

Linguistics in Modern Foreign Languages

Project Briefing

Context

Addressing the decline in Modern Foreign Language (MFL) study in FE and HE

Current A-level syllabi make a distinction between language skills and content, the latter referring to literature, film, history and culture.

This differs from many university courses in which linguistic content is fundamental, as reflected in past and current Research Excellent Framework (REF) entries.

Linguistics has the potential to appeal to different kinds of students given its scientific approach.

Aims

We aim to get linguistic content options added to MFL A-level syllabi.

By doing this, we hope to:

- (i) attract new kinds of students to the study of languages at A-level and beyond;
- (ii) bridge the content/skills gap in MFL A-level syllabi, in line with the HE context;
- (iii) enhance the linguistic skills of A-level linguists by raising their metalinguistic and sociolinguistic awareness.

Key questions

1. How interesting and intellectually stimulating do students find linguistics?
2. What effect does exposure to linguistics have on students' language attitudes?
3. What effects does better linguistic knowledge have on language skills?

Research approach

A joint venture between Anglia Ruskin University, University of Birmingham, University of Bristol, University of Cambridge, Queen Mary University of London and 15 teachers of French, Spanish, and German from state/independent UK secondary schools. All teachers have volunteered to take part in the study and most have a background in linguistics.

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Research design

Different introductory mini-courses were developed for French, German and Spanish linguistics comprising four 50-minute lessons.

These were then delivered mainly by teachers with a background in linguistics.

Feedback was collected before and after the pilot from teachers and pupils.

Teacher testimonials

“Pupils liked the linguistics mini course ... there is a lot of scope for building linguistic activities into existing topics”

“Pupils who took the intro to French phonology said that it helped them a great deal with their French orals”

“Some pupils were inspired to do a research project on a linguistic topic after taking the mini course”

Future plans

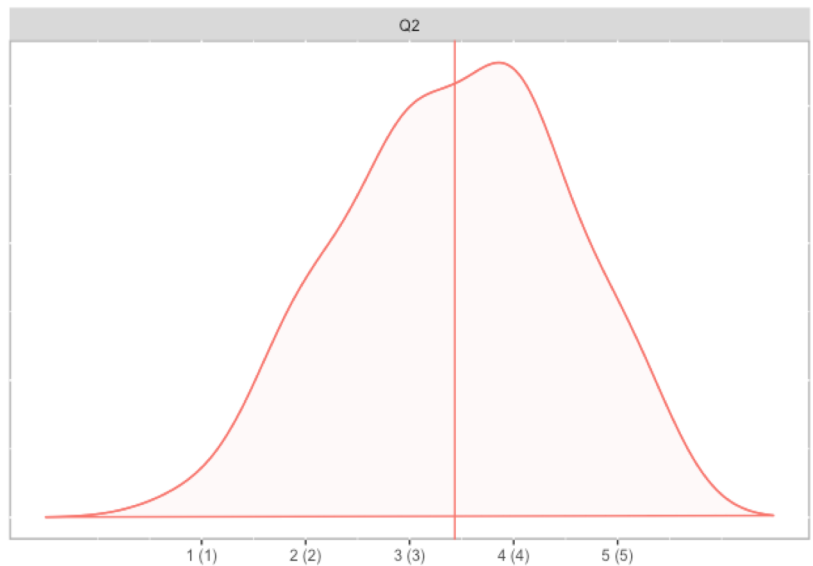
Second iteration of the project pilot with a larger sample of schools

Funding bids to expand the project and include:

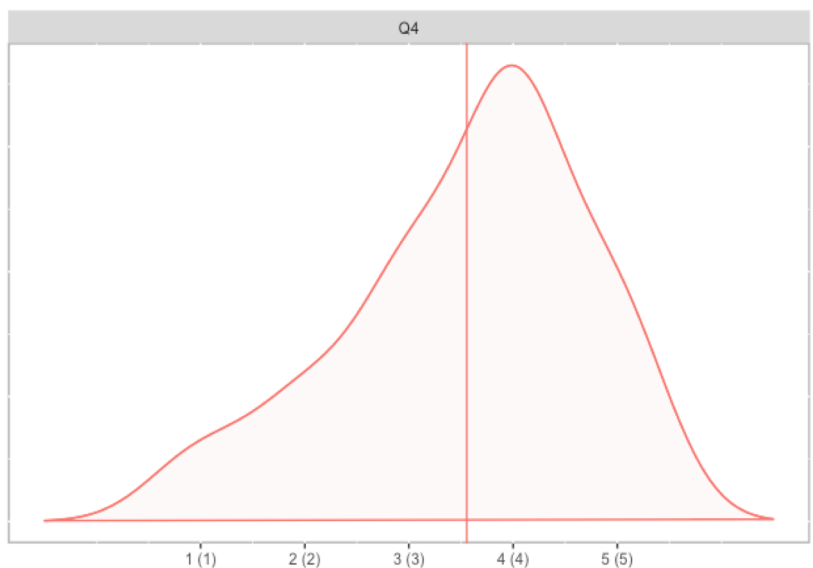
1. Training sessions for teachers without a background in linguistics
2. Co-creation of new materials with participating teachers

2017-18 Pilot: Student feedback

‘Having taken the course, I intend to read some more about linguistics’ (n=46)



‘Learning a bit about linguistics has helped me with my language skills’ (n=46)



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