

CEELBAS Language Workshop

10 May 2007 – Wolfson College Oxford

Report

Participants:

Robin Aizlewood, Lydia Buravova, Jan Fellerer, Aniela Grundy, Stephen Hutchings, Tanya Lipatova, Jeremy Morris, Peter Sherwood, David Hornsby, Robert Vanderplank

RA explained briefly the overall aims and objectives of CEELBAS and the specific aims and objectives in language training, including projects to be funded and workshops. CEELBAS would look to take this forward by identifying strategic priorities and commissioning work to realize those priorities, in three areas: syllabus development; piloting innovative modes of delivery; mapping skills and competences. CEELBAS was setting up a Language Training Sub-group to advise the Management Board on the language training dimension of CEELBAS.

1. Towards a converged syllabus

This session occupied the main part of the workshop.

Presentations from Oxford, UCL and Birmingham on the postgraduate language training programmes showed a significant commonality of approach and content in the syllabus for training postgraduate research students, with a shared emphasis on intensive training in reading skills at initial and intermediate levels, with some (more or less targeted) development of the other skills alongside. Some differences of workload (contact hours) were evident, with the Birmingham programme currently involving more contact hours. The Birmingham advanced oral course for fieldwork was also presented.

Main points of discussion and suggestions for follow-up

- The development of a shared curriculum framework for these courses at initial and intermediate level, with special emphasis on reading skills
- The sharing and development of a list of skill-specific exercise types and a list of varied appropriate assessment tasks
- The sharing and development of teaching materials, for individual languages and for discipline areas within each language
- The development of a linguistics-based framework for grammar awareness that could be generic across languages
- The problem of progression from the intermediate level (which incorporates some development of other skills, speaking, listening, writing, alongside reading) to specialized advanced skills for fieldwork (eg interviewing)

Other points noted

- The place of postgraduate language training programmes alongside specialized advanced courses in translation/interpreting (in some universities both may exist, in others only one)
- ‘Mixed ability’, the fact that some research students who need language skills may not be proficient linguists and yet can achieve a level, primarily in reading skills, that equips them for research
- ‘Mixed interest’ groups, ie a group that may combine economists, political scientists, geographers, historians etc. – the balance between common curriculum and individual research-oriented interests
- The role of an intensive summer school in developing language skills between levels, eg between initial and intermediate

2. Web-based learning, multimedia

There were presentations of the Oxford Language Centre website as a support for language learning, eg list of web-based resources, and of materials developed at UCL (Ukrainian reading course, Listening and speaking materials in Polish and Czech).

The use of VLE, WebCT (or similar) for the sharing of materials, a discussion board etc. were noted as an avenue for future discussion and collaboration, with the possibility of developing a shared online learning environment to be explored.

3. Mapping competence/skills and progression pathways

Vicky Wright (Southampton, LLAS Subject Centre) made a presentation on the range of frameworks available for mapping skills and levels of competence.

It was agreed that the most appropriate mapping of the competence/skills of the postgraduate training courses against existing frameworks should be examined.

Next steps: RA would report to the next CEELBAS Management Board after which it was expected to identify areas in which to commission projects. The proposal for a follow-up workshop in the autumn was welcomed.

At the end of the workshop a questionnaire relating to language provision was circulated. It was agreed that the workshop had been very interesting and valuable.

Robin Aizlewood
June 2007

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Programme

11.00: Introduction – Robin Aizlewood: CEELBAS aims and objectives and proposed language-related activities.

11.15-12.45: Session 1. Towards a converged syllabus. Chair: Robin Aizlewood
This session will involve presentations and discussion to share information on existing pg language training programmes/syllabus: common ground and differences, to include one or more presentations from outside our languages (eg language X for academic purposes)

12.45-1.45: Lunch

1.45-2.45: Session 2. Web-based learning, multimedia. Chair: Robert Vanderplank
This session will involve presentations and discussion of the use of web-based learning and multimedia in pg language training programmes

2.50-3.50 Session 3: Mapping competence/skills and progression pathways. Chair: Jeremy Morris
This session will consider the mapping of the competence/skills developed in pg language training programmes against existing frameworks (eg the steps and stages on the Language Ladder and the Common European Framework) and progression pathways into pg language training programmes

4.00- 4.30: Plenary, conclusions, next steps