RECONCEPTUALIZING THE AGENDA FOR LANGUAGE EDUCATION:
Languages for All

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In 1997, the St. Augustine Campus of The University of the West Indies (UWI) embarked on a programme of languages for all via the establishment of the Centre for Language Learning (CLL). The mission of the unit was clear. The CLL was to be the institutional means for organizing and expanding the teaching of foreign languages at the UWI, St. Augustine. Its mission meant that students could now aspire to foreign language competence as a core skill of their "graduateness." At the end of the first decade, it is useful to examine how successfully the Centre has accomplished its mission. Moreover, as the Centre embarks on its second decade, a refocusing of its mission—with reference to current research on non-specialist learning, new societal imperatives such as the Spanish as a First Foreign Language (SAFFL) Initiative, and institutional objectives such as the Campus's adoption of internationalization as a strategic objective—is called for. These are the issues addressed in this paper, which seeks to set out how the CLL, as a UWI centre of excellence for languages, proposes to meet the challenge of teaching, research, innovation, advisory and community services, and intellectual leadership in non-specialist language learning in the next decade.

Introduction

Background to the CLL/Language Centres

By order of the St. Augustine Campus Finance and General Purposes Committee, a campus centre for languages was established in August 1997. This new teaching unit, the Centre for Language Learning (CLL), was to become the institutional means for organizing and expanding the teaching of foreign languages at The University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine. The CLL's immediate focus was on Spanish and French, two international languages spoken in the region. But its mission to organize and expand meant that it was mandated not only to bring a

different group of learners to the language-learning table, but also to introduce new languages to the menu.

A review of the CLL's work reveals that it has been very successful—both in quantitative and qualitative terms—in meeting its original mandate. From a core of two languages, the Centre has expanded to offer some 10 languages: Arabic, (Mandarin) Chinese, French, German, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Spanish, and Yoruba. Additionally, in January 2006, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), formerly attached to the Department of Liberal Arts, was included in the curriculum at the CLL. From approximately 200 students, the CLL now regularly enrols 800 persons in its campus programmes and approximately 100 learners off-campus. Qualitatively, the Centre receives high praise from its students, who value the dynamism of their teachers and the fact that many of them are native speakers of the languages they teach. External assessments have been equally complimentary. The CLL underwent its first full-scale programme review, via a Quality Assurance Review, in December 2005 and emerged with flying colours.

The CLL has grown. But, not surprisingly, this dynamic growth has not been without certain drawbacks. As the CLL prepares to enter a new decade, it is an opportune moment to pause and reflect on its work thus far. If we are to chart a path forward for this campus language centre, the clichéd looking back to look forward is a necessary step in the process. A good starting point for this review is to revisit the notion of the CLL as a university language centre.

Challenges and Opportunities

One criticism levelled against the CLL in the Quality Assurance Review was that it had succumbed to mission creep. The reviewers felt that as it had expanded, there had been some degree of dissolution of its primary focus and, as a result, the CLL's mission as a university language centre had become obscured, both for internal and external stakeholders. The fundamental question then was: What is a university language centre and what is or should be its mission?

Identity/identity formation is a truly contemporary challenge, which equally besets the individual juggling roles and responsibilities and institutions. In the case of UWI, the question can be posed: How does the premier tertiary education provider in the region reconcile its role and responsibilities as (a) a research intensive institution that values research and publication, and uses this as *the* metric for promotions; (b) an institution in the mould of a liberal arts college with a focus on high-quality undergraduate teaching; and (c) an enabler in the society,

cognizant that, within a perspective of widening participation in tertiary education, it must assume a responsibility to increase access by providing pathways to a university education for traditionally under-represented groups?

I am not suggesting that these roles and responsibilities are mutually exclusive. But like many of UWI's internal stakeholders, I am fully aware of the dissonance that sometimes seems to arise from attempts to engage equally on all these fronts at the same time. The CLL's identity crisis was no less profound. Is it a revenue-earning profit-seeking enterprise? Is it a provider of extra-curricular (not accredited, therefore less prestigious) learning for the student population? Is it an enabler of the university's public service mission, providing a public good—subsidized language training—for adult learners? All of these issues about what the CLL is and what it does are further complicated by its web of relationships with department, faculty, and campus.

Defining a University Language Centre

A useful definition of a university language centre and its role in providing non-specialist language learning comes out of Fay and Ferney (2000):

> Institution-Wide Language Programmes and Language Centres aim to maximise opportunities for language learning by providing a comprehensive and viable language programme which takes into account the needs of a wide spectrum of non-specialist language learners. These learners who specialise in disciplines other than modern languages, now outnumber those specialising in languages in Higher Education. To identify and meet their needs, provision must emphasise how language learners' competencies can transfer from generic contexts to a range of disciplines; it must promote greater awareness of learning strategies and devise curricula which facilitate subsequent professional mobility across linguistic and cultural frontiers in an increasingly global economy. Mapping non-specialist provision has prompted much debate about the process and product of learning and teaching during a period of unprecedented change within the language learning community. (Book jacket blurb)

This definition of the *what* and *how* of a language centre coincides well with the original mandate of the CLL to organize and expand the teaching of foreign languages at the St. Augustine Campus of UWI. The

Fay and Ferney (2000) definition also points to some of the characteristics of a university language centre. A university language centre's scope is campus/institution wide and its curriculum represents a departure from the traditional offering for specialist learners. The reach and nature of non-specialist provision are intended to have a broad appeal to students from all disciplines, and in many institutions in the UK, Institution-Wide Language Programmes (IWLPs)/non-specialist programmes are dubbed "languages for all" programmes.

Reconceptualization of the Centre's Mission

The challenge to our identity forced us on to the path of realigning our work with our original mandate. As part of the process of redefining who we are and what we do at the CLL, we embraced the suggestion of the Review Team to define a core mission, a commercial mission, and what was dubbed a *pro bono publico* mission. Our core mission then is the provision of "languages for all"/institution-wide non-specialist programmes, grounded in relevant research. Our commercial mission is the revenue-earning role referred to earlier, and our *pro bono publico* mission, a public/outreach mission that allows us to see added value not only in financial terms. As the title of this paper suggests, the major thrust of this paper will be on our core mission—the languages for all programme. The paper will therefore explore what a languages for all approach means to the institution and the wider society. To do this, I shall examine some curricular issues, then some sociocultural challenges that influence a languages for all agenda. Finally, I shall discuss what I see as an appropriate institutional response to the challenges that I have outlined.

Curricular Issues in Non-Specialist Learning

I shall confine my attention to three curricular issues that tend to feature prominently in discussions on non-specialist language learning, and which also engage our attention as we try to craft the best curriculum for our learners: content, entry levels, and levels of achievement. As noted earlier, most non- specialist learning tends to be generic language provision catering to students from a variety of disciplines. This pedagogical decision is supported by research from applied linguistics, which demonstrates that specialist lexis and registers are independent of the actual structure of the language (see O'Leary, 2000). Moreover, the lexical items that are peculiar to each discipline occupy such a reduced field that it seems more efficient to give priority to the common core of

generic technical terms in whole-group teaching, and respond to the disciplinary focus in some other way, for example, via strategy instruction or an autonomous approach.

A second curricular issue that often appears in discussions on non-specialist teaching and learning centres around entry levels of non-specialist language courses, and the fact that the majority of this provision is sub-General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) Level. The concern here is that such courses introduce an academically less challenging element into a degree programme and compromise the degree status of the student's major. Ferney (2000) and Brierley (2006) both provide robust rebuttals to this argument. Ferney (p. 6) contends that "sub-A Level elements can be tolerated within a degree programme provided the degree programme *as a whole* is of A Level + 3/4 standard." Brierley makes a similar point, citing Quality Assurance benchmark statements that routinely allow for a range of generic and transferable skills, which can be accredited within a degree programme without compromising the core disciplinary competences that are taught and assessed at the degree level.

What is seen as a more critical curricular issue for linguists involved in non-specialist teaching is that the levels of competence achieved in the various stages of the IWLPs are clearly specified. Indeed, defining language proficiency in a way that makes clear both to students and other stakeholders what they (students) can do with the language is a pedagogical concern at the heart of *all* language teaching (e.g., Bissar, 2000). The adoption of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEF)—a non-language-specific tool—has been a tremendous boon in this regard. The CEF (2001) recognizes a basic, independent, and proficient user and provides illustrative descriptors of the competence of these users in the four broad skills areas. This has facilitated both curriculum/syllabus development and testing/assessment/certification in many language programmes in the UK, in Hong Kong, and throughout Europe. Sheils' (2001) view that adoption of the CEF can "facilitate coherence and transparency in the description of objectives, content and methods" is widely shared by many in languages. At the CLL, we too have adopted the CEF. We have found that not only does the CEF provide good descriptors for our programmes, but it also facilitates articulation with the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) and the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) Spanish and French, which, like the UK's General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level (AS)/A Level language syllabi, are inspired by a communicative approach to language learning. Adopting the CEF will allow us to more easily reward previous

school-based learning certified by the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC).

A third curricular issue alluded to earlier is the integration of a learner autonomy approach in non-specialist language provision. Broady and Kenning (1996) underscore the utility of learner autonomy in the higher education language curriculum:

> Promoting learner autonomy has become an important aim for many university language teachers as they respond positively to the widening range of student needs and interests, the exciting possibilities for self-directed learning offered by new technology, and the increasing emphasis in higher education on providing students with skills for life-long learning. (Book jacket blurb)

The greater heterogeneity of the non-specialist language classroom—differences in students' disciplinary background, their previous experience of foreign/second language learning, their perceptions about language learning, their learning styles, their vocational/academic/social reason for learning a language—in comparison with a specialist programme, suggests that a one-size-fits-all approach would not be suitable. In a curriculum that integrates learner autonomy, there are more opportunities for learners to personalize their learning according to their own learning profile. Learner autonomy promotes the sharing of responsibility for learning between teacher and students (Carter, 2006). Thus, while the classroom teacher takes charge of the core content, autonomous learners working in a self-access centre, with the support of classroom teacher or language adviser, *can* tailor their independent learning to enhance classroom learning, for example, as discussed earlier with reference to a specialist lexis. Learners can exercise considerable freedom by focusing on skills, topics, media, materials, and so on of their own choosing. Further, they may work in ways more compatible with their learning style than in the whole-group encounter.

Sociocultural Conditions Affecting Language Teaching/Learning

Moving from the curricular/classroom focus, this paper will now look at some of the wider issues affecting non-specialist learning and the implications of promoting a languages for all perspective in Trinidad and Tobago. While the classroom is undoubtedly one of the most important parameters in classroom-based acquisition (e.g., Freed, 1991), Stern (1983, p. 274) reveals the multiplicity of factors that affect language

teaching and learning. Dörnyei (2003, p. 4) notes that a foreign language is "socially and culturally bound, which makes language learning a deeply social event." While Dörnyei's focus is on the sociocultural dimensions of the target language (L2), Stern's diagram shows that the sociocultural dimensions of the native language (L1) context are no less significant in classroom-based acquisition.

The role of English as the official language of Trinidad and Tobago immediately suggests one of the challenges involved in promoting language learning/teaching locally. The progressive spread of English and its status as *lingua franca* in the globalized world often means that English speakers are less willing to invest in foreign language learning. English speakers' knowledge of the importance of English is further buttressed by a belief that the majority of the world's population is monolingual and that multilinguals are the exception. This is a myth that proves difficult to dispel, even among educated L1 speakers.

Research conducted by Horwitz (1987), among others, has revealed some of the implications of learners' beliefs on their attitudes and motivation. It is hypothesized that in contexts where language learning is not highly valued, the "group language learning self-image" (Horwitz) is lower. This hypothesis was also shown to be valid in the local context. In research conducted among specialist learners of French in 1997/98, reported in Carter (2006), there was almost universal agreement that everyone can learn a foreign language. Students were also confident about their individual potential for success. On the other hand, there was less enthusiasm about the language learning potential of the society as a whole. The majority of respondents were neutral, neither agreeing nor disagreeing that people in Trinidad and Tobago are good at learning foreign languages.

Another example that illustrates the significance of the group language learning self-image, also at the tertiary level, comes out of research by Byrne (2006). Byrne surveyed non-specialist linguists at 11 UK universities in 2005/06 and at 12 universities in 2006/07. These students attended both traditional research-intensive universities like Cambridge and Durham and newer universities like the University of Surrey and Leeds Metropolitan. He found that almost all the students (99% in 2005/06 and 97% in 2006/07) thought that the European Union (EU) goal that all students should have skills in their mother tongue plus two languages was desirable. However, when the results were disaggregated by nationality, international non-EU students were the most optimistic that this goal was achievable; followed by EU students; with UK students (the only group where English speakers were dominant) being the least optimistic. Byrne's survey provides further

compelling evidence that the group language learning self-image can be strongly influenced by prevailing societal attitudes to languages and language learning.

The influence of sociocultural factors on language teaching/learning throws into sharp relief the importance of a language policy as a guiding document and the sign of a society's commitment to language learning. In Trinidad and Tobago, the Spanish as a First Foreign Language (SAFFL) Initiative seeks to realize the Government's goal to make Spanish the country's first foreign language by 2020. Although similar initiatives have been announced before, this time the creation of an implementation body—the Secretariat for the Implementation of Spanish (SIS)—responsible for raising public awareness and coordinating projects that promote the acquisition of Spanish language proficiency is a concrete step to realize the state's goal.

The Secretariat is headed by a full-time Director and employs persons with competency in areas such as foreign languages, communications, and project management. The Secretariat operates under the aegis of a Cabinet-appointed Steering Committee, chaired by the Trade Ministry's most senior public officer—the Permanent Secretary. The membership of the Steering Committee is drawn from Ministries that are closely linked with the SAFFL Initiative, for example, Education; Science, Technology and Tertiary Education; Foreign Affairs; and Tourism. Other institutions that are key to Spanish language teaching and learning, notably UWI; the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAATT), and, more recently, The University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT), as well as private sector organizations such as the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Commerce, also belong to the Steering Committee. Two subcommittees—a Language Planning Subcommittee and a Communications Subcommittee—complete the organizational structure.

The composition of the Steering Committee and Subcommittees has ensured that people who are multipliers in the language field—language professionals and educators, senior civil servants, and other professionals who occupy positions of influence in the society—have a stake in the success of the SAFFL Initiative. What this helps to do is reinforce the credibility of the SAFFL Initiative in the eyes of key stakeholders, and, by extension, telegraph to the society at large the importance of SAFFL. The SAFFL Initiative is less than five years old, but the initial data seem to suggest that it is encouraging a change in public perceptions about the importance of Spanish language learning for Trinidad and Tobago citizens. We at the CLL *have* noted that the SAFFL Initiative has

stimulated demand for Spanish language proficiency both among students and members of the public who access our courses.

A University Language Policy

This brief description of the SAFFL Initiative shows the potential of a national language policy for providing strategic direction and putting language learning on the national agenda. It is argued that a university language policy can serve the same function in an institutional context. The implications of a university language policy, firstly in contexts where such policies are common and then in the UWI context where such a policy is being proposed, will conclude the reflections in this paper.

The Situation in the USA

The concept of a university language policy is fairly common in prestigious colleges and universities in the USA. Students are often required to complete a number of semesters of language study as part of the general curriculum requirements. Although this policy is often cast in terms of a mandatory foreign language requirement, the net effect is that students continue to develop their foreign language proficiency or begin to acquire such proficiency in the course of their undergraduate education. The foreign language requirement is a proven way to extend language learning in the US higher education sector. What is less certain is whether students who think of the foreign language requirement as an obligation emerge with a more positive attitude to language learning. In other words, while mandatory courses *extend* language learning, it is debatable whether they *promote* language learning and intercultural competence among the target population.

Indeed, in a paper entitled "Globalization and 21st Century Competencies: Challenges for North American Higher Education" (Fantini, Arias-Galicia, & Guay, 2001), the authors' strong plea in favour of "competencies appropriate for the 21st century" and their singling out of second language proficiency and intercultural competence among these suggest that, despite the spread of mandatory foreign language requirements, the US higher education sector is not meeting its objectives in the take-up of foreign language learning. On the other hand, a statement by President Margaret Lee (2006) of Oakton Community College, Illinois, underscores the importance of foreign language and intercultural competence even for the community college sector, traditionally regarded as third tier in the highly stratified US tertiary

education sector. Lee said that "you can't live in the world today, and you can't do business in the world today, unless you are a global citizen," and added that while community colleges are meant to serve the community, "we do live in a world that is so small now that the 'community' is the people on the planet."

The growing realization of the paucity of foreign language skills in the USA and the consequences of this for trade and investment, and recently for national security and defence, led in 2006 to the launch of the National Security Language Initiative (NSLI). The NSLI will "dramatically increase the number of Americans learning critical need foreign languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Russian, Hindi, Farsi, and others through new and expanded programs from kindergarten through university and into the workforce." (United States. Department of State, 2006).

This new focus will undoubtedly have a knock-on effect in colleges and universities, with administrators and language educators revisiting their current language policies to determine how to extend and promote language learning among those in tertiary education.

The Situation in Europe

In Europe, "the aim of language learning is to develop individual plurilingualism and pluriculturalism," this according to Joseph Sheils, the Head of the Modern Languages Division of the Council of Europe, the body charged with responsibility for language use, and language learning and teaching in Europe. In Europe, the focus is on language learning for all, rather than as the "preserve of any social or intellectual elite" (Shiels, 2001). The three key planks of the European approach to language policy formation are: 1) that language learning is a right for all, 2) individuals must be helped to develop their plurilingualism and pluriculturalism, and finally 3) that Europe's linguistic heritage is a source of enrichment. These understandings have led to a comprehensive approach to developing and promoting language learning in sectors ranging from primary to adult education, straddling majority language, minority and regional languages, and, more recently, community languages.

One recent initiative in the higher education sector is a proposal to form a Higher Education Language Policy (HELP) network. The decision to establish this network was one of the outcomes of the European Network for the Promotion of Language Learning Among All Undergraduates (ENLU) closing conference held in Nancy, France in April 2006. Conference deliberations on the importance of university language policies and the necessity of taking both top-down and bottom-

up strategic action to realize the goal of making language competence a core component of undergraduate curricula resulted in a call for a formal structure to coordinate European efforts in this area.

Although the concept of language learning as a right for all implies work on all educational fronts, there is nevertheless an expectation that universities have a *special* role to play in supporting language learning and teaching through the research in which they engage, as, for example, the research that is expected to support the HELP network. According to Berthoud (2001):

> Universities must reflect on their specific contribution in their dual role as providers of education and research...they must respond to the new linguistic and cultural needs through their educational structures while at the same time anticipating future needs through their research structures.... However, in order to develop and make educational and academic choices relating to language, universities must develop a language policy, which will direct their choices.... Universities must become actors in language policy and be recognised as such in the political, economic and professional worlds.

What the European model underscores is the need for universities to drive the language agenda, not only by ensuring full coverage of language learning needs through languages for all programmes within their institutions, but also by adding value to foreign language education through the conduct of research.

This conceptualization of the way in which the language sector in higher education is expected to act—as a promoter of language learning and a driver of research—is indeed one of the acknowledged goals of higher education. A primary mission of higher education is "to contribute to the development and improvement of education at all levels" (UNESCO, 1998). There is widespread agreement that, "owing to the scope and pace of change, society has become increasingly knowledge-based so that higher learning and research now act as essential components of cultural, socio-economic and environmentally sustainable development of individuals, communities and nations" (UNESCO). This is a perspective that we share. At the CLL, we are committed to a vision of applied research into language teaching and learning, and language policy to inform our practice and our approach as a teaching unit. Our research on adult language learning also responds to the societal need of the SAFFL Initiative to engage more adults in language learning. Finally, through our individual and institutional research in areas such as technology applied to language learning, learner autonomy, the

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integration of self-access resources, corpus linguistics, and motivation, we continue to help shape the research agenda in foreign language education.

A Language Policy for UWI, St. Augustine

In a document presenting a draft language policy for UWI, St. Augustine (Carter, 2007), I make the point that:

> In the globalised higher education sector, a curriculum devoid of a focus on communicative and intercultural competence will be judged to be deficient, failing to provide opportunities for its beneficiaries to acquire a vital skills set. UWI graduates who do not have communication in foreign languages as a key skill will find their prospects for employment and for academic and professional mobility very constrained whether at the national, regional or international level. (p. 2)

The document continues:

> To raise institutional awareness of the importance of foreign language skills what is required is a policy statement showing that the University acknowledges that foreign language competence adds value to undergraduate and graduate study and endorsing foreign language competence as a strategic institutional, national and regional goal. Moreover, the University of the West Indies St. Augustine Campus must project itself as the visionary and credible voice on languages in the national education sector, leading from the front in 2007 as in did in 1997.... What is needed is a broad framework that promotes the added value of foreign language competence; that underscores the verticality of language learning throughout the education system (rewarding previous language study at secondary school) and recognises language learning as a lifelong pursuit. That framework should also emphasise diversification in the provision and choice of languages. The last point needs to be stressed, for such a perspective will accommodate both specialist and non-specialist language learning and the latter at varying degrees of proficiency. Additionally, unlike the SAFFL initiative, which designates a first but to date is silent on the place and role of *other* languages, a focus on diversification in choice of languages will not result in the promotion of Spanish at the expense of other languages. Instead, diversification of choice of languages would mean a continuing role for French as an important regional and world language; an

enhanced role for strategically important languages like Arabic, (Mandarin) Chinese, Hindi, Japanese and Portuguese; and a place among non-specialist offerings for heritage languages such as French-lexicon creole (patois) and Yoruba. (p. 3)

Finally, I propose the following statement:

Draft Language Policy Statement:

Foreign language competence is one of the basic competences of the tertiary educated person. It is a key to national and international citizenship in today's multilingual and multicultural world. The University of the West Indies St. Augustine Campus will promote and foster student engagement with foreign language learning as it pursues its strategic goal of embedding an international and intercultural dimension in the curriculum. (p. 3)

Conclusion

I have argued here that the Centre for Language Learning, established in 1997 as the medium to expand and organize the learning of foreign languages, must renew with its strategic role of putting languages on the agenda by aggressively ensuring that language learning becomes a feature of undergraduate programmes. I have further argued that the creation and implementation of a university language policy provides a rallying point around which all efforts to promote language learning can be focused. Not only will such a policy enhance language learning, but it will also make research into language education—pedagogic research as well as language policy research—a vital component of the work of this centre, like other language centres. There will certainly be implications, especially resource implications, in this reconceptualization of the mission of the language centre. But if this Centre for Language Learning is to fulfil its developmental role as an academic unit within higher education, it must engage equally as a provider of learning and a provider of research in higher education.

UWI sets out as its mission, "teaching, research, innovation, advisory and community services and intellectual leadership" (UWI website). The Centre for Language Learning aims to do no less in carrying out its core mission, its commercial mission, and its *pro bono publico* mission in the language learning/teaching field.

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