

<b>Institution:</b> University of Cambridge		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 26		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Changing the value of languages in the UK: from policy to public opinion		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2010 - 2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Wendy Ayres-Bennett	Professor of French Philology and Linguistics, PI MEITS	1983-present
Dora Alexopoulou	Principal Research Associate, MMLL	2007-present
John Bellamy	Research Associate, MEITS	2016-2018
Rhiannon McGlade	Research Associate, MEITS/CTO	2016-2019, 2019-present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> October 2015 – November 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The well-attested decline in numbers choosing languages at GCSE, A Level and in HE, and the lack of a UK languages strategy, reflect the relatively low status of languages with policymakers and the general public. Building on a National Languages Policy Workshop, Ayres-Bennett and the MEITS team have worked 'top-down' to change both the discourse about language policy and policy itself, through a policy journal, workshops, briefings, expert advice, and training of policymakers. A Pop-Up World of Languages – designed to change public opinion 'bottom-up' – demonstrates the value and the benefits of language learning through fun activities, especially for young people.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Multilingualism: Empowering Individuals, Transforming Societies (MEITS) is a multi-disciplinary, multi-institution AHRC-funded research project led by the University of Cambridge (PI Ayres-Bennett). It seeks to demonstrate the value of languages to key social and political issues of our time, and the benefits of speaking more than one language – or of being multilingual.</p> <p>The underpinning research is of two main kinds. Related to the policy work, Ayres-Bennett has published extensively over a number of years on standardisation, language policy, and linguistic ideology in France, and on the relationship between prescription and usage (<b>R1</b>). Key insights include the complexity of the relationship between corpus planning, status planning and the implementation of language policy, and the role of ideology and linguistic attitudes in effecting change. Since 2014, this has evolved into research on language policy and theories of language standardisation more generally (<b>R2</b>); comparison with France has demonstrated the lack of a clear national language strategy, the need for champions both within and without government, and the need for more cooperation and focus across government on language issues (<b>R3</b>).</p> <p>The editor of <i>Languages, Society &amp; Policy</i>, an open-access journal created as part of MEITS under the direction of Ayres-Bennett, is Dora Alexopoulou, who researches second language (L2) acquisition with a focus on English as a foreign/second language and who has a strong interest in transferring research insights into learning and teaching practice and policy. A central question of her research is how L2 research can best exploit the increasingly larger and richer learner corpora that are becoming available in the era of big data in order to further understanding of second language learning, and, in turn, impact on practice (e.g. assessment, teaching) and practical technological innovation, in particular in online language learning. Working with an industrial partner, EF Education First, she has built an open-access corpus consisting of the writings submitted to the online school of EF from learners from dozens of countries around the world across the proficiency spectrum, facilitating research into learning patterns for learners with different linguistic and socio-educational backgrounds (<b>R4</b> – winner 2016 Albert Valdman award for outstanding publication in <i>SSLA</i>).</p> <p>The Pop-Up World of Languages is underpinned by research conducted by members of MEITS. Ayres-Bennett was responsible for the museum's overall concept and design (<b>R5</b>). Examples of underpinning research from the submitting unit include: John Bellamy's research on notions of correctness and attitudes towards the standard in Luxembourg translated into an activity inviting participants to identify and evaluate people according to their accents and</p>		

exploring attitudes towards linguistic differences (R6); Rhiannon McGlade's research on humour, code-switching, identity and translation informed an activity looking at loan words in English, which asked visitors to consider whether they were already multilingual (R7).

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

#### Publications list

(R1) W. Ayres-Bennett & M. Sejjido, *Remarques et observations sur la langue française: histoire et évolution d'un genre*, Paris: Éditions Classiques Garnier, 2011.

(R2) W. Ayres-Bennett, 'From Haugen's codification to Thomas's purism: Assessing the role of description and prescription, prescriptivism and purism in linguistic standardisation', *Language Policy*, 19(2), 2020, pp. 183-213. doi.org/10.1007/s10993-019-09521-4.

(R3) W. Ayres-Bennett, 'Collaboration, connectedness, champions: approaches within government', in M. Kelly (ed.), *Languages after Brexit: How the UK Speaks to the World*, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp. 231-239.

(R4) A. Murakami & T. Alexopoulou, 'L1 influence on the acquisition order of English Grammatical Morphemes: A learner corpus study', *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 38(3), 2015, pp. 365-401. doi:10.1017/S0272263115000352.

(R5) W. Ayres-Bennett, 'Celebrating languages and multilingualism in the UK and beyond: a pop-up museum of languages for the UK', in M. Gahtan, N. Cannata, M. Sonmez (eds), *Language and the Display of Intangible Cultural Heritage*, London: Routledge, 2019, pp. 188-205.

(R6) J. Bellamy & K. Horner, 'Ein Mischmasch aus Deutsch und Französisch: Ideological tensions in youth discourses on language and identity in multilingual Luxembourg', *Sociolinguistic Studies*, 12 (3-4), 2018, pp. 323-343. doi: 10.1558/sols.34809.

(R7) R. McGlade, 'Laughing on the Other Side: Humour in the exile narrative of Avelí Artís Gener' in J. Larios & M. Lunati (eds), *Catalan Narrative 1875-2015*, Cambridge: Legenda, 2020, pp. 199-215.

All of the above were peer reviewed: R1, R3, R5, R7 were published by leading international presses, and R2, R4 and R6 in international peer-reviewed journals.

#### Funding

[Multilingualism: Empowering Individuals, Transforming Societies](#), 1 July 2016-30 June 2021, PI Ayres-Bennett. GBP3,212,709 from the AHRC (Open World Research Initiative).

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Marrying top-down and bottom-up impact is vital, since changes in the status of languages nationally and increased uptake of languages will not occur without the right policy framework, and without public buy-in on the importance of languages, policies will neither change nor succeed. The 2019 BBC Languages Survey attested to an 18-year low in language learning in schools, and the decline in languages in HE is well known. Ayres-Bennett and MEITS have worked to shift the national debate about the value of languages, to raise the profile of languages in policy and the public imagination as previously achieved for STEM, and to bring about changes in public policy.

#### Top-down impact on UK language policy

In order to begin tackling the lack of awareness of languages in government, the tendency for civil servants not to recognise the importance of languages in their portfolios and the lack of coordination across government, Ayres-Bennett has: 1) created a robust network of policymakers across Whitehall and the devolved governments; 2) championed the value of languages at the highest levels of government; 3) produced high-quality policy documents which are widely cited and used by UK policymakers.

In October 2015, Ayres-Bennett, supported by Cambridge's Centre for Science and Policy (CSaP), organised the **first national languages policy workshop**, co-chaired with Baroness Coussins [Text removed for publication]. This broadened the scope of language policy in moving beyond the educational sphere and in including community and indigenous languages. The morning session comprised of presentations from civil servants about language policy from a wide range of ministries and departments, including Defence, Trade and Investment, Hefce, Education (DfE), GCHQ, and the three devolved administrations. Over 100 people attended, and a number commented on the value of broadening the discussion beyond Whitehall and, in the words of one respondent, 'How important it is to change a culture towards the importance of

learning and speaking MFL' (E2, p.1). The afternoon session (Chatham House rules), discussed: 1) how to promote more strategic thinking about languages in government and ensure greater cross-department cooperation; 2) cross-cutting policy issues including building UK prosperity; security, defence and diplomacy; community and social cohesion; 3) education policy. In addition to the departments cited above, there were representatives from FCO, Defence Centre for Language and Culture, Business, Innovation and Skills, Ofsted, the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Modern Languages, British Academy (BA), as well as researchers. Significantly, most of the policymakers had never met, underlining the event's convening power, and it was agreed, as a result, to enhance the Cross-Whitehall language group and to appoint a language champion from the Civil Service [Text removed for publication].

Following the insights from this workshop, Ayres-Bennett authored, with support from the Cambridge Public Policy Strategic Research Initiative, a policy brief, **The Value of Languages**, which underlined the need for a cross-government language strategy and champions, including a Chief Government Linguist. This has been widely cited, e.g. in the House of Lords debate on Languages in the Armed Forces, 27.10.2016 (E3, p.21); in the House of Commons Briefing Paper: Language Teaching in Schools (England), 19.12.2018 and 17.1.2020; and in *Languages in the UK: A call for action from the four UK-wide National Academies* (which also cites R3). [Text removed for publication]. It received press coverage in the *Financial Times*, *Cambridge News* and *Tes* (E3).

Building on this success, **three policy workshops** were co-organised by Ayres-Bennett and Janice Carruthers (QUB, AHRC Modern Languages Leadership Fellow) on **Community Languages and Social Cohesion** (Cambridge, Dec 2017), **Modern Languages Educational Policy in the UK** (Belfast, Dec 2018), and **Languages, Business, Trade and Innovation** (Westminster, Jan 2020). Each has innovated in bringing together civil servants and researchers, and has achieved significant impact. The second workshop, for example, part of a five-way collaboration between the AHRC, BA, British Council, UUK, Association of School and College Leaders, offered an innovative comparative perspective on primary and secondary education across the four jurisdictions of the UK, and its recommendations fed directly into their 'National Languages Strategy: Education and Skills', published spring 2020 (E4). Three related **Policy briefings** were published following each workshop (E4). The second on **Modern Languages Educational Policy in the UK** (Jan 2019), has been particularly widely cited, including in the NI and England British Council *Language Trends* 2019 reports, and on the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment website.

MEITS, through Stephen Kinnock MP, took the lead in organising an **OWRI event in Parliament** (28.11.2018), which had as its key policy ask the need for a Chief Government Linguist, as argued for in the *Value of Languages*. Amongst the audience were two Members of the House of Lords and seven MPs. Following the event, Ayres-Bennett took the lead in writing to the Cabinet Secretary about the need for a coherent cross-government languages strategy to build global Britain; [Text removed for publication].

Impact has been achieved through **CSaP Fellows attached to MEITS**, from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the FCO, DfE, and NI Executive. The Director, Urban Villages & Communities in Transition Division (NI Executive) organised a meeting for Ayres-Bennett and Carruthers with the Head of the NI Civil Service, David Sterling (28.1.2019) (E5). As a result, Ayres-Bennett and Carruthers were invited to provide languages awareness training to 16 NI Policy Champions (25.11.20). Feedback from the attendees from across Stormont departments was very positive: 90% of those responding to a feedback survey said they were very likely/likely to implement learning from the workshop in their policymaking (E5, p.6), commenting, for instance, on a new awareness of the importance of home languages.

Following a meeting with three colleagues at the Office for National Statistics (27.7.2019), Yaron Matras (Manchester) and Ayres-Bennett were invited to provide **expert advice** on the wording for the guidance about answering the language question in the 2021 Census, especially on the question of 'main language'. Subsequently 'multiple improvements/corrections' to the language classification and indexation were made on their advice (E6).

Impact has also been achieved through the MEITS online, **open-access policy journal, Languages, Society & Policy** (Editor Alexopoulou), which makes language research and its implications for policy accessible to policymakers, stakeholders across the public services and industry and the wider public. Policy papers are authored by academics who explain a piece of



their research with derived policy implications and recommendations. The 18 policy papers published as of 2.12.20 are achieving significant global reach with 85,055 unique pageviews, from readers in 216 countries, including the US, India and China, as well as across Europe (E7). Targeted publicity to stakeholders/policymakers has assured impact: for example, Myles's paper on primary languages was promoted by the Association for Language Learning (ALL) which supports language teachers' professional development.

### **Bottom-up impact on understanding of the value of languages, language learning and engagement with languages through the pop-up museum of languages**

Working with policymakers reinforced the need to change public opinion about the value of languages and improve motivation by demonstrating that language learning is both possible and fun. Since the UK has no museum devoted to languages, despite languages being central to who we are and how we view the world, MEITS designed and ran a **Pop-Up World of Languages (PUWL)**, the first UK languages museum. This comprises 15 activities and games, many of them interactive, of which 10 were researched, designed and produced by the Cambridge team, one each by researchers in the Nottingham, Belfast and Edinburgh partner institutions, and two by projects funded under the MEITS flexible funding scheme. Ayres-Bennett was responsible for the PUWL's overall conception and design, liaising with a professional designer, and managing all stages of production.

To maximise impact, the activities were refined over a number of iterations, with the Cambridge team piloting their activities at the Cambridge Festival of Ideas (Fol: Oct 2017, 2018), Cambridge Ethnic Forum Diversity Day (Nov 2017, 2018), and with Year 7-9 students at Parkside School (June 2018). The 230 visitors at the 2017 Fol provided excellent feedback (E9, e.g. 'it made me think that I shouldn't be embarrassed about admitting that I can speak another language badly'), but the majority were adults, already interested in languages. For the 2018 Fol children aged 10-14 were targeted via schools and community groups, resulting in many more families and young people attending (total 202). The feedback was again very positive, one child writing, 'now I want to learn more languages'.

The PUWL itself ran in accessible, 'non-threatening' locations in Cambridge, Belfast, Edinburgh and Nottingham, October-December 2019 (a planned 'pop-up' in the Barbican Centre London (March 2020) was cancelled due to Covid-19). In Cambridge it was in a busy shopping centre, favoured by young people and attracting a different demographic from previous events on university property, including many drop-in visitors. Promotional material targeted areas of multiple deprivation, and schools visits were organised with free transport provided. **Attendance figures were high, with a total of 3,108 visitors** (the first figure refers to general visitors, the second to school visits): Cambridge (1666, 60), Belfast (245, 185), Edinburgh (464, 85), Nottingham (138, 265). Visitors were encouraged to contribute to our research by recording the languages they spoke: in Cambridge, 85 different languages were named, reflecting the linguistic diversity of the attendees and their communities. The PUWL featured in the *Times*, *Tes*, and *Independent* (E8), and interviews with Ayres-Bennett were broadcast on UCB radio (25.10.19) and in Radio Cambridgeshire news bulletins.

The PUWL created a space where visitors were able to engage deeply with the concepts of multilingualism and language learning, leading to new discoveries and changed attitudes. For instance, comments in response to a question about how the event changed visitors' thinking about speaking more than one language included (E9): 'I am now inspired to learn a not so popular language and about its culture' (p.5); 'I had preconceived ideas about languages and being involved in those games/activities changed my perceptions' (p.27). There was clear evidence of stimulating conversations within families and groups and appreciation of the team's 'enthusiasm' and 'knowledge', which contributed to transforming the understanding of multilingualism. One team member recorded, 'A particularly memorable moment for me was speaking to a Finnish-speaking girl who said she never really wanted to tell her friends before that she spoke Finnish at home with her family because she didn't want to be different, but now she felt it was something she should be more proud of' (p.87).

We also collected feedback in Cambridge from the 60 primary and secondary school pupils (all of whom qualified for pupil premium funding for disadvantaged pupils). Research shows that lack of access to language learning is particularly acute in areas of relative deprivation, and we identified the PUWL as a way of reaching communities that might otherwise not engage with our work. One primary school pupil wrote that s/he had learnt 'that languages are so important to so

many things' (E9, p.35). Importantly, one child saw how languages resonate with their own interests: Today I learnt... 'that languages can help communicate with your teammates in sports' (p.52). Senior school pupils showed new appreciation of linguistic diversity and its value: Today I learnt... 'that there are over 7,000 languages in the world and how many people rely on them' (p.67); and of the cognitive benefits of language learning: Today I learnt... 'that learning a language is like revision for the brain' (p.70). Comments also emphasised the practical benefits of multilingualism for future careers: Today I learnt... 'what languages are required for certain jobs' (p.71).

There is a film about the event (E8) (1,799 views as of 3.12.2020); a sustainable legacy will be achieved through an online games site for the activities, currently under construction. The material is available to take to schools, youth clubs, etc. Ayres-Bennett has received requests for advice from language researchers in Australia and Germany wishing to run similar projects to the PUWL, many requests for school visits, offers of donations including from ALL and the UK Association for Esperanto, all testifying to the interest it generated.

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

##### [Text removed for publication]

(E2) Feedback from the national languages policy workshop in Cambridge, October 2015.

(E3) [Value of Languages](#) press coverage and citations in Hansard: Barber, 'Must try harder: why Britain should embrace foreign languages', *The Financial Times*, 26.05.2016, pp.2-3; Wiggins, 'Urgent action needed over decline in language learning, Cambridge University warns', *Tes*, 24.05.2016, pp.4-5; Care, 'UK needs a Brian Cox for languages to tackle national deficit says Cambridge professor', *Cambridge News*, 25.05.2016, pp.6-9; Hansard, Vol. 776, Armed Forces: Foreign Language Speakers 27.10.2016, pp.10-32; Hansard, Vol. 788, House of Lords, Industrial Strategy debated on 08.01.2018, pp.33-42; Hansard, Vol. 788, Education: Modern Foreign Languages 18.01.2018, pp.43-47.

(E4) Citations of [Policy Briefing on Community Languages and Social Cohesion](#) (Aug 2018); [Policy Briefing on Languages, Business, Trade and Innovation](#) (June 2018); [Policy Briefing on Modern Languages Educational Policy in the UK](#) (Jan 2019); in [Towards a National Languages Strategy: Education and Skills](#) (British Academy, July 2020), pp.2-26; [Language Trends](#) (British Council, July 2019), pp.27-46; [Language Trends Northern Ireland](#) (British Council, 2019), pp.47-86; House of Commons Briefing Paper: Language Teaching in Schools 17.1.2020, pp.89-122; [Languages in the UK: A call for action](#) (2019), pp.123-132.

(E5) Letter from NI Executive 24.07.2020 and training feedback 25.11.2020.

(E6) Office for National Statistics Ethnicity, Identity, Language and Religion Topic Leads: letter 24.07.2019; email 24.04.2020.

(E7) Online evidence: Google Analytics for *Languages, Society & Policy* and [ALL website](#).

(E8) Pop-up Museum of Languages: Martin, 'Brexit or Not MFL cannot be optional for Britain', *Tes*, 21.11.19; Woolcock, 'Language museum hopes to stem a loss in translation', *The Times*, 19.10.2019; Martin, 'Is gendered language the last stronghold of binarism', *The Independent*, 13.11.2019; YouTube [video](#) of the event.

(E9) Feedback: PUWL visitors and schools, impact report extract and Festival of Ideas.