Network project for the decentralised and centralised
dissemination of TNP3 results and outcomes

Building bridges for languages, a European perspective

A conference of the third Thematic Network Project in languages (TNP3-D)

29th June 2007, University of Southampton

Conference report

This one-day conference (one of four regional European conferences) presented the findings of the three TNP3 sub-projects on the themes of:
Languages for language-related industries and professions
Linguistic and cross-cultural skills and competences for enhanced opportunities on the European and international labour market
Consultation and collaboration between universities and the other sectors of education

The aims of the conference were to discuss TNP3 outcomes and to strengthen the dialogue and collaboration between universities and stakeholders, the ultimate result being that higher education language provision is geared to meet the needs of the labour market in the widest sense. The event was attended by representatives of educational institutions and authorities, employers, graduates and students.

Welcome from Bill Brooks, University of Southampton

Dr Bill Brooks, Associate Dean of Law, Arts and Social Sciences, welcomed delegates to the University of Southampton, which has been a lead partner since the launch of TNP.

Introductory remarks from Wolfgang Mackiewicz, Freie Universität Berlin

Wolfgang Mackiewicz presented a brief history of TNP languages and changes in the European labour market that have influenced TNP since its inception. Universities have a key role to play in developing lifelong language learning but there is a need to consult with employers and other stakeholders, hence the theme of this conference: building bridges.

Sub-project presentations and panel discussions

Each sub-project presentation was followed by a panel discussion, with panel members being invited to reflect on two questions:
Do you consider that the presentation you have just heard has accurately assessed the issues as they affect the countries of Western Europe? Are there other issues in this field that you would wish to raise?
Which recommendation do you think is most likely to address your concerns, and how would you suggest it could be strengthened?

Time permitting, discussions were then opened to the floor with delegates being given the opportunity to comment and ask questions.

Sub-project 1: Languages for language-related industries and professions

Presentation: Marc Van de Velde, Hogeschool Gent

Marc Van de Velde presented the findings of sub-project 1's regional synthesis report for West Europe (Belgium, France and Ireland), which examined:
Recent developments in the language industries and the language professions
New specialist HE programmes and offerings
New needs in the labour market and new needs in HE provision
Structured consultation and collaboration

Panel discussion

Chair: Bernie O'Rourke, National University of Ireland, Galway

Karl-Heinz Stoll, FASK, Universität Mainz in Germersheim, Germany

Germany is not mentioned in the report but is active in this area, with four universities and six polytechnics teaching translating and interpreting, and language industries being consulted in the development of BA/MA programmes. As a result of internationalisation, the number and diversity of foreign students are increasing although there are very few coming from the UK, which is regretable as the language industries are looking for English native speakers. Applicants come from many different backgrounds, e.g. from Medicine, and courses on offer include less widely used less taught languages. Employers in Germany say that the stress on cultural studies is a waste of time and interpreting students do not want to learn about literature. A recent study confirms that more interpreters will be needed in future.

Liz Robertson, Association of Translation Companies, UK

A great deal of the UK situation is recognisable in the report. Although there are some increases through multilingualism, there is a general decrease in the amount of work carried out by translation companies. English is the lingua franca worldwide so translation can be carried out anywhere in the world, which is resulting in price decreases. Prices are also falling because of mobility within the EU, e.g. it is cheaper for a company to bring in a sales person from Italy than to employ a qualified translator from the UK. A lot of bread and butter work, e.g. translating memos, is now done in-house. The impact of translation tools, e.g. free internet translation, is wide and has a negative effect on the perception of translation. Clients expect lower prices and now have more control over projects, with the power residing in large translation company providers. The response to these issues at UK and European level is to work with universities to develop well-trained, commercially aware graduates (not just translators but also project managers and advisers), through participation in the graduate apprenticeship scheme, and the Routes into Languages networks. The European translation services standard is beginning to role out across Europe. The most important element is consultation with employers but it is difficult for people running programmes to obtain the consultation they need as companies do not have the time. There is a need to keep dialogue open and to go forward together. There are no mechanisms for measuring the real number of translators and interpreters across Europe as freelance bodies are not included in the statistics. The industry finds it difficult to sell itself without these statistics. Dialogue has started with the EU Commission for Multilingualism but this is at a very early stage.

Maria Norton, British Council, Belgium

The sector is growing and there are more translation courses. Companies in Belgium want specialist courses, e.g. to learn how to write in English, and not just language but the intercultural aspect too. English is not enough. Marketing languages is key and we need to make sure resources are available, e.g. YouTube is a useful tool. An organisation of 17 cultural institutions is currently developing a project to sensitise youngsters to language learning. Suggesting services can be done quickly devalues them and we have to address this. We need to recognise translation alongside mother tongue as a foreign language and to work together in a range of languages and pool resources.

Hilary Maxwell-Hyslop, IoL Educational Trust, Chartered Institute of Linguists, UK

A distinction must be made between conference, public service and community interpreting.

There is a national register for public service interpreters, i.e. those who work in law, local government and health. All public service interpreters in criminal justice have to belong to the register, but it is not compulsory for other professions. Therefore anyone can call themselves an interpreter which is not good for the profession. It is hoped that new national standards in interpreting which specify minimum competences will improve matters. In the UK there should be a better understanding between English as a foreign language and translationg and interpreting. People need access to top quality translating and interpreting services and there needs to be a greater understanding of how everything fits together. There is a call for more systematic training in translating and interpreting. Some courses are expensive to run and labour intensive and some universities find it difficult to attract funding. Constant pressure is needed to maintain the profile. It is hoped that professional organisations can play a part in consultations between employers and universities.

Questions/comments from the floor

Supply and demand

Business is desperate for English interpreters and translators but supply is not meeting demand and there is dearth of quality. Why is this? In some countries, e.g. the UK and USA, languages are not compulsory at secondary level. In the case of languages such as Mandarin, employers are looking for translators based in China who are cheaper to employ.

Increasing profile

We need better marketing to sell languages in schools - it is about educating schools, students and parents. We need to inform young people and show them what translators and interpreters actually do. We also need to raise awareness amongst purchasers and potential purchasers about the real value of translating and interpreting – standards and benchmarks are useful marketing tools here. Language students have not heard of many of the organisations represented at the conference and membership organisations need to address this issue.

Graduate skills

What are employers looking for when hiring graduates? People with precision in their foreign language, at least two (preferably three) languages plus English, a thorough knowledge of current translation tools, thorough competence and confidence in being able to translate and revise other people's work, awareness of commercial life, the ability to work independently and in a team, the ability to accept criticism, and the potential to become a manager.

Sub-project 2: Linguistic and cross-cultural skills and competences for enhanced opportunities on the European and international labour market

Presentation: Brigitte Forster Vosicki, Université de Lausanne

Brigitte Forster Vosicki presented the findings of sub-project 2's regional synthesis report for West Europe (Belgium, Germany, France, Ireland, Lichtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Switzerland, UK), focusing on:
Economic, societal and labour market developments
Main consequences for skills and competences needed for sustainable employability and competitiveness
Diversity of linguistic contexts and effects on the perception of language needs
Reactions and developments in higher education
Future prospects and needs

Panel discussion

Chair: Gail Taillefer, Université des Sciences Sociales Toulouse 1, France

Alex Pratt, Serious Readers, UK

Everything in the presentation makes sense but these are symptoms of globalisation, which has created mobile human capital. This is a growing opportunity for languages and everything is moving very fast. The means of production has changed – people are benefiting from capitalism but there is a growing underclass. We need to consider investment at the level of the individual, the company and the state. In the UK there is poor attitude to investment overall and we do not link rewards with investment. At individual level, investing in language skills unlocks the ability to become a player in the globalised world. The benefit is deep and lasts for a lifetime. At state level, we need to discuss whether we invest in skills or languages or bring in outsiders. The case needs to be made for investing in oneself and targetting the individual. Universities are not selling languages in this way and are being sidetracked by

organisational changes and issues. There is no financial premium for language skills in the UK is because there is not sufficient demand for it.

Anne Davidson Lund, CILT, the National Centre for Languages, UK

The presentation sets out a reasonable summary of the situation. There is a huge demand for languages other than English but UK employers do not come forward readily to articulate it. The recent ELAN study underlines the economic impact of shortages in foreign language skills. There is a sea change but it is developing slowly. There is a need to stress rewards to the individual. The Business Language Champions Scheme brings companies together with teachers and students (aged 11-19) for a range of experiences to develop mutual understanding. More of this needs to be done on a larger scale both in the UK and internationally. Although we need conference interpreters we have to recognise that most people will not achieve this level but we do not yet recognise that lower level competence is important. A base of language learning and intercultural competence benefits both the individual and the company.

Robert McGinty, University of Nottingham, UK

Most of today's discussions are negative about the prospects for UK students studying languages. The idea that there should be benchmarks for the number of students taking languages is worrying – quality is more important than quantity and we need to invest more in those who want to do languages. The lack of contact hours at university is a concern, as is the tendency to live with non-native speakers on the year abroad. It is beneficial to learn the basics of a language with people who speak your language but once you reach a certain level you need to learn with native speakers so there should be more integrated classes. It is the responsibility of employers to say what they need – it is not the student's responsibility to find out. If employers do not get the message across, students will go elsewhere. The message about the importance of foreign languages is not coming across from employers and many students do not know that employers are looking for two languages plus mother tongue. Final year students do not see the benefit of returning for an extra year after the year abroad, so we need to look at the structure of courses. People who have the potential to reach level C2 need resources. We need to look after beginners and the most talented. Students are asked to invest a lot of money – perhaps we should offer bursarsies similar to those received by Physics students.

Daniel Binet, Zhendre SA, France

There is nothing to add to the report but how do we present these studies to colleagues? It is different in large companies but small and medium sized enterprises are obliged to hire people with two or three languages which is difficult. How can employers fill the gap between the worlds of business and education when it takes a long time to learn a language? Employers in France

will pay a premium of 30% for people with language skills but we need to get this message across. The problem is to reduce the gap between education and business but at the moment there is no solution.

Arnaud Raynouard, Université Toulouse-1, France

The issue is how we deal with languages today but the pace of change is important. How do we organise teaching if we do not know what demand will be in ten years time? We cannot just simply look at the role of universities today, we also have to give them the possibility to adapt. We cannot change programmes and attitudes quickly so it is difficult to address the needs of the market. Tomorrow's winners will be those who are able to take account of globalisation. The role of universities in this is crucial and they also have a social role. Employability, competitiveness and languages are all linked. In terms of language levels, in many business fields poor English is sufficient but not in law. Lifelong learning is important and should be looked at more. The flexibility and adaptability of professors is another issue that is not addressed in France.

Sub-project 3: Consultation and collaboration between universities and the other sectors of education

Presentation: Mike Kelly, University of Southampton
Mike Kelly presented the findings of sub-project 3's regional synthesis report for West Europe, focusing on:
The sub-project on languages as an interface
Transitions (secondary to higher education, and higher education to school)
Overcoming obstacles to cooperation
Case study: Routes into Languages

Panel discussion
Chair: Piet Van de Craen, Vrije Universiteit, Belgium

Vicky Wright, University of Southampton, UK

The local Routes into Languages consortium involves partnerships between nine universities, the Comenius network, Aim Higher, the Specialist Schools Trust, specialist language schools, Education Business Partnerships, the Assocation for Language Learning, professional associations, local authorities, employers, and parents. These partners are working together to promote language learning. The aim of the consortium is networking - engaging with all secondary schools and local authorities in the region to develop language strategies. The consortium will trial a number of projects, which if successful will be rolled out. A lot of the projects involve technology, e.g. an e-mentoring scheme. Many teachers are not involved in networks and are unaware of developments at national level.

Adrian Ash, CILT, the National Centre for Languages, UK

There are three levels of 14-19 transition in the UK: at age 14 (when languages are no longer compulsory), at 16 (when formal education is no longer compulsory), and at 18 (into higher education). It is important for universities to work with schools in an information giving way, and also to prepare students for a different way of working. CILT is setting up a series of 14-19 networks in the government regions in England. Many of these have the direct involvement of universities. They want to appeal to students of all abilities, including able linguists. The Business Language Champions scheme which began in the south west of England is now spreading. Students appreciate going into university and finding out about university life. Cambridge University has been working on intensive language learning in schools, enabling students to study 'new' languages. In terms of teaching approaches, CLIL is an area where the UK can take a lead. National governments are most protective of education - if we want to encourage mobility then we have to address this issue.

Bernd Wächter, Academic Cooperation Association, Belgium

Cooperation between different levels is important. The text of the report was sometimes difficult to understand and would need to be adapted for a general audience. The survey that is mentioned should be elaborated upon to make the case stronger and give more credibility to the conclusions. It would be useful to pursue a common purpose. It is necessary to obtain information on labour market needs and to enter into more structured cooperation with others. There is a growing demand for people with language competences that cannot be satisfied by supply but what do we mean by demand? We must engage in a big information campaign to show how useful our graduates are.

Kate Green, Department for Education and Skills, UK

Data is a difficult animal. A-level numbers have declined but in context this was at a time when subjects on offer at A-level broadened and students opted for 'new' subjects. Languages are not alone - science and history have had the same problem. In the UK, we are some way ahead in nationalising our projects and rolling them out. UK students have no imperative to learn a language as we have no borders. In other countries students studying English have an advantage because culture/media is delivered through English. Not everyone learnt languages in the UK until relatively recently so there is a lot of parental baggage – there is a perception that languages are difficult. We have to look to the future. England has a national languages strategy with three core strands, one of which is about engaging more students learning languages through the system and through life. The Association of University Language Centres'

statistics show that students studying languages as a minor part of their degree is high. Every child from the age of 7 to10 has an entitlement to learn languages and there is a recommendation that this will be embedded in the primary curriculum when it is next reviewed. The focus is on learning how to learn a language and intercultural skills. The language ladder is a national recognition scheme for languages to give people credit for their skills at different times in their lives. The UK is diversifying in terms of accreditation and languages learnt.

Questions/comments from the floor

Importance of early language learning

It is too late to start learning languages at the age of 13/14. Young learners are very important. Research shows that cognitive abilities gain in power and that brain patterns are like those of native speaker if you learn at a young age.

Cooperation

We need to work with the school sector but not just for the sake of cooperation – we must be clear about objectives. It is about motivation – we need to reflect on what we can do in terms of teacher education to increase motivation at school level. It would make sense for regional networks to meet at European level and learn from each other. There are things happening in the UK that other countries cannot copy but that the UK can advise on. There are common approaches even though there are huge differences. What are the areas of cooperation and what do we want to achieve?

European language portfolio

If possible we should introduce the portfolio at regional level starting in schools. Individual schools cannot do this on their own – they need to cooperate with other schools and universities. However, a word of warning about the portfolio: in the UK an experiment with records of achievement failed because the end users did not show students any appreciation of their value. Not only does the student have to feel pride in the portfolio but employers and higher education institutions have to value it too. Where the ELP works well is where there is an atmosphere of value - without that students will not see the point. However, the situation is different in Germany, where the ELP is something students take individual pride in and it is not for the employer. Perhaps the e-portfolio developed in the Netherlands is the way forward. In the UK, there is interest in developing a database of immigrants' skills but the people investing in this are not interested in language skills.

Knowledge cafes

Delegates were allocated to one of six groups (cafes), each agreeing upon a chair and a rapporteur. Each cafe was invited to address two questions and the rapporteur then summarised, in plenary session, the main outcomes of the group's discussion. What follows is a summary of the plenary.

Question 1: Given the specific conditions prevalent in your organisation/country, what types of consultation and collaboration do you regard as particularly relevant to higher education language studies?

Who?
Cradle to grave – working with stakeholders from primary schools through to employers
Alumni working in business
Other humanities departments
Policy makers and power brokers (locally, regionally and nationally)
The media

How?
Create a virtual meeting space for stakeholders for meaningful collaboration
More information exchange to increase knowledge and awareness within each sector
More collaboration between universities to avoid duplication of effort
Differentiate company needs, e.g. distinguish between employers in language industries and other employers, and between local and international markets
Develop knowledge of a rapidly changing market, e.g. the impact of technology on language learning and language careers
Funding - links between employers and universities needs to be strengthened and enlarged but we cannot rely on goodwill to do this
In ways that are seen as mutually beneficial, e.g invite employers onto university management boards, offer to meet in employers' offices

Question 2: In view of your own experiences, what do you regard as the principal difficulties that have to be overcome in order to make consultation and collaboration between higher education institutions and other stakeholders a fruitful endeavour?
Misunderstanding of terminology, e.g. what do we mean by *linguist*?
Embedding the Common European Framework
Lack of time and money to bring people together on an **equal** footing
Differences in school systems
Difference between the needs of large and small/medium sized companies, e.g. small companies might not realise the benefits of languages
Companies are too busy with their core business
Universities and employers are working to different timescales

Report by the conference rapporteur Lis Lillie, University of Ulster, UK

Lis Lillie presented her summary of the conference:

We live in a multicultural, multilingual world and have to operate in a globalised, international context. There is a lot of ability both inside and outside Europe. Graduates must be multi-skilled, have an awareness of the workplace, be able to work in teams, be independent and self-motivating, and have the flexibility to adapt to an unknown future.

The language industries. There is an increased need for English, which is an opportunity for Anglophone countries but which is also having a negative effect. It is important that standards should be maintained and new skills are needed, e.g. proof reading and project management, as well as good competence in translation/interpreting. There needs to be consultation with employers and a change in young people's perception about what it means to work in the language industry.

Employment. There is a language skills deficit which is resulting in lost business and creating barriers to trade. Business seems to realise this when questionned in surveys but is not getting the message across to government. Business is concerned with the short term rather than the long term and needs employees with language competence at different levels as well as intercultural awareness. There is a need for pan European standards and more research about the real needs of employers and business trends. More thought needs to be given to how we train human capital and the needs of the state, the company and the individual.

Cooperation between sectors. Perhaps this is the most important issue – the interactions between different sectors and different players in education. The training of teachers at all levels is key, including making them aware of the needs of the language industries and the workplace. It is necessary to have a greater European understanding of emerging needs in education, which could be achieved by cross European university meetings, and increasing mobility. There is a need to develop accreditation instruments (e.g. portfolios) to measure educational achievement that are intelligible across Europe. Schools and universities could work together on developing joint modules. Thought needs to be given to the way we teach so that languages are viewed as up-to-date, challenging and fun. Teachers should be helped to update the curriculum to meet their students' needs and interests.

Overall, there is a need for cooperation, development in certain areas, publicity and engagement with the media, and to talk to governments and the European Commission. It is hoped that the action points arising from the conference will lead to a new discourse for languages.

Closing remarks from Mike Kelly, University of Southampton

Mike Kelly concluded that the conference had resulted in new insights and ideas to take forward, including developing more attractive public presentation of languages than has been achieved to date.

The conference report, and the outcomes of the other three regional conferences, will feed into the final TNP3-D conference to be held Brussels on 27th September 2007.