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The UK language learning crisis in the public media: a critical analysis

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Low levels of foreign language learning in the United Kingdom have been attributed to a lack of interest and motivation which, it is claimed, is partly fostered by the media. The present study examines 90 UK newspaper articles that contributed to the public debate on the language learning crisis in the UK between February 2010 and February 2012. Articles were drawn from both national (England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland) and regional newspapers via Nexis UK. Adopting a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theoretical perspective, the authors analyse the themes mentioned in different newspapers, before relating the findings to the target readership demographics of individual newspapers, in order to show how themes identified in particular publications, as well as in the press of the four UK nations, relate to the target readerships and the political context of language policies within England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Introduction

While the growth of English as a global language has arguably boosted motivation to learn English (e.g. Csizér and Lukács 2010), the take-up of foreign languages in England steadily decreased over at least two decades, both at school and university (e.g. British Academy 2013; The Nuffield Foundation 2000), leading to levels of language learning at school (Eur-ydice 2012) and proficiency among adults (European Commission 2012a, 2012b) which are consistently among the lowest in Europe. The UK's poor linguistic skills are often linked to insufficient motivation in the context of the use of English as a global language, as well as changes in national language education policy (Coleman 2009; Coleman, Galaczi and Astruc 2007; Macaro 2008).

These poor educational results jar with the linguistically diverse demographics of the UK, where 17.5% of primary and 12.9% of secondary school pupils speak languages other than English (DfE 2012). In addition, social inequalities in opportunities to study languages, as well as take-up of languages at all levels, have been highlighted. It is the case, for instance, that independent schools teach significantly more languages than those in the State sector (Tinsley and Han 2012) and there is a negative correlation between the percentage of free school meals provided in a school (considered a reliable measure of the socio-demographics of schools' intake) and take-up of language study (Filmer-Sankey, Marshall and Sharp 2010).

Successive governments have supported several initiatives to promote language learning (Lanvers 2011), among them the university consortium-based 'Routes into Languages'

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project,¹ offering outreach promotion activities in schools. The UK language learning crisis has been an ongoing concern for many academics, educators, politicians and the public media, with debate sometimes polarising opinion across the UK political landscape. It is therefore pertinent to examine press coverage of the crisis from a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective, to provide a contextualised analysis of newspaper coverage in relation to target readerships and political orientation.

UK language education policy

Educational policy in the UK is devolved to its four nations (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). Education in England is governed by the Department for Education (DfE) at school level and the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) at higher education level. Within England, the last decades have seen further devolution of central education policies, permitting individual schools to function with greater autonomy, to the extent that schools classed as ‘academies’ and ‘free schools’² can now opt out of the National Curriculum. In the public sector in England, languages are taught in primary (ages 5–11), secondary (ages 11–18) and higher education (age 18+), but in 2011–12 foreign languages were compulsory only for the age groups 11–14/15 years (Key Stage 3). Language study was not required for either GCSE (nationally standardised and accredited tests in a variety of subjects at age 16+) or A-level (age 18+).

In 2004, under a Labour government, compulsory language learning for students in Key Stage 4 (typically aged 14–16) was abolished in England, a decision widely viewed as contributing to a substantial fall in the number of students studying a language up to GCSE. At school level, head teachers face systemic disincentives to make languages compulsory in their schools beyond Key Stage 3: schools’ achievements are measured in ‘league tables’ (rankings) featuring GCSE results and languages suffer from the reputation that good grades are harder to achieve than in other subjects. Consequently, making GCSE languages optional after 2004 allowed many schools to drop languages and improve their ranking. By 2011, only 23% of state schools had made languages compulsory at age 14+ and 75% of 14-year-olds did not study a foreign language. Furthermore, socially disadvantaged students were much less likely to study languages beyond the compulsory stage (Tinsley and Han 2012). A policy review and consultation led to the *Expert Panel Recommendations on the National Curriculum* (DfE 2011), which recommended making languages compulsory between ages 9 and 16. However, at the time of writing, the intention of the Coalition Government is to introduce mandatory language study from ages 7 to 11 and to retain compulsory language learning only from ages 11 to 14. Their introduction from 2011 of the so-called English Baccalaureate (EBacc),³ which promotes five core subject areas at GCSE, one of which is foreign languages, did trigger a one-off increase in language take-up at GCSE in 2010/11 (Tinsley and Han 2012); however, at university level, numbers opting for a languages degree fell by 14% in 2012. Although language education policy and linguistic contexts differ across the four British nations – in Wales, for instance, study of Welsh is compulsory to GCSE, while Scotland is committed to achieving, over time, the target of two foreign languages for all pupils – all are currently experiencing a decline in language learning.

The language crisis in the public eye

Recently, there have been two substantial government-funded and/or initiated inquiries into the state of language teaching in the UK: the Nuffield Inquiry and the Dearing Report.

The Nuffield Inquiry (Nuffield Foundation 2000), launched in response to an independent working group with representatives from the world of business and employment, found that the government lacked a coherent approach to language learning and alluded to the negative effect of English as a global language with the slogan ‘English is not enough’ (Nuffield Foundation 2000: 6). It concluded that ‘by any reliable measure, we are doing badly.’ (Nuffield Foundation 2000: 5). Many policy recommendations were made, such as making a 16 + language qualification a requirement for entry into higher education and designating languages a key skill (Executive Summary, Nuffield Foundation 2000). The government-initiated Dearing Report (2007) came to similar conclusions; its recommendations included the development of a statutory curriculum for languages at primary school.

The Worton Review (HEFCE 2009) of Modern Languages provision at university level underlined departments’ failure to work together to promote their subject. The Browne Report on the future of Higher Education (2010) recommended that language learning should be treated as a strategic priority. In addition, many professional institutions in the UK have expressed their concerns on many occasions: for instance, a 2009 poll for Rosetta Stone (a language learning software provider), a 2011 Education and Employers Taskforce report and a 2010 market analysis by the University Council of Modern Languages (UCML) all report on the strategic need for language skills in business (Coleman 2012). Similarly, the British Academy, with their initiatives *Languages Matter* (2009) and *Languages Matter More and More* (2011), has expressed its grave concern at the national lack of language skills.

The language crisis has been frequently debated in both houses of the UK parliament. Baroness Coussins, the Chair of an All Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages, has repeatedly called for a national languages recovery programme (e.g. in November 2010 during a parliamentary debate). In the economic sector, the benefits of language skills for employees have been demonstrated in several studies (e.g. Klein 2010; Williams 2011) and employers have sought cooperation with education providers to address the crisis (DIUS 2007). This position was made very clear in a 2007 speech by Miles Templeman, then Director of the influential Institute of Directors:

Languages have an important place in our education system and Lord Dearing’s reports rightly identify primary schools as the central focal point. In addition, more flexible, innovative and engaging courses could also improve language take-up at higher levels. For example, the IoD particularly welcomes the report’s support for our suggestion of a GCSE in several languages in a business context. (IoD 2007)

The Confederation of British Industry’s annual report (2011) reiterates concerns about the widespread lack of language skills for business and Business for New Europe, an influential coalition of business leaders, has called for improvements in language learning in the interests of UK business (Business for Europe 2013). Foreign diplomats in the UK are vocal in this matter,⁴ as are national and regional radio and TV programmes. Thus, the crisis has attracted wide-ranging attention from the media, business people and pressure groups,⁵ but neither the previous Labour government (1997–2010) nor the subsequent Coalition government has demonstrated commitment to implementing significant changes to remedy the crisis.

The language crisis debate in academic publications

To this day, few academic publications specifically address the crisis (Coleman 2009; Lanvers 2011, 2012). Several publications make connections between the UK’s lack of interest in languages and the status of English as a global language (Clark and Trafford

1996; Coleman 2009; Lee, Buckland and Shaw 1998; McPake et al. 1999, 2008: 150; Nuffield Foundation 2000: 44). Indeed, the very slogan of the Nuffield Inquiry, 'English is not enough,' suggests that Global English acts as an undesirable but pertinent demotivator for foreign language learning in the UK.

While the argument that Global English makes English native speakers unwilling to learn languages seems commonsensical, it remains unclear to what extent the economic value of English as a first language (Grin 2001) may impact on student motivation to learn further languages. Recent research investigating student motivation for students studying English *in competition* with other second languages (L2s) (Csizér 2012; Henry 2009, 2010) found that, in such competitive situations, motivation for other L2s has suffered, to the advantage of English. However, few studies have looked at this issue from the perspective of English first language (L1) speakers, asking if their L1 acts as a demotivator to learn languages. The few studies that concern students in the post-compulsory sector (HE and adult education) (Lanvers 2012; Pickett 2010) reveal that these students are partly motivated by a desire to reverse the declining language trend in the UK and seek to distance themselves from what they perceive to be the dominant UK culture of linguistic arrogance and ignorance. To date, no such studies with students having English as L1 have been undertaken in the compulsory (school) sector.

There is increasing evidence to suggest that many English L1 speakers perceive their mother tongue as the most important or indeed only language required for today's world (Dermont-Heinrich 2007, 2008, 2009). Recent empirical and statistical analyses of UK public media discourses have revealed a portrait of English as the ubiquitous, unquestionably available language, thus co-constructing the 'English is enough' fallacy. For instance, Ensslin and Johnson (2006) assert that the prestige and power associated with English in the UK act as a sanction for the decline in language education and Norton and Gieve observe that:

...the way 'foreigners' are represented on British television does ideological work, potentially reinforcing the notion that it is not important to learn foreign languages because everyone speaks English these days [...] (Norton and Gieve 2010: 205)

In normal programming a monolingual world is largely assumed. Even in programmes when a multilingual environment is to be expected, the workings of cross-linguistic communication are largely avoided, eliminated or obscured. (Gieve and Norton 2007: 207)

Academic studies have thus given some attention to the language learning crisis in the UK, in particular in England. In contrast, discussions in the public sphere, in particular those led by prominent public figures, such as the television newsreader Trevor McDonald, or the House of Lords peer Baroness Coussins, have adopted a more urgent tone, emphasising the dire need to remedy the situation. The UK language learning crisis has become a highly politicised debate. In this context, applying CDA to press coverage may allow us to challenge its objectivity and to link the nature of the press coverage to the well-established political orientations of newspapers and to their target readerships.

Research questions

Within the topic of the language learning crisis in the UK:

- (1) What themes are covered in English national, English regional and local and Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish newspapers?

- (2) What is the content and tone of headlines in different papers?
- (3) How do the themes relate to:
 - (a) the voting intentions of target readerships of the different publications (for English national press)?
 - (b) the political context of the language learning crisis in the UK?

Methodology

Data set

A Nexis UK archive search⁶ was carried out, selecting UK newspapers dated 28 February 2010 to 29 February 2012, a period of rapid decline in uptake of foreign languages at school. Early during this period (May 2010), there was a change of government from the Labour administration to the Coalition government formed by the Conservative party, with support from the minority Liberal Democrats. A two-year period was selected for this research in order to gain two annual cycles of the academic year, covering key events such as the release of GCSE examinations results. Within this restriction, a total of eight Boolean queries were used with the following keywords:

language learning, decline
language learning, fall
foreign languages, decline
Routes into Languages
language, learn, school, poor
Michael Gove, language, learn
language, learn, bad, British
National Curriculum, language

The resulting listed items were superficially scanned for suitability of topic, giving 244 articles. The next step of data selection required close reading of these articles, as only articles focusing on the language learning crisis were included; articles reporting on GCSE results in general and listing languages among these were discarded. Identical articles appearing in several search result lists were also excluded. Articles from specialist magazines (such as *Times Higher Education*, *Times Educational Supplement*, or *Investors Chronicle*) were discarded. All ‘hard news’ genres (national and local), ‘soft news’ genres (feature articles) and newspaper opinion genres (column, editorial, comment) articles, (Tardy 2009: 272–274) were included. ‘Letters to the Editor’ were discarded since the compatibility of their ideological agenda with the paper they appear in could not be determined. Sunday editions and online editions were included, though since Sunday editions tend to reprint articles from their sister dailies, the total number of articles in newspapers with Sunday editions can appear higher than those without Sunday editions. As journalists tend to work from similar feeds and press releases, overlap in coverage is to be expected (see O’Neill and O’Connor 2008).

Theoretical framework: Critical Discourse Analysis

In this study, CDA serves as analytical framework to investigate how an educational ‘problem’ is presented in the public discourse of printed media. CDA rests on the basic

assumption of a dual interaction between language and communities, whereby language both creates communities and is constrained by the nature of a given community in which it is used (Fenton-Smith 2007). CDA highlights relations between authorship, readership and the ‘talked about’ topics of a text in order to identify representations of social and political power and is thus a particularly suitable method for the analysis of media texts. Unlike other text analysis approaches, CDA takes an inherently ideological stance, concerned with revealing not just textual understanding but the relation between the representations of themes and the socio-political contexts in which they emerge. In the context of CDA, Van Dijk (1998: 69) defines ideology as:

...representations of who we are, what we stand for, what our values are, and what our relationships are with other groups [...] In other words, an ideology is a self-serving schema for the representation of Us and Them as social groups.

Matu and Lubbe (2007: 402) note that ideologies, as well as sustaining social interests of specific groups, can serve to organise social representations and ultimately monitor group-related social practices, including those manifest in texts. In other words, CDA sees textual manifestations of social dynamics inherently intertwined with their contextual factors.

In his seminal article on CDA, Van Dijk (1993: 272) lists among the analytical tools of CDA macro-semantic, or thematic, analysis. Thematic analysis can reveal issues of group identity and ideological beliefs (Van Dijk 1993, 1998), especially if textual and contextual information are brought together. In this study, the articles are first analysed for their salient content (thematic analysis) and then related to the consumption of the different newspaper types (demographics of target readership) as well as the political context of the language learning crisis in the UK (as described above). Thus, the analysis follows Fairclough’s three-dimensional view of discourse in which texts may be read:

...firstly in terms of the language itself; then, with attention to the processes of production, distribution and consumption of the text, and finally, in terms of how texts relate to broader social structures (social, political and economic) and reflect dominant power relations. (Arnott and Ozga 2010: 339)

In CDA, the ideological positioning of text production and consumption are seen as linked; an especially important consideration for newspaper texts:

Thematic analysis is useful for the explication of assessment of social, cultural and political dimensions of the news media, including ideological orientations of journalists or newspapers. (Fang 2001: 587)

Thematic and target readership analysis

Thematic analysis, including quantification, is a well-established approach in media analysis research (e.g. Riffe, Lacy and Fico 2008). In order to relate the thematic analysis to target readership audiences, articles were sorted into those from English national papers, English regional and local papers and those from Scottish and Welsh papers, resulting in three data sets. Each article was allocated up to five themes (one or two in the case of very short articles). The thematic analysis of the texts was undertaken by both authors. As a check on coding, the second author independently allocated themes to the articles drawn from the regional press. At the first run through, there was agreement on 62% of categorisations.

Further discussion between the two authors achieved agreement on all categorisations. Next, the headline of each article was analysed for its tone (negative, neutral, positive, humorous, see Boykoff 2008). Figures 1–7 list the frequency of themes and tone of headline in the different data sets.

The UK newspaper landscape is characterised by socially, culturally and economically very distinct target audiences. The major polarisation is between the so-called ‘broadsheet’ or ‘quality’ newspapers (*The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Financial Times* and weekend counterparts) and the ‘red-tops’ or ‘tabloids’ (*The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Express*, *The Daily Mirror*, *The Sun*). Carvalho and Burgess (2005: 1460) characterise the broadsheets as having ‘extensive political and economic comment’ and ‘relatively small but well educated and influential readerships,’ while the tabloids have ‘a more populist orientation including greater emphasis on crime, sex and celebrity’. The ‘quality’ press is believed to influence policy and decision-making at national and international levels (Boykoff 2008: 551).

The most widely adopted classification scheme for target readerships of UK newspapers is that of the National Readership Survey (NRS) (www.nrs.co.uk/toplinereadership.html), in which demographic categories are based upon the occupation of the household’s ‘chief earner.’ Separate analyses for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are not available. Figures for 2007 show that the majority (60%) of UK broadsheet readers are from classes A (upper middle class) or B (middle class), while all but 20% of tabloid readers are from classes C (lower middle class/skilled working class), D (working class) and E (underclass) (Boykoff 2008: 551). Duffy and Rowden (2004) note that education topics receive much greater coverage in broadsheets – a significant fact, given that tabloid readership, according to the NRS, is ten times greater. Information on the voting intentions of English national newspaper readerships (Duffy and Rowden 2004: 18) allows the broad classification of *The Morning Star*, *The Daily Mirror*, *The Guardian* and *The Independent* as left-leaning (i.e. readership tending to vote Labour) and *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Times* and *The Express* as right-leaning (i.e. readership tending to vote Conservative).

For a critical analysis of articles in relation to their target readerships, the polarisation between broadsheet and tabloid readership is a key focus. This study also relates textual analyses to information regarding voting intentions of target readerships, where such information is available. However, there are some 1500 regional and local papers in the UK (www.magforum.com/papers/regional.htm) and information on socio-demographics or voting intentions of target readership of many publications is unavailable. Therefore, only the data relating to the English national press will be analysed with respect to demographics concerning target readerships.

Findings

Articles in English national press

As shown in Table 1, 39 of the 47 English national press articles appear in the broadsheets. Coverage of the UK language learning crisis thus features predominantly in the ‘quality’ press; some high-readership tabloids do not even appear in our analysis.

Figure 1 shows that the most frequent theme in the English national press was the decline in specific languages, in particular German and French, which came up a total of 21 times, nine of which were in *The Daily Telegraph*:

Table 1.

Data sample		No. of articles
47 in English national press	<i>Telegraph</i>	15
	<i>Guardian and Observer</i>	8
	<i>Independent</i>	9
	<i>Times</i>	7
	<i>Daily Mail</i>	5
	<i>Express</i>	2
	<i>Morning Star</i>	1
20 in English regional press	<i>Evening Standard</i> (London)	3
	<i>Sentinel</i> (Stoke)	2
	<i>Hull Daily Mail</i>	2
	<i>The Journal</i> (Newcastle)	2
	<i>Essex Chronicle</i>	1
	<i>Kidderminster Shuttle</i>	1
	<i>Evening Chronicle</i> (Newcastle)	1
	<i>Cambridge Evening News</i>	1
	<i>Coventry Evening Telegraph</i>	1
	<i>Gloucestershire Echo</i>	1
	<i>Western Morning News</i> (Plymouth)	1
	<i>Grimsby Telegraph</i>	1
	<i>Birmingham Evening Mail</i>	1
	<i>Daily Post</i> (Liverpool)	1
<i>Eastern Daily Press</i> (Norfolk area)	1	
20 in Scottish press	<i>The Herald</i> (Glasgow)	13
	<i>Scottish Express</i>	2
	<i>Evening Times</i> (Glasgow)	1
	<i>Evening News</i> (Edinburgh)	1
	<i>The Express</i> (Scotland)	1
	<i>The Times</i> (Scotland)	1
3 in Welsh press	<i>The Scotsman</i>	1
	<i>South Wales Echo</i>	1
	<i>South Wales Evening Post</i>	1
	<i>Western Mail</i>	1
Total		90

The drop has been particularly marked in French and German, with both being named among the fastest declining subjects at GCSE level last summer.

The Daily Telegraph, 23 January 2012: 'Pupils shun language GCSE'

The importance of language skills for the UK economy in general and job prospects in particular is a frequent theme (17 times), found in nearly half of English national articles and in all types of press represented:

Our economic future depends on linguists, just as much as engineers and scientists.

The Daily Telegraph, 26 November 2010: 'Learning to talk the language of business'

In a global economy, language skills are more valuable than ever.

The Express, 31 August 2010: 'The right language'

Britain's lack of foreign language speakers costs the economy up to £17 billion a year, a report suggests.

The Times, 30 January 2012: 'Lost in translation: £17 billion a year'

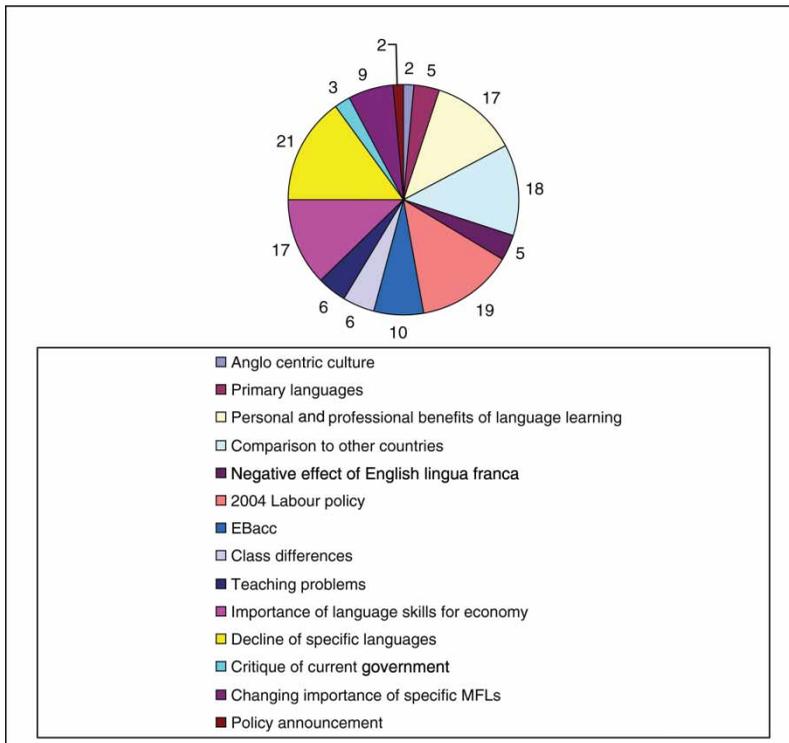


Figure 1. Themes in English national press.

The fact that the UK lags far behind other European countries in foreign language skills is frequently thematised (18 times), especially in *The Times* – as exemplified by the headline:

Schools are teaching pupils to be linguistic paupers of Europe.
The Times, 15 May 2010

It also occurs regularly in *The Daily Telegraph* (five times in 14 articles) but also in *The Guardian*, *The Independent* and *The Daily Mail*. Meanwhile, the benefits of learning a language for the individual learner, ranging from better job prospects, to cultural enrichment and cognitive advantages, also feature prominently (17 times), most prominently in *The Guardian*.

Young people coming out of university with language degrees, after medicine, are the most employable of all graduates.
The Guardian, 27 January 2011: ‘Dumping languages stunts life chances, schools are told’.

Learning a language is thus a double win. [...]To acquire another language is to open yourself up to the world and to increase vastly your employability.
The Observer, 5 February 2012: ‘We continue to harm and isolate ourselves by only speaking English’

Language graduates are more likely to find work soon after leaving university than their peers who studied subjects such as law, business and computer science.
The Times, 30 January 2012: ‘Lost in translation: £17 billion a year’

Regarding the question of responsibility for, or origin of, the crisis, six different explanations were identified for the UK's lack of interest and/or skills in languages. The Labour policy of abolishing compulsory language GCSEs in 2004 was cited most frequently (19 times, of which 15 times in *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Times*).

It [the decline in students taking languages GCSEs] follows a decision by Labour to make languages optional for 14-year-olds in England for the first time in 2004.'

The Daily Telegraph, 23 January 2012: 'Pupils shun language GCSE'

The Labour government made learning a language at GCSE optional in 2004, a move that led to the widespread collapse of French and German in state schools.

The Telegraph, 14 December 2011: 'Language teaching is deplorable, says Bishop'

Ms Blower [National Union of Teachers Leader] said that the decline in the number of pupils choosing to study a language from 61 per cent in 2005 – just after it was made non-statutory – to 44 per cent in 2010 was a result of 'the mistaken decision to make modern foreign languages optional.'

Morning Star, 12 January 2011: 'Britain – Fewer pupils opt to take languages'

The Coalition government (whose Education Minister during our period of analysis was Michael Gove) is rarely framed as agent of the crisis but is evoked three times, in *The Guardian/Observer* and *The Independent*:

We cannot endorse Gove's comments that there is a 'slam-dunk case for extending foreign language teaching to children aged five.' On many levels there are problems with this policy.

The Guardian 14 October 2011: 'Response There's no 'slam-dunk' [sc. irrefutable] case for teaching languages to five-year-olds: Michael Gove is wrong'

The Coalition government was also cited as attempting to redeem the crisis:

The Department for Education insists that the English Baccalaureate, which measures schools by their performance in core GCSE subjects including a foreign language, will stop the fall in numbers [of students taking languages].

The Times, 30 January 2012: 'Lost in translation: £17 Billion a year'

Another explanation given for the crisis was a reliance on the imagined ubiquity of English, mentioned in publications across the spectrum and twice coupled with a description of English culture as inward-looking or Anglo-centric.

...there is the age-old complacency that all foreigners speak English. They don't: foreigners may all have to learn English, but they are not all good at it, especially not outside northern Europe.'

The Times, 7 February 2012: 'The world is talking but we're not taking part'

Reasons for not trying to speak a local language included not being bothered, fear of making a mistake or expecting hosts to be able to speak English.'

The Daily Mail, 18 November 2011: '2 IN 3 'CANNOT SPEAK A SINGLE FOREIGN WORD' [capitals in original]

TV, pop music and the internet discourage teenagers from learning foreign languages, veteran broadcaster Kate Adie has claimed With all three available in English, youngsters think 'why bother?', she warned.

The Daily Telegraph, 25 June 2011: 'Adie blames TV and Net for decline in languages'

Teaching problems were mentioned occasionally (six times), either stressing challenges for teachers:

In 33 of the 90 secondary schools inspected, Ofsted found pupils were not reading beyond exercise books because teachers focused on getting pupils through exams.'

Morning Star, 12 January 2011: 'Britain – Fewer pupils opt to take languages'

or – conversely – poor teaching and boring learning experiences for students:

Researchers have told *The Times* that children who already know the language are repeating basic work, becoming bored and resentful, and dropping languages at 14 when they make GCSE choices. They blame incoherence in language teaching, and claim that none of the main political parties will address the problem.

The Times, 15 May 2010: 'Schools are teaching pupils to be linguistic paupers of Europe'

Six articles also referred to the class differences with respect to opportunities for language learning:

Foreign languages are believed to be among the most demanding subjects, with fears that many pupils are abandoning them to inflate their overall results. Experts say they are in danger of becoming the preserve of independent and state grammar schools.

The Daily Telegraph, 25 August 2010: 'Slump in language GCSEs'

Poll shows only a third of state schools teach the majority of their pupils a foreign language, while almost all private schools do.

The Guardian, 27 January 2011: 'Dumping languages stunts life chances, schools are told'

Looking at positive themes, the introduction of the English Baccalaureat or E-Bacc is mentioned (10 times) as a way to incentivise students to take up languages:

Ministers are attempting to reverse the decline by introducing the English Baccalaureate – a school leaving certificate that rewards pupils who gain good grades in English, maths, science, a language and either history or geography.

The Daily Telegraph, 23 January 2012: 'Pupils shun language GCSE'

The new 'English baccalaureate' qualification, rewarding students who pass a range of subjects at GCSE, will include one foreign language as a compulsory element among five. It is easy to see how obtaining the baccalaureate will become a minimum requirement for admission to a good university. It may address what has become a catastrophic situation.

The Independent, 27 November 2011: 'Can you say good morning in Bengali?'

Language teaching in primary schools also receives some coverage, both positive:

Primary schools were found to have made 'good progress' and also recognised the significant efforts made to support languages in secondaries.' [*sic*]

Morning Star, 12 January 2011: 'Britain – Fewer pupils opt to take languages'

He [German ambassador Mr Boomgaarden] said it was 'a good thing' that attempts were being made to make it mandatory for primary schoolchildren to learn a language.'

The Independent, 18 June 2010: 'German diplomat urges children to learn a language'

and negative:

Pupils at state primary schools must be offered a language option, though they don't have to take it. More than 90 per cent now do, but the teaching, in my experience, is desultory.

The Daily Telegraph, 26 August 2012: 'Should we be minding our languages?'

...because the teaching of languages at primary school is patchy and variable, secondary teachers have to start from scratch at 11.

The Times, 15 May 2010: 'Schools are teaching pupils to be linguistic paupers of Europe'

The changing importance of world languages, notably Mandarin, is regularly cited (9 times) as a reason for the decline of more traditionally taught languages:

Wendy Piatt, the director-general of the Russell Group of elite universities, said: 'The sharp decline in modern languages, particularly French and German, is of grave concern. Despite welcome growing interest in less traditional languages such as Chinese, Portuguese and Polish, the current uptake of foreign languages is inadequate to meet the needs of our universities, economy and society.'

The Daily Telegraph, 25 October 2010: 'Slump in Language GCSEs'

In summary, the majority of articles in the English national press refer to the economic importance of language skills or the decline in the learning of German and/or French, offer some form of comparison to language skills elsewhere and stress the personal and career advantages of language skills. Only one article in all data sets (from *The Independent*) adopts an unusually positive stance, emphasising a 'can do' attitude:

You don't need to be smart to learn a language, he [John Tanner, head of English as an additional language at Southbank International School] insists, it just takes practice. Adult learners can access courses at beginner through to advanced levels at colleges and universities throughout the UK and there are distance learning and part-time courses for those who have other commitments.

The Independent, 11 October 2010: 'You don't need to be smart, it just takes practice'

Readership and themes in different publications

As is evident from [Figure 1](#), the language crisis is predominantly a concern of the broadsheet press. Unlike some tabloids, the 'quality' press in this data sample focuses not on individual schools but on national policies and developments, the economic argument for languages, as well as personal benefits of language learning beyond the functional. Thus, themes relating to personal professional ambitions and advancement via education, as well as those regarding policies and decision making, are foregrounded in the 'quality' press.

Scanning the themes covered in the tabloid press, it is noticeable that the *Daily Mail* articles focus on the decline of French and German and on responsibility for the crisis, notably that of the Labour government, the negative effect of Global English and the shameful comparison with other countries. Themes missing from tabloids are the personal benefits of language learning and the EBacc, while the importance for the UK economy is proportionally mentioned less frequently than in broadsheets. To summarise, the readership of the tabloids receives less information about the crisis and, if reported, coverage focuses more on concrete facts, less on strategic or policy issues relating to the crisis and not at all on personal benefits of language learning.

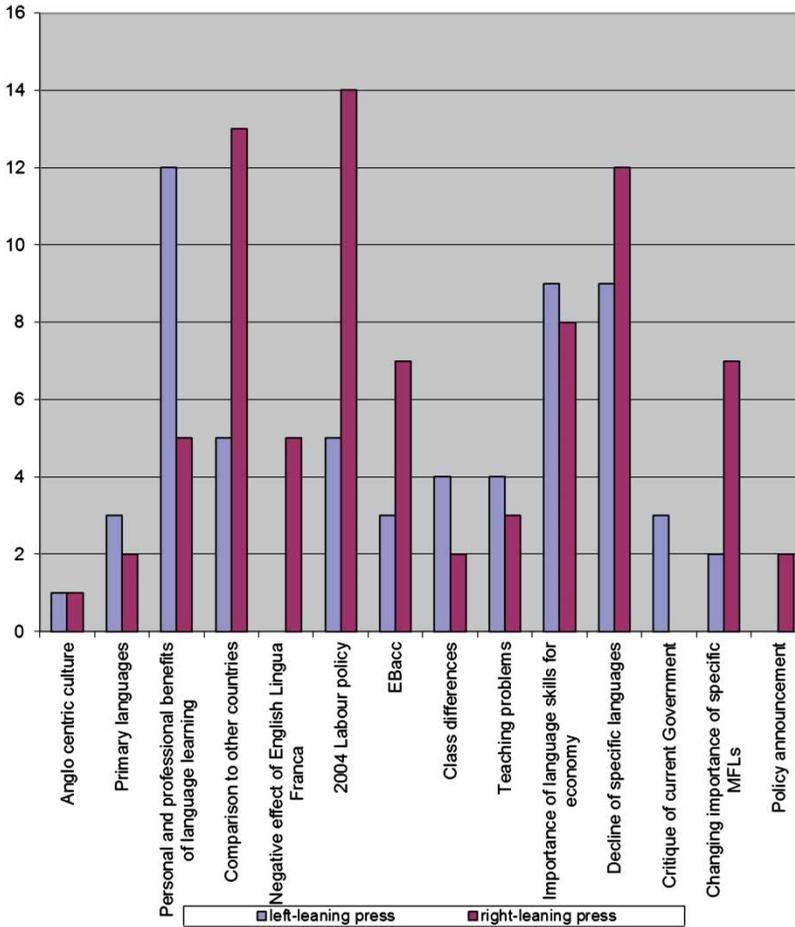


Figure 2. Themes in left- and right-leaning press.

The findings of the thematic analysis according to the broad political orientation of each newspaper’s readership (Duffy and Rowden 2004) are shown in Figure 2. The thematic analysis reveals that the 2004 Labour policy of making languages optional from age 14+, the negative comparison to language skills in other countries, the decline of specific languages and changing importance of specific languages, such as Mandarin, are mentioned more in the right-leaning press, as is the EBacc, permitting positive reporting on actions of the Coalition government. Left-leaning papers, on the other hand, mention both personal and professional advantages of language skills significantly more, but also refer more frequently to differences in learning opportunities related to class and problems at the teaching level. Unlike the right-leaning press, left-leaning papers also evoke the argument that having English as mother tongue may act as a disincentive and critique the Coalition government for not doing enough to address the crisis. Of all themes, the frequently cited economic argument for language skills is most evenly spread across the political spectrum.

Articles from English regional press

Twenty articles were found relating to the language crisis in the English regional press and the regional papers represented are from all areas of England. Figure 3 shows the breakdown of themes covered in the regional press.

While national and regional press are often similar, a striking contrast with the national coverage is that personal and career benefits of learning languages are emphasised more (15 out of 20 articles, as opposed to 17 out of 47 articles in national papers). The second most frequent theme (eight articles) is specific events and initiatives to promote language learning, e.g. a Routes into Languages project. This reporting provides a more positive coverage and frames the specific town or region as agents against the crisis.

As an organisation promoting the speaking of foreign languages holds its annual members' day in the North East, NEIL McKAY asks why the British are so poor at learning different languages.

The Journal, 24 August 2011: 'A Oui problem' [capitals in original]

Similarly, primary languages are presented very prominently and – unlike in the national press – positively whenever mentioned. Linked to this is the argument favoured in the regional press that the younger the child, the easier they learn languages.

Many primary schools teach a foreign language to children from a young age, hoping to get round the resistance to foreign cultures more prevalent in sulky teenagers.

The Journal, 24 August 2011: 'A Oui problem'

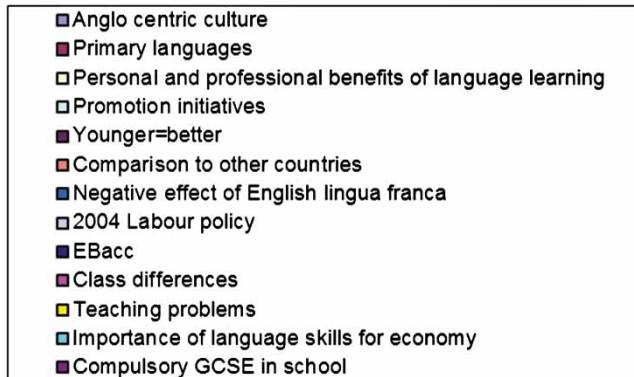
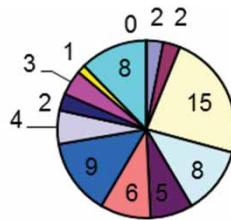


Figure 3. Themes in English regional press.

And the best way to learn is to start when you are young – after all, primary school children are sponges for information.

Hull Daily Mail, 21 December 2011: ‘Language is a vital tool in our ‘shrinking world’

Overall, the regional press tends to avoid direct blaming of agencies (such as the Labour or Coalition governments) for the crisis. Instead, these papers tend to focus on socio-cultural (anglo centric culture and Global English) rather than strictly political explanations for the crisis.

Many still believe that everybody should speak English, and are wary of foreigners who have command of two languages. They expect outsiders to respond in English...

The Sentinel, 10 February 2012: ‘The old days are gone, pet: it’s time we talked the talk’

To summarise, the regional press seems overall to take a much more positive and personal perspective, is keen to report local promotional events and refrains from clear political stances in ‘blaming’ specific parties or governments, thus simultaneously promoting their local schools and events and catering for a readership across the political spectrum.

Articles from the Scottish and Welsh press

As shown in Table 1, the Scottish press reports on the crisis very prominently (20 articles), especially *The Herald*. The Welsh press, however, has only three articles within the data collection period, while the Northern Irish press has none. The Scottish interest can partly be explained by a 2011 report and campaign by British Council Scotland, contrasting an 80% cut in foreign language assistants (FLAs) in Scottish schools with a drop of just 21% in England. However, even after discarding articles focusing on this alone, the Scottish press stands out as showing great concern for the language crisis (see Figure 4).

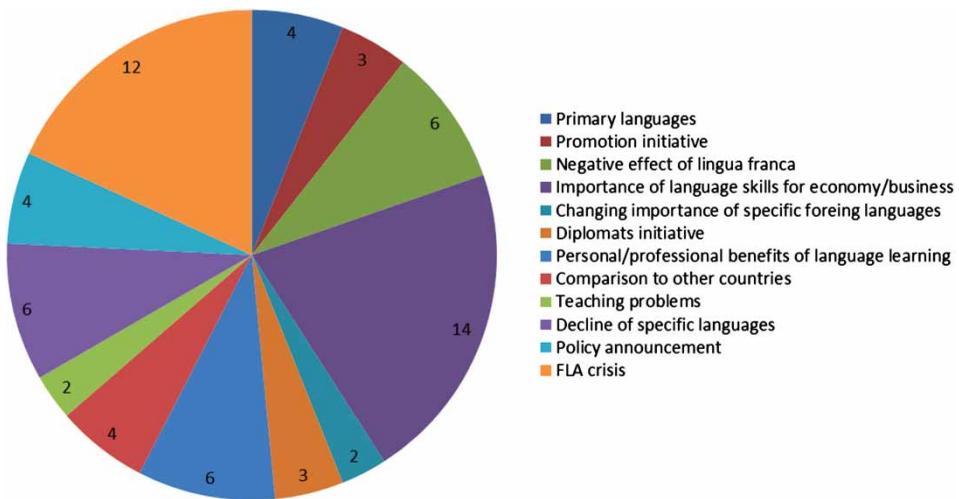


Figure 4. Themes in Scottish press.

With 14 of 20 articles evoking the economic benefits of language skills, the Scottish press puts significantly more emphasis on this argument than the English press:

British Council Scotland believes the decline in FLAs will hit Scotland's ability to increase trade and investment with France, Germany, Spain, Italy and China. Exports to these five nations alone were worth £4.52 billion in 2009, representing around 21% of Scotland's total international exports.

Sunday Herald, 4 December 2011: 'How not to boost Foreign Language Skills'

In contrast to the English press, *The Herald* frames Scottish mentality as possessing the desired cosmopolitan outlook, albeit in need of further development:

As a young lad, growing up in a deprived part of Hamilton, languages opened up an exciting world way beyond the boundaries of my home town. They offered so much in terms of culture, literature and communication skills, not to mention friendships [...] The Holyrood committee is right to argue for a Scotland which is truly international in its outlook but sadly, there is no national commitment to language learning.

The Herald, 14 March 2011: 'It's all too easy for us to take the monolingual route'

The personal and career benefits of language learning receive a similar level of coverage (30% of articles) to the English national press (36%), as does the decline of specific languages. Furthermore, the Scottish press mentions interventions and initiatives by the diplomatic services, or language promotion events targeting schools or teachers, thus sharing with the English regional press a positive stance towards regional/Scottish national events. As might be expected, announcements of political intent to change the language policies refer explicitly to the Scottish context.

Explanations for the crisis, such as reference to Global English, negative comparisons to other countries or teaching problems, receive very little coverage, but include similar references to national language policies:

The fall in pupils taking languages is also thought to be linked to a decision by the former Scottish Executive in 2001 to scrap what was effectively a requirement that all secondary school pupils take languages for four years.

The Herald, 25 November 2010: 'Alarm at number of schools dropping German'

The prominent Scottish coverage of the economic argument for languages appears to be intrinsically linked to a framing of the Scottish economy as internationally connected. Regarding the international dimension of the Scottish discourse, Arnott and Ozga (2010: 335), evaluating the discourse of education policies of the Scottish National Party, have observed a similar theme:

We suggest that there is a self-conscious strategy of 'crafting the narrative' of government that seeks to discursively re-position 'smarter Scotland' alongside small, social democratic states within the wider context of transnational pressures for conformity with global policy agendas.

Similarly, regarding coverage of the language crisis, the Scottish press uses themes suitable for distancing Scotland from a English mentality (perceived as more anglocentric), while simultaneously strengthening national identity.

The three articles in the Welsh press mention the changing importance of specific languages, the importance of language skills for the economy and blame directed at the

government. Thus, the crisis is covered in a relatively superficial manner, except, perhaps, in order to blame political opponents:

‘This latest news is yet more evidence that the Welsh Government is struggling to keep a grasp on education in Wales’ said Mr Roberts.’ [Education Spokesman for the Welsh Liberal Democrat Party in the Welsh Assembly, which is dominated by Labour].

The South Wales Echo, 28 September 2011: ‘Lib Dems in Languages Call’

Headlines

An analysis of headlines in English national (Figure 5), English regional (Figure 6) and Scottish and Welsh (Figure 7) newspapers suggests the stance adopted by the individual titles.

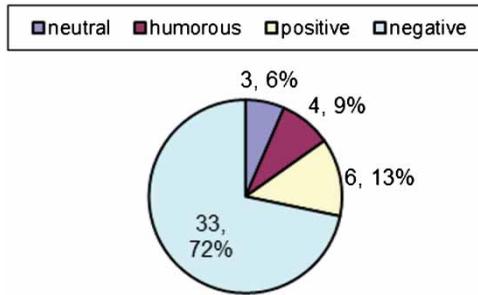


Figure 5. Tone of headline in English national papers. (Note: Figures 5–7 give total numbers, then percentages).

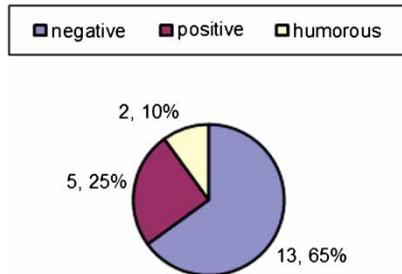


Figure 6. Tone of headlines in regional English papers.

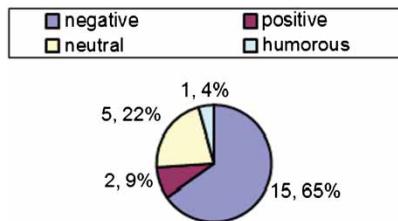


Figure 7. Tone of headline in Scottish and Welsh papers.

Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of headlines carry a negative tone, often featuring negatively charged words such as *decline*, *deplorable*, *dump* and *slump* in the following examples:

Decline in school languages hurting British business
The Independent, 14 December 2011.

Language teaching is deplorable, says Bishop
The Daily Telegraph, 26 September 2011.

Dumping Languages stunts life chances, schools are told
The Guardian, 27 January 2011.

Slump in Foreign Languages
The Daily Mail, 26 August 2011.

Three headlines comment on school policies aiming to address the language crisis by introducing a language GCSE as a condition for entering the sixth form, i.e. the two years of post-compulsory secondary education typically viewed as preparation for university. Two such articles are from regional papers ('Language compulsory until 16,' *Grimsby Telegraph*, 25 November 2010 and 'Students without language denied 6th Form,' *Essex Chronicle*, 14 October 2010) and the third from *The Independent* ('No language GCSE means no sixth form place, say top schools,' 8 October 2010). Since these articles also mention the importance of languages for business and deplore the decline in general, any implied criticism in the headline is probably unintentional especially for *The Independent*, which offers nine articles in total on the crisis.

Very few articles from the English national, Scottish or Welsh press carry a positive tone, though 'Languages provide a world of opportunities to our students' (*The Herald*, 25 November 2010) is an exception. Few English national papers even have neutrally-phrased headlines ('The right language,' *Express*, 31 August 2010; 'Britain – Fewer pupils opt to take languages,' *Morning Star*, 12 January 2011) but neutral headlines do feature more prominently in the Scottish and Welsh press ('Foreign Language assistants summit to be held,' *The Herald*, 2 January 2012; 'Excuse our French... it seems we really should be speaking Arabic or Mandarin,' *The Western Mail*, 17 June 2010). Confirming results from the thematic analysis, it is the regional papers that have the greatest percentage of positive headlines:

Language is the key to your success
Birmingham Evening Mail, 24 August 2010.

Pupils meet Toons French Star
Evening Chronicle, 2 September 2010.

Encourage kids to learn a language
Hull Daily Mail, 28 September 2010.

These regional articles typically report a local promotional event, thus simultaneously promoting the hosting institution (e.g. football stadium, school). English national papers, by contrast, only report one such event ('German diplomat urges children to learn a language,' *The Independent*, 18 June 2010).

Humorous headlines such as *The Times*' 'Donner und Blitz, we're not learning German any more' (16 December 2011) are rare and reserved for feature, column and comment texts in broadsheets (i.e. not 'hard news' stories). Humour is used, however, to introduce some hard news reports in regional papers (e.g. 'A Oui problem', *The Journal*, 24 August 2011). A humorous tone is all but absent in articles from the Scottish and Welsh papers.

Conclusion

The CDA approach has permitted a rich analysis of both textual and contextual factors in coverage of the UK language crisis. In the first instance, textual analysis (focusing on themes and headlines) revealed some differences in coverage in the different UK nations and newspaper types. Contextual analysis then allowed us to draw links between themes and different target readerships, as well as different political orientations. Finally, the themes were also related to education policies and some wider political agendas in the UK nations.

Our analysis shows that the English national broadsheets and Scotland's *The Herald* report on the language crisis in some detail during the two year period, with themes ranging from teaching issues, policies (e.g. 2004 Labour policy, see above introduction of primary languages, EBacc) and aspects of national interest (e.g. importance for business, effect of Global English, anglocentric culture), to holding different stakeholders responsible for the crisis. Depending on political stance and interests, the previous Labour and the current Coalition governments, teachers, head teachers, pupils and in fact the UK public as a whole, could *all* be held accountable to some extent for the language crisis, making it an ideal locus for 'political spin' by various stakeholders. It would thus be simplistic to take the press coverage as necessarily representing genuine concern for the crisis, or support for attempts to redeem it. Hence, the findings of this study showing relatively high media interest in the language crisis are entirely compatible with those by Ensslin and Johnson (2006), or Coleman (2009), describing the media as perpetuating the 'English is enough' fallacy.

The English national press offers the clearest political stance towards the crisis, revealing rather transparent links to the political orientation of specific papers, as exemplified in the thematic analyses of *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph* respectively. Regarding the demographics of target readerships, a link can clearly be seen between the middle-class target readership of the broadsheets and the prominence in those papers of education as a topic of national interest and its sub-themes, in particular personal advancement through language learning. Coverage in English regional papers refrains from party-political positioning in terms of finding scapegoats, but rather promotes local/regional institutions and events.

These findings are borne out by the headline tone analysis: only the regional press had a significant percentage of positively framed headlines. Few attempts are made in the 'soft genre' articles of the national press to lighten the tone by introducing humorous headlines. The importance of contextualising headline tone analysis is exemplified in three negatively phrased headlines reporting school efforts to remedy the crisis, thus revealing inconsistencies in coverage in the same articles and papers, i.e. deploring the language crisis.

Meanwhile, the distinctive interests of the UK nations also influence coverage. The Scottish press, for example, uses the crisis to promote distance from a neighbouring England framed as more (linguistically) anglocentric and to endorse themes of national wealth and unity (economic arguments). The (quasi) absence of coverage in the Welsh press could tentatively be linked to the national linguistic agendas of promoting Welsh, whose revival and

teaching take precedence over that of other foreign languages, but since Scotland is involved in similar efforts (with regards to Gaelic), it seems that the *political* rather than purely linguistic national agendas of the UK nations offer a better explanation for the coverage in Scotland. This is especially relevant given that further political devolution from the UK was a prominent topic in Scottish politics at the time of undertaking this research.

Notes

1. Routes into Languages. <https://www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/> (accessed 7 July 2013).
2. Until 2000, all English state schools were controlled by state-funded local authorities. Both academies (<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/academies/b00205692/whatisanacademy>) and free schools (<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/freeschools>) are independent, self-governing schools directly funded by, but not controlled by, the state. Academies account for 70% of secondary and 30% of primary schools.
3. The Ebacc is a new performance measure for secondary schools measuring 'good' GCSE achievements in five key subjects, including a modern or classic language.
4. See for example <http://www.orbit-comms.co.uk/scotlands-diplomats-alarmed-by-language-assistants-drop/> (accessed 7 July 2013).
5. For example, during the period discussed:
 Word of Mouth, BBC Radio 4, 19 July 2011,
 You and Yours BBC Radio 4, 31 August 2010
 Talk Sport Radio and Radio France, 25 August 2010
 15 local radio stations including Heart and BBC, 25 February 2010
 BBC Radio Wales, 28 October 2009
 BBC1 The Politics Show, 7 February 2010
 France 2 (TV), 26 August 2010
 The One Show (BBC1), 21 September 2009
 More 4 News (Channel 4), 10 September 2009
6. Nexus UK is a searchable database of current and archived newspapers.

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Appendix 1

Newspaper readership by social class				
	AB	C1	C2	DE
Great Britain	24	27	21	28
<i>The Times</i>	53	30	8	8
<i>The Daily Telegraph</i>	52	30	10	9
<i>The Guardian</i>	52	31	7	10
<i>The Independent</i>	46	36	8	10
<i>The Daily Mail</i>	26	33	21	19
<i>The Daily Express</i>	23	32	24	21
<i>The Daily Mirror</i>	11	23	27	39

Source: MORI aggregates 2004. Base: c.10,000 interviews with GB residents 15+ (Quoted after Duffy and Rowden 2004: 13)

Appendix 2

Newspaper readership by voting intention			
	Labour	Conservative	Liberal Democrat
GB (%)	35	33	22
<i>The Daily Mirror</i> (%)	60	16	17
<i>The Star</i> (%)	53	18	15
<i>The Guardian</i> (%)	46	6	37
<i>The Sun</i> (%)	41	32	13
<i>The Independent</i> (%)	35	13	39
<i>The Daily Express</i> (%)	27	46	17
<i>The Times</i> (%)	27	39	28
<i>The Financial Times</i> (%)	25	43	24
<i>The Daily Mail</i> (%)	21	55	16
<i>The Daily Telegraph</i> (%)	16	63	16
None (%)	35	28	26

Source: MORI aggregates 2004. Base: c 9.000 interviews with GB residents 18+ (quoted after Duffy and Rowden 2004: 18)