Bridging the Languages Divide
For Post Graduate and Early Career Researchers

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Language Learning

In addition to your mother tongue(s), how many languages do you know?

When, how and why did you learn these languages?

EURAXESS - Researchers in Motion

"unique European initiative providing access to a complete range of information and support services to researchers wishing to pursue their research careers in Europe or stay connected to it."

http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/#

Science without Borders (Ciência sem Fronteiras)

Brazilian Government initiative to:

* send 101,000 students abroad on undergraduate sandwich courses, PhD sandwich courses and full PhDs by 2016.
* attract 1,250 researchers from around the world to Brazilian institutions with early career and visiting professor fellowships.

http://www.cienciasemfronteiras.gov.br/web/csf-eng/opportunities-for-individuals-from-abroad

Science without Borders (Ciência sem Fronteiras)

Paulo Artaxo - Professor of Environmental Physics, University of São Paulo

'…laments the amount of time it takes to get professional visas for visiting academics. He also points to rules that require academics to go through a civil service selection process, usually conducted in Portuguese, to become a full professor. "That has to be changed, but it takes a lot of time…[These are] just old rules that nobody's broken down," he says. "In the [São Paulo] Institute of Physics I don't recall any [foreign] professor being hired in the past 30 years," he adds.'

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Arts & Humanities Research Council

Three areas of current strategic need:

* Design, heritage and modern languages

"enhance strategic support for vital so-called 'minority' languages (i.e. those largely outside the current, largely western European, provision)"
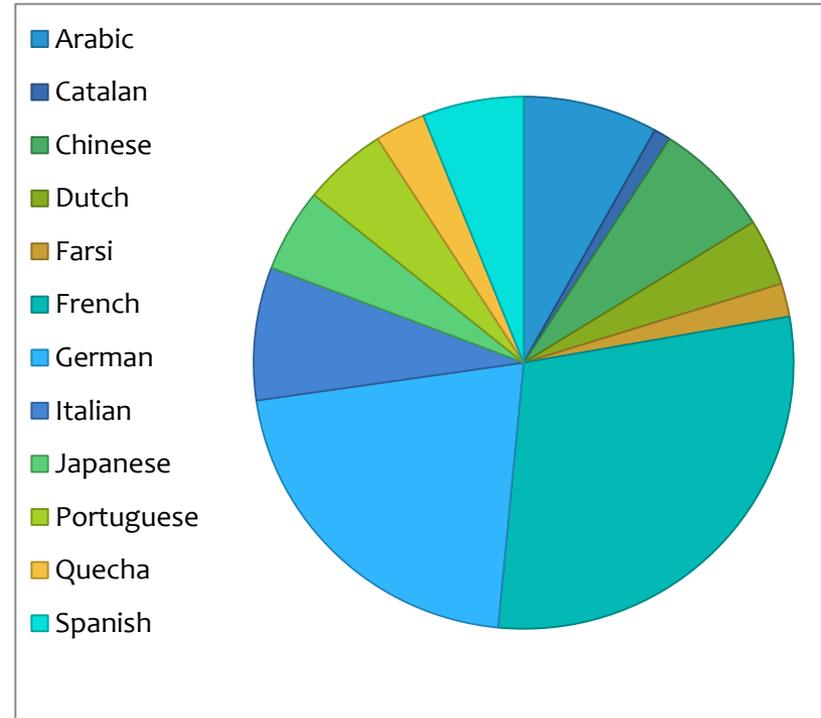
* AHRC Delivery Plan 2011-2015

* http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/News-and-Events/Publications/Documents/Delivery-Plan-2011-2015.pdf

Why Language Training?

* Market research highlighted widespread and as yet unmet student demand for a programme of this kind.
* 84 PGRs at Newcastle university were asked to respond to a brief survey on foreign languages needs.
* 54 stated that knowledge of another language would help them to carry out their PhD research.

(data collected on 24.11.11)

Legend:
- Arabic
- Catalan
- Chinese
- Dutch
- Farsi
- French
- German
- Italian
- Japanese
- Portuguese
- Quecha
- Spanish

The Project

"An integrated, collaborative offering of a suite of academic languages skills courses, peer language mentoring and support, and languages experience for Post Graduate Researchers (PGRs) and Early Career Researchers (ECRs) in the Arts and Humanities at the Universities of Durham and Newcastle."

Main Objectives

* To address a major skills gap in modern and global languages among PGRs and ECRs, by offering training and development opportunities to meet this strategic need (Researcher Development Framework: A.1.6; B.3.2; C.2.3; D.3.6).
* To enhance the employability of postgraduate researchers by developing their skills in teaching, mentoring, and leadership (RDF: A.1.6; B.2.1 and 3; B.3.2; D.1; D.2.1; D.2.1
* To increase access to, and range of, language training
* To expand scope of training to encompass *intercultural competence*
* To provide access to *individually tailored* support.

Language Courses

Existing Provision (Durham)

* German
* French
* Italian
* Spanish
* Farsi

New Courses

Newcastle

* Chinese
* Japanese
* Portuguese

Durham

* Arabic
* Russian

The Language Peer Mentoring Programme

* Select, train and support languages mentors to prepare them to offer a series of languages support activities.
* Develop mentors' awareness of their linguistics skills and cultural understanding and appreciation of the experiences of students approaching language learning.
* Offer mentors skills development opportunities, on-going support in their practice, and opportunities to develop academic leadership skills.

"I have learnt a lot about the role of mentors. It was interesting to think about cultural differences and personal space habits."

Mentoring Role

* reading support
* translation and transcription support
* pre-conference consultancy
* presentation practice session
* a cultural acclimatisation session prior to fieldtrips, conferences and residences abroad.
* language and pronunciation surgery
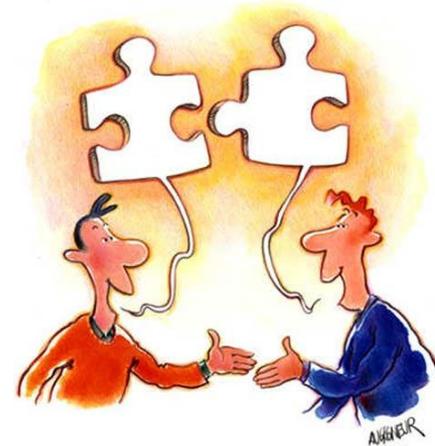
Classes offered to PGR in Durham
9 weeks (1 term), 2 hours per week

Different languages:

- German

- French

- Spanish

- Italian

- Farsi

Different levels (for German and French):

- Beginners

- Post-Beginners

- Intermediate

Who are the students?

* Mother tongue
* Linguistic background
* Subject area
* Type of texts

Given the time constraints (9 weeks, 2 hours per week), how would you design a languages for research course?

The Common European Framework

(CEFR)

What is the CEFR?

* **Frame of reference** for language learning, teaching and assessment
* common basis for language syllabuses and curricula, examinations, textbooks, etc. **across Europe** (Council of Europe initiative).
* **Descriptors** about using a language for **communication** and about **knowledge** and **skills**

Advantages

* Enhances transparency of courses, syllabuses and qualifications

  -> promotes international co-operation in the field of modern languages.

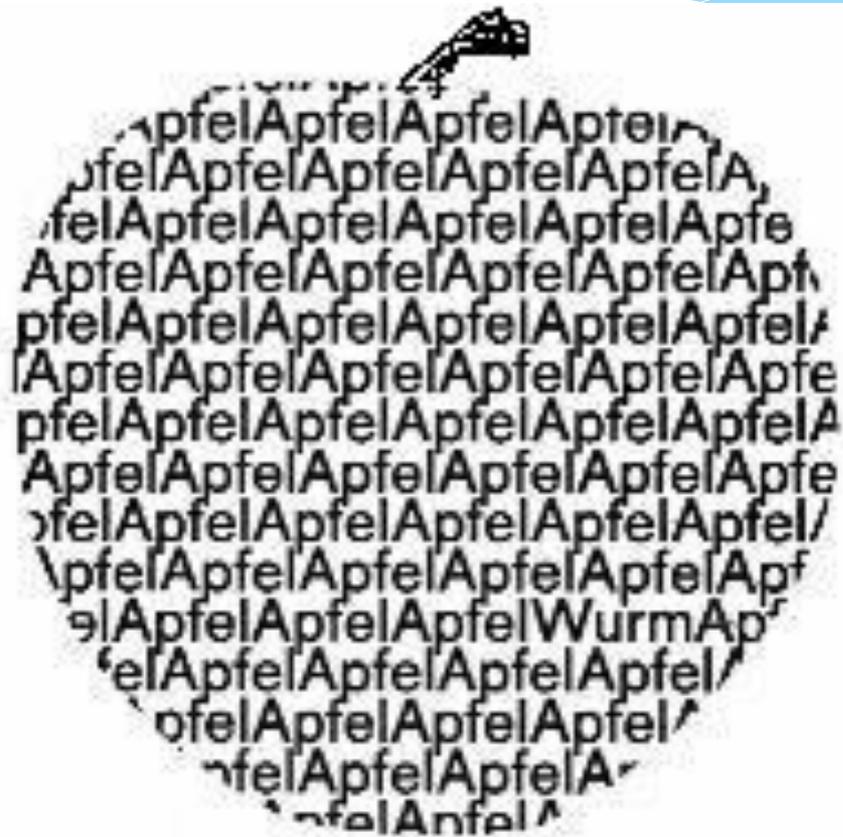* facilitates the mutual recognition of qualifications gained in different learning context.

Application

* very common all over Europe
* used in other parts of the world
* Applicable to non-European languages

Can-do statements

* For each level

  - understanding: listening & reading
  - speaking: spoken interaction & spoken production
  - writing

How to go about it?

* Only one skill required: reading

  - > a bit like teaching Latin

- Focus on grammar and sentence structure

- What is already out there?

- Bespoke textbooks for reading academic texts and online resources about grammar

- Resources for students

Course Content

* Vocabulary:
- Dictionary skills
- Cognates / false friends
• Grammar:
- Steep learning curve
- Based on texts from the start
• Consolidation for higher levels:
- Based on authentic texts

Syntax analysis

* Der Türhüter stellt öfters kleine Verhöre mit ihm an, fragt ihn über seine Heimat aus und nach vielem andern, es sind aber teilnahmslose Fragen, wie sie große Herren stellen, und zum Schlusse sagt er ihm immer wieder, daß er ihn noch nicht einlassen könne. Der Mann, der sich für seine Reise mit vielem ausgerüstet hat, verwendet alles, und sei es noch so wertvoll, um den Türhüter zu bestechen. Dieser nimmt zwar alles an, aber sagt dabei: „Ich nehme es nur an, damit du nicht glaubst, etwas versäumt zu haben." Während der vielen Jahre beobachtet der Mann den Türhüter fast ununterbrochen

* Case markers & case rules (nouns, pronouns)

* Forms of verb (patterns of conjugation, tenses)

* Morphology of verbs (separation)

* Sentence level syntax ; subordinate / dependent clauses, word order rules

Student Feedback

What did you find most useful about the course?

Grammar and sentence structure

Would you recommend the course to friends and colleagues?

"Yes-aids one in beginning to learn how to translate texts in another language – a vital skill for academics"

German course participant

Student Feedback

What did you find most useful about the mentoring sessions?

- Additional reading,
- Going through vocabulary,
- Opportunity to practice,
- Consolidation of understanding,
- Discussion of grammar,
- Individual support and clarification,
- Addressing specific questions.

Mentor Feedback- challenges

"In the beginning helping with grammar was challenging,"

"The only thing which was challenging is a huge variation of learning backgrounds, purposes and motivation in the group."

"It requires time commitment, responsibility, linguistic and interactive teaching skills, and passion for teaching"

Mentor Feedback - Improvements

* Increased opportunities for communication between:
  * Tutors and mentors,
  * Mentors and mentors.

* Clarification of the 'teaching philosophy',

* Longer /continuation courses and mentoring.

Sustainability and Future

Administration

Emails

* German course: 191 (31 participants)
* Farsi course: 229 (12 participants)

Farsi Team

Sustainability and Future

* Languages are now firmly embedded in the PG programmes at both University

* Researchers have developed important networks and have continued to work together on language issues

* Challenges of the interim period: vouchers scheme vs. in-house provision

Any Questions?

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