

SEVEN HUNDRED REASONS FOR STUDYING LANGUAGES: REFLECTIONS ON DISCUSSIONS AT FOURTEEN UNIVERSITIES

Janet von Randow, The University of Auckland

ABSTRACT

At a time when “internationalisation” is dominating the thinking of tertiary providers world-wide it is depressing to discover that learning languages other than English is not a high priority. In increasingly multilingual communities the thinking remains firmly monolingual. What is being done and what should be done to make the internationalisation of these institutions a reality? Increasing intercultural communication and understanding by ensuring that language learning is promoted and encouraged at the highest level would mean that the claim that universities are educating “global citizens” is not an empty one.

INTRODUCTION

It was serendipity at the University of Stirling, Scotland: “Seven Hundred Reasons for Studying Languages”. This poster caught my eye at the twelfth university I visited on my *Universitas 21* travels in 2005. Words such as *autonomy, careers, communication, community languages, diversity, education, experiential learning, intercultural competence, inclusion, identity, international relations, multilingualism, mobility, personal satisfaction* leapt off the sheet. If I had only had this in my hands at the previous eleven universities, discussions would have become even livelier. Any number of these seven hundred reasons for studying languages should resonate even with the most recalcitrant Anglophones.

At one university after another across five countries I kept hearing that fewer and fewer students were studying languages other than English. The fact that English has become the international lingua franca has seen literally thousands of young people for whom English is an additional language (EAL students) seek a tertiary education in English-medium institutions across the world, while, at the same time, English-speaking background students (ESB) either study at home or, when they do choose to study abroad, the majority of them seek out English-medium universities.

The international standing of English has done ESB students a disservice because those EAL students who are adding English to their linguistic repertoire are in the lead. If we focus just on the word ‘careers’ from the poster at this point, we read the following:

Monoglot English graduates face a bleak economic future as qualified multilingual youngsters from other countries are proving to have the competitive advantage over their British counterparts in global companies and organisations (Graddol, 2006, p. 10).

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And then the words 'education and multilingualism':

A world-class education system preparing people for life in the 21st century must reflect the fact that the world we are living in is multilingual (Gallagher-Brett, 2005, p. 17).

What I learnt on my travels, what the people I held discussions with had to say, what further reading they directed me to, has increased my belief that, if we want to enrich and be enriched by the world around us, acknowledging and valuing diversity and international communication and demonstrating intercultural competence – to take just a few more themes from the poster - then studying languages can no longer be an optional extra on any curriculum.

This paper will look at four broad themes:

- Internationalisation
- Monolingual thinking in a multilingual and plurilingual world
- Seven hundred reasons for studying languages
- Promoting language learning.

International relations, inclusion and diversity, and universities' responses to those issues, and my international travels, are part of the first theme. Multilingualism, indigenous and community languages are part of the second. The third focuses on the seven hundred reasons for studying languages and finally I want to provide encouragement for continuing to promote language learning. Language teachers are the linchpins in a process that will prepare young people to play a full role in the multicultural, multilingual world and they must be celebrated and treasured.

When I quote the colleagues across the world with whom I talked about these four issues I identify them by their surname and university.

INTERNATIONALISATION

In a conversation with Jo Lo Bianco at the University of Melbourne, Jo reported to me that "[u]niversities have always been quite international". They have become increasingly so. He went on to suggest that internationalisation, from a cynical perspective, means "making money out of international students". In 2005 2.1 million students were studying abroad.

International students, as we know, mean money both in the school and the tertiary sector but over the past decade universities have been considering the bigger picture. To quote Lo Bianco again: "There is a code for really serious systemic efforts to make teaching and research work have international frameworks. We have to think globally about what we do and things we claim in our teaching and research, already the demography is international". Brierley, Langdon, Lomas and Norris (2005) describe internationalisation of the university in terms of "moving beyond boundaries and borders". The University of Auckland enhances and broadens its international dimension through its membership of strategic alliances, for example the Universities of the Pacific Rim, *Universitas 21*, and smaller partnerships which "promote academic mobility, benchmarking (quality assurance), joint curricula or program development, seminars and conferences and joint research initiatives" (Brierley et al., 2005, p. 3).

Immigration over the past three decades and the increasing numbers of international students over the past two, have made our universities more than 'quite' international. My

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position at the University has involved me, since 2002, in diagnosing the academic language needs of undergraduate students at our English-medium university and guiding them to academic English language enrichment to enhance their studies. On my database there are 143 countries represented and over 120 languages. We live in a richly multicultural, multilingual country and we can all benefit from this at the educational and the social level. Education should lead the field to impact positively on society.

According to its Strategic Plan (University of Auckland, 2005), the University of Auckland wants to promote and support a culture which encourages internationalisation of the student experience by the following measures:

- Provide domestic and international students with opportunities to engage with one another and with local and international communities in order to maximise the benefit they receive from their international experiences
- Encourage and support the development of strong and meaningful links between staff and colleagues in national and international academic communities
- Take its place on the global stage
- Be a “world-class university” (pp. 1-3).

The intention is, in the theme of this conference, to ‘bridge cultures and reach heights’ - world-class, no less. As language is embedded in culture, then this intercultural engagement will be really ‘meaningful’, if both staff and students have knowledge of and respect for one another’s languages. The words *language* or *languages* do not appear in that Plan.

UNIVERSITAS 21 (U21)

One of the networks through which the University of Auckland develops strong international academic connections is *Universitas 21* (U21). Professor John Hay, Chair of *Universitas 21*, states that *Universitas 21*, created in 1997, represents “a unique grouping of 17 of the finest research-led, comprehensive and innovative universities to be found round the globe ...it is a robust and internationally recognised network for higher education”.

THE FELLOWSHIP

The U21 collaboration seeks to advance the internationalisation of its members by fostering global learning in a variety of forms and within this context the promotion of student and staff mobility plays an important role. In 2005 my *U21 Travelling Fellowship* made possible discussions with staff at ten of the member universities in this consortium. Being part of this ‘family’ network I was able to approach colleagues all over the world and to expect them to be pleased to see me and share ideas with me. Most meetings were planned but many, like my trip to Stirling, happened because staff at one university suggested people I should definitely meet at another.

I had two major goals; to see how these universities handled language assessment and enrichment for EAL students and to look at patterns of student mobility, the latter being a joint U21 venture with Rebecca Hughes at the University of Nottingham. I also included four universities outside the group. In the course of my discussions I became really distressed by the subject I am addressing in this paper - the lack of language learning by Anglophone students worldwide.

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U21 is intentionally a small network although the recruitment of additional research-led universities in regions in which it is currently under-represented (to a maximum of 25 members) is part of the planned development. During my trip last year the University of Korea joined, and this May Tec de Monterrey, Mexico and University College, Dublin became new members. The total is now 20. Table 1 outlines the universities I visited.

Table 1. *Universities visited, national language and language of instruction*

University	National language	Language of instruction
Auckland	Maori/English	English
Birmingham	English	English
British Columbia	English/French	English
Edinburgh	English	English
Fudan	Chinese	Chinese
Glasgow	English	English
Hong Kong	Cantonese/English	English
Korea	Korean	Korean
Lund	Swedish	English/Swedish
McGill	English/French	English
Melbourne	English	English
Tec de Monterrey (Mexico)	Spanish	Spanish/English
New South Wales	English	English
Nottingham	English	English
Shanghai, Jiao Tong	Chinese	Chinese
Singapore (NUS)	Malay	English
University College, Dublin	English	English
Peking	Chinese	Chinese
Queensland	English	English
Virginia	English	English
Sydney	English	English
Macquarie	English	English
Lancaster	English	English
Stirling	English	English

The language this network functions in is English and, as you can see, the teaching is done in English at the majority of these universities. But for me, what makes this an interesting network is its cultural and linguistic diversity. In my naïveté I felt sure that students at member universities would seize the opportunity to spend a semester or a year at a 'kindred' university in a society where other languages could be heard and learnt, but I was wrong. They do not do this in large numbers as the 'foreign' language is seen as a barrier rather than a challenge.

MOBILITY – LANGUAGE ISSUES FOR OUTGOING STUDENTS

Here are some of the voices from the different universities I visited:

“Language is a key factor in decision making that is why they go to the UK, US and Canada” (Young, University of Melbourne).

“Students are a bit nervous of China and Japan. They go to Hong Kong because it is English-speaking” (von Barth, Lund).

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“Fudan and Beijing are a barrier at the moment and Hong Kong seems too close for UBC students and they are missing out on an amazing opportunity” (Beaumont, British Columbia).

“When you are in a foreign country and sitting in a café you do not get the benefit of the environment, if you don’t understand Scottish students have become complacent about their need to learn foreign languages. Not having language skills to make the most of an exchange stops them going to non-English-speaking countries” (Morris, Edinburgh).

Outside the classroom at the University of Hong Kong, “international students feel excluded because they do not understand Chinese” (Tsui, Hong Kong), and for that reason the University would like the lingua franca on campus to be English. In my opinion, this is not only impossible but the plurilingual nature of the campus is an opportunity for international students to learn a new language or languages in the target language country where, as Byram et al. (cited in Gallagher-Brett, 2005) point out “learners are surrounded by and immersed in a new environment and learn consciously and unconsciously through all the senses” (p. 12).

“Students who take this opportunity have foresight as sooner or later it will give them the advantage ... Nottingham is very aggressive and they see this chance that students should go out and see Asia” (Wan, Hong Kong).

Most discussions about the newest member in 2005, The University of Korea, were based on the difficulties this was going to make as far as mobility was concerned. Everyone focused on the language as a deficit, rather than something that could be used to their advantage, and I was assured that they would be teaching in English there by 2010.

Young tertiary students, even those who are motivated enough and good enough (at least a B or B+ average) to undertake an international exchange are seemingly conservative. The Anglophone students within the U21 network chose, on the whole, English-medium universities, and in 2004 the Chinese students from Hong Kong, 99 of them, chose to go to Chinese-medium universities. From all 16 other members in the consortium 23 students went to Fudan and Beijing.

For students who undertake an exchange it is, from all reports, really “a life-changing experience” (Wan, Hong Kong). Indeed, it “may be the first step in constructing an ‘intercultural lifeworld’ (King & Ruiz-Gelices, 2003, p. 232), and how much richer if another language is part of it.

MOBILITY – LANGUAGE ISSUES FOR INCOMING STUDENTS

In our multicultural universities domestic students do not have to go abroad to experience ‘internationalisation’. At the University of British Columbia they declare, in posters all over the university, “Go Global at Home”, and they actively promote engagement between domestic and international students. But what is the reality for many EAL international students at the other universities I visited? They already have another language or languages and have chosen to study at an English-medium university only to find it difficult to meet the ‘locals’ and speak English.

“The social aspect is very important for EAL students and they find this one of the hardest aspects of university study” (Tindale, Macquarie).

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“International students are not having contact with Australian students” (Ransom, Melbourne).

“I hope the University can provide us [with a] special chance to talk with ‘Kiwi’ students” (international student, Auckland).

“I have to search for someone to speak English . . . I never give up but I think I need to be more brave” (international student, Auckland).

Like the University of British Columbia other universities have to be proactive in helping students, “to maximise the benefits from this international experience”, as the University of Auckland strategic plan puts it. The domestic students, of course, have their own anxieties: at Macquarie they claim to be overwhelmed by the large numbers of international students, and at many universities they feel they are being disadvantaged in tutorials and group presentations. At one UK university the domestic students did not want to know about international students who believed in a God and did not drink alcohol!

As one of the students in the 700 Reasons project said:

“We need to understand other people, not just expect them to understand us” (student, Gallagher-Brett, 2005, p. 26).

Those domestic students and staff who do have the experience of another language or languages and other cultures, find it easier to understand, interact with and support students who are having the difficulties that they themselves encountered when living in another culture and communicating in another language. Their experience makes them tolerant and proactive:

“It allows you to sympathise with other people when they may be learning English, learning your language. You know when you talk to them you can understand how they’re trying to say something that they might not be as direct as an English person and also it makes you more sensitive to other behaviour patterns that people demonstrate in different cultures ... you can fit in better, at least you don’t offend people” (student, Gallagher-Brett, 2005, p. 25).

Learning another language or languages is a major step in this engagement – “only through multilingualism can we really understand and appreciate the stranger” (King & Johnstone, 2001, cited in Gallagher-Brett, 2005, p. 15.)

MONOLINGUAL THINKING IN A MULTILINGUAL AND PLURILINGUAL WORLD

It is hard to believe that when language learning has never seemed so pertinent wherever one is in the world that most Anglophone university students are not recognising this:

“‘Why do we need to learn foreign languages, the rest of the countries should speak English’ - that actually made me laugh and showed me the narrow-mindedness of some people” (student, Gallagher-Brett, 2005, p. 25).

We do need to remember that some students are, as we see, getting the ‘big picture’:

“If you are travelling around the world, speaking the language is *BETTER THAN SHOUTING*” (student, Gallagher-Brett, 2005, p 26).

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As King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003) suggest, graduates with language and intercultural skills are well placed to fill key gaps in the high-skill international labour market.

The seemingly unassailable international position of English, and thus the prevailing monolingual mindset created by the political agendas of what Edwards (2004) calls “the inner-circle countries; all represented in U21, the UK, Ireland, the US, Australia and New Zealand, those where English is the native language of the majority” (p. 3) is now being seriously challenged.

I now turn my attention to those speakers of languages other than English who are now part of all our lives and who are, in many instances, at the beginning of the 21st century, struggling to maintain their languages and thus their cultural identity.

COMMUNITY LANGUAGES IN A MONOLINGUAL SOCIETY

On the basis of the 2001 Census figures there are over 150 languages spoken in New Zealand (East, 2003, p.10), 240 in Australia (Clyne, 2005, p. 5), and in London, regarded as the most multicultural city in the world, 300 languages are ‘spoken’ in schools. Over 40 languages can be tested at A level (Bursary or NCEA level 3 equivalent) in the UK, over 40 languages can be examined for university entrance in Australia, and in New Zealand we have curriculum statements for 12 languages. In spite of this linguistic richness, and some acknowledgement of it, the mindset remains largely monolingual (Clyne, 2005, Edwards, 2004, McPake, Johnstone, Low and Lyall, 1999).

This mindset says that “[u]sing another language is an inability or unwillingness to speak English” (Clyne, 2005, p. xi). It is a mindset which is:

less than conducive to learning other languages, whether indigenous or foreign. In fact most of the world’s population perceives some form of bi- or multilingualism as the norm, a capacity which is not only functionally useful to them but which also allows them to perceive reality in more than one way (McPake et al., 1999, p. 19).

INDIGENOUS AND COMMUNITY LANGUAGES

From the 1970s inner-circle countries gradually acknowledged the need for language maintenance of indigenous and community languages. But when indigenous languages have been almost stamped out, where are the teachers? In New Zealand, as elsewhere, training teachers of indigenous languages has been a major first step and persuading young people to learn those languages has been and continues to be the next. Peddie (2003) documents the decreasing number of Māori and Pasifika students in New Zealand accessing immersion programs. They need to see a reason for learning or maintaining a language and if they see that they can get by without it in a society where monolingualism reigns and others sharing their cultural roots are managing just fine without their language, then there is clearly less incentive.

When mainstream teachers believe that bilingual children already speak their own language so they just need to be taught English as soon as possible, and monolingual politicians exhort people who know no English to speak it to their children at home, and proclaim the ‘one nation, one culture’ scenario, it is no wonder that maintenance of languages other than English is difficult. That is why educating people and giving them good reasons for studying languages is essential.

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Community and migrant language initiatives tend to rely on individual schools, the private and voluntary sector, with students often accessing instruction in their first language in private or religious schools, after school or at the weekend, in Saturday schools. Community languages are able to be fitted into the school curriculum where numbers and enthusiastic teachers and committed principals allow.

In Auckland, for example, at Richmond Road Primary School, a state school, three immersion programs, in Māori, Samoan and French, are enjoying success. Learning in all subjects is in the community language 3 days a week and in English 2 days a week. All children from all programs mix during the breaks. This is the ideal way to acquire a language – learning it as one learns other subjects, content and language integrated learning (CLIL) – and gives a real signal that the language is important. We need many more such schools.

NEEDS OF BILINGUAL STUDENTS

It is important for students to learn to understand, speak, read and write their indigenous and community languages well and to gain access to the history, culture and or religion associated with the languages. There is also demand for these languages in careers ranging from interpreting, translating and teaching to business, international relations and the media (CILT, The National Centre for Languages, 2005). Keeping the provision of these languages alive means greater collaboration and mutual support in the form of networking and professional development.

The benefits for these language learners, who are the plurilinguals in our societies, and for all potential language learners, need publicising. These benefits, according to CILT, include:

- Being more versatile and creative in their thinking
- Being more intellectually advanced in other fields at four and five years old
- Being better at retaining their mental abilities into old age
- Having increased awareness of and interest in the wider world
- Having greater confidence in communicating in a range of different contexts
- Having enhanced understanding of cultural differences
- Having a willingness to engage with people and ideas from elsewhere in the world

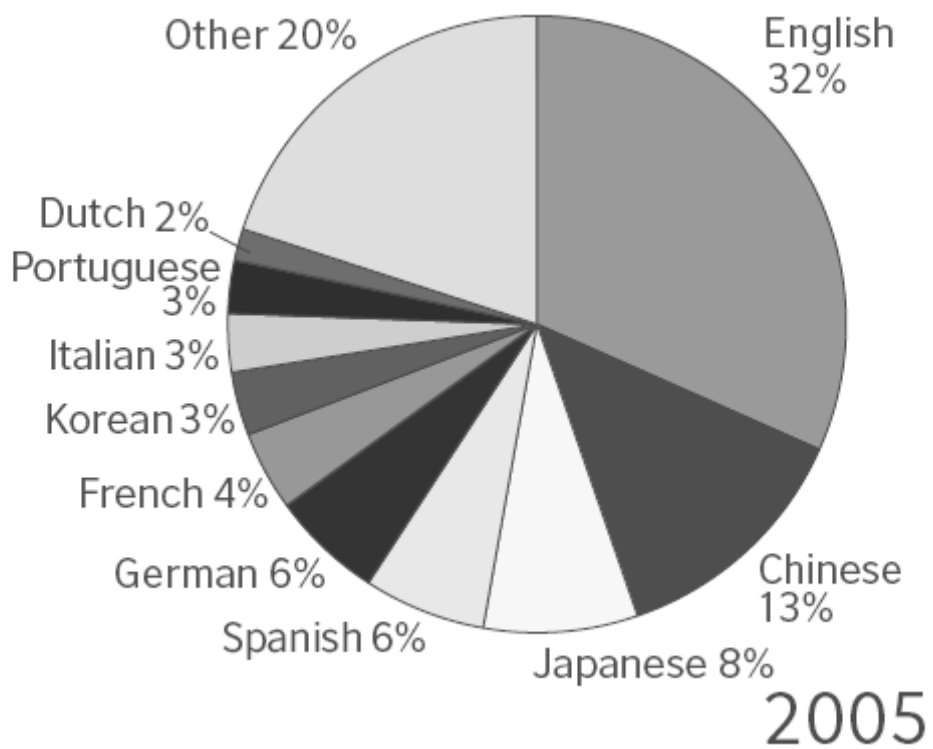
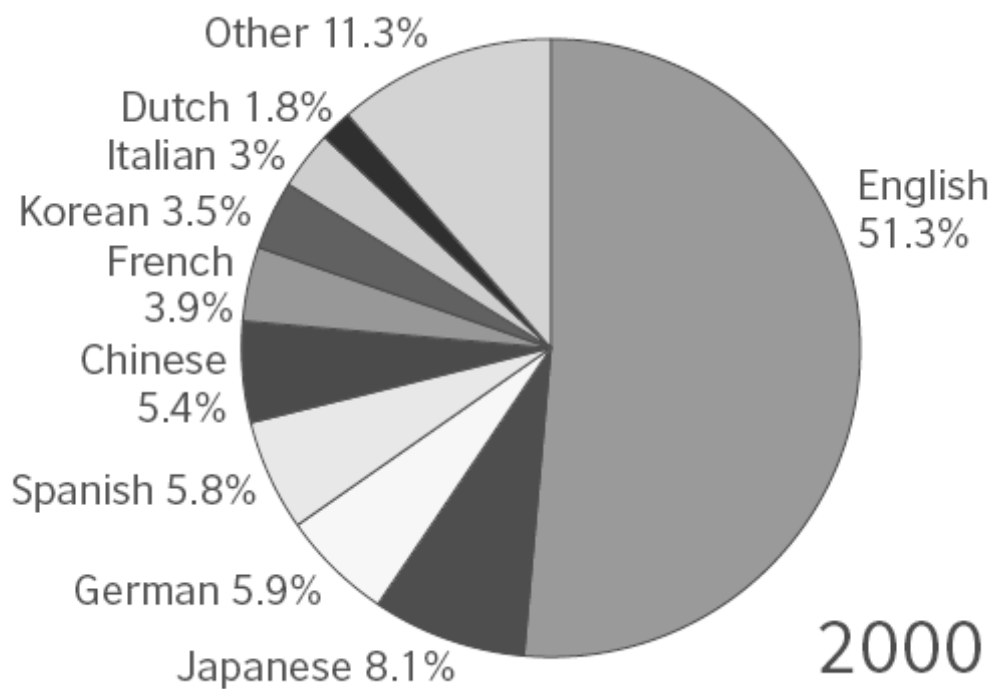
MONOLINGUALISM CHALLENGED

The Internet

The internet which seemed to have been an English domain, and yet another excuse for Anglophones to remain monolingual, is now increasingly accessed by people in other languages (see Figure 1).

What began as an Anglophone phenomenon has rapidly become what Graddol (2006) calls 'a multilingual affair' (p. 45). The internet is now able to be used by immigrants to keep in touch with their homelands and maintain their languages, another reason for them to keep learning – e-mail knows no geographical boundaries. It is also proving to be a very useful resource to those interested in learning lesser-used languages.

Figure 1. From Graddol (2006), p. 44



EAL STUDENTS FOCUSED ON LANGUAGES

While Asian students, according to Graddol (2006), are rushing to learn Mandarin, Indian students are keen to learn whatever languages they can as more and more graduates with more and more language skills are required in the business sector in India. As we know, the Council of Europe – and I remember our getting very excited about this and thinking this was grist to our mill in the 1990s – advocates Mother tongue and two additional languages for its citizens and it is only in the UK where this is nowhere near the case. As European students flock to the UK under the *Erasmus* scheme only half as many go the other way. The paradox is that English monolinguals expect the rest of the world to be plurilingual. How do they get this message?

Languages are the cinderellas of the school curriculum; they are the dispensable component... Like some other English-speaking countries, such as the UK, the US & NZ, Australia is treating languages at best as a luxury and not a necessity (Clyne, 2005, p. 22).

“Languages are always the thing that people want to push out, they are the disposable subjects” (McPake, Stirling)

SEVEN HUNDRED REASONS FOR STUDYING LANGUAGES

Anglophone students worldwide certainly seemed to be picking up the message that languages were a luxury most of them did not need, and in the UK, according to a comment made by McPake when I was at Stirling, in 2000 there was panic. Language learning was in crisis, particularly at the 16+ level.

The language learning crisis revealed that learners needed to be made aware more than ever of the benefits of language study and these benefits had to be more clearly defined. This was the impetus behind the project undertaken by the UK Subject Centre for Languages in 2003-2004. It resulted in the “Seven Hundred Reasons for Studying Languages” (Gallagher-Brett, 2005) to promote language study and inform the design of courses. Its findings are significant for the current campaign in the UK to have more people learn languages both in and out of school. It is possible to access this study on the following website: www.llas.ac.uk/700reasons. There is food for thought there for us. I wished I had had it in my hands earlier. The website is a treasure trove for language teachers and for students as well.

Reasons for studying languages were obtained from language learners across two educational sectors: 16 – 19 year-olds and undergraduates. The initial survey of the literature resulted in the ‘seven hundred reasons’ which included the following 17 themes, some of which have already been mentioned earlier in this paper. The reasons were grouped into 70 different key areas in which languages make a difference.

Table 2. *The 17 themes*

1. Citizenship (UK and EU)
2. Communication
3. Economic, Social and Political Dimension
4. Democracy
5. Employability
6. Environmental Sustainability
7. Equal Opportunities
8. Globalisation
9. Identity
10. Intercultural Competence
11. International Dimension, Foreign Policy etc
12. Key Skills
13. Language Awareness
14. Mobility/travel
15. Multilingualism
16. Personal and Social Development of the Individual
17. Values

Questionnaires were sent to 12 16-19 institutions and to language tutors in one Higher Education institution – one of the Russell Group, a consortium of 19 major research-intensive universities in the UK. There were also 2 undergraduate focus groups from that university. Once this data was collected discussions were held with a Higher Education Advisory panel. In this way a range of stakeholders were included. There were 212 responses, a 58.3% return. From the 16-19 group and 62 from the undergraduates there was a 43.1% return. Participants' reasons for studying languages proved to be very varied and seemed to raise the following issues:

- **Language learners value the personal benefits of language learning**
 - Communication, travel and employability
- **Language learning is enjoyable**
 - In a post-compulsory setting – personal satisfaction, enjoyment, fun, interest and challenge
- **Acknowledgement of employability**
 - But not the main motivation – 86% said language learning would be helpful
- **Languages promote better relationships with others – individuals and countries**
 - Wanting to communicate, meeting people and making friends featured prominently
- **Uncertain about the existence of strategic benefits of language learning for the UK and EU**
 - Far less aware of any potential significance of languages for the economic well being of the UK, the national security of the UK and EU citizenship
- **Language learners interested in learning about culture**
 - Learning about culture along with the history, geography and politics with the language
- **Some learners are motivated because they experience success and find languages easy, others seem attracted by the perceived difficulty of languages**
 - Finding them easy and then the opposite – challenging and elitist.

Responses to statements on key themes were overwhelmingly positive and this made the researchers wonder whether it is simply in the nature of students who opt for language study that they have the confidence to 'take on the world', as it were. Here are a few more student responses. Others have had their say earlier in this paper.

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“languages unite people in this stressful international panorama” (undergraduate).

Employment mobility – “almost like a gift ... an amazing advantage over other graduates” (graduate).

“A language enables you to communicate with others without seeming arrogant enough to expect them to speak English” (sixth former).

Gallagher-Brett (2005) observes that “[i]n previous studies employability has been seen as much stronger but in this one it was intrinsic motivation, enjoyment and behaviour performed for its own sake in order to experience pleasure and satisfaction” (p. 27). Does this say something, one wonders, about this generation? I cannot remember which letter we now give them as a generational label, but it seems that they are into what gives them personal pleasure rather than looking at long-term goals first.

All this raised the question “If these students are so satisfied with languages why are graduate numbers dropping and why do only about 24% of A level students opt for a language degree?” Using the findings from this project, the voices of the prime stakeholders, to market language study and direct it at students younger than 14, when it becomes optional, is obviously a way forward. Go directly to the website!

PROMOTING LANGUAGE LEARNING

“We are going to use the press, give them figures, this is what they like” (McPake, Stirling). Anything but negative headlines. In the UK the climate of negativity surrounding foreign language learning has been fed by “years of relentless press abuse” which seemed to be a self-fulfilling prophecy (Watts, C., 2003, pp. 15-16):

‘Once again we are becoming the language dunces of Europe’
‘Fear over poor UK language skills’
‘Britons lag in languages’

We too have to go on drip feeding information about the benefits of language learning, about the students who have done well, the special benefits bilinguals have. Eventually it must get through to students, parents and to society at large. Public opinion should influence the government.

VALUING LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

At both school and university all EAL students need to see their culture and language valued. The many ways that teachers can demonstrate inclusion and intercultural understanding in their classrooms, schools and communities, were outlined by Noel Watts in 1998 and again at our Conference in 2000. Making young students aware of the other voices and cultures around them and encouraging them to reach out into the community to increase this knowledge is easier than ever in today’s classrooms. Languages rather than one language become then the norm. As well as fostering independent learning this “will inspire students to see that language learning has a real place in their lives” (Ellis, 2000, p. 47).

STARTING WITH COMMUNITY LANGUAGE LEARNING IN SCHOOLS

In the school sector then “an environment should be created where learning another language is a normal activity” (East, 2003, p. 12). And as Ellis suggested, again at our Conference in 2000 – community languages, Māori and Samoan and others, should be introduced at the primary level where learning is more experiential, and a second or third language at secondary school when learning can be slightly more formal and analytical without losing the ‘experience’ of language (Ellis, 2000).

A leading article in the *New Zealand Herald*, 18 June 2003, carried the headline “One language is not enough”, and promoted Māori for Years 7 & 8:

This is a culture indigenous to this country and increasingly demanding recognition here. There is no better way to meet that demand than to all citizens a grounding in its language. A general understanding of the language could do more for this country than all the treaty settlements. (p. A14)

If young Māori students saw their language being acknowledged as ‘real’ enrolments in immersion programs could well rise.

A LANGUAGES’ POLICY

In spite of the lack of a national languages policy some progress has been made. Languages are at last acknowledged as a separate essential learning area on the National Curriculum Framework which should mean that language learning in the secondary school is not an option. Is piecemeal progress the way to go, however?

In her study “Decline in the take-up of modern languages at degree level” Catherine Watts (2003) discovered in the UK a wide variety of institutions across all levels of the education system which had some imaginative and effective ways to promote the study of modern foreign languages and enhance students’ experience of them, but felt that “without an integrated and coherent national language teaching and learning policy, which is urgently needed at all levels of the education sector, these efforts and initiatives are but wasted” (p. 24). As Ellis (2000) said, “[l]anguage is such an important issue in New Zealand that it seems fool-hardy not to move towards some definite policy – bearing in mind that any language policy would need to be implemented gradually” (p. 38).

A comprehensive national policy would coordinate the provision of community and migrant language learning and the flow of language learning from primary to tertiary level. It would include provision of teacher training and ongoing professional development and mean that all students, not just those lucky enough to have access to language learning, would experience it, as of right. It should mean that, with the big picture in mind, government funding would be wisely targeted.

UNIVERSITY LANGUAGES’ POLICIES

The flow-on effect of fewer students studying languages at school has meant that university departments are offering beginners’ programs – something that they were not initially trained for, something that diverts them from their other activities and gives them the superhuman task of trying to get students to a reasonable level of proficiency in a very short time.

J. von Randow: non-refereed paper

Full language degrees at university should be promoted with scholarships and an exchange year built in so that we produce excellent language teachers. Other degrees can build in language components so that commerce students, for example, are able to compete in the business world. Students need to be made aware that “it is important to view the future in multilingual terms, whereby English alone, although clearly important, is becoming insufficient” (East, 2003, p. 10).

At the universities I visited there were no language policies. At Melbourne Jo Lo Bianco was working with a team of experts on a university-wide policy to be implemented this year: “Diverse practice is not effective and it is costly. Policies will have to be made. It is simply practical”. Educational excellence, equity of access and internationalisation are the three guiding principles.

Internationalisation of the student body will not, as I pointed out at the beginning of this paper, happen on its own. There is, at the moment, a gap between rhetoric and practice. Universities that claim that they want all students to benefit from their interaction on campus and their participation in internationalisation both at home and overseas must be proactive. If the Auckland students are to understand and interact successfully with international students whose first language they do not share they need to be encouraged to get to know them. This can be done, according to some of the international students themselves, “in small study groups run by students”. Peer assisted learning at two U21 universities, The University of Queensland, and The University of Melbourne, and at Macquarie University, have made some impact in helping international and domestic students to learn from one another. As monolingual students mix increasingly with plurilingual students they may begin to discover what they are missing out on. They, too, in a comprehensive university languages policy, need to be shown some of the reasons why languages should be studied.

CONCLUSION

We do not need seven hundred reasons to convince us that studying languages is important, but we may be able to use the outcomes of the project to promote language study in New Zealand. Young New Zealanders need to be brought up from their earliest years to experience and enjoy cultural and linguistic diversity. Such diversity must be celebrated in schools where pupils are still open minded and ready to learn. Indigenous and community languages promoted at this stage will enable all young people to become plurilingual and able to take up the next language or languages more easily. These too need to be promoted and resourced so that the language learning experience is a good one and encourages students, through the excellent skills they learn by virtue of language learning, to become independent, resourceful language learners. This will enrich their world, give them great personal satisfaction, and increase their employability. *Let us strike the word ‘monolingual’ from the New Zealand language landscape.*

Universities gaining students who are natural language learners will find numbers rising in languages courses. There will also be more outgoing students who are not overwhelmed by numbers, but are ready to take on the challenge that a truly international university offers them both here in New Zealand and abroad. As they take their place as players on the global stage they will be bridging cultures and the University will be able to claim that it has indeed reached the heights of a “world class university”.

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