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Teacher perspectives on the introduction of linguistics in the languages classroom: Evidence from a co-creation project on French, German and Spanish

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Abstract

Linguistics is conspicuously absent from language teaching in UK schools. A-level cultural topics cover a range of themes such as cyber-society, cultural heritage and multiculturalism, but the approach taken to these topics is not informed by linguistics. In previous work, we have argued that this is an unfortunate omission not only because linguistics is appealing to many language students and perceived by them to be useful, but also because the existing cultural topics could be significantly enriched by the inclusion of the critical/analytical study of language itself. In this paper, we provide concrete examples of how linguistics can be integrated into the existing A-level curriculum for Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) in England and Wales. Reporting on a project in which teachers trialled linguistics materials co-created by us (a group of academics) and experienced languages teachers, we present evidence that linguistics materials are perceived to be both highly novel and nonetheless compatible with the existing A-level curriculum. Data from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with participating teachers also show that: (i) these new materials can be taught with little or no prior experience of linguistics; and (ii) adding linguistics materials to the curriculum leads to significant impacts

on teacher and pupil attitudes towards language(s). Despite some challenges, which we also discuss, the results highlight again the great potential of linguistics as a component of language teaching and the contribution that it can make to the enrichment of the discipline.

KEYWORDS

co-creation, languages teaching, Modern Foreign Languages (MFL), participatory research, pedagogical linguistics

Key insights

What is the main issue that the paper addresses?

This paper investigates the feasibility of including linguistics as part of the existing A-level curriculum for French, German and Spanish. Materials co-created with experienced teachers were tested in classrooms and teacher feedback gathered from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

What are the main insights that the paper provides?

Materials that take an analytical/critical approach to language are perceived by teachers to be novel but nonetheless compatible with the existing A-level curriculum. Teachers report that both they and their students found the materials accessible and intellectually interesting. Co-creation is also shown to be an effective way for academics and teachers to collaborate.

INTRODUCTION

In previous work (Sheehan et al., 2021), we have highlighted the great appeal of linguistics to languages students, based on pupil reactions to a free-standing four-part introductory course on French, German or Spanish linguistics devised by a subset of us (academics in UK universities). While this course provided students with an introduction to selected core areas of the discipline (phonetics and phonology, morphosyntax, sociolinguistics and historical linguistics), feedback from teachers and pupils highlighted the desire for linguistics materials to be better integrated into the existing A-level curriculum for Modern Foreign Languages (MFL). Elsewhere (Corr et al., 2019), we have highlighted how such an integration ought to be possible, given the breadth and nature of the cultural topics that form the basis of language teaching at A level. With this in mind, the present study introduces A-level MFL pupils in England and Wales to linguistics, not as an additional add-on, but rather as an integrated component of their course, tracking the success of this initiative.

The study has three main aims. First, there is a need to assess Corr et al.'s (2019) claim that linguistics can be integrated into the existing A-level MFL curriculum. Will teachers deem materials that take a critical and analytical approach to language to be relevant to and compatible with existing content? Second, we are interested in assessing whether the

introduction of linguistics into the A-level curriculum is in principle feasible. This concerns both the extent to which teachers without a background in linguistics feel able to teach linguistics materials and the accessibility of such materials to A-level pupils of varying abilities. Finally, we seek to explore teachers' perceptions of the co-created materials and the extent to which adding this critical/analytical view of language has an impact on teachers and pupils. Does comparing descriptive and prescriptive approaches to language result in confusion or unease, or does it rather enrich teacher/pupil understanding of language variation and change?

Our research questions therefore fall into two categories.

1. Feasibility and compatibility.
   a. How well do the linguistics materials integrate into the existing A-level curriculum and do they offer cross-curricular links?
   b. How feasible is it for teachers to deliver this content?
   c. What are the barriers to introducing linguistics into MFL A levels?
2. Perception and impact.
   a. How did teachers perceive the materials?
   b. What did teachers say about their pupils' engagement?
   c. What was the perceived impact on pupils and teachers?

Our focus in this study is on teacher reactions to the co-created materials. There are several reasons why we focus on teachers here, rather than pupils. First and foremost, teachers have a greater awareness of the A-level curriculum and the topics it contains, so they will be better placed to assess the compatibility of the new materials with that curriculum. Second, the feasibility of introducing linguistics as part of the A-level curriculum depends largely on the ability and willingness of teachers to teach it. Third, as one of the potential barriers to the introduction of linguistics in language teaching may be the prescriptivist views shared by some languages teachers, we are interested in investigating how teacher perspectives are impacted by teaching linguistics. Finally, Sheehan et al. (2021) focused on pupil reactions to linguistics and so, in this contribution, we pivot to the teacher perspective to offer a complementary perspective.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The next section introduces linguistics, discusses its relation to language teaching and highlights its potential contribution to the existing A-level curriculum for French, German and Spanish in England and Wales, and describes our co-creation approach. The third section outlines the study methodology, introducing the co-created materials as well as the instruments used to collect teacher feedback on them and the analytical approach taken. The fourth section provides an overview of the results of our study, highlighting teacher views on the feasibility and compatibility of the materials as well as the impact of the materials on teachers and pupils. Finally, the fifth section discusses the implications of our study and makes recommendations based on our findings.

SETTING THE SCENE: LITERATURE REVIEW, THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Linguistics and language teaching

Linguistics is a broad discipline that can be characterised simply as the critical/analytical study of language. It is often absent from approaches to language teaching that adopt a skills-based approach and assess students only on their practical language abilities (usually the four skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening). To illustrate the difference, a

skills-based approach will teach and assess student production and comprehension of morphology, whereas a linguistics-based approach may study the origins of that morphology, how to model it, how it has changed over time or how it varies across speakers/dialects. A fundamental shared tenet of the discipline of linguistics that is not usually shared with language teaching in schools is descriptivism.

As we, like many others, have previously noted (see, e.g., Celce-Murcia, 2008; Crystal, 1986; Durrell, 1986; Feldhausen, 2022; Hawkins, 1984; Hodges et al., 2023; Hudson, 2020; Moulton, 1963; Mukherjee, 2006; Sheehan et al., 2021; Stevenson, 1986; Trotzke & Kupisch, 2020; Wilkins, 1972), there are many ways in which linguistics can contribute to language teaching. First, current findings in second language acquisition should feed into the pedagogical approaches taken in language teaching and learning. But in addition to this, as Corr and Pineda (2023: 17) note, citing Hulshof (2009: 3), the following areas of linguistic knowledge/understanding should also be informed by findings from linguistics:

(i) students' intuitive metalinguistic reflection (*taalbeschouwing*);
(ii) explicit knowledge of textual or rhetorical conventions (*taalbeschouwing*);
(iii) pedagogical grammar ('explicit grammatical knowledge');
(iv) linguistic-cultural knowledge about (named) languages ('linguistics'/knowledge about language, KAL);
(v) disciplinary knowledge of modern linguistics ('linguistics'/KAL).

To this, we would add sociolinguistic awareness about variation in the target language (which has both practical and motivational benefits) and historical understanding of the target language (which again is interesting to students but can also explain and contextualise recalcitrant features of spelling, pronunciation, morphology or syntax). Studying the linguistics of a language (e.g., morphosyntax, phonetics/phonology, lexis, sociolinguistics, pragmatics) can enhance the subject knowledge of both teachers and pupils by raising awareness of linguistic structures, functions, variation and usage in context (see also Celce-Murcia, 2008). The technical aspects of this approach prioritise declarative knowledge of the workings of language, furnishing students (and teachers) with a precise metalanguage that facilitates metalinguistic reflection. This goes well beyond traditional grammar to include phonetics and phonology as well as sociolinguistic and pragmatic conventions (around politeness, for example). The teaching of pedagogical grammar should also be informed by linguistics, particularly when it comes to complex concepts such as tense, mood and aspect, which require significant abstraction to be understood (Domínguez et al., 2017).

Moreover, the potential role of linguistics extends beyond this contribution to skills development. Linguistic-cultural knowledge about the language of study should arguably be fundamental to the academic study of a language. This dimension is often completely lacking from language teaching in UK schools, despite evidence that it is of great interest to language students (Sheehan et al., 2021) and may empower them for further language learning.[1] An integration of the descriptive view of language and the tools of modern linguistics can empower students to investigate aspects of the language they are studying, moving beyond a fixed prescriptive view of the second language and engaging their intellectual curiosity.

Teacher attitudes to language

Prescriptive views of language are common in language teaching and learning. Textbooks are taken to present *the* 'correct' form of language and assessments are geared towards reproducing such 'correct' forms. Many teachers and students subscribe to these prescriptions—teachers correct any language they consider 'wrong' (cf. Davies and Langer, 2014,

who discuss issues that teachers face in their judgements of what is 'correct' German) and students avoid what they are taught to be 'mistakes' (which may simply be non-standard aspects of language). Harper and Rennie's (2009) study on knowledge about language in Australia has shown that pre-service teachers too have prescriptive attitudes towards language variation. Pomphrey and Moger (1999: 234–235) found that such prescriptive views can 'generate anxiety and inhibition in talking about language structure' as they can lead to a perceived lack of knowledge about language among student teachers. Such anxiety, along with fears of students being penalised for using 'non-standard language' in examinations and of teachers confusing students by describing a range of possible forms, results in the exclusion of language variation in language teaching (Stollhans, 2020).[2] This, in turn, leads to a focus on 'conceptually written' language, even in listening and speaking tasks, which does not prepare A-level students to deal with more spontaneous, informal and authentic language (Durrell, 2017).

In addition to the failure in providing students with essential language skills that can result from this prescriptivist presentation of language, teachers' attitudes towards language variation can impact students' self-esteem and academic achievements (cf. Reaser & Adger, 2008; Romaine, 2000: 205–212). Conveying the message that every language varies without attributing negative judgements to particular varieties can create a more inclusive classroom environment, particularly for so-called 'heritage' speakers (cf. Stollhans, 2020), whose language is often considered 'incorrect' when compared against dominant or standard norms. This, of course, presents challenges. In their study of teaching practices and opinions of UK-based Spanish teachers concerning the treatment of language varieties in the classroom, Bárkányi and Fuertes Gutiérrez (2019) found that teachers are generally aware of Spanish language variation but do not necessarily teach different varieties to students. These teachers reported that they would require more training to feel secure and comfortable in taking a more descriptive approach (Bárkányi & Fuertes Gutiérrez, 2019: 213). While many teachers are aware of the issues around prescriptivism, and while they see the benefits of students engaging with 'authentic' language illustrating regional and/or social differences in a language, they seem to lack both the understanding of this variation (Harper & Rennie, 2009) and the skills to teach it (Bárkányi & Fuertes Gutiérrez, 2019). As our discussion shows, the co-created materials presented in this paper can alleviate these issues by incorporating elements of linguistics into existing A-level topics, resulting in materials that can be taught without prior experience of, or expertise in, linguistics.

Linguistics and its relation to the revised A-level topics

While there are differences between the A-level specifications for French, German and Spanish, there are also strong parallels between their underpinning cultural topics. All three languages cover the broad themes laid out in Table 1 (though with distinct nomenclature).

We would argue that linguistics has the potential to make an essential contribution to all these topics, as well as to the study of literature and film.[3] Indeed, the materials that we have co-created relate to all of the above, with the exception of (i), (iv) and (v) (see the materials overview below). The exclusion of these topics should be seen as coincidental, however, as there are clearly ways in which 'the family', 'artistic outputs' and 'politics (and young people)' could also accommodate an approach informed by linguistics.

In the next subsection we provide some brief background information on co-creation, before elaborating in more detail on the specific co-creation approach adopted in developing these materials, as well as their content and focus in the next main section. Note that, in all cases, these materials were carefully designed with experienced teachers to fit into the AQA A-level specifications for French, German and Spanish.

TABLE 1 Themes of A-level topics (T) and units (U) in AQA-approved A-level textbooks.

Topic	French (d'Angelo et al., 2016)	German (Bates et al., 2016)	Spanish (García Sánchez et al., 2016)
(i) The family	T1: U1	T1: U1	T1: U1
(ii) Regional identity and heritage	T2: U4	T2: U4	T2: U5, 6
(iii) Cyberspace	T1: U2	T1: U2	T1: U2
(iv) Artistic outputs	T2: U5, 6	T2: U5, 6	T2: U4–6
(v) Politics (and young people)	T4: U10, 11	T4: U10–12	T4: U10–12
(vi) Immigration	T4: U12	T3: U7, 8	T3: U7
(vii) Multiculturalism	T3: U7	T1: U3 T3: U7–9	T3: U8, 9
(viii) Discrimination	T3: U8	T3: U9	T3: U8, 9

A co-creation approach

In pedagogic research, 'co-creation' is usually used as an umbrella term for a wide range of practices and approaches involving students as 'partners' (e.g., Bovill, 2020). This partnership can have varying degrees of engagement and students can take on a number of roles: for example, acting as representatives, consultants, co-researchers or pedagogical co-designers, or a combination of these roles (Bovill et al., 2016).

In the context of the present study, we have adopted a different educational co-creation approach. As outlined in detail in the methodology below, we developed sets of teaching and learning materials to be used in French, German and Spanish A-level classes. These were created by language-specific teams, each consisting of two academic linguists and two experienced secondary MFL teachers with the relevant language expertise. During the subsequent pedagogical intervention, teachers trialled the materials and we elicited feedback from participating teachers and pupils.

This co-creation process, which saw academic researchers collaborating directly with practising secondary teachers, enabled us to combine 'both experiential and research knowledge' (Gore & Gitlin, 2004: 54). That is, while the academic linguists had access to relevant academic research that could inform the development of the materials, the practising teachers could contribute relevant experience and pedagogical expertise to gauge the feasibility of the materials and lead on the development of concrete classroom activities. This made the research 'part of a relational analysis that tries to understand classroom practices and school policies from two differing points of view' (Gore & Gitlin, 2004: 54) and corroborated Herrenkohl et al.'s (2010: 75) argument that:

> […] the roles of teachers and researchers collaborating together often involve moving across the chasm of inside–outside in ways that have the potential to positively impact both communities (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Although this kind of in-depth collaboration is rare, it is an important way that the field can address ongoing concerns about the theory–practice divide (Duckworth, 2005).

We chose this approach to ensure that our materials would be both informed by current linguistics research and at the same time designed to fit into the AQA A-level specifications. The method also made it more likely that the materials would be accessible to students and feasible for teachers with no linguistic knowledge to teach. We now proceed to outline our methodology and concrete approach in detail.

METHODOLOGY

Schoolteachers who had collaborated on an earlier project (see Sheehan et al., 2021) were invited to be involved in the design and conduct of this study from the earliest phase. Funding from Language Acts and Worldmaking, part of the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Open World Research Initiative enabled us to buy all participating teachers out for 4 days, enabling co-planning and the co-creation of A-level materials, as detailed below. Further funding from University of Bristol and Newcastle University enabled us to employ Peter Gilman, another practising teacher, as a Research Associate on the project. In this section we report on the protocols that were adopted in our co-creation research design.

Phase 1: Consultation and co-creation of materials

We met with participating teachers at an initial meeting in September 2018 to review the curriculum and identify content topics on the existing French, German and Spanish A-Level specifications, for which an approach informed by linguistics was agreed to be of potential benefit (and not supplementary) to the delivery of learning outcomes. This was an inductive process, and academics and teachers split into language-specific groups. While approaches to this task varied by group, the following three principles were adhered to.

1. Teacher-led: the pedagogical approach was guided by the teachers due to their first-hand classroom experience.
2. Coalescent: materials were aligned with existing A-level curriculum topics.
3. Interactive: activities were task-based and student-focused; imparting analytical skills and offering the means for critical debate.

Once key A-level content topics were identified, we pitched specific themes to the teachers that were known to be popular based on our experience of undergraduate-level teaching in linguistics and school-outreach work (e.g., themes such as non-standard variation, language attitudes, language change, comparative analysis, historical relatedness). Teachers also pitched themes that they themselves would have liked to see included in the curriculum more directly. From these possibilities, we began to narrow down the scope in line with the existing A-level topics. Over the course of subsequent meetings between October 2019 and July 2020, we co-created novel materials that could be introduced into the classroom as part of the teaching of these content modules (see the following subsection for an overview of these materials). To ensure that these materials could be adopted and deployed by UK languages teachers irrespective of whether they had prior training in linguistics, each group also designed teacher prompts and notes to accompany the materials, signalling, in accessible terms, the definitions of key concepts and how task-based activities might be directed or further elaborated on. The outcome of Phase 1 resulted in four 1-hour classes (with PowerPoint slides, worksheets and accompanying teacher prompts and notes) for each of the current French, German and Spanish A-level specifications.

Materials overview

In Phase 1, design parameters were agreed upon across language groups. First, it was decided that a good hook would be to base each class around the notion of language myths (styled on Bauer & Trudgill, 1998). For example, one of the French classes began with the myth that *French is the language of France*. From here, the materials go on to deconstruct

said myth by, in this case, discussing France's regional minoritised languages, and the fact that most speakers of French are now located outside Europe. Second, to ensure maximum flexibility for teachers wanting to deliver some (though not all) classes, we included introductory slides on basic concepts in linguistics that were germane to all materials we designed. These included concepts such as *descriptivism* and *language change*. Teachers were able to remove these slides if they had already delivered them in a previous class. All classes included activities for students and a set of teachers' prompts and notes that contained answers to all the activities as well as further background information on the material covered. Teachers on this co-creation project were instrumental in guiding the format of both the activities and the teachers' materials, based on their own extensive classroom experience. Below, we flesh out in more detail specifics of the co-created materials by target language.

French

The French materials were co-created with Janette Swainston (Head of Languages at Longsands Academy and Sixth Form, St Neots) and Claire Robinson (Head of Languages at Suffolk One, Ipswich) over a series of four day-long meetings. The French co-creation materials covered topics 1–4 below, which were embedded in the broader A-level curriculum topics as outlined in Table 1.

1. Regional languages of France (ii).
2. French in contact: Breton and Francoprovençal (ii).
3. Linguistic discrimination (v, viii).
4. French outside France (v, ii, vi).

Classes 1 and 2 introduce students to languages other than French that are spoken in France. The materials consider outcomes of language contact and language change, introducing concepts such as the comparative method and historical linguistics (e.g., regular sound change). The case studies on Breton and Francoprovençal explore both linguistic properties of these varieties compared with French, as well as the sociolinguistic status of these languages and the state of minority languages more generally in France. Class 3 focuses on the notion of *glottophobie* (or 'accent discrimination') and how it manifests in everyday local and national discourses in modern France. Finally, class 4 turns to the French spoken outside France and again considers both its linguistic properties (touching on language contact) as well as attitudes towards French in different Francophone countries.

German

The German materials were co-created with Christina Westwood (Head of Modern Languages at Ellesmere College, Shropshire) and Laura Probodziak (Head of German and Spanish at St Olave's Grammar School, Orpington). As above, the German materials were also focused on busting language myths. The following four topics were chosen, again in line with Table 1.

1. German in digital media (iii).
2. Kiezdeutsch (a multiethnolect) (vii).
3. German outside Germany (ii, v, vi).
4. Regional variation in German (ii).

Class 1 covers *cyberspace* and is designed to encourage students to think about language change as a natural and productive process, and to examine characteristics of online German language use. Class 2 introduces *Kiezdeutsch*, an urban youth variety that has emerged particularly in multilingual and multicultural parts of big German cities such as Berlin (Wiese, 2012). The class can therefore be taught as part of the broader topic of *multiculturalism*, whilst also touching on themes such as *young people*, *immigration* and *regional identity*. Classes 3 and 4 consider various forms of regional variation, including dialects within Germany as well as German spoken outside Germany, including Texas German as one of the case studies.

Spanish

The Spanish materials were co-created with Susana Lopes (The Thetford Academy) and Débora Minguito (Manchester Grammar School), and follow the same methodological principles as described above. The classes covered the following topics.

1. Attitudes to language change (ii).
2. Online communication (iii).
3. Attitudes to linguistic diversity in Spain (ii).
4. Language and gender (v).

Class 1 discussed language change, deconstructing the myth that young people speak bad Spanish and looking at how Latin changed into Spanish. Class 2, like German class 1, introduced pupils to online uses of languages and how different registers affect language use. Class 3 introduced the regional dialects and languages of Spain and explored attitudes to these varieties, including linguistic discrimination. Finally, class 4 questioned societal prejudices surrounding how different genders use language (e.g., the myth that women speak more than men).

Phase 2: Testing materials

In Phase 2 the objective was to gather data from teachers and pupils not involved in Phase 1 concerning the accessibility of the materials, their contribution to learning and to students' own development. The data were elicited by means of questionnaire (teachers and pupils) and participant interviews (teachers only).

To first ensure the accessibility and validity of the co-created materials in terms of their contribution to learning outcomes, each class was initially piloted by the teachers working on the project before a phase of data collection began. Teachers reported no issues or difficulties in this phase. Then, from summer 2020, the project team began sampling teachers from our existing networks, and through the snowballing method. The project was, however, perturbed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which had significant and well-reported ramifications for day-to-day teaching and learning (see Howard et al., 2021). The immediate impact for the project was that while there was initially significant interest from teachers nationally in participating in the study ($N = 156$ registered to participate in our trial), only 17 teachers delivered the co-created content and participated in the data collection process, as summarised in Table 2.[4]

Table 3 shows the languages taught by participating teachers. Most participating schools (15/17) used the materials with Year 12 students, with two teachers adopting the materials in a Year 13 classroom. In addition, one teacher also reported that they used the materials with

TABLE 2 Final sample of participating schools, $N = 17$.

School type	*N*
Voluntary-aided school (V)	1
Academy (A)	6
Free school (F)	2
Grammar school (G)	2
Independent school (I)	6

TABLE 3 Final sample by languages taught, $N = 17$.

Language	*N*
French (Fr)	4
German (Ger)	4
Spanish (Sp)	9

a Year 10 cohort. Class sizes across the board ranged from 2 to 15 pupils (wide variance is typically expected in UK languages classrooms).

During this phase, online questionnaires were administered to teachers. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams. Teachers who participated in Phase 2 were pseudonymised using the following convention: for example, Q1.A.Fr, where Q refers to *questionnaire* (vs. I for *interview*) followed by a unique identifying number assigned to the participant, A for *Academy school* (vs. C for *Comprehensive school*, F for *Free school*, G for *Grammar school*, I for *Independent school*, Int for *International school* and V for *Voluntary-aided school*) and Fr for *French* (vs. Ger for *German* and Sp for *Spanish*).

Questionnaire design

The questionnaire, which was designed and delivered through Online Surveys, was made up of 38 items, comprising a mix of forced-choice questions, questions on five-point Likert scales and open-ended questions. Teachers provided feedback anonymously on the materials and their experiences in teaching them (which included questions concerning any previous training in linguistics, as well as teachers' confidence in delivering the materials).

Interview design

As we outline below, we extracted from the survey data themes that were used as the basis for further investigation via semi-structured interviews. An additional aim of this data collection component was to allow participants to feed back to the authors in more detail about their experiences, whilst expanding on the themes we had identified in questionnaire responses. A semi-structured interview protocol was devised, which comprised questions associated with the design and delivery of the co-created materials. Interviews lasted for roughly 1 hour. Of the final sample of 17 participating schools, seven teachers were interviewed at the end of the 2020/2021 school year. Our anonymising protocol meant that the results of the questionnaire could not be matched with semi-structured interviews. All

TABLE 4 Subsample (participant interviews), $N = 7$.

School type	*N*
International school	1
Academy	1
Comprehensive school	1
Further education college	1
Independent school	3

TABLE 5 Subsample (participant interviews), $N = 7$.

Language	*N*
French	4
Spanish	3
German	0

interviewed teachers had used the co-created materials themselves and had volunteered to participate in a feedback session (see Tables 4 and 5 for details).

All teachers used the materials with their A-level classes. In addition, one teacher used them in the context of an International Baccalaureate class, while another teacher trialled them with a Year 10 class as well as a Year 12 class. Interviews were conducted and transcribed by Peter Gillman and subsequently coded and analysed for key themes by the wider project team.

Coding and analysis

Recall that this study concerns itself specifically with teachers' explicit views regarding the introduction of linguistics as an integrated component of the languages A-level curriculum, and we identified in the introduction a number of research questions that we collapsed into two categories: feasibility and compatibility (of the co-created materials) on the one hand; and perception and impact on the other. As the data collection process was driven by these pre-defined categories, in what follows we adopt an analyst-driven, deductive thematic analysis for answers to open-ended questions from the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews. This approach informed our coding protocol: all responses were first extracted, and all named authors then read the open-ended responses from the questionnaire and the interviews. This allowed us to map out the data in a collaborative fashion. As we were principally interested in how participants would respond to the materials in an explicit way, the authors then collectively coded the responses with keywords in the two pre-identified categories.

Owing to the small size of the final sample, the quantitative analysis that follows relies on descriptive frequencies for binary and Likert-scale data, rather than inferential statistical modelling via *k-means* clustering or factor analysis. The small sample size is partly due to our study being perturbed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which placed many additional burdens on school resources, not least teachers' time. This caused significant sampling difficulties in recruiting from different types of schools (see Appendix A). We acknowledge the limitations that this aspect of the research design places on the discussion and conclusions that follow, but we nonetheless argue that our results present strong indications.

RESULTS: TEACHER PERSPECTIVES

The presentation of the results follows the research questions we introduced initially. To remind the reader, these are listed again below.

1. Feasibility and compatibility.
   a. How well do the linguistics materials integrate into the existing A-level curriculum and do they offer cross-curricular links?
   b. How feasible is it for teachers to deliver this content?
   c. What are the barriers to introducing linguistics into MFL A levels?
2. Perception and impact.
   a. How did teachers perceive the materials?
   b. What did teachers say about their pupils' engagement?
   c. What was the perceived impact on pupils and teachers?

In what follows, we present a general overview of the shape of the data from forced-choice and Likert-scale questions in the questionnaire, which we contextualise further with (a) the open-ended questionnaire data and (b) representative excerpts from the semi-structured interview data.

Feasibility and compatibility

Teacher responses to the online questionnaire suggest that it would indeed be feasible to integrate linguistics topics into the existing A-level MFL curriculum. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that the content of the co-created linguistics classes was accessible for students and that the level of language was appropriate (see Table 6). Of course, this feedback applies only to the specific content and presentation of the co-created materials, but it also shows the potential for this kind of integration and validates the co-creation model we adopted. For instance, Q14.I.Sp noted that the materials were '*very relevant to the topics we study at A level and a very good introduction to linguistics*'.

Although most teachers agreed that the target language level was suitable for A-level students, four teachers did note the combination of novel content and domain-specific vocabulary to be challenging for some pupils, especially in Year 12. As one teacher put it: '*The students don't have the ability to discuss the wider concepts in the* [target language] *yet but can understand the ideas presented and engage with the level of the content in English*' (Q9.F.Sp), with other teachers adding that pupils needed '*a little support*' (Q13.G.Ger) and for teachers '*to guide them more*' (I18.A.Sp). The same teacher also suggested that their students would have had more to discuss in English but added that they did not want to allow the use of English in a Year 12 Spanish classroom. This challenge of combining novel

TABLE 6 Teacher response data (1).

Statement	Mean	Median
1. The content was well presented and accessible for students.	4.2	4
2. The level of language was suitable for A-level students.	4.3	4
3. Linguistics should be taught as part of MFL at school.	3.8	4
4. Linguistics should be part of teacher training.	3.9	4
5. The teachers' notes were easy to follow.	4.6	5
6. The content was easy for me to understand as a teacher.	4.7	5

content with novel language in Year 12, when students are coming from a more skills-focused GCSE, requires further consideration, but note that this did not seem to be an issue for most of the sample.

Respondents also overwhelmingly agreed or strongly agreed that linguistics should be taught as part of the languages curriculum at school and as part of teacher training, providing (in free text) a range of reasons, including the fact that it: (i) links well to the rest of the curriculum (5 teachers), where maths, science and English language were mentioned; (ii) connects with future study options (2 teachers); (iii) is engaging (2 teachers); (iv) highlights the links between languages (1 teacher); (v) enables discussion (1 teacher); and (vi) pushes students to reflect on their own prejudices (1 teacher). Q1.I.Ger provided a more detailed rationale:

(1) Q1.I.Ger *This goes right to the heart of addressing the fundamental psychological barriers towards modern languages learning in the United Kingdom: linguistics reduces the gulf between the knower and the 'non-knower' and therefore increases the wish to learn, by bringing in observable, fascinating details that everyone can partake in. It makes languages come alive, be a multi-faceted tool for human understanding that is part of everyone's history. Linguistics is a leveller, and a formidable skill to learn.*

In the interviews too, several teachers mentioned connections with the existing MFL curriculum and other subjects, highlighting, for example, the links to topics on *immigration* as well as the *independent research project* (IRP). Not only could pupils reflect on other components of the curriculum, but they could also consider their own lived experiences in their first language, be that English or another language.

(2) PG *So the four students you had, what would you say was their feedback on doing these?*

I18.A.Sp *I think what they really got is the no judgement. It doesn't matter, you know, like you use the language you use, and it's not worse or this is what it is. This is what's cool. People or Latin American people, you know, we just use it like. This* […] *you know, like in terms of English, and we're not speaking properly. I remember one of them making the comment. Yes, we're being told that we don't speak English properly, or that we don't do that, but actually it's just languages evolving. And having to contrast with well, actually doing an exam at school we do continue to ask you to use a certain register of language.*

PG *Would you say that that was the most engaging thing for them?*

I18.A.Sp *That we shouldn't judge and yes.*

(3) I22.I.Fr *When you talk about* la francophonie *you concentrate very much on Africa, which obviously is interesting and, actually, we do have here some students who you know this really speaks to you being from African origin as well.*

We should stress that some teachers in the sample already subscribe to this approach and introduce content on the African context where possible, to put it simply, this is '[…] *to get people to understand, it's not just talking about Paris and the Eiffel Tower*' (I25.F.Fr). Indeed, one teacher reported on the fact that a Réunion Creole-speaking Teaching Assistant was able to use the materials on the other languages of France as a springboard for class discussion, which highlights (a) that the materials are not simply inclusive for pupils but for teachers too and (b) that they facilitate discussion in a multilingual classroom.

Relatedly, teachers commented that their pupils appreciated, and could draw on the linguistic tools detailed in the materials to better understand the historical development of the target language. In particular, teachers noted benefits on students' language learning, such as the ability to '[decipher] *unfamiliar words*' (Q5.A.Fr.Sp) with the help of links to other

languages (I23.I.Sp) and '*much increased* […] [s]*ound awareness*' (Q1.I.Ger). The materials also allowed for discussions of societal changes (Q8.A.Fr.Sp), for example, '*how language can be influenced by migration*' (Q13.G.Ger) and '*issues of social progress, colonial background, etc.*', which linked to other aspects studied in class (e.g., a '*Black France documentary*', Q12.A.Fr) and fit squarely with the exiting curriculum's focus on such topics. A teacher from an international school further added that knowledge of how language changes can, they thought, help to improve students' language skills (I24.Int.Sp). The linguistics classes thus offered links between languages and other materials studied in class, whilst contributing to the development of language skills in and beyond the target language.

The response data also indicate that it is feasible for teachers to deliver the co-created materials. 100% of responding teachers felt comfortable teaching the classes, agreeing strongly that the teachers' notes were easy to follow. As we have said, these brief notes, developed in close collaboration with experienced teachers, were designed to make the materials understandable, even for teachers with little or no background in linguistics.[5] As just over half of the responding teachers had never studied linguistics, they appear to be effective in this regard, though there may obviously be a sampling effect (as these are teachers who both taught the materials and chose to provide feedback on them). The reader is reminded that no a priori assumptions were made about teachers' knowledge of linguistics in the design phase (Appendix A provides further demographic details on the final sample). The median score of 5 (Table 6) is therefore particularly encouraging.

The interview data confirmed that most teachers found the materials easy to teach, and they also felt confident in adapting them to their own classes' needs. One teacher commented that '*I felt confident that I could just read it and I knew what I was doing*', adding that '*the PowerPoints were accessible*' and that '*any teacher available would find it ok*' (I18.A.Sp). But other teachers, while feeling confident themselves, did note that teachers without the same background or interest might find teaching linguistics more daunting. A French teacher at a comprehensive school commented as follows.

(4) I19.C.Fr *I mean, I've really loved it. Because it's my thing really. I think. I guess if you've got someone who's a bit less confident who's maybe more on the literature and film side, who doesn't have that background. They're going to find it a little bit more daunting, but actually they can, you know, in a way, use it as a student themselves. You know, because actually it is really interesting if you don't know anything about that, I think. Don't be daunted. Because it is really well explained in the materials.*

Further, I22.I.Fr noted that they had difficulties talking about terminology they were not familiar with.

(5) I22.I.Fr *Well, I say that as a non-specialist, obviously I had to… I felt I had to tread very carefully in how I was wording things and particularly as you… there are quite a few… kind of definitions of various concepts in your in your presentations like… Uh, I felt like maybe in the teachers' notes you know a bit more explanation or support would help the amateur.*

This suggests that while teachers generally felt confident delivering the materials, some teachers without a background in linguistics did face additional challenges and this would need to be considered in any future initiative of the same kind.

The questionnaire respondents also made suggestions for how the materials could be improved. In addition to minor critiques on formatting (font, font size, animations), participants felt the classes '*could have been more interactive*' (Q17.G.Ger), or '*more accessible*'

for weaker students (Q15.A.Sp). The issue of the need for more differentiation also emerged in the interviews.

(6) I19.C.Fr *The student who does Spanish as well and did Latin GCSE, he found them easier to engage with because he's used to the idea of sort of different versions of the same language in a way, if that makes sense. Because he's used to sort of the same similar routes, but with like the Spanish version and the Latin and the French version. And so he found that a little bit easier to engage with. The other students took a little bit more time and encouragement to actually sort of see.*

This suggests that, in developing these materials, further work may be needed to differentiate content and make it accessible for students of differing abilities taking different subject combinations.

Teachers were also asked about challenges facing the potential introduction of linguistics into the teaching of languages. Twelve teachers identified time as a major hurdle, for example, as stated by Q12.A.Fr.

(7) Q12.A.Fr *We used to have 9 hours a fortnight in Sixth Form—budget pressures reduced this to 8* [hours]*, 3 years ago. We struggle to fit in the 'normal' stuff and the extras like this (and various translation competitions run by university departments, etc.) that I always try to do are the most likely things to be squeezed out.*

This was a view echoed by comments from other teachers. As Q13.G.Ger and Q16.F.Sp state (respectively): '*We are following the Edexcel curriculum to cater for exam content but barely get time to supplement with other relevant materials*'; '*There is barely time to cover the content, but it was good to have interesting lessons for after assessments*'. Q17.G.Ger stated clearly that the lack of a '*link to examined material*' is a barrier. These comments highlight an important paradox: teachers agree that linguistics topics can and should be integrated into the *existing* A-level curriculum, but the pressure to prepare students for assessments means that it is difficult to justify doing this without linguistics topics also being part of assessments.

Other potential challenges that teachers raised were: (i) the absence of linguistics from teacher training courses (4 teachers) and undergraduate degrees (3 teachers); and (ii) the tension between prescriptive and descriptive approaches to language (3 teachers). This tension is something that also emerged as a theme in teacher interviews. Teachers were generally of the view, however, that making pupils aware of these different approaches to language was positive as it encouraged students to think more deeply about the target language. One teacher felt that it would encourage more questioning and a more nuanced understanding of what constitutes a '*mistake*'. Equally, however, there was a sense of pragmatism that ultimately students will be judged in an exam according to norms closely approximating the standard language. The fact that this was a basis for discussion shows that the materials are provoking interest and generating discussion, and indeed providing students with an overall deeper understanding of language they would not otherwise receive from the traditional A-level curriculum. In fact, one teacher felt this distinction could have been discussed in more nuanced terms, suggesting that '*the difference between prescriptive and descriptive* [approaches] *… was presented as a very simplified question but the philosophical depth behind it could be explored more*' (Q3.I.Ger).

Despite the challenges mentioned by the teachers, they support the idea of including linguistics in the MFL A-level curriculum and their responses indicate that it is feasible to do so. Teachers feel that the co-created materials integrate well into the existing MFL curriculum and that they offer cross-curricular links. While there is enthusiasm for integrating linguistics

into MFL teaching, concerns remain about curriculum pressures and the need for appropriate exam preparation and differentiation.

Perception and impact

Teachers noted that the materials were interesting for their studen (see Table 7).

Teachers also reported a broad interest in the content of the classes among their students, and open-ended questionnaire data attest to the level of engagement with the materials. It was reported, for example, that students in some cases had or were undertaking further research following their exposure to non-standard, regional and other minoritised varieties of the target language (e.g., *Kiezdeutsch* in the German content). Several teacher comments highlighted the extent to which variation and ideology in language was enjoyed too, as items 1–4 below illustrate ('What did students find most interesting?').

1. To learn about *Kiezdeutsch* and European *Kiezlanguages* (Q3.I.Ger).
2. Hearing, seeing and generally discovering different regional languages (Q4.V.Fr).
3. Discussions of good and bad views of language use (Q8.A.Sp).
4. Seeing that young people were already scolded for speaking badly many years ago (Q16.F.Sp).

Participants also reported strong positive responses in terms of the extent to which these materials differ from content typically covered in MFL A-level classes. This emerges in the qualitative data in several ways. For example, interviews revealed that teachers found it particularly helpful to talk about the socio-historical reflexes that gave rise to standard forms, and how these same codifying practices continue today (which students often have questions about, but which are not usually covered in the curriculum).

(8) I22.I.Fr *And then what I did as well, the first session on linguistics because you clearly make the point of explaining the normative approach and descriptive. I made a point of actually that was my excuse to talk a little bit and to present and I actually introduced the* Academie Française *because I realised that you know those students are going through the whole cycle of learning French and at no point have they been made aware or we would have heard about it but not exactly looking into the institution and at the time there was the whole debate, do we say* la COVID *do we say* le COVID*?*

(9) I25.F.Fr […] *as far as linguistics are* [sic] *concerned, we should have something about linguistics in the A-level or in the IB because, you know, how did they ever find out where language comes from? It's never discussed, is it?*

We find evidence in the interview data that the materials could succeed in drawing in/or retaining different kinds of students for languages study at A level: '*Neither of them is particularly into sort of literature and films and so on. So actually this is* […] *what they like.*

TABLE 7 Teacher response data (2).

Statement	Mean	Median
7. The content was interesting for my students.	4.1	4
8. The content was different from that which we usually cover in MFL A-level classes.	4.2	4
9. The level of detail was appropriate.	3.8	4

This is what they want' (I19.C.Fr). Similarly, while there can be an anxiety around '*teaching grammar*', the approach that we adopt in the materials is seen as refreshing, and very much in line with what students desire, according to I22.I.Fr.

(10) I22.I.Fr *You know students do like to engage with this kind of aspect, you know for languages we are always afraid of teaching grammar or looking at those kind of a bit more difficult things, but actually there is the cry for it.*

Lastly, we note that the disparate demographic backgrounds of the sample appear to have some impact on teaching and the extent to which teachers develop the materials with their own knowledge. For example, one teacher benefitted from a detailed knowledge of Breton, having studied this formally and having family who live in Brittany. This enabled them to use real-life examples and extend the materials that were developed. Another teacher had detailed knowledge of low-register Spanish forms and used this to engage their students. Where teachers did not benefit from prior exposure, however, we note too in the interview data that teachers were adapting the materials, and in particular undertaking further research of their own, making use of contemporary debates and identifying resources to supplement the class.

(11) I19.C.Fr *We kind of updated it* [the materials] *a little bit with all the protests and the sort of constitution kind of stamping on regional languages. I've got an old school friend who actually lives in* [Brittany]. *I pilfered some bits* [on Breton and Brittany] *off her Facebook page to bring into it as well. So yeah, it's been absolutely fantastic.*

There were problems identified with the materials in the test phase that emerged in the interview data. For example, while the teachers' notes were regarded as very easy to follow (see Table 6), some teachers did remark that they were not detailed enough, which complicated preparation under significant time constraints.

(12) I22.I.Fr *You introduced* langues régionales, patois *and so on. But somehow I felt that here as a teacher I didn't know enough or there were not enough examples or support to really look at well what's the difference then between* patois, *or* français régionale.

Irrespective of these shortcomings, teachers were also very keen to make suggestions for further improvements to the materials provided, and demonstrated a broad range of interests that a linguistically informed approach to MFL teaching could provide. One shortcoming of the materials design was that an insufficiently broad range of modalities and registers was included, which several teachers thought could be usefully augmented.

(13) I22.I.Fr *Obviously it's you know* [an] *investigation of* la langue parlée *I would say to try to give as many examples as possible, even like. Maybe I don't know… an example of a graffiti you know on the wall.*

(14) I23.I.Sp [I] *don't think there was anything about like more examples of Spanish slang and they really like that. We spent a little bit of time on that. They were very interested in knowing what you know what people actually say.*

Overall, the feedback from teachers indicates that the co-created materials are perceived as novel, engaging and useful to language learners. The responses also suggest that the linguistics materials had an impact on both teachers and pupils. Several teachers stated that their students' perspectives on language and language variation changed, with students gaining a '*more subtle understanding*' (Q12.A.Fr) at different levels of linguistic description in the target language. Another teacher noted that their students gained a '*greater*

awareness and appreciation of the language and how it works' and that '[s]*tudents also seem*[ed] *to have been able to develop their understanding of approaching languages critically*' (Q17.G.Fr.Ger).

Several teachers (I18.A.Sp, I19.C.Fr, I23.I.Sp) observed a change from students' prescriptive or even discriminatory judgements on language to more descriptive views: '*They gained a greater awareness of their own use of language and attitudes towards others*' (Q14.I.Sp). This awareness '*certainly had stuck*' with the students, according to one teacher (I18.A.Sp). Another teacher thought that '*changing students' perspectives when they realise that the way they speak is not wrong but enriches languages*' (Q2.A.Sp) was the highlight of teaching the linguistics materials. The materials thus do not just lead to a '[w]*ider awareness of what linguistics is*' (Q9.F.Sp), but also '*provide depth and inclusivity*' (Q1.I.Ger) in the classroom.

Teachers also noticed an impact beyond learning a particular language. The linguistics materials gave students '*a broader perspective* [and] *encouraged them to think outside the box*' (Q10.I.Fr.Ger) and '*beyond the confines of simply studying* [a language]' (Q4.V.Fr). Teachers offered a range of examples of these impacts, such as students '*think*[ing] *about register and appropriate vocabulary choices, reinforcing* [the teacher's] *literature lessons*' (Q16.F.Sp).

While it is not clear whether up to four linguistics classes would have had an observable impact on students' language learning, as some teachers (I18.A.Sp, I19.C.Fr, I24.Int.Sp) noted in response to an interview question about this, materials made a difference when it came to background knowledge, approaches to language (including changes in language awareness and attitudes), students' ability to deal with unfamiliar language and their interest in pursuing linguistics topics. One teacher believed that the students' awareness of prescriptive and descriptive approaches to language may result in students asking more questions about '*actual*' language use, which would be an '*enriching*' experience for students (I23.I.Sp). Three teachers (I19.C.Fr, Q1.I.Ger, Q13.G.Ger) reported that some of their students planned to do a linguistics-related IRP because of the materials, and others reported on their students' desire for further learning.

The materials also had an impact on teachers and their teaching practices. Thirteen out of the 17 teachers who filled in the questionnaire agreed or strongly agreed that they learnt something from teaching the classes, for example, about linguistic diversity in France (Q7.I.Fr), language change (Q2.A.Sp) and similarities and differences between Old English and Old High German (Q1.I.Ger).

The fact that only 35% of teachers agreed/strongly agreed (Table 8) with the statement that classes made them think differently about the language(s) they teach is partly related to teachers' attitudes towards linguistics before teaching the materials. Four of the 11 teachers who either disagreed or neither agreed nor disagreed noted that they already incorporated some linguistics elements in their teaching and agreed with the points made in the materials (Q1.I.Ger, Q2.A.Sp, Q11.A.Sp, Q16.F.Sp). The other seven teachers did not provide further details. Two of the six teachers who agreed/strongly agreed with the statement thought that linguistics should be added in lower year groups: '*a lot of the material produced would*

TABLE 8 Teacher response data (3).

Statement	Mean	Median
10. The classes made me think differently about the language(s) I teach.	3.3	3
11. I learnt something from teaching the classes.	4.3	5
12. I would be interested in teaching more lessons like these.	4.1	5
13. I would recommend this course to other teachers.	4.2	5

be highly relevant (and engaging) for younger students—although we may need to adapt' (Q17.G.Ger); '*languages at KS3 and 4 could be made more engaging by covering more relevant topics and more cultural and current context*' (Q13.G.Ger). Similar responses were solicited from the question 'Has teaching the materials made you reflect on and/or change your teaching practice?', to which five teachers answered '*yes*', six teachers were '*unsure*' and six answered '*no*'. This group of 12 teachers did not provide any further details on their answers. The five teachers who answered the question with '*yes*' specified that they would like to include more linguistics in their teaching, also in other year groups (Q14.I.Sp, Q17.G.Ger), that they added certain elements to the curriculum (Q3.I.Ger), that they wanted to include the linguistics materials each year (Q12.A.Fr) and that they made '*more reference to any other languages known to the students to lose some of the "otherness" of German*' (Q1.I.Ger).

On the whole, the linguistics materials were very well received by the teachers in our sample, which can also be seen in the scores for items 12: 'I would be interested in teaching more lessons like these' (mean = 4.1, median = 5) and 13: 'I would recommend this course to other teachers' (mean = 4.2, median = 5) in Table 8. The feedback summarised here suggests that the co-creation materials were perceived as novel and engaging and had an impact on pupils and at least on some of the teachers.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Feasibility and compatibility

Our results show that our co-created A-level linguistics materials were perceived to be novel and yet clearly compatible with the existing curriculum. This is an important finding. Although it may be desirable to integrate linguistics more explicitly into the A-level specification in future review cycles, the success of our co-created materials shows that the existing curriculum has space to accommodate linguistics in its current form, as proposed by Corr et al. (2019). This is not unexpected. Language lies at the heart of many of the core A-level topics: regional identity and heritage, cyberspace, politics, immigration and discrimination. It is actually surprising that these topics do not already include the critical/analytical study of language at their core. This is especially true given the focus on skills in A-level assessment, whereby only 20% of marks are awarded for understanding of 'content', with 80% being awarded for the four language skills. Integrating the critical/analytical study of language into all A-level topics would bridge the content skills divide that we have written about elsewhere (Sheehan et al., 2021). It would, for example, enable students not merely to talk *about* regional identity *in* French/German/Spanish, but rather to understand how regional varieties of French/German/Spanish and other regional languages embody regional identity. Learning about this in relation to European countries as well as countries in the Global South would also open up discussions about colonialism and empire and how they relate to language—topics likely to be of interest to many pupils.

Our results also provide suggestive evidence that teachers with little or no background in linguistics (e.g., since the formal study of linguistics as an academic field was not part of their language degree programme or teacher training) are able to teach some linguistics without any training, as long as sufficient guidance notes are provided. This is also a promising finding as it suggests that it would be feasible for an approach based on linguistics to be integrated into A-level teaching without the need for large-scale teacher development. That is not to say, of course, that trainee and experienced teachers would not benefit from additional training in linguistics. In fact, our respondents overwhelmingly agreed that linguistics should be part of teacher training and some respondents commented that the absence of linguistics from teacher training and/or from university degrees in languages could be a barrier to the wider inclusion of linguistics as an element of language teaching in UK schools.

We must remain conscious of the potential sampling effect of an opt-in study such as this and the subsequent bias of our results. Nonetheless, our results highlight the great potential for integrating linguistics topics into the existing A-level curriculum. Providing opportunities for teachers to learn more about linguistics through continuing professional development would clearly facilitate this change as well as yielding positive impacts on teacher attitudes and practice, as discussed in the following subsection.

Perception and impact

Our results also show that teachers felt the materials were interesting to students, who were particularly attracted by topics such as language change and language attitudes. This is in keeping with the findings of Sheehan et al. (2021), which found students to be overwhelmingly interested in historical linguistics and sociolinguistics. There was also general recognition that the materials were different from the usual A-level materials, giving students new critical skills and creating opportunities for debate. In fact, the materials arguably had effects that extended beyond language learning: teachers reported that their students extended their critical thinking skills to other aspects of the curriculum. For instance, teachers reported occasions when students linked linguistic concepts to discussions about societal issues and to other school disciplines like English language and sociology.

Anecdotal evidence from teachers suggests that linguistics may be particularly interesting for multilingual students, both those studying multiple languages and those who speak a language other than English at home. While the former group of students is, unfortunately, ever decreasing in England (Collen, 2023), the latter group is slowly increasing and now constitutes over 20% of pupils at state schools and nurseries in England (Department for Education, 2023). It is therefore increasingly important that language teaching in UK schools considers this large minority of pupils and enables them to connect the languages they study at school with their own linguistic repertoires. Linguistics offers a means to do this: a critical/analytical approach can be applied to any language allowing pupils to identify structural parallels and differences between their languages as well as sociopolitical parallels. In fact, the same is true for monolingual pupils, or pupils bilingual in the indigenous Celtic languages of the United Kingdom, as the teachers in our study highlight. Linguistics gives pupils the tools to critically examine language in all its guises.

Linguistics can also contribute to the demystification of grammar teaching, as our results highlight. This is because a wider consideration of how the morphology of a language works and where it comes from is not only interesting to many pupils, but also offers them an explanation for things that otherwise may appear perplexing (e.g., the subjunctive mood). An important aspect of this is the simple recognition that there is no *one* perfect form of language and that there are even multiple standards of French, German and Spanish. This can have a demystifying effect for pupils who have been exposed to authentic language that departs from 'exam language' and for heritage speakers who may speak a non-standard variety of the language, or even a standard different from the one being taught in the classroom. Indeed, the inclusion of linguistics in A-level teaching has the potential to have a deep impact on pupils' perception of language. Teachers noted that pupils developed a subtler understanding of language, gained greater awareness and appreciation of language and learned to approach language learning in a more critical way. Notably, teachers reported that this shift in perspective led students to move away from prescriptive judgements and towards adopting a more descriptive understanding of language use. This is noteworthy as

the co-creation project (were it to be scaled up) demonstrates a promising opportunity to introduce more authentic language learning and language use into the classroom.

Teachers themselves also benefitted from teaching the linguistics materials (e.g., by learning about new concepts and analytical techniques). The way the materials were designed—by and for teachers—offered them agency and facilitated discussions, as well as the means to incorporate their experiences and provide students with a more holistic approach to language learning. The majority of teachers expressed a positive inclination towards incorporating more linguistics content into their language teaching, with many intending to include similar materials in the future. These strong benefits all suggest that the co-created linguistics materials fit well with existing curriculum, enriching the skills and understanding of both teachers and pupils and impacting their views of language, albeit within the confines of a small and limited study. Unfortunately, the fact that this knowledge is not assessed at A level (or GCSE) makes it difficult for some teachers to justify dedicating classroom time to linguistics, and this remains a significant hurdle.

Languages as skills

As has been widely reported, the United Kingdom has for some time been suffering from a 'languages crisis' (e.g., British Academy, Academy of Medical Sciences, the Royal Academy of Engineering and the Royal Society, 2019; British Academy, Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Association of School and College Leaders, the British Council and Universities UK, 2020; Bowler, 2020; Kasstan & Swainston, 2023), with an ongoing decline in uptake of languages qualifications at GCSE and A level in England and Wales (see, e.g., Collen, 2020, 2023). This crisis has many contributing factors, many of which are beyond the control of educators (English as a global language, improvements in automated translation and artificial intelligence, Brexit, the reduction in the number of subjects studied by pupils at A level, the relatively harsh marking of A-level language exams, the perceived difficulty of the subject, teacher shortages, the mismatch between languages offered and pupil interests). The role played by many of these disparate factors on languages teaching and learning has already been the subject of a substantive literature. UK language skills are reported to be among the worst in Europe (Lanvers & Coleman, 2017), and candidate numbers for formal qualifications have been in decline for some time (Dobson, 2018). Against this backdrop, it is worth considering what educators *can* do to make languages more attractive to their pupils. The curriculum itself must be considered (e.g., Corr et al., 2019). This curriculum has been branded as 'dull and uninspiring' (Pountain, 2019), not least because it implies languages to be little more than practical skills.

In schools in England and Wales, the practical skills-based focus of language teaching is driven largely by Sweet's (1972) four skills (listening, reading, writing and speaking), with little emphasis placed (in assessment at least) on transferable analytical and/or critical skills. This conceptualisation of languages is out of sync not only with languages in higher education, but also with the approach to other school subjects that have both a practical and a theoretical dimension. In other 'practical' subjects (e.g., Physical Education [PE], Music), a critical, creative, theoretical and/or analytical dimension is introduced at GCSE and further enhanced at A level. PE is a striking example. In the AQA GCSE PE specification, even the 40% of the GCSE assessment based on practical performance also requires students to analyse and evaluate their own performance. The remaining 60% of the assessment is based on two written examinations assessing (among other things) applied anatomy and physiology, sports psychology and use of data. In the A-level assessment for PE, practical skills (as a performer or coach) constitute only 30% of the assessment weighting (see the *AQA A-level PE scheme of assessment*: AQA, 2020). In French, German and Spanish

A levels, the four skills still account for 80% of overall assessment (see the *AQA A-level French scheme of assessment*, *German scheme of assessment* and *Spanish scheme of assessment*: AQA, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c). Overall, the picture that emerges is one in which languages alone are assessed primarily as skills, while other subjects with a practical dimension tend to be explored in more critical/theoretical terms.

Adding linguistics to A-level languages is an obvious way to redress this imbalance and it is possible that this could make the study of languages more appealing to a broader range of students. As noted by the teachers in our study, some students of languages are primarily interested in the language itself rather than the study of literature/film. Making these students aware that advanced analytical/critical study of language is possible may persuade some of them to continue with languages after A level. Even if students do not continue with languages, the skills they acquire through the study of linguistics can be applied elsewhere, not least in the study of future languages.[6]

The co-creation model

Before concluding, we would like to reflect on the advantages and issues associated with the co-creation model that we have adopted here. In a context in which academics are increasingly encouraged to engage with audiences beyond the academy and have meaningful impact on the real world, and in which teachers are increasingly urged to develop their own expertise and practice by engaging with research, the co-creation model affords obvious advantages. The most obvious is the specialist contribution of those involved and the efficiency this brings to the creation of materials. While academics may have significant subject knowledge to share and access to the latest research (much of which is still, unfortunately, paywalled), teachers have—in addition to subject knowledge—an in-depth understanding of pedagogy and the particular teaching expertise necessary to adapt this combined subject knowledge for the A-level classroom. The process of selecting and developing the co-created materials took time, but we would contend that this was time well invested and that the overall time taken to produce materials, which are informed by academic research and pedagogically tailored to the A-level classroom, was comparatively less than would have been necessary if either group were working alone. More importantly, the end result, we would contend, is of higher quality and of more use to teachers and pupils. The process was also extremely enjoyable for both groups (see Kasstan & Swainston, 2023; Kasstan et al., 2021).

The model also brings with it some challenges, not least the lack of funding available for this kind of initiative. Teachers and academics need to be bought out of teaching/other activities in order to be able to dedicate time to co-creation and this kind of funding is often not available through institutional engagement and impact funds, which are mainly intended to cover travel and catering expenses and/or administrative assistance. There are also no obvious sources of funding through UK Research and Innovation or charities/learned societies such as the British Academy or Leverhulme Trust. If universities and the UK government are serious about encouraging engagement and impact, then funding schemes ought to be established to enable schools and universities to work together. In the case of languages, which face notable challenges and a call to rethink the discipline, this will become increasingly important in the coming years. To help inspire and guide such collaborations, we recently launched an open-access *Manifesto for linguistics in language teaching in the UK context* (Sheehan et al., 2023), which we developed with teachers and other stakeholders and has since been endorsed by learned societies and other sectoral institutions in the United Kingdom.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has aimed to (i) test the feasibility and compatibility of introducing linguistics topics as a component of the existing A-level curriculum and (ii) record the perception of teachers and pupils of these materials and any impact of teaching/studying linguistics on either group. The materials in question were co-created by us (a group of academics) with another academic colleague (Dr. Norma Schifano, Birmingham University) and six experienced secondary school teachers in England. The co-created materials were tested by secondary school teachers of French, German or Spanish and feedback gathered via online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. We received feedback from 17 teachers. The data gathered show the great potential for linguistics topics to be introduced as part of the existing A-level specifications without the need for curriculum change. Not only did teachers overwhelmingly feel comfortable and confident teaching the materials, but they also found them to be compatible with existing A-level materials—albeit distinct from them. There was general agreement that taking a critical/analytical approach to language itself has many benefits and is attractive to pupils, as well as being more inclusive of multilingual pupils (in an increasingly multilingual context). Given the challenges facing the discipline of languages, we need universities and schools to work together to invigorate teaching and encourage the next generation of linguists. The co-creation model, we would argue, is a good way to do this.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There are no conflicts of interest to declare.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Ethical approval for this research was granted by university research ethics committees at Anglia Ruskin University (where the first author was based at the time the research was commenced), Newcastle University (where the first author is now based), the University of Bristol and the University of Westminster.

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ENDNOTES

[1] An anonymous reviewer pointed out that linguistics is much better integrated into the teaching of English language in schools, particularly at Key Stage 5 (A level). As they note, this provides further evidence that linguistics is both interesting to school-age pupils and feasible for teachers to teach.

[2] We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for their comment in which they emphasise the significant impact that standardised expectations in examinations and rigid marking may have on teachers' approach to teaching languages. Whilst we fully agree that a 'teaching to the test' culture creates pressures on teachers and contributes to prescriptivist approaches, sociolinguistics research—as we discuss in this section—suggests that this is just one of the potential contributing factors and that prescriptivist views held by some teachers are the result of a number of complex reasons.

[3] A reviewer asks us why our intervention targets Key Stage 5 (A level) rather than earlier stages of language learning. The reason is that the A-level topics and assessments permit greater space for linguistics than GCSE qualifications. While the content of GCSE exams is heavily prescribed, the independent research project component of A levels permits students to be awarded marks for their understanding of linguistic topics.

[4] This is not to say that not more than those 17 might have used the materials in their classes.

[5] It is important to note that not all language degree programmes in the United Kingdom include the study of linguistics as a subfield. This should not be confused with teachers' language proficiency.

[6] This aligns with much earlier calls for teaching language awareness (cf. Hawkins, 1999). Hawkins, for example, argued for the introduction of 'foreign language apprenticeships', which teach pupils 'how to learn a language' (Hawkins, 1999: 125) rather than teaching them skills in one particular language.

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APPENDIX A

Teacher participants by school, cohort and experience

#ID	School type	Language taught	*N* = students in A-level language cohort	Has previously studied linguistics
Q1.I.Ger	Independent	German	5	Y
Q2.A.Sp	Academy	Spanish	4	Y
Q3.I.Ger	Independent	German	22	Y
Q4.V.Fr	Voluntary-aided	French	7	N
Q5.A.Sp	Academy	Spanish	15	N
Q6.I.Sp	Independent	Spanish	4	N
Q7.I.Fr	Independent	French	6	N
Q8.A.Sp	Academy	Spanish	15	Y
Q9.F.Sp	Free	Spanish	5	N
Q10.I.Fr.Ger	Independent	French/German	15	N
Q11.A.Sp	Academy	Spanish	31	Y
Q12.A.Fr	Academy	French	28	Y
Q13.G.Ger	Grammar	German	6	Y
Q14.I.Sp	Independent	Spanish	5	Y
Q15.A.Sp	Academy	Spanish	16	N
Q16.F.Sp	Free	Spanish	50	Y
Q17.G.Ger	Grammar	German	14	N
I18.A.Sp	Academy	Spanish	4	N
I19.C.Fr	Comprehensive	French	2	N
I21.I.Fr[a]	Independent	French	8	Y
I22.I.Fr	Independent	French	2	Y
I23.I.Sp	Independent	Spanish	15	Y
I24.Int.Sp	International	Spanish	12	N
I25.F.Fr	Free	French	3	N

[a] *Note*: One German interview (I20) was excluded from the sample here as feedback given did not concern the co-creation project.