



HELLENIC REPUBLIC

National and Kapodistrian
University of Athens

European Perspectives in Language Teaching, Learning, Assessment

Importance of Languages in Vocational Life

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“Languages: The State of the Nation”- British Academy Report (1/2)

- There is strong evidence that the UK is suffering from a growing deficit in foreign language skills at a time when globally, the demand for language skills is expanding.
- The range and nature of languages being taught is insufficient to meet current and future demand.
- Language skills are needed at all levels in the workforce and not simply by an internationally-mobile elite.



“Languages: The State of the Nation”- British Academy Report (2/2)

- A weak supply of language skills is pushing down demand and creating a vicious circle of monolingualism.
- Languages spoken by British school children, in addition to English, represents a valuable future source of supply – if these skills can be developed appropriately.



The CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey 2012

- 72% of businesses say that they value foreign language skills among their employees, particularly in helping build relations with clients, customers and suppliers.
- One in five firms (21%) is concerned that weaknesses in foreign language proficiency are losing them business or is uncertain whether this is happening.
- Among firms concerned about shortfalls in language proficiency, 52% are looking to recruit staff with appropriate skills.



The British Chambers of Commerce Survey

- Of almost 5000 British business owners it was discovered that 57% speak no German, 65% no Spanish, 76% no Italian.
- Even when business owners claim to have some language knowledge, very few are able to conduct deals in the buyer's language.
- The problem is even more acute in faster-growing markets outside the eurozone, with 95% of business owners having no knowledge of either Russian or Mandarin Chinese.



Professor James Foreman-Peck – Cardiff University

- Shows that the UK economy is bleeding money – up to £17 billion per annum – in lost export opportunities.
- “There is evidence that Britain’s language investment is so low that it effectively imposes a heavy tax on British trade.”
- “If Britain’s language standards were up to the international average, exports could increase by 8%, raising the country’s GDP by between £7.3 billion and £17 billion.”



Some Additional Reported Concerns (1/3)

- Rapid decline in Languages GCSE entries - partly stemmed by the introduction of the E-Bacc.
- Almost no vocational languages learnt currently in Further education Colleges.
- Consequential decline in Language A Level entries (more candidates take sociology than German, French and Spanish combined) (Some candidates discouraged to continue with A level studies if they are unlikely to achieve high grades to boost the school's league table position.



Some Additional Reported Concerns (2/3)

- There are more University applicants for English Literature than all foreign languages combined.
- The closure of about one third of university language departments.
- The closure of so many university courses for translators and interpreters - there is a serious shortage of native English translators/interpreters working for the European Commission institutions which has led to cancelled meetings.



Some Additional Reported Concerns (3/3)

- In 2011 only 1.5% of the applicants for European Union jobs in Brussels were British - because of the lack of language skills - resulting in 7 successful UK candidates.
- Increasingly the world of business is dominated by an international elite – multinational, multilingual, at ease anywhere in the world.
- The misconception that the “whole world speaks English” – 75% of the world does not speak English – On the Internet in 2000, English dominated with 51% but by 2010 this share had dropped to 29%.



More concerns

- Few representatives of tour companies can speak an appropriate level of the language of the country in which they are posted.
- There is a similar lack of foreign language competence in most UK Tourist Information Centres/Airports/Hotels/Visitor Attractions to welcome and communicate with overseas visitors in their own language – a major UK industry!



European Commission ELAN Survey

Amongst the 200 SMEs that lost potential contracts for lack of foreign languages, 37 valued the lost business at between €8 million and €13.5 million. A further 54 companies had lost contracts between €16.5 million and €25.3 million and 10 had lost contracts worth more than €1 million.



What's in a name?

Coca Cola initially rendered its brand as “Ke-Kou-Ke-La” in Mandarin Chinese. Unfortunately that pronunciation can mean “bite the wax tadpole” or “female horse stuffed with wax”, depending on the local dialect. Coca Cola had to research 40000 characters to find a close phonetic equivalent, which translated positively in marketing terms “Ko-Kou-Ko-le” equalled “happiness in the mouth” and so Chinese Coke was duly named appropriately!



“Language Competences for Employability, Mobility and Growth” – European Commission (1/3)

- Language competences are a key dimension of modernising European Education systems.
- Raising the language competences of children, young people and adults will foster the mobility of workers and students and improve the employability of the European workforce.
- Labour competences should be useful in real life and match, in particular, labour market needs.



“Language Competences for Employability, Mobility and Growth” – European Commission (2/3)

- Currently the outcome of foreign languages is poor: only four in ten students reach the “independent user” level in the first foreign language, indicating an ability to hold a simple conversation (9% in England, 14% in France to 82% in Sweden and Malta).
- English is becoming de facto the first foreign language, most taught language in Europe and globally but it is proficiency in more than one language that will make a decisive difference in the future.



“Language Competences for Employability, Mobility and Growth” – European Commission (3/3)

- Member States should make the teaching and learning of languages significantly more effective.
- Proposal to develop the first ever EU benchmark on language competence.



The ELAN Study

- Staff could not speak the language.
- Information enquiries or quotations were not followed up.
- A lack of confidence in using the foreign language.
- Breakdown on receiving foreign call at phone or switchboard.
- Errors in translation or interpreting.
- Inability to capitalise on opportunities.
- Lack of cultural affinity.



Where a company's language and cultural needs are most likely to occur (1/3)

- Undertaking market research in a foreign market.
- Describing the company's business on the website.
- Complying with local laws and regulations and completing customs declarations.
- Preparing employees for secondment or posting abroad.
- Tendering for public procurement and other types of contracts.



Where a company's language and cultural needs are most likely to occur (2/3)

- Drawing up contracts in the proper style and in conformity with local regulations.
- Attending court proceedings (such as pursuing bad debts and defending patents).
- Advertising and launching publicity campaigns abroad.
- Selecting and managing a local agent or distributor.



Where a company's language and cultural needs are most likely to occur

- Managing and training multilingual workforces at home and abroad.
- Providing customer care and ensuring the quality of after-sales service.
- Pursuing payment and recovering bad debts.
- Handling local documentation, protocols, in-house styles and technical specifications.
- Negotiating joint ventures, acquisitions and take-overs.



Where using a customer's own language can bring additional benefits

- Establishing a positive rapport and sense of trust with major customers.
- Showing respect for cultural and religious differences.
- Demonstrating a long-term commitment to a foreign market.
- Showing employees and foreign clients that you mean business.
- Increasing the flow of market intelligence and customer feedback and understanding its real meaning.



Do pictures tell a true story?

A British washing machine manufacturer decided to market their latest machines in Arabic-speaking countries. The instructions were duly translated into Arabic and inserted into leaflet along with the original diagrams and photos. Machines were exported and sold. A few weeks later the new customers complained that if they followed the instructions then their clothes went into the machine clean and came out dirty! The manufacturer was ignorant of the fact that Arabic is written from right to left and the diagrams should also run from right to left!



The Way Forward

- Speak to the Future – “The 1000 words Challenge”.
- HEFCE to fund a three year programme under the Routes into Languages label to boost student demand for MFL courses.
- British Academy to stage a review called “Born Global” investigating the nature and extent of language needs in the labour market and the implications for languages education from school to higher education.
- A UK Business Languages Campaign?
- ESF and ERDF funding for Company Language Training?



Financing

- The present educational material has been developed as part of the educational work of the instructor.
- The project “Open Academic Courses of the University of Athens” has only financed the reform of the educational material.
- The project is implemented under the operational program “Education and Lifelong Learning” and funded by the European Union (European Social Fund) and National Resources.



Notes

Note on History of Published Version

The present work is the edition 1.0.



Reference Note

Copyright National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Bessie Dendrinou. Bessie Dendrinou. “European Perspectives in Language Teaching, Learning, Assessment. Language and language education policies: Importance of Languages in Vocational Life”. Edition: 1.0. Athens 2015. Available at: <http://opencourses.uoa.gr/courses/ENL13/> .



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