

***MOVING THROUGH LANGUAGES:  
SCHOOLS & UNIVERSITIES  
WORKING TOGETHER***

# ***LINGUISTICS & MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE (MFL) TEACHING***

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# ***LINGUISTICS IN MFL TEACHING***

- × What is Linguistics?
- × What can Linguistics do for MFL decline?



**Language learning:  
turning a crisis into  
an opportunity**

Neil Kenny and Harriet Barnes spell out  
the British Academy's call for action

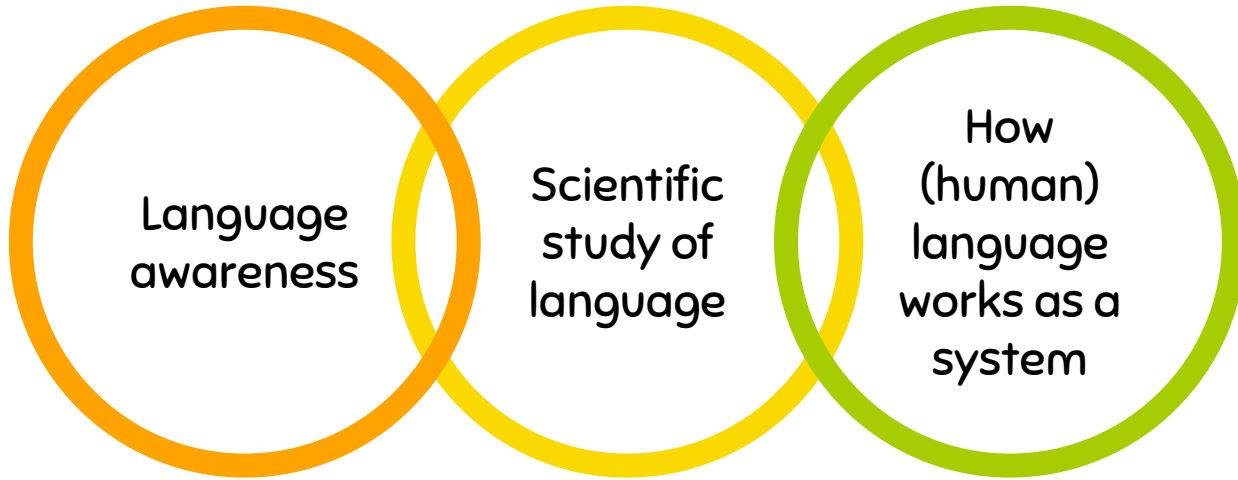
- × Our project: how can teachers in schools and universities work together to do something about it?



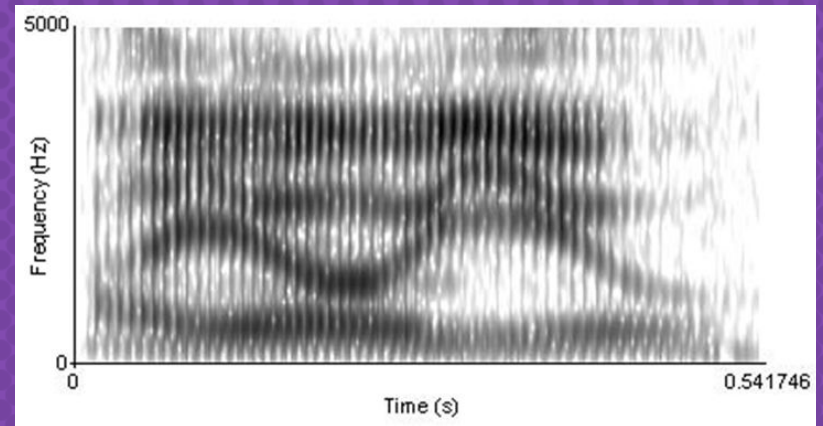
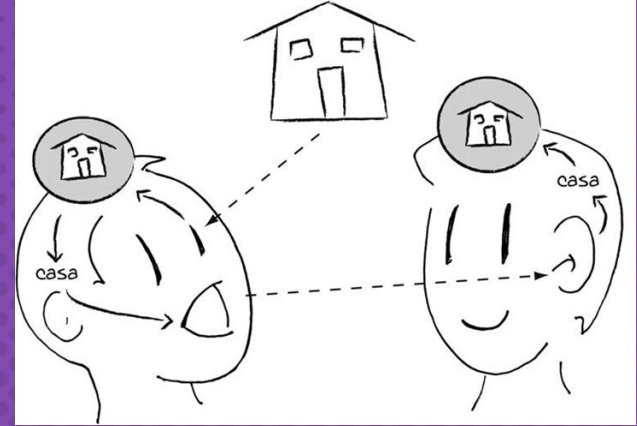
**1.**

***WHAT IS LINGUISTICS?***

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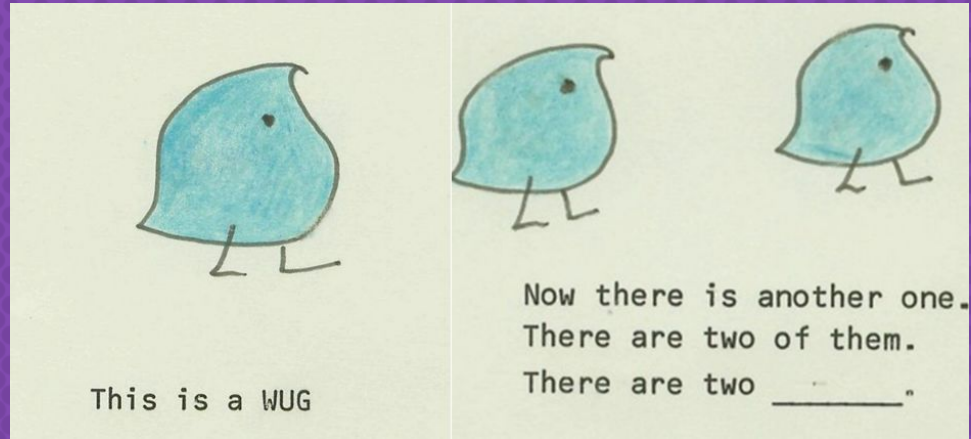


# WHAT IS LANGUAGE?





# WHAT IS LINGUISTICS?



SHIPPING... BUILDING... LOW COST...  
WEEK END... CAMPING CAR...  
SMART PHONE...





# 2.

## ***WHAT CAN LINGUISTICS DO FOR MFL DECLINE?***

- What are the benefits?
- Who benefits?
- Where's the evidence?





*SCIENTIFIC/OBJECTIVE APPROACH*

*RECRUITING NEW LINGUISTS*

**DIFFERENT WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT  
AND ENGAGING WITH LANGUAGES**

**IMPROVE LANGUAGE LEARNING ITSELF!**



*EMPOWERING STUDENTS*

*CROSS-CURRICULAR LEARNING*



# LINGUISTICS: THE BENEFITS

## New ways of thinking about languages

- o Scientific, objective approach
- o Descriptive rather than prescriptive or evaluative approach

## Recruitment

- o Attract different/new kinds of students to the study of languages

## Empowering students

- o Combat linguistic misconceptions and prejudices
- o Ownership of their unique way of speaking (“idiolect”)
- o Taking away pressure that they’re not “native” speakers
- o ‘instill an appreciation of the universality of human cognition and also of human diversity’ (Tortora 2017:4)

## Cross-curricular learning

- o Empirical investigation and scientific theory formation (‘STEM’ skills)
- o Accessibility: ‘hands-on’ research (for free!)
- o Intersects with sciences, maths, history, geography, sociology, PSCH...

## Language learning!

- o raising metalinguistic and sociolinguistic awareness

'I appreciate my ability to speak a second language fluently much more than I did before, too, and I find myself picking up little differences in how people say things in French'

– Danielle

'Linguistics has made me more interested in learning new languages and has also made it easier than before'

– Valentin

'I found it fascinating that there are so many different sounds in other languages that aren't in English or Spanish. Now I am also very interested in studying another language'

– Eric

## ***THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE***

allows you to explore languages in a whole different dimension. I have learned more about word formation/ morphology and observed the structure of words in different languages'

– Kenedy

'Not only have the things I learned expanded my knowledge of the study of languages, but they've opened my eyes to ways the world works'

– Kylie

## ***THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE***

Linguistics gives us an appreciation of the complexity that language is. I [was] fascinated by trying to discover patterns in how and why we do what was observed. That's one of my favorite parts of linguistics—being able to apply it to real life'

– Gianna

**'Linguistics touches everything** and is involved in any and every possible topic [...]

This makes this one the class where really the **questions or points of interest are limitless** as to what people can do...

That kind of **connection to humanity** was what I learned from linguistics, **all things people have ever learned depended on language'** – James





**3.**

***BENEFITS IN THE UK  
(MFL) CONTEXT***

# ***OUR PROJECT***

AIM: get Linguistics into the MFL curriculum

- × Address decline in MFL study in schools and universities
- × Drop in GCSE entries from early 1990s, not helped by languages becoming optional after age 14 (only 49% in 2014)
- × Drop in A-level entries (and knock-on effect at university level)
- × Growing divide (state vs. independent sector; gender; socio-economic groups)
- × Long-held views that MFL study is inherently difficult and that marking criteria for A-levels are tougher than in other subjects

(cf. Tinsley & Doležal 2018; Corr et al. 2019)

***WHY?***

## WHY NOT?

- × Current A-level spec: distinction between language **skills** vs. **content** (= literature, film, history, culture)
  - × Language as a 'skill' – but it can be much more than that!
- × Linguistics is already written into the A-level!
  - × English Language A-level engages with English itself in a nuanced and insightful way:
    - × sociolinguistic variation, linguistic analysis, phonetics, semantics, pragmatics, language acquisition, stylistics, language change, language attitudes

## ***WHY NOT?***

- × We can do the same for MFL!
  - × Attract new kinds of students to the study of languages at A-level and beyond;
  - × Bridge the content/skills gap in MFL A-level spec
    - × In line with the university context
  - × Enhance the linguistic skills of A-level linguists by raising their metalinguistic and sociolinguistic awareness



# WHAT'S OUR PROJECT DOING ABOUT IT?

The '*Linguistics in MFL* Project':

- × Introductory mini-courses for French, German and Spanish linguistics
- × 4x 50-minute interactive lessons
- × delivered by teachers with some background in linguistics

<http://www.linguisticsinmfl.co.uk> / @inmfl 



Anglia Ruskin  
University

Faculty of Arts,  
Law & Social Sciences



UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE



UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

UNIVERSITY OF  
WESTMINSTER 



University of  
BRISTOL

PhilSoc  
The Philological Society

Linguistics has the potential  
to help students with their language skills in  
interesting and nuanced ways.

Grammar is not really a list of constructions  
to be employed; it is an ever-changing system  
with rules and intricate interactions,  
used in different ways by different speakers.

Understanding this, and how linguistic differences can encode  
social differences, is an essential skill for anyone wanting  
to use language authentically.

## + Language or dialect?

- What is a dialect?
- Are there any dialects of English?
- Are there any dialects of French?
- Why is Occitan (France) a language and Neapolitan (Italy) a dialect?

“A language is a dialect with an army and navy” (Max Weinreich)



***THE SOCIAL LIFE OF  
LANGUAGE***



## Introducing the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet)

- The IPA allows us to represent the sounds of a language, regardless of its spelling system
- Can you guess what these English words are?

■ [reɪn]

■ [kæt]

■ [mæt]

■ ['lɪt(ə)rɪtʃə]

■ [θru:'aʊt]

■ ['gɔ:dʒəs]



## German in the IPA

- Can you work out what these German words are?

■ [ˈblu:mə]

■ [ˈʃwainə]

■ [ˈbu:x]

■ [ˈʃu:lə]

■ [ˈtsvoelf]

■ [ˈbrykʰə]

■ [ˈpfefa]

■ [ˈʃpi:ɡalbɪlt]

- Is this easier in German or in English? Why? Which va



## German in the IPA

- Can you work out what these German words are?

■ [ˈblu:mə] = Blume



■ [ˈbu:x] = Buch



■ [ˈtsvoelf] = zwölf



■ [ˈpfefa] = Pfeffer

■ [ˈʃwainə] = Schweine



■ [ˈʃu:lə] = Schule



■ [ˈbrykʰə] = Brücke

■ [ˈʃpi:ɡalbɪlt] = Spiegelbild



- Is this easier in German or in English? Why?

**'THE SOUNDS OF  
GERMAN'**

## + Spoken vs. written grammar

### ■ Suffixal and prefixal grammar in verbs

- The written language carries grammatical information in the suffix of the verb
- The spoken language tends to carry this information in prefixes: the subject pronouns do most of this work:

■ je donnais	[ʒə.dəne]
■ tu donnais	[ty.dəne]
■ il donnait	[il.dəne]
■ nous donnions	[nu.dɔnjɔ̃]
■ on donnait	[ɔ̃.dəne]
■ vous donniez	[vu.dɔnje]
■ ils donnaient	[il.dəne]

## + Verb morphology

### ■ Suffixal and prefixal grammar in verbs

- Similarly, in spoken French, gender and number are marked via the article before the noun, whereas written French marks gender and number at the end of the noun in the suffix:

■ Le chat	[lə.ʃa]
■ Les chats	[le.ʃa]
■ La table	[la.tabl]
■ Des tables	[de.tabl]

- Written verb morphology likely approximates 12th century French!



**'THE GRAMMAR OF  
SPOKEN AND WRITTEN  
FRENCH'**



## + The history of word order

- Take a look at the following sentences from Old Spanish. Do you notice anything particular about word order? Would this order be natural in Modern Spanish?

- 1) **Despues quiso S.M.** ver algunas ciudades del estado de Milan  
'His majesty wanted to see some cities in the state of Milan afterwards'
- 2) **Grande duelo avien las yentes christianas**  
'The Christian people suffered great grief'
- 3) **Un dia fablava el conde Lucanor** con Patronio su consejero, en esta guisa  
'Count Lucanor spoke to his adviser Patronio in this way one day'



## + The history of word order

- They all share the order **Phrase – Verb – subject** (e.g. **Object – Verb – Subject**), i.e. the verb is always placed in second position, unlike Modern Spanish, where the most common word order in unmarked contexts is **Subject – Verb – Object**
- This is a rule known as Verb Second (V2), which used to be active in Old Spanish (and is still active in modern languages like German)
- But has V2 disappeared at all from Modern Spanish? Can you think of any contexts in the modern language where the **Object – Verb – Subject** order is required?



## + The history of word order

- How about the following sentences? What do they have in common? How do they relate to (1)-(2)-(3)?

\* = not accepted by speakers

- 4) ¿**Qué compró Mara** ayer? (\* ¿Qué Mara compró ayer?)
- 5) ¿**Cómo se llama tu hija**? (\* ¿Cómo tu hija se llama?)
- 6) ¿**Cuándo ha llegado Anna**? (\* ¿Cuándo Anna ha llegado?)




This is not far from what we see in English (also formerly a V2 language): today, the unmarked word-order is **Subject – Verb – Object**, but what do you see in wh-questions?



# 'THE HISTORY OF SPANISH'

## ***FEEDBACK: EVIDENCE OF THE BENEFITS (SO FAR...)***

 ***DID STUDENTS LEARN NEW THINGS ABOUT THE STUDY OF LANGUAGE/LANGUAGE AWARENESS?***

 **YES:**

by the end of the course,  
everyone could define  
linguistics (or made a good  
stab at it)\*

o beforehand, around 20% 'didn't know'  
or gave inaccurate responses

\* In answer to the question 'How would you describe linguistics to a friend?'

## ***FEEDBACK: EVIDENCE OF THE BENEFITS (SO FAR...)***

 ***DID STUDENTS BECOME MORE  
INTERESTED IN THE STUDY OF  
LANGUAGE/LINGUISTICS?***

 **YES:**

25% students had read something about linguistics before the course

60% said that they **intended to read more** about linguistics afterwards\*

\*on a scale of 1–5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree), 59.2% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the statement 'having taken the course, I intend to read some more about linguistics'.

## ***FEEDBACK: EVIDENCE OF THE BENEFITS (SO FAR...)***

 ***DID STUDENTS FEEL THEIR  
LANGUAGE SKILLS HAD BENEFITED?***

 **YES:**

students agreed that 'learning  
a bit about linguistics has  
helped me with my language  
skills'\*

\*on a scale of 1-5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree), with a median result of 4.

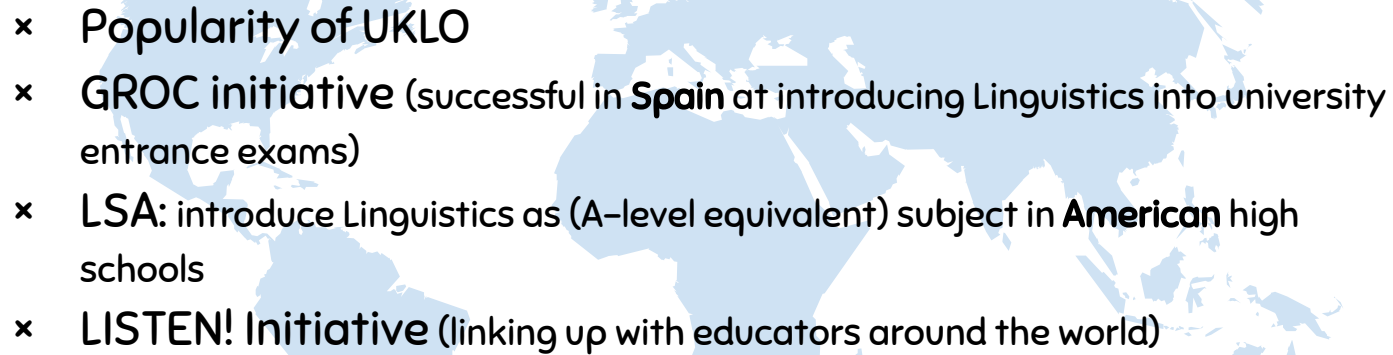
## ***FEEDBACK: EVIDENCE OF THE BENEFITS (SO FAR...)***

### ***DID TEACHERS OBSERVE ANY BENEFITS?***

 YES:

- × The lesson was helpful for my students (92.3%)
- × Students seem interested and engaged (91.8%)
- × lessons triggered discussion on further topics, debates, language comparisons, independent research



- 
- × Popularity of UKLO
  - × GROC initiative (successful in **Spain** at introducing Linguistics into university entrance exams)
  - × **LSA**: introduce Linguistics as (A-level equivalent) subject in **American** high schools
  - × **LISTEN!** Initiative (linking up with educators around the world)

***EVIDENCE FROM ELSEWHERE...***

## WHAT NEXT?

- × Join our **MFL A-level pilot** for 2019/20!
- × **Adopt** a linguist!
- × Try out the **International Phonetic Alphabet** (IPA) to pronounce words from any language
- × Have a go at some linguistics puzzles from **UKLO**
- × Visit our **Linguistics in MFL** website to find out more...



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# THANK YOU!

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