

Thematic Network Project in the area of Languages

Sub-project 4: Postgraduate Studies

Establishment of a university programme at
advanced level (Masters' type) in Applied
Language Studies

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Appendix to the Final Report for Year Two

Establishment of a university programme at advanced level (Masters' type) in Applied Language Studies

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Introduction

The European University Programme at Advanced Level (Masters' type) in Applied Language Studies (ASPALS) relates to language policy and use in social, political, economic, and professional contexts, and in this it is central to the European project of furthering integration while at the same time promoting the cultural and linguistic diversity which is part of our common European heritage.

The field of applied language studies impinges on a wide variety of apparently disparate academic disciplines; its very breadth has made it difficult for it to establish a presence in its own right and has meant that it is virtually impossible for institutions to cover the whole area in an integrative manner.

The present proposal for an ASPALS pilot project is an outcome of the Thematic Network Project in the Area of Languages as implied by the synthesis report of the Project. This TNP has as one of its objectives the strengthening of international collaboration in post-graduate language studies.

Need for New Integrative Programmes at Advanced Level

Elements of what is here included in applied language studies are to be found in a variety of university programmes at both first and higher degree level; in particular, there is an emphasis on languages for special purposes (particularly in business communication and in law), on the applications of linguistics in language pedagogy, and on translating and interpreting. The provision at advanced level tends to be tightly focused on specific areas (e.g. translating and interpreting) without a consideration of the wider context. For instance, a student of interpreting may develop essential skills in linguistic mediation without an awareness of the bases of multilingualism or the language policies which affect her professional activity; in the area of language pedagogy, a student will acquire necessary skills to further the dissemination of a particular language without an awareness of the political and commercial forces driving the activity. Moreover, the wider socio-psychological framework tends to be neglected.

In the member states there is also wide variation between national research and teaching traditions influencing the ways in which the field of applied language studies has evolved as well as the generally low status of applied language studies/applied linguistics in many European universities as against literature, general linguistics, etc. The unclear professional status of applied language studies in European universities has resulted in the existence of a restricted clientele in applied language studies. This has also meant that adequate funding has not usually been available.

To counteract the superstructural specialisation without a critical theoretical base, there is an urgent need to develop advanced level programmes which will integrate the different areas of applied language studies in a way which will heighten the awareness of those professionally engaged in language not just for the concerns of their specialist areas but also for wider theoretical and practical issues. Advanced level programmes with such objectives will thus not only promote professionally relevant skills but will also inform policy and make a valuable contribution to a higher level of language education.

The status of advanced level university programmes varies from member state to member state. In the British system the master's degree is considered a postgraduate degree, while in a number of the other member states, e.g. Finland and the Netherlands, it is part of the undergraduate degree system. In some countries, like Spain, the master's degree has been an unfamiliar concept.

Need for Collaborative Action at European Level

The range of sub-disciplines to be covered in an Advanced Studies Programme in Applied Language Studies preclude adequate widespread provision being available at individual institutions operating independently. At least there is an urgent need for multilingual regional cross-border collaboration, and it is important that regional centres will collaborate on an EU-wide basis, first to develop and secondly to implement a multi-disciplinary ASPALS.

The ASPALS programme will be particularly valuable for students in member states where there is no equivalent for the Master's or where the PhD is not preceded by any proper course work. Even if the differences in national systems and non-uniformity of levels makes it impossible to have a uniform Euro Master's, the ASPALS programme can bring students in different European countries closer to each other in terms of their expertise.

Synopsis of the Field

The University Programme at Advanced Level in Applied Language Studies involves the following core areas:

1. Multilingualism/plurilingualism, including

- individual and societal multilingualism
- minority languages, language ecology
- official EU language, EU working languages
- language planning and policy, language rights
- sociology of language

2. Language education, including

- language acquisition and language learning, language processing
- language pedagogy
- new and open language learning environments, technology and language learning

- languages for the workplace, languages in professional/vocational competence
- development of new literacies, multiliteracy and multioracy
- bilingual and multilingual education
- intercultural communication, comparative cultural studies
- foreign language policy and planning

3. Applied language science, including

- standardization of languages
- language engineering
- translation and interpreting
- applied aspects of language description and typology, polycentric languages

4. Languages in social and public life and the workplace

- language use in the law, social work, medicine, business, public life
- language and European citizenship
- business communication
- academic and scientific communication, popularization
- language and media
- languages and language policy for aiding social, academic and commercial mobility
- languages and employability

5. Research methods

In the light of the breadth and diversity of the field and in order to accommodate the needs and interests of students from a variety of constituencies, it will be necessary for the proposed programme to have a modular structure with various pathways through it, each with a 'core plus options' configuration. A modular structure is also advisable in the light of the differing Higher Education structures within which potential partners operate; it would also be advisable to use the ECTS currency so that nationally valid named awards can be granted and that the transferability of credits may be guaranteed.

A carefully tailored study programme will be offered which will consist of a common nucleus, which is the same for all students, specialized options to be chosen from among the areas listed above, and completion of a thesis.

As the expertise underpinning the programme will necessarily be widely distributed, the programme will need to make allowance for both staff and student mobility and will in all probability require a distance learning element for some students using facilities provided by the Internet.

Potential target groups

The ASPALS programme will be open both to recent graduates in relevant disciplines and to practising professionals from education, commerce, the law, social work, public service and politics, particularly those who are centrally engaged in multilingual and cross-cultural communication. The programme will enhance the employability of recent graduates and those at present unemployed,

allow practising professionals to extend and up-date their knowledge, understanding and skills, and provide scientific training for those intending to proceed to appropriate higher degrees by research.

Application

Graduates in language and linguistics subjects, psychology, sociology, social psychology, law, education, and anthropology will be eligible for the programme. Candidates with other degree qualifications can also be considered for admission. Applicants must fulfil the entry requirements for masters' programmes as defined by their home institutions. Students with no background in the area of language studies will be required to participate in a propedeutic course in the area of linguistics.

The application is submitted to one of the participating institutions. The admittance and selection procedure will be the responsibility of the particular institutions in agreement with the instructions of the Board of Studies of the programme.

Structure of the programme

Since the educational systems of the member states vary so much, the only way in which a European programme of this type can be structured is modular. It should consist of two tiers of modules: post-BA modules and PhD modules. As a whole the programme could be considered part of the coursework required as preparation for the PhD degree. It could also consist of modules which are clearly job-oriented and have a less strong research orientation.

The total number of credits required for the Master's is 60 ECTS credits (one full year of study). The programme consists of two sections, 30 ECTS credits each. These sections are: 30 ECTS credits of course work and a thesis (dissertation) of 30 ECTS credits.

Evaluation will be based on written examinations and/or course work. A common marking scheme will be adopted. The thesis will be evaluated by assessors in two of the participating institutions.

The 30 ECTS credits of course work will consist of

(a) a common compulsory introductory nucleus programme in applied language studies of 10 ECTS credits; an attempt will be made to make this nucleus programme available in the Internet through collaboration between participating universities; this would mean a considerable investment into the programme initially but would mean marked savings later on.

(b) a set of specialized options for up to 20 ECTS credits selected from a pool of modular courses, which will be created through collaboration between the participating institutions in the member states; various alternative methods of study will be offered (lectures and seminars; summer schools; papers, etc.).

The thesis (30 credits) will be submitted for evaluation at the student's home university. The thesis, which can also be professionally oriented, permits the

candidate to demonstrate creative ability in identifying and treating a significant research problem; collecting, analysing, and interpreting data by appropriate research methods to make valid generalizations based on the findings; and presenting the study in acceptable written form. The thesis should make a positive contribution to the knowledge of the profession. A copy of the thesis will be lodged in the home university. A list of the titles of completed theses will be distributed to all members of the European Language Council.

Every student will produce a personal study programme after enrollment. The students will work under the direct supervision of experienced academic supervisors. The supervisor endorses the personal study programme.

Administration

It is proposed that the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, will serve as the first coordinating university for the programme. The programme will be initially launched for a three-year trialling period with a restricted number - six to eight - of participating universities.

The programme will be coordinated by a Board of Studies nominated from among the representatives of the participating institutions by the European Language Council. Decisions will be made on the basis of simple majority of the members of the Board present.

The Board will be responsible for

- (a) decisions on all aspects of policy and strategies of the programme;
- (b) curriculum development;
- (c) monitoring and evaluation of the programme;
- (d) decisions on the number of admissions in the programme;
- (e) advice to participating institutions on admittance procedure;
- (f) quality control; and
- (g) instructions for the acceptance of individual study programmes.

Funding

It is necessary to have a solid funding policy for the programme. In addition to a SOCRATES grant, it should partly be funded by participating universities whenever the modules offered could form part of the regular programmes at the universities concerned.

Future prospects

The ASPALS programme can also serve as a stepping stone towards a European doctorate in applied language studies.