes across clearly as we see insects of various shapes and sizes crawling across the computer screen as David and Greg record videos of stories and conversations and analyse them electronically. These are typically the kinds of fieldwork conditions faced by linguistic researchers in their drive to document disappearing languages.

The film then moves to India where our heroes visit a boarding school for "tribal" children, sent from remote villages by their parents to learn

English and economically relevant skills (such as sewing) in the hope that they will have a better future in the wider world. The children's linguistic skills and abilities to manage in several languages (their own tongue, Hindi and English at least) are not recognised by the school teachers, and when David and Greg travel to the children's home village they glimpse the rich musical and cultural traditions that will be lost as the language and its setting disappear.
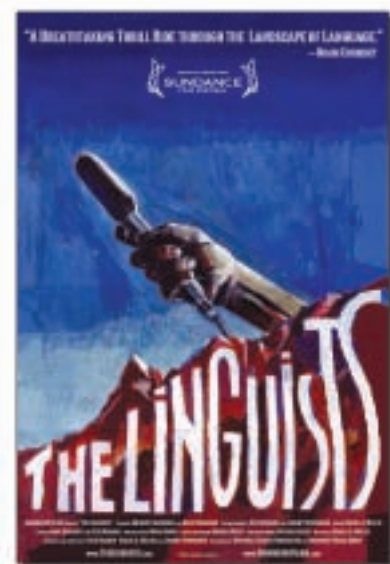
In Arizona we meet one of the last speakers of Hualapai, who learnt the language growing up with his grandmother. Keen to keep his knowledge alive, he speaks Hualapai to himself and listens to cassettes of speakers recorded decades ago while driving a road grader for work. I found this one of the most touching parts of the film – the plight of the speaker of an endangered language, who lives with memories of the past but is unable to share these with anyone in his own language.

The spectacular scenery of the Peruvian Andes features in the film sequence on the Kallawaya language, kept alive by hereditary medicine men who pass their medicinal knowledge and language from father to son. Kallawaya is only used in healing rituals, one of which is presented in the film. In contrast to this we see David and Greg visiting a local radio station run by indigenous people where modernity in the form of rap and rock music is the order of the day. Again, the loss of language and cultural knowledge in the face of the global spread of such things as popular music is made clear to the audience.

The Linguists is a nicely presented film that gives an overview of diminishing linguistic diversity, the context of such loss, and its effect on individuals and groups. It will be of interest to a range of audiences, and the "boys' own adventure" style of some parts is sure to appeal to teenagers and young adults. There is a mix of comedy and pathos (at one point Greg becomes very sick from eating some local food) and the dynamic between the two central characters is appealing. I do, however, have some reservations about the film and they centre on the somewhat heroic way the two linguists are presented. An earlier version of the film was entitled The Last Speakers and focused more on the perspectives of the language communities. However, following feedback from broadcasters, the film was edited to focus more on the linguists as the central characters, with the effect that the actual people whose languages and cultures are under threat are somewhat sidelined. I should also point out that David and Greg's "short and sharp" style of fieldwork is not typical of most linguists researching endangered languages, who spend months and years living with communities, getting to know the people and languages intimately, and supporting the communities in their drive to address language loss. This is frequently through revitalisation efforts such as developing writing systems for unwritten languages, and producing school materials, dictionaries and reference books to help support and maintain threatened tongues. The film, unfortunately, tells us little of this important aspect of the collaborative work of linguists and native speakers around the globe.

The Linguists (2008)
Ironbound Films Inc.
http://thelinguists.com
Running time: 65 minutes

Professor Peter K. Austin is Marit Rausing Chair in Field Linguistics and Director of the Endangered Languages Academic Programme at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

700 words on...
e-learning

In the spirit of both "700 reasons for studying languages" (www.llas.ac.uk/700reasons) and "International Reflections" (www.leedsmet.ac.uk/internat/reflects - daily articles exactly 200 words in length), we invited Gráinne Conole to write 700 words on e-learning.

I have been involved with e-learning since the early nineties when, as a Chemistry lecturer, I created interactive computer-aided tutorials for my students and dabbled with the early Internet. Before I knew it, I was hooked. It was great to get positive feedback from the students on how these technologies were helping their studies, but these technologies also raised a lot of issues in the university relating to, for example, technical infrastructure, making lecture materials freely available on the Web, and the ethical implications of writing students' feedback evaluation forms on the Web. I became increasingly interested in looking at e-learning not just from a teaching perspective, but as an area of research – developing research methodologies and evaluation techniques to better understand how students might use technologies, and how the design and use of technology-mediated activities could be improved.

So here I am more than fifteen years on very much immersed in e-learning research, but those early aspirations are still with me. I believe a close relationship between e-learning research, development activities and actual practice is imperative. I find it valuable to be both a researcher and a teacher and to see the impact of technologies within my own context. Perhaps it is not surprising that four of my current areas of research relate to these areas: understanding better how teachers design e-learning activities;[1] understanding students' use and experience of technologies;[2] questions about methodologies in e-learning research;[3] and issues of impact on individuals and organisational structures and policies.

What fascinates me about e-learning is that it seems to be dominated by a series of 'crazes'. In the eighties there was an obsession with multimedia content. The nineties saw the arrival of the Internet, email replaced the good old memo, and marketing departments became obsessed with creating structured websites adhering to the institutional brand. The next key fad was the emergence of Virtual Learning Environments. I remember seeing an early prototype of WebCT and being excited about its potential to allow me as a teacher to have hands-on control of a digital learning environment for my students. Recent years have seen the dramatic impact of Web 2.0 technologies: social networking and the ability to communicate and connect in multifaceted

[1] This is through the work we are doing as part of the OU Learning Design Initiative – http://ouldi.open.ac.uk
[2] For a recent article in this area see Conole, G., De Laat, M., Dillon, T. and Darby, J. (2008) Disruptive technologies, pedagogical innovation: What's new? Findings from an in-depth study of students' use and perception of technology. *Computers and Education*. 50 (2), 511-524. And join the ELESIG special interest group, http://elesig.ning.com if you are interested in this area.
[3] We have a masters module on this: H809 – 'Practice-based research in educational technology', www3.open.ac.uk/courses/bin/p12.dll?C01H809

"A close relationship between e-learning research, development activities and actual practice is imperative."

ways. This has created a tension between institutionally-owned technical infrastructures and student controlled use of freely available tools. Micro-blogging services seem to have taken off recently; in contrast, some are arguing that MySpace and Facebook are old hat and email is for 'oldies'. Then there is Second Life…

It's interesting within all this to reflect on my own recent experience of being a student and using technologies. I have just completed an excellent beginners' Spanish course with the Open University. It's been great to have paper-based coursebooks, but I also wanted all the text and audio digitally to use on my computer and iPod. Unable to access the audio-conferencing systems, I supplemented the course with my own ways of learning – going to Spain in the summer, attending a summer school (to make the much needed contact with other students), and getting peer support via Twitter and other social networking channels. My Spanish learning experience has been a combination of the 'official' course and my own personalised learning environment. Ask any student and they will give you a similar story – of how they appropriate technologies to create an individual,

personalised learning environment. Understanding this is one of the keys to harnessing new technologies.

So what of the future? None of us can deny that technologies are having a dramatic impact on educational institutions and this impact is likely to continue and increase. It raises huge implications for organisations - for strategy and policy, for organisational systems and processes, for individual roles and identities. We can't predict future directions, but we can at least prepare ourselves for a changing and dynamic context. It's an exciting time to be working in education; the possibilities of new technologies are truly amazing. However, how we manage this change process, how we design courses to take best effect of the potential of technologies is key. As such I think e-learning research has a profound role to play in helping us better understand the changes, and better harness the technologies.

Gráinne Conole is Professor of e-Learning at the Open University.
www.e4innovation.com
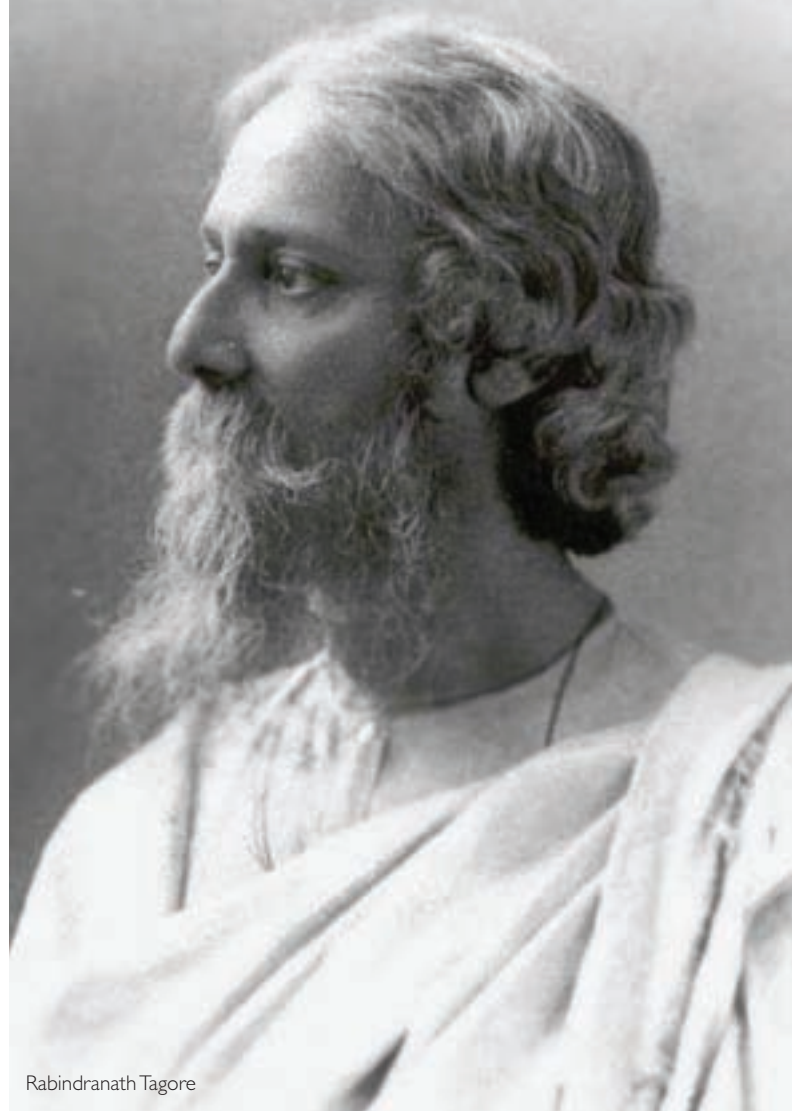
Rabindranath Tagore

Great food, a great number of people and one of the greatest poets ever – all linked together by a fascinating language that is well worth learning.

A taste of Bengali

Hanne-Ruth Thompson offers a sample of one of the most spoken languages in the world.

Pulao, people, poetry

Did you know that most of the Indian restaurants in Britain are run by Bangladeshi people? Have you ever wondered what *garam masala, saag, aloo, doopiaza, jeera, paneer, dal, murgh, bhaji* or *achaari* actually mean? Well, a little knowledge of Bengali can go a long way here.

Rice, of course, is eaten with everything. Pulao is an elaborate rice dish, cooked with cloves, cumin and onions, and reserved for special occasions.

Are you surprised to hear that Bengali is the sixth largest language in the world? Bengali (or Bangla) is the national language of Bangladesh and the state language of West Bengal in India (capital: Kolkata). There are large Bengali communities in the US, the UK, the UAE and in many other countries. Altogether there are about 260 million speakers of Bengali around the world.

gorom	=	hot
mosla	=	spice
sak	=	spinach
alu	=	potato
do	=	two
peyaj	=	onion
jira	=	cumin
ponir	=	cheese
dal	=	lentils
murgi	=	chicken
bhaji	=	fried
acar	=	chutney

Were you aware that the great Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore, the first non-European to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913, was a Bengali? He wrote not only the national anthems of both India and Bangladesh but also this famous prophetic poem:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;
Where words come out from the depth of truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;
Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action--
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

চিত্ত যেথা ভয়শূন্য, উচ্চ যেথা শির,
জ্ঞান যেথা মুক্ত, যেথা গৃহের প্রাচীর
আপন প্রাঙ্গণতলে দিবসশর্বরী
বসুধারে রাখে নাই খণ্ড ক্ষুদ্র করি,
যেথা বাক্য হৃদয়ের উৎসমুখ হতে
উচ্ছ্বসিয়া উঠে, যেথা নির্বারিত স্রোতে
দেশে দেশে দিশে দিশে কর্মধারা ধায়
অজস্র সহস্রবিধ চরিতার্থতায় –
যেথা তুচ্ছ আচারের মরুবালুরাশি
বিচারের স্রোতঃপথ ফেলে নাই গ্রাসি,
পৌরুষেরে করে নি শতধা – নিত্য যেথা
তুমি সর্ব কর্ম চিন্তা আনন্দের নেতা –
নিজ হস্তে নির্দয় আঘাত করি, পিতঃ
ভারতেরে সেই স্বর্গে করো জাগরিত ।

Script and sounds

Bengali is an Indian language, derived from Sanskrit and related to Hindi, Nepali, Assamese and Oriya but with its own script. It reads, like English, from left to right but has syllables rather than individual letters. This means that the vowels are attached to the consonants. They can come before, below, after or around the consonants and the first vowel of the Bengali alphabet is not written at all unless it stands on its own. The word *gorom* (hot), for instance, consists of just three consonants g + r + m but is pronounced "gorom".

Bengali has pure vowel sounds, both long and short, such as *i* as in "tin", *ee* as in "teen", o as in "hot" and *ō* as in French "mot", and so on. Bengali consonants distinguish aspirated (*khobor* = news) and non-aspirated (*kobor* = grave) as well as voiced (*gan* = song) and unvoiced (*kan* = ear) sounds. There are not many consonant clusters but where two consonants (such as k + t, t + r , s + th, n + dh, k + s) come together, Bengali has separate conjunct letters which often don't look anything like their components.

Graceful grammar - vast vocabulary

Bengali nouns have four cases: nominative, genitive, objective (for both direct and indirect objects) and locative, but in practice animate nouns very rarely occur in the locative and inanimate nouns rarely in the objective case. The genitive is particularly important as Bengali has a great number of impersonal structures which usually have a genitive subject. Instead of "I have a car", in Bengali we say *My car exists*; instead of "I am afraid", we say *Of me fear gets*; instead of "I am cold", we say *Of me cold attaches*.

Bengali verbs are conjugated for five persons: 1st person, 2nd person familiar and polite, and 3rd person ordinary and honorific. The verb endings for 2nd person polite and 3rd person honorific are the same. There are eight tenses and verb conjugation is almost completely regular. Apart from these conjugated verb forms, every verb has four non-finite forms: verbal noun *the dancing*; perfective participle *having danced*; imperfective participle *about to dance*; and conditional participle *if one dances*. These verb forms are very versatile, reduce the need for conjunctions and make for graceful and concise sentence structures.

Where in English we have a whole clause: *if we go in the morning...*
Bengali has just two words

sokale	gele...
morning - locative	go - conditional participle

Basic word order is SOV (subject – object – verb), which also means that Bengali has postpositions rather than prepositions. Due to the fully conjugated verbal system and case markings, word order is relatively free and subject pronouns are often omitted.

Bengali has a vast vocabulary. About half of it is more or less directly derived from the ancestor-language Sanskrit, the other half consists of more distantly derived words and 'native' words liberally sprinkled with lexical items from Arabic, Persian, Farsi, Hindi, Portuguese, Turkish and, of course, English. If you want to speak particularly refined, literary and difficult Bengali, the Sanskritic words are the ones to go for but you can go a long way in Bengali with ordinary, everyday vocabulary. For this reason, learning Bengali is nothing like as daunting as it may first seem.

Pictures, postures, playfulness

Rabindranath Tagore called Bengali "a language with attitude" and even beginner students come across this very quickly. Interjections and emphasisers are sprinkled through speech to indicate a speaker's expectations. One of them is *tō* which can express exasperation, urgency or "you should know this!", and can be used on its own for a loaded "well...?"

There is reduplication (doubling) which can be emphatic, e.g. *boṛo boṛo* (big big) for "very big", vague *boi-ṭoi* for "books and suchlike", or approximate *hote hote* (be be) for "almost happening".

There are a great number of onomatopoeia which paint colourful pictures of far more than sounds and are often difficult to convey in translation: *khã khã* = gaping emptiness; *dop-dop* = blazing fire; *nish-pish* = itching to do something; *iniye-biniye* = exaggerating; as well as the more usual sound imitation words: *tapur-tupur* = falling rain, *khosh-khosh* = rustling; *kiṛi-miṛi* = gnashing teeth.

We all know that learning a language, particularly one from a different culture, is more than a linguistic enterprise. Bengali is a language we can learn in order to communicate with its people or to read its literature, but it is also a language we can learn from. When we encounter its playfulness and concentration as well as its grandeur, when we observe the way sounds create images and meanings are modulated with imaginative subtleties, we begin to gain an understanding of the vision in Tagore's poem: "Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high..."

Dr Hanne-Ruth Thompson is Lector in Bengali at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

Events calendar

More information: www.llas.ac.uk/events

Language diversity in Scottish universities: practical strategies to support teaching and learning

Date: 20 February 2009

Location: University of Glasgow

This workshop will consider the importance of language diversity in Scottish universities and will focus on practical issues involved in setting up and sustaining modules and programmes in lesser taught languages. It will cover themes such as getting started with a new module in a lesser taught language, teaching ab initio and introducing students to content modules. Participants will also have the opportunity to experience a taster session in a lesser taught language.

Globalisation: a conference for undergraduate students

Date: 4 March 2009

Location: University of Ulster

Globalisation interests scholars from a wide variety of different subject areas including area studies, sociology, history, modern languages, geography and economics. Aimed at undergraduate students, this study day seeks to explore different disciplinary approaches to the study of globalisation. The conference will: explore different perspectives and ideas about globalisation in contemporary and historical contexts; provide insights into how people working in different subjects approach the study of globalisation; and demonstrate a range of topics which impact upon and are impacted by globalisation.

Enhancing oral language learning using the Wimba Voice Tools

Date: 20 March 2009

Location: University of Manchester

Wimba Voice Tools can provide opportunities for language students to practise their oral skills outside the classroom and receive feedback on their performance. These tools are already available on the Blackboard VLE at the University of Manchester, but most language tutors are not aware of their potentials and do not know how to use them. This workshop will demonstrate the use of the Wimba tools, evaluate their pedagogical applications and outline their plans for future development of learning materials using these tools. The event includes hands-on activities using the Wimba tools.

Teaching poetry

Date: 21 April 2009

Location: University of Exeter

This event aims to share good practices in the teaching of poetry within modern languages curricula. Areas to be discussed on the day include: using poetry as a way to engage students with literature; training students in formal analysis; addressing apprehensions about understanding poetry and managing interpretations; setting up new modules; and exploring different poetic forms.

Life and work in academia: an event for new lecturers in languages, linguistics and area studies

Date: 23-24 April 2009

Location: University of Cambridge

Aimed at new teaching staff (less than two years' experience) in languages, linguistics and area studies, this workshop aims to complement 'generic' Postgraduate Certificate courses offered by institutions. The workshop will also be useful for experienced staff who are new to the UK, and finishing and recent PhD students seeking academic employment. The event will take a holistic and long-term examination of the academic career and will include discussions of: classroom issues; career promotion and progression for both fixed-term and permanent staff; university citizenship; making use of the Subject Centre; good practice in e-learning; assessment; and transition into higher education.