

Challenges in training reading skills for graduates and researchers – the role of online resources

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Main challenges

- Decline in language teaching in UK school sector
- International competition
- Globalisation of research activity
- Need for language skills – particularly (but not exclusively) for Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences research and doctoral studies
- Danger of concentration on sources written in English or translated into English for quality of research if not acquired

British Academy: *Language Matters* (2009)

The demand for language skills from non-language-based HSS disciplines is increasing, as more and more high quality UK HSS research is international in outlook, adopts comparative methods, and has non-Anglophone parts of the world as its object and/or context. The languages in greatest demand across the greatest range of subjects and areas of study (other than English) are German, French, Spanish, Italian (and to a lesser extent Russian). However, the supply of UK-born researchers with language skills is declining and HSS departments are increasingly recruiting non-UK-born doctoral and postdoctoral students, project researchers, and academic staff in research areas where language skills are required.

British Academy: *Language Matters more and more* (2011)

- *If the global centre of gravity for scientific research shifts eastwards, there is no guarantee that English will be the preferred language.*
- *A lack of foreign language skills will limit the engagement of UK born and educated researchers with international projects requiring knowledge of languages other than English. Given the increased competition and limited availability of research funding, UK researchers without language skills may find it increasingly difficult to compete with their counterparts from overseas. As 90% of the world's research is undertaken outside the UK, it is critical that UK researchers are in a position to collaborate with the very best researchers from overseas.*

AHRC commitment to language training

- Regular citation of *Language Matters*
- Funding Language Based Area Studies consortia (including CEELBAS)
- Grants from the *Skills Development Fund* explicitly for language training
- Highlighting language training in expectations for bids for new Doctoral Training Partnerships (announced 15 October 2013).

Meeting the challenges

- Fieldwork/collaboration requirements can potentially be met by 'communicative' language courses within Institution Wide Language Programmes (IWLPs)
- Tailored teaching for graduate students/researchers for reading skills, accessing archives, giving presentations in other countries

However

- Diversity of levels/languages/discipline-specific needs make these hard to plan, deliver, finance
- Sometimes unrealistic expectations if starting from a low level of language competence

Therefore also need complementary self-study learning resources

Examples: 'Learning Objects' made available as Open Educational Resources

Context:

- University of Cambridge Language Centre – expertise and experience
- AHRC Skills Development grant – collaboration with University of Manchester

'Learning Objects':

- Specific focus: reading skills for researchers in Arts & Humanities (mainly)
- Web-based architecture - easy to adapt / add to / refine
- Mobile platform enabled (tablets)
- AHRC project focussing on French and German
- Internal development includes Italian and Spanish in addition

'Learning Objects' : content

- Not designed as 'courses' but as resources to complement taught provision (e.g. of grammar, reading strategies etc)
- Designed for self-study (but usable in class)
- Building on assumption of groundwork in general language skills
 - Focus entirely on developing reading skills (not knowledge of the writer, their works etc), but contextualised
 - Text-driven + multimedia support where appropriate + extension activities
 - Variety of genres, potential disciplinary interest, age
 - Comprehension exercises (reading for gist / detail)
 - Developing grammatical, lexical, stylistic, syntactic awareness

Open Educational Resources

- **Creative Commons Licence**
- Attribution + Noncommercial + NoDerivatives
 - no commercial use and no derivatives allowed, otherwise no restrictions
- Publication of individual learning objects from both projects Sept 2013 – Feb 2014 (via University of Cambridge Language Centre website <http://www.langcen.cam.ac.uk/opencourseware/index.html>).
- Further objects will be added as developed
- AHRC project branded learning object launch/dissemination: January 2014

Examples

- German
 - Goethe
 - Heisenberg
- Italian
 - Machiavelli
- French
 - Foucault

What next?

- Create your own for Russian and other East European Languages?
- Share with the sector as we do:
 - Add to the CEELBAS Language Repository
http://www.ceelbas.ac.uk/repository_welcome