



A manifesto for linguistics in language teaching in the UK context¹

ABOUT

This document sets out a manifesto for how linguistics could be incorporated into language teaching in the UK context. It responds directly to published calls for change^{2, 3, 4}, and identifies challenges and opportunities as well as potential actions.

RATIONALE

Linguistics has been overlooked both as a pedagogical and motivational tool in language teaching.⁵ Linguistics can (i) help students of languages (both classical and modern) understand the relevance of the subject, (ii) increase learner independence, (iii) increase curiosity for a wider range of languages and (iv) foster intrinsic motivation for language learning. These benefits have important implications for the development of skills and, ultimately, for the economy.

OBJECTIVES

This manifesto has been produced with three purposes in mind:

1. To provide a clear framework of challenges, opportunities and potential actions in this domain;
2. To catalyze networking between academics and other stakeholders involved in linguistics and languages teaching;
3. To lay out pathways to impact.

Challenges	Opportunities	Actions
Employers report that languages graduates need further specialist language skills for professional tasks.	Training in linguistics can enhance professional language abilities and offer transferable analytic and problem-solving skills, in addition to building metalinguistic knowledge.	Embed linguistics in the teaching of languages in schools and at universities , and make the value of these skills clearer to Senior Management Teams in schools/universities. Create add-on activities that link linguistics to existing topics in schools and make them widely available through academic publishers/exam boards.
The advanced study of languages is often seen as socially exclusive by students and parents .	Linguistics can attract a more diverse range of students to languages and can also help address serious issues such as linguistic discrimination and other biases.	Include social aspects of linguistics in language teaching.
Findings in linguistics have not been adequately conveyed to teachers, pupils and Senior Management Teams in schools.	Many areas of linguistics are inherently appealing to pupils and teachers (codeswitching, AI, new media, language and identity) once they become aware of them. Linguistics goes well beyond grammar teaching. It is a broad discipline which includes the structural (syntactic, morphological, phonetic, phonological), social, historical and psychological study of language(s) as well as areas such as typology, historical reconstruction, language learning and multilingualism, language policy, language endangerment and many more.	Increase and diversify dissemination of findings in linguistics via a consortium of universities and schools to the languages communities they serve (i.e. via festival of linguistics, teacher conferences e.g. ALL and Classical Association, magazine articles, other events).

Challenges	Opportunities	Actions
Teachers have limited time available and often lack training in linguistics.	There is appetite among teachers to experiment with new tools, and academics are also increasingly encouraged and supported to engage with partners beyond the university sector. This provides an ideal opportunity for increased and urgently needed collaboration .	Use the co-creation model to develop shared resources , including online training for teachers and conceptual skills maps, taking advantage of Knowledge Transfer funding to buy out collaborating teachers. Embed linguistics in initial teacher training provision.
Teachers, textbooks and exam boards can take an overly prescriptive attitude to language, denying the existence/validity of variation, for reasons to do with assessment and/or pervasive ideologies.	The teaching of variation and change can prepare learners for the real world where languages are used differently depending on factors such as social contexts, and who is speaking to who.	Reframe 'grammar' sections in textbooks so that they explain learner errors in linguistic terms and also distinguish between learner errors and instances of variation.
Subject specifications for languages do not mention/include/refer to linguistics, so this is not necessarily assessed in exams and is hence not a focus for classroom teaching.	There is scope to enrich the curriculum further so that it includes linguistic topics alongside film, literature and/or culture.	Build an evidence base to persuade DfE and devolved equivalents and exam boards that the addition of linguistic topics will be attractive to students, universities and employers.
Curriculum change is complex and takes a long time so there is understandable resistance to it.	Linguistics can be embedded into the existing specification without the need for substantive curriculum change, notably in relation to existing cultural topics (e.g., multiculturalism and multilingualism) and Independent Research projects .	Make the case to academic publishers, exam boards and teachers that linguistic topics already fit within the existing specifications and encourage the introduction of linguistic components (e.g. linguistics IRPs for A-Level oral exams).

Challenges	Opportunities	Actions
Pupils' multilingualism is often seen as a hindrance in UK schools, rather than an advantage.	Linguistics can help multilingual pupils develop expertise in English alongside their other language(s), which in turn can improve academic attainment more generally.	Use linguistics to develop frameworks for EAL pupils and their teachers to explore multilingualism while augmenting English skills.
Community languages are often not recognized or valued in mainstream schools.	Teachers can use linguistics to promote their multilingual pupils as language experts, increasing inclusivity and capitalizing on linguistic diversity in the classroom.	Work together as schools, universities, government and learned societies to promote the use of creative, linguistics-based materials for multilingual pupils. Develop co-created materials for heritage and community languages.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] This document was drafted by [Linguistics in MFL project](#) members Michelle Sheehan, Alice Corr, Anna Havinga, Jonathan Kasstan, Norma Schifano and Sascha Stollhans following the discussion session entitled 'The way forward: linguistics and language teaching' at the event [Linguistics In School-Based Language Provision](#) held in September 2022 at Newcastle University. The manifesto was further amended following discussions with stakeholders on 2nd November 2022 at an online meeting.

[2] "Towards a National Languages Strategy: Education and Skills." British Academy, the Arts, Humanities Research Council, the Association of School, College Leaders, the British Council and Universities UK, 2020.

[3] "Languages in the UK: A Call for Action." British Academy, Academy of Medical Sciences, the Royal Academy of Engineering and the Royal Society, 2019, www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/languages-uk-academies-statement/. Accessed 19 August 2020

[4] Bowler, Megan. "A Languages Crisis? HEPI Report 123." Higher Education Policy Institute, www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/HEPI_A-Languages-Crisis_Report-123-FINAL.pdf 2020. Accessed 26 August 2020.

[5] Sheehan, M., Corr, A., Havinga, A., Kasstan, J. R. and N. Schifano. (2021). Rethinking the UK languages curriculum: arguments for the inclusion of linguistics, [Modern Languages Open](#) 1:1-24.

Launch endorsers:

