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Modern Languages Research: Towards a Challenge-Based Interdisciplinary Model

ARTICLES

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ABSTRACT

This article draws on the experience of the multi-institution, multidisciplinary research programme Multilingualism: Empowering Individuals, Transforming Societies, funded by the AHRC under its Open World Research Initiative, to argue that research in Modern Languages has important things to say about key issues of our time. This implies a challenge-based model for research conducted in an interdisciplinary framework. As Klein and Newell (1998) argue, interdisciplinary studies address topics that are too broad or complex to be dealt with by a single discipline but, drawing on disciplinary perspectives, seek to integrate their insights into a more comprehensive perspective. The approach is illustrated through four case studies relating to conflict and peacebuilding, linguistic rights and inequalities, health and wellbeing, and social cohesion.

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1 INTRODUCTION

There has been considerable debate and soul-searching about the future and shape of Modern Languages (ML) in the UK over the past ten years, not least because of the continued decrease in uptake of languages in our schools and universities that has been very well documented (Henderson and Carruthers 2021). Beside the conferences and many blogs on the subject,[1] there have also been a series of policy reports proposing ways to remedy the decline, perhaps most notably that jointly authored by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), the Association of School and College Leaders, the British Academy, the British Council, and Universities UK.[2]

This is not to say that no progress has occurred. For example, the AHRC-funded programme Translating Cultures,[3] which studied the role of translation, "understood in its broadest sense, in the transmission, interpretation, transformation and sharing of languages, values, beliefs, histories and narratives", was a crucial step in nurturing linguistic sensitivities across a range of fields and in the reimagining of ML, perhaps especially in moving beyond national philologies and transnationalizing ML.[4] Nevertheless, the situation for ML remains precarious. A major issue is the perceived lack of identity for ML and uncertainty as to whether the breadth of the subject should be celebrated as a strength or challenged as a weakness. Since REF 2014, Modern Languages and Linguistics have been assessed as a single unit, rather than according to single languages or language families, which historically have been in competition for resources and students; this necessitates a long list of the different types of work that constitutes the area as the definition for REF 2021 illustrates:

> The sub-panel will take a broad view of what constitutes modern language studies. This will include, but not be limited to: literature and thought; cultural studies; theatre studies; film and media studies; visual cultures; language studies; translation and interpreting studies; political, social and historical studies; editorial scholarship, bibliography, textual criticism and theory and history of the book; philosophy and critical theory; world literature and comparative literature; literature in relation to the other arts; and applied, practice-based and pedagogical research, including translation and creative writing. The sub-panel welcomes the submission of interdisciplinary research, including work on language and literature in relation to science, medicine and technology, digital humanities, or creative technologies.[5]

What is striking about the list is that—inevitably—many aspects, including literary and cultural studies, theatre, film and media studies, political, social and historical studies, philosophy and critical theory, translation and creative writing, are likely to be part of other disciplinary areas, especially across the arts and humanities, raising the challenge of what the unique selling proposition (USP) for ML might be. While the same might be said for other units of assessment, notably Classics, this description appears qualitatively different from, say, those for history or philosophy. For history, for instance, the list of what is included embraces different types of history.

If, some thirty years ago, the "core business" of many university languages departments was the study of languages and literatures, the diversification of courses, options, and the rise of joint degrees, while bringing many advantages, have compounded the sense of a lack

1 See, for instance, Byford (2017); Hutchings (2017); Kohl (2016; 2018); Stewart (2018). Already in 1999 Swaffar argued for the need to articulate and implement a coherent vision for the discipline and the imperative to stop thinking "in terms of an elitism that insists on each language and each area of study as a separate entity" (Swaffar 1999: 156). We will not address the question of the appropriate name for the discipline, which has recently been the subject of considerable discussion. Note that the term Modern Foreign Languages is still widely used in school contexts.

2 *Towards a National Languages Strategy: Education and Skills*: www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/2597/Towards-a-national-languages-strategy-July-2020_R0FHmzB.pdf. Accessed 23 June 2022.

3 translatingcultures.org.uk/about/ahrc-translating-cultures-theme/. Accessed 23 June 2022.

4 www.transnationalmodernlanguages.ac.uk/. Accessed 23 June 2022.

5 www.ref.ac.uk/media/1451/ref-2019_02-panel-criteria-and-working-methods.docx. Accessed 23 June 2022. The complexity of delimiting ML is underlined by the fact that panel 26 (Modern Languages and Linguistics) includes Celtic Studies, while panel 25 (Area Studies) covers not only African Studies, Asian Studies, Latin American and Caribbean Studies, etc., but also European Studies, including Russian and Eastern European Studies, meaning that certain work in ML is submitted to this panel.

of clear disciplinary identity. This is associated with uncertainty about how best to "sell" the subject in our schools and universities. Over a hundred years ago, the so-called Leathes Report (Committee on the Position of Modern Languages in the Educational System of Great Britain 1918), described as the Magna Carta of language teaching (Byram 2021), set out five reasons for what the report termed Modern Studies: the business value; the increase of knowledge in general; the need for knowledge concerning foreign countries and peoples; acquiring knowledge important for public service; and the value of Modern Studies as part of general education and culture. For Leathes and his committee, culture develops "the higher faculties, the imagination, the sense of beauty, and the intellectual comprehension" (Committee on the Position of Modern Languages in the Educational System of Great Britain 1918: 47), and its educational importance had, in their view, already been proven in Classical Studies. The tension between instrumental arguments—the need for speakers of other languages in business and public service—and more intrinsic values already apparent in Leathes's list has continued to dog ML.[6] In this article we will consider how ML, including core research in literature and culture, might contribute to "public service" in helping address major contemporary societal issues.

2 MULTILINGUALISM: EMPOWERING INDIVIDUALS, TRANSFORMING SOCIETIES (MEITS)

It was within this challenging context for ML that Multilingualism: Empowering Individuals, Transforming Societies (MEITS) was conceived as one of the four multi-institution, interdisciplinary research programmes funded by the AHRC under its Open World Research Initiative (OWRI) that sought to reinvigorate and transform research in ML and demonstrate the strategic importance of language-led research and enhanced language expertise across the arts and humanities, and beyond.[7] Led by the University of Cambridge (PI Wendy Ayres-Bennett), MEITS comprised a team of around thirty-five researchers from the universities of Cambridge, Edinburgh, Nottingham and Queen's University Belfast and included fourteen postdocs and six PhD students (2016–21). It also had international academic partners at the universities of Bergen, Girona, Peking and the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and around thirty non-academic partners ranging from large national bodies such as Age UK and the British Chambers of Commerce through to grassroots organizations such as the Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum and the East Belfast Mission.[8]

MEITS sought to transform attitudes towards ML through engaging with stakeholders, policymakers and the general public and to show that language learning is highly beneficial to individuals, communities and nations.[9] Above all, it aimed to demonstrate the value of languages to key issues of our time, including social cohesion, conflict resolution, soft power, health and wellbeing. It was innovative in a number of respects. First, the programme brought together disciplines and sub-disciplines rarely combined in a single integrated research programme: literary and cultural studies, the history of ideas, sociolinguistics, education, applied linguistics and cognitive neuroscience. A second innovative aspect was the breadth in the range of languages researched, based on a desire to adopt a more holistic approach to the languages of the UK, so that language learning was situated with the broader context of the UK's multilingualism. As a result we explored: 1) languages traditionally taught and researched in UK schools and universities such as French, German and Spanish, as well as Mandarin whose importance as an academic language is growing; 2) lesser-taught European languages such as Catalan or Ukrainian which are available in certain universities; 3) the UK's indigenous languages (British Sign Language, Irish, Scottish Gaelic, Welsh, etc.); 4) the UK's numerous community or

6 There is, moreover, a disjunction between the way ML is conceived and taught in schools and universities, with the teaching of culture being relatively marginalized in schools, especially up to GCSE level.

7 I would like to acknowledge the very generous support of the AHRC for this project (AH/N004671/1). I am also grateful to all the MEITS team whose research is presented in this article. Particular thanks go to Janice Carruthers and Linda Fisher, who led the interdisciplinary sessions and gave helpful feedback on the first draft, and to Mícheál Ó Mainnín, Napoleon Katsos, John Bellamy, Andreas Krogull and Rhiannon McGlade for their input to the description of their strand's research. Any weaknesses are my own.

8 Details can be found on the project website: www.meits.org. Accessed 23 June 2022.

9 In turn, MEITS brought about curriculum change, through the embedding of MEITS research into the teaching of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in the four universities, with a view to making the curricula more relevant and more appealing to students.

heritage languages (Arabic, Bengali, Cantonese, Polish, etc).[10] Furthermore, within particular studies, languages that often sit in different university departments, schools or faculties were brought into dialogue. Examples include Ukrainian and Catalan; Luxembourgish, Dutch, Catalan, Chinese, and Mongolian; Irish and French; and Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) and English as an Additional Language (EAL). While the focus was on the promotion of languages in the UK, we consistently introduced comparative studies from elsewhere in Europe and beyond, in order to strengthen our evidence base and findings.

The project comprised six interlocking research strands:[11]

S1. Arts of identity: literature, cinema, culture and citizenship in a globalizing Europe (with a particular focus on Catalan and Ukrainian)
S2. Standard languages, norms and variation: comparative perspectives in multilingual contexts
S3. Sociolinguistic perspectives on multilingualism: identity, diversity and social cohesion (with a particular focus on Ireland and France)
S4. The influence of multilingual identity on foreign language learning
S5. Language learning across the lifespan: the role of age, language-specific factors and learning experience on language acquisition
S6. Multilingualism and cognition: implications for motivation, health and wellbeing

The six strands therefore addressed two main issues: how ML can be made more relevant and appealing, and how to improve the language-learning experience that has to be the solid foundation of any language-led research. In relation to the first issue, we aimed to demonstrate how research in ML heightens insight into such major contemporary issues as conflict resolution and the advancement of democracy (S1, S3); linguistic rights and the value of pluralism and diversity in the face of cultural imperialism and linguistic hegemony (S2, S3); social cohesion at the local, regional, national and international level (S1, S3, S4); health and wellbeing, including for those with dementia or recovering from stroke (S6). These and other questions were sharpened through the study of minoritized and/or non-standard languages (S1–S3). In relation to the second issue, we considered it essential not only to understand the factors affecting language learning (S5), but also to nurture learners with multilingual identities (S4), who conceive language learning as a lifelong process (S5, S6). We also sought to open up ML to diverse groups, including autistic children and third-age learners (S6). We will return to how our research was able to speak to key issues of our time in the case studies below (sections 4–7).

3 INTERDISCIPLINARITY: TOWARDS A CHALLENGE-DRIVEN MODEL FOR ML

As Carruthers and Fisher (2020) point out, despite its inherently multidisciplinary composition making it highly suitable for interdisciplinary collaborations, ML has rarely been the focus of theoretical discussions about interdisciplinarity. In their article they concentrate on methodological issues, while the focus here is rather on outcomes. As we discovered in the MEITS project, practising interdisciplinarity can be both rewarding and challenging. Scholars from different disciplines often approach the same research question with diverse research methodologies and approaches, different terminologies and conceptualizations, and different epistemologies. Any interdisciplinarity achieved was the result of many meetings, prolonged discussion and negotiation as to how to interpret key concepts and research findings so as to be better able to answer our joint research questions.

At each of our project meetings, a session was devoted to interdisciplinary working in which methodological and definitional issues were discussed, including reviewing basic key terms

10 These categories are, of course, not mutually exclusive. For instance, French is a community language as well as an academic language, and Irish is both an indigenous language and a language taught in schools in Northern Ireland and in UK universities.

11 For more details, see www.meits.org/project-strands. Accessed 23 June 2022.

such as "multilingualism", "native speaker", "new speaker", "proficiency" and "identity".[12] On the positive side, taking a narrow view of interdisciplinarity, it allowed us to see the complementarity (rather than incompatibility or opposition) of insights from sub-disciplines of ML, notably research in literature and culture on the one hand, and language and linguistics on the other, which have not always been easy bedfellows. Extending the breadth of the disciplinary range to cognitive science increased the methodological and practical challenges, but also potentially brought even greater rewards.

Definitions of interdisciplinarity are problematic and contested. In the context of this article, Klein and Newell (1998: 3) afford a useful working definition. They characterize interdisciplinary studies (IDS) as "a process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline or profession". They add that "IDS draws on disciplinary perspectives and integrates their insights through construction of a more comprehensive perspective". Two other leading figures in interdisciplinary research, Repko and Szostak (Repko 2012; Repko and Szostak 2017) similarly emphasize as key features of interdisciplinarity the treatment of "a complex problem (including mega ones)", too complex to be solved by a single discipline, and the need not just to draw on disciplinary insights (and sometimes stakeholder views) but also to integrate them (Repko and Szostak 2017: 26–7). Two key notions for interdisciplinary working are "common ground" and "integration".[13] Finding "common ground", defined by Repko (2012: 56–7) as "the shared basis that exists between conflicting disciplinary insights or theories", is an essential prerequisite for integration. "Integration" is characterized by Repko and Szostak (2017: 221) as "the cognitive process of critically evaluating disciplinary insights and creating common ground among them to construct a more comprehensive understanding". This integration assumes that "concepts, assumptions, or theories are modified in order to reconcile insights regarding the same problem from two or more disciplines" (Repko and Szostak 2017: 18–19). As Carruthers and Fisher (2020: 4) observe, there are a number of major obstacles to the realization of this goal: these are epistemological (incommensurable concepts that are so qualitatively distinct that the gaps are impossible to breach); ideological (both within and between disciplines); and methodological (a plurality of understandings is achieved rather than an integrated understanding). Inevitably, the wider the interdisciplinarity, the more challenging integration is. Another useful way of conceptualizing interdisciplinarity is Campbell's (2005) fish-scale metaphor that depends on Polanyi's (1966: 72) "chains of overlapping neighborhoods" to think about interdisciplinarity as specialities that overlap with each other, so achieving breadth rather than the height which comes from "a redundant piling up of highly similar specialities leaving interdisciplinary gaps" (Campbell 2005: 4). For MEITS, conceptual interdisciplinarity therefore derived at least in part from seeing how the results of the different strands intermeshed and overlapped (Ayres-Bennett and Fisher 2022).

Starting from the premise that interdisciplinarity enables scholars to tackle problems that are too large or complex to be solved from a single disciplinary perspective, it is clear that analysis and understanding of major societal issues such as social and community cohesion and integration, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, healthy old ageing and social care for those who are neurologically atypical are challenges which require insights from a range of disciplines if they are to be addressed successfully. The fact that ML is inherently interdisciplinary suggests that a challenge-based approach to research in ML is a fruitful avenue to explore. Challenge-based research aims to address and find solutions for real-world problems, is de facto interdisciplinary and, because of its scope, necessitates collaboration with partners from government, business, education and civil society.[14] As experts in languages and cultures, Modern Linguists are well placed to engage in the important questions and grand challenges in education, society and diplomacy, including those at the forefront of current government

12 Carruthers and Fisher (2020) show how, in the cross-strand discussions of identity as an individual and social phenomenon, there was broad agreement on the conceptualization of identity as multifaceted, fluid and dynamic, and thus constantly being constructed and (re)negotiated. Conversely, it was much more difficult to find common ground on the conceptualization of certain concepts such as "proficiency".

13 Some of these ideas are developed and illustrated in Ayres-Bennett and Fisher (2022).

14 For a useful summary, see the ECIU University's *Challenge-Based Research for a Stronger and More Sustainable Europe*: https://assets-global.website-files.com/562fb917aa38ca2e349b422e/62950553d7108b2c9295bd95_CBR%20paper.pdf. Accessed 23 June 2022.

policy, such as "Global Britain"[15] or the "Levelling-up" agenda.[16] A challenge-driven approach allows us to bring together the creativity and flexibility associated with research in the arts and humanities with more quantitative approaches typical of the social or "hard" sciences, to temper the purely quantitative with qualitative insights. Just as historians have for decades used their historical insights to inform current policy, so Modern Linguists can offer rich insights from different languages and cultures across time and space.[17] Indeed, it could be argued that Modern Linguists have a responsibility to bring their research-informed expertise to these debates.

Returning to Leathes's tension between more instrumental motivations and more intrinsic values for ML, it is important to emphasize from the outset that in MEITS, rather than these two approaches being in opposition, the cultural dimension was integral to the instrumental, but still retained its disciplinary integrity, distinctive methodologies and theoretical rigour. For instance, S1's research on multilingualism in the Catalan Countries[18] sought to "understand how politics animate, interpellate and/or quell language use in multilingual societies, but also how culture enables, contributes to, and even spurs, political practice" (McGlade and Epps 2022: 2), something which is particularly acute for a minoritized language such as Catalan. This research therefore explored how cultural products and performances contribute to (mis)understandings about the place and function of languages in civil society. As such it explored cultural texts and/or events—Catalan theatre, literature, documentary cinema, performance—that "foreground, problematize and inform questions of linguistic unity, diversity, identity, community and power in—and out of—the public sphere" (McGlade and Epps 2022: 3). The work of the strand was also enriched by sociolinguistic insights which, for instance, brought the lens of translanguaging and linguistic repertoire to bear on multilingual Catalan cultural products. In this way, the interdisciplinary framework and the political dimension of the project enhanced, rather than compromised, the reading and analysis of cultural texts, which is at the heart of ML.

Regarding the challenge of integrating our findings, this was facilitated through having six common research questions (RQs) that underpinned all the work, including "How can we re-energise ML research?" and "How can we influence attitudes towards multilingualism?"[19] For the purpose of this article, we will focus on three of these:

RQ1. *What is the relationship between the multilingual individual and the multilingual society?*

What does it mean to be multilingual in a monolingual/multilingual society? Or monolingual in a multilingual society?

RQ2. *What are the opportunities and challenges presented by multilingualism?*

How might multilingualism benefit individuals, enhance communities, enrich cultures and foster social cohesion? To what extent might multilingualism disadvantage individuals, dilute culture, divide communities or fragment societies? In other words, from the outset, the RQs built in consideration of the negative as well as the positive associations and outcomes of multilingualism.

RQ3. *What is the relationship between multilingualism, diversity and identity?*

15 www.gov.uk/government/collections/global-britain-delivering-on-our-international-ambition. Accessed 23 Jun. 2022. This is the current iteration of the government's international strategy, "demonstrating that the UK is open, outward-looking and confident on the world stage".

16 www.gov.uk/government/news/ambitious-plans-to-drive-levelling-up-agenda. Accessed 23 June 2022. This represents the current government's formulation of the aim to achieve greater inclusivity through raising living standards, spreading opportunity and making "tangible improvements in every part of the UK".

17 As part of MEITS, we created an online policy journal, *Languages, Society and Policy*, in part at least inspired by *History and Policy*: www.lspjournal.com/. The journal publishes high-quality peer-reviewed language research in accessible and non-technical language to promote policy engagement and provide expertise to policymakers, journalists and stakeholders. Policy work has continued in the follow-on funding award from the AHRC, *Promoting Language Policy*, PI Wendy Ayres-Bennett: www.promotinglanguagepolicy.org/. Lessons for Modern Linguists in policy engagement are also to be found in the Institute for Government's publication, *What is the Value of History in Policy Making*, https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/what-value-history-policymaking. All three websites accessed 23 June 2022.

18 This research was conducted by Brad Epps and postdoctoral researcher (PDRA) Rhiannon McGlade (University of Cambridge).

19 See www.meits.org/project/research-questions. Accessed 23 June 2022.

How does this play out at the individual, local, regional, national and international level?

In the rest of this article, we present a number of case studies illustrating how insights from different disciplinary perspectives were integrated to address major contemporary challenges and the project's RQs. In section 4 we focus on issues of conflict and peacebuilding and their relationship to questions of space, territoriality and nationhood. In section 5 we turn to questions of linguistic rights, language status and power. In section 6 we present case studies relating to languages, health and wellbeing. In section 7 we consider how a targeted programme of language teaching focused on questions of identity can contribute to social cohesion and wellbeing. In a final section we draw some conclusions from the case studies and point to some future directions for ML research.

4 CASE STUDY 1: CONFLICT, TERRITORIALITY, NATIONHOOD AND PEACEBUILDING

These themes were explored by researchers who are specialists in literary and film studies, sociolinguistics and sociology, or from three areas broadly within ML—literary studies, film studies and more language-focused research—and a social science.[20] The material came from two highly charged current contexts, Ukraine and Northern Ireland, bringing together discussion of a language relatively rarely taught in UK universities (Ukrainian), a more widely taught Slavonic language (Russian), and a minoritized indigenous language (Irish) as it relates to the dominant UK language, English. In both the Ukrainian (S1) and the Irish case (S3), the country or jurisdiction's multilingualism is positioned as a central element in the conflict. In each case the studies offered greater understanding of what multilingualism means at the individual, societal or national level.

Finnin and Kozachenko (2020; 2022) employed literary and sociological analysis to examine the conflict in contemporary Ukraine, which at the time the research was being conducted (2016–21) had already experienced the Euromaidan Revolution, endured an invasion and annexation of its territory (Crimea) and an ongoing war in eastern Ukraine (2014–). The "international armed conflict" with the Russian Federation (International Criminal Court 2016: 35) is often presented in international news media as being, at least in part, informed by language issues. It is notable that cultural discourse is typically neglected—or even dismissed—in much analytical work on conflict societies, but the work of Finnin and Kozachenko demonstrates that it has an important role to play, not least because it can offer understanding of challenging and contentious issues in a "safe" mode. Consequently, cultural texts can play a role in shaping and changing opinion.

The conventional media portrayal of Ukraine's multilingualism at a time of revolution and war reveals the predominance of what Finnin and Kozachenko term territorialist discourse in presentations of the country's intricate linguistic landscape, whereby the variable of space—oblast, region, even macroregion—is given analytical privilege over the complex lived everyday reality of the individual. There is, in their words, a "long-standing stereotype of Ukraine as a country divided by languages, as beset by competing monolingualisms that corral 'Russian-speaking Ukrainians' over here and 'Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainians' over there" (Finnin and Kozachenko 2020: 6). In the media this translates into simple colour-coded maps with a so-called "Russian-speaking east" and "Ukrainian-speaking west". This has allowed the Kremlin to justify military and political aggression towards Ukraine as a defence of the Russian-speaking populations in the Donbas, the industrial eastern region of Ukraine.

In their study, Finnin and Kozachenko (2022) shift the focus away from the national to the lived reality of the individual multilingual Ukrainian subject, who may move between languages on a daily basis. Combining insights from sociological and literary analysis, they were able to shed a very different light on the relationship between language, nation and questions of identity. For the sociological analysis, they conducted semi-structured interviews with twenty-eight Ukrainian cultural producers from across the country. While all the interviewees, whatever their

20 This research was conducted by Rory Finnin and PDRA Ivan Kozachenko (University of Cambridge) and by Mícheál Ó Mainnín and PDRA Deirdre Dunlevy (Queen's University Belfast).

first language, asserted the importance of being able to use Ukrainian in their cultural productions as the sole state language, the overwhelming majority also considered the concomitant use of other languages—minority languages, mixed languages, dialects—as both an important element of everyday life and a valued part of artistic expression. Indeed, they view their art as "a force for the cultivation of national dialogue, belonging and community" (Finnin and Kozachenko 2022: 45). These interviews were complemented by close reading of works by two popular and influential cultural producers interviewed in the study: Serhiy Zhadan's bestselling novel *Internat*[21] (2017) and Natalia Vorozhbit's screenplay for the blockbuster film *Kiborhy: Heroi ne vmyraiut* (2017).[22] Finnin and Kozachenko emphasize that this was not to imply tight lines of intention or causality, but rather to explore what they term "common *dispositions* across constative and performative discourses" (Finnin and Kozachenko 2022: 46), which involve embracing linguistic diversity while privileging Ukrainian and promoting national consolidation in wartime. What they observe is contemporary writers and filmmakers "languaging the nation", that is, simulating multilingual "scenes of talk" (Finnin and Kozachenko 2022: 46) that perforate essentialist discourse about language, sovereignty and identity and invigorate public discussions of the national idea at a time of war and upheaval. Works of culture, particularly literature and film, are effective ways of short-circuiting reductive territorialistic thinking because the texts employ a host of voices and perspectives, and the active reading/spectating offers an opportunity to engage in perspective taking. Finnin and Kozachenko were able to integrate their findings derived from literary and sociological perspectives to show that when analyses pivot towards the lived reality of multilingual individuals, who may move between languages on a daily basis, we see more clearly engaged, tolerant citizens with inbuilt skills of translation and compromise.

Our second study on multilingualism, territoriality and religion in Northern Ireland (NI) likewise displays a disconnect between individual and political reality. In the NI context it is clear that language choice is embroiled in the broader political context and the use of a particular language can be viewed as threatening, divisive and confrontational. Thus, in NI, speaking Irish is traditionally associated with the Catholic, Nationalist, Republican (CNR) community and, as a result, language may be employed as a cipher for political, religious and cultural identities. Since Irish is a minoritized language, the politicization of language use can impact negatively on efforts at language maintenance and limit language use to sections of the community.[23] However, the experience of NI also shows that, in exploring multilingualism as a historical and contemporary global phenomenon, a deeply contested language has the potential to become a site of reconciliation and shared space in post-conflict societies.

Mitchell and Miller (2019) found that language learning, particularly Irish among the Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist (PUL) community, can be a vehicle for reconciliation, "offering opportunities to revise destructive understandings of history, challenge exclusivist territorialisation of group memory and to facilitate critical reflections on self, and empathy for the other" (Dunlevy 2020: 12). Traditionally, the community-level learning of Irish is strongly associated with nationalist areas and communities (Dunlevy 2020: 3). Ó Mainnín and Dunlevy conducted interviews with Irish learners in four centres in Belfast, including at Turas, run by Linda Irvine at the East Belfast Mission, one of the project's non-academic partners. Significantly, Turas is based in a predominantly loyalist, working-class area, which would traditionally be considered hostile towards the Irish language, yet it runs Irish language classes for a heterogeneous group of language learners. Ó Mainnín and Dunlevy found that in 2019, in response to a question about religious background, approximately 51% of the learners at Turas said they were Protestant, 30% Catholic and 19% gave "other", indicating engagement with the Irish language across communities. For the interviewees, learning Irish was seen not just as a way of engaging with the shared heritage of the Irish language, but also of widening their social network and connecting with people with different beliefs in ways that, to them, would have previously seemed implausible (Dunlevy 2020: 9). The classes gave access to some of the most alienated in the PUL community, with a view not just to building their language skills but also encouraging them to think of Irish as part of their shared heritage.

21 Translated as either *The Boarding School* or *The Orphanage*.

22 *The Cyborgs: Heroes Never Die*, directed by Akhtem Seitablaiev.

23 A second indigenous language, Ulster Scots, is broadly associated with the Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist community.

A second element of their research was the exploration of the linguistic landscape. Ó Mainnín (2021) discusses the historical background and legal framework for the erection of bilingual signage (Irish alongside the original English version). He observes that, for some, this is perceived as a form of "resolute action" in promoting a minoritized language, while others maintain that it can have an adverse impact on community relations and the potential for ghettoization and therefore advocate for the retention of monolingualism in English as a "neutral" position. In other words, street-name and place-name signs can act as symbolic markers of identity and belonging for the community (Dunlevy 2021). Conversely, the visual representation of a place name that goes against one's identity (such as the Irish form of a place name in mixed council areas which contain segregated areas and/or areas in transition) will often lead to acts of transgression and attempts to remove that unit from the linguistic landscape. In Dunlevy's words, "Every inclusionary policy is potentially exclusionary, as the inclusion of a particular linguistic marker, which is understood to index a particular politico-cultural group may indirectly create an out-group of those who will find it alienating or even threatening" (Dunlevy 2021: 139). There is no trilingual signage. English is obligatory in all street- and place-name signage, and where the signage is bilingual, Irish is more common. Where Ulster Scots is found, it is often preceded by the word "formerly", suggesting attention to cultural heritage rather than an expression of identity, as in the case of Irish.

In both the cases presented here, the comparative insights gained from Modern Linguists working on cultures and spaces with which they are deeply familiar provide new understandings of conflict and routes to conflict resolution. In relation to RQ3, we see that the relationship between multilingualism, diversity and identity is complex. In the Ukrainian case, there is no clear, determinate correlation between language usage and national identity: rather in "languaging the nation", writers and artists are challenging simple equations made between language, sovereignty and identity. In the Irish case, the teaching of the Irish language can become a means—as yet in its infancy—of breaking down the association of the language exclusively with the CNR community. With respect to RQ1, we found that, in each case, moving away from global, national perspectives to focus on the lived experience of individuals, whether cultural producers, characters in films or works of literature, or language learners, demonstrates that beneath the simplistic classifications or binaries—Ukrainian-speaking/Russian-speaking, CNR/PUL—individuals find positive ways of negotiating multilingualism and breaking down barriers between communities. These two studies clearly demonstrate how the challenges and opportunities associated with multilingualism can be closely entwined (RQ2). When territorialist presentations of multilingual societies prevail in public discourse, *casus belli* are not far behind, but cultural texts can play a key role in shaping and changing opinion. In divided societies, where languages form part of the contested space, language choice can at worst reinforce the divisions, but at best be used as a way to show common cultural heritage.

5 CASE STUDY 2: LINGUISTIC RIGHTS, LANGUAGE STATUS AND POWER

The academic fields of language rights and linguistic human rights have emerged in recent years and, together with the field of language policy and planning, offer insights into the relationship between language and power. Language laws and the choice of official language(s) for a nation or region can potentially create inequalities of access to education, health care, the law and other public services, which may be unavailable in the speaker's first language (L1). A power hierarchy may therefore be established between speakers of the standardized official language and speakers of other, minoritized languages in multilingual contexts (Ayres-Bennett and Bellamy 2021). Being multilingual means dealing with language hierarchies that can result in language inequalities regarding opportunities for language maintenance, education and qualification in a language, and an ability to access services (which are more difficult/more costly to deliver). The protection of linguistic rights is thus an essential part of wider discussions of equality, diversity and inclusion, and is likely also to play a role in the Levelling-up agenda as multilingualism can intersect with other (protected) characteristics which shape societal inequalities. In MEITS the themes of language, power and linguistic rights were explored through theoretical and historical studies of language standardization across a range of language types and geographical areas, the exploration of the history and development of key concepts, ideas

and ideologies, sociolinguistic studies of minoritized languages in multilingual contexts, and perceptual and attitudinal analyses of non-standardized varieties, notably contemporary urban vernaculars.

MEITS research on standardization broke new ground in a number of ways.[24] First, it sought to overcome the erasure of multilingualism both in historical accounts of standardization—which have traditionally been narratives of the creation of monolingual European nation-states with their renowned writers and poets—and in contemporary studies of the potential advantages and disadvantages of standardizing minoritized languages. Second, it opened up new research sites, including non-European contexts and notably Asia (McLelland and Zhao 2021; Zhao 2022)[25] and minoritized languages.[26] This research involved not only exploring new areas and communities, but also revising traditional models of standardization (Ayres-Bennett 2021). A number of different methodologies from different fields were brought to bear to address research questions around linguistic inequalities and language rights including historical and archival research, historical sociolinguistics, critical discourse analysis, language policy and planning, and contemporary sociolinguistics.

On the historical side, two studies demonstrated how narratives about the imposition of a dominant language can erase the multilingual reality and threaten minorities' linguistic rights. Andreas Krogull's research on historical multilingualism and language contact in the Dutch–German borderlands in the long nineteenth century challenges the traditional narrative of "one language—one nation", underpinned by an ideology of clearly separated linguistic and political spaces which has rendered the multilingualism of speakers and writers invisible (Krogull 2021). Through painstaking archival research and a close reading of family archives and collections of letters, Krogull shows how, despite the growing importance of nation-states and their standard languages, multilingual practices and contact phenomena can be traced in the private sphere and that the Dutch–German borderlands remained a multifaceted sociolinguistic space well into the nineteenth century. Jiaye Wu (2021) expanded the range of work on standardization and its relevance to language-learning contexts by exploring the little-known history of the teaching and learning of Mandarin Chinese as a L2 to Mongolian learners in China since 1912. In this, she combined close reading of language textbooks and policy documents with interviews and classroom observation of the contemporary situation. For minority language speakers in China, learning the national standard language is part of being bilingual, but it also creates tensions between the aim of unifying and modernizing the country through uniformity of language and the language rights of ethnic minorities. On the one hand, the teaching—or imposition—of Mandarin Chinese as an L2 encourages interethnic communication and promotes social cohesion, through the promulgation of a shared Chinese national identity. On the other hand, the hardening of the boundary between the national Mandarin and localized Mongolian identities raises issues about ethnic minorities' language and cultural rights in multilingual China. Textbooks frequently serve as a tool to reproduce official understandings of Chinese national identities, with Mongolian cultural features often being neutralized and/or made subservient to Han-dominant Chinese national values.

As previously mentioned, a number of MEITS studies explored standardization in previously understudied or neglected contexts. One of the striking features of the standardization of minority languages is that speakers of minoritized languages usually strive to maintain or encourage diversity as part of their standardization efforts rather than restrict it (Lane et al. 2018: 12–13). Moreover, standards of minoritized languages may be contested among "traditional" or "native" speakers who in some cases consider the new norms learned and adopted by so-

24 This research was conducted in S2 by Nicola McLelland (strand lead), PDRA Hui (Annette) Zhao and PhD student Jiaye (Jenny) Wu (University of Nottingham) and by Wendy Ayres-Bennett and PDRAs John Bellamy and Andreas Krogull (University of Cambridge). For an overview of S2's work, see Ayres-Bennett et al. (2019).

25 Work on Asia allowed exploration of the difference between spoken and written standards, as well as the contrast between policies/ideologies and the lived experience. For instance, in China, there is a gap between the strongly promoted monolingual ideology and the multilingual reality.

26 A number of other contexts are explored in Ayres-Bennett and Bellamy (2021), including stateless languages and sign languages.

called "new speakers" as "artificial" or "book" versions (O'Rourke and Ramallo 2011: 149–51).[27] This can lead to a sense of marginalization or exclusion for those speakers for whom the codified standard does not reflect their own linguistic practices. While standardization of a minoritized language may then enhance the status of that language, it may paradoxically have a negative impact, as linguistic variation is reduced and new inequalities are created within speech communities.

John Bellamy's work on Luxembourg illustrates well the opportunities and challenges associated with the standardization of a minoritized language. A 1984 language law (*Mémorial* 1984) formally recognized French and German as legal, judicial and administrative languages while officially designating Luxembourgish as the national language (Bellamy 2021). French and German have traditionally been regarded as the languages that fulfil the written functions, with Luxembourgish mainly used for speaking. In primary schools, literacy is initially taught through German, with French being introduced at the end of the second year; Luxembourgish therefore has a minor role in the syllabus, although it is frequently used informally in the classroom for spoken communication. This raises questions about equality of opportunity and access to education, qualifications and testing in pupils' L1. While dictionaries and spelling guides for Luxembourgish have been published since the nineteenth century (Bellamy forthcoming), as well as several official orthographies in the twentieth century, there is a general lack of knowledge of spelling rules, leading to insecurity about writing the norm "properly" (Bellamy 2021). A partial mitigation is provided by emerging online and digital resources for language standardization, which are more accessible, and by the increasing use of Luxembourgish in informal domains such as text messaging and social media between friends, where speakers feel freer to use non-standardized varieties.

A different aspect of linguistic inequalities and how variation impinges on social identities was explored in S3's work on Contemporary Urban Vernacular French (McAuley and Carruthers 2020; Carruthers and McAuley 2022).[28] Contemporary Urban Vernacular French is a contact-induced variety strongly associated with the suburbs of major French cities such as Paris or Marseille.[29] It contains a number of non-standard linguistic features and is heavily influenced by the individual and community multilingualism of its speakers against a national picture of a strong national official language. McAuley and Carruthers were interested in the perceptions of non-users of this variety as elicited in focus groups. What makes Contemporary Urban Vernacular French particularly interesting is that it is created out of intense contact between French and several migrant languages (notably dialectal Arabic, Spanish, Portuguese and various sub-Saharan African languages) as well as local regional languages such as Provençal in Marseille. The variety has tended to be named in relation to the social properties of the supposed speaker group and is thus variously labelled as "youth speech", "tower-block speech", "Arab speech" or "parler/accent des banlieues" ("suburban speech or accent"), the term *banlieue* ("suburb") being associated negatively with migrant settlement, social deprivation and civil unrest, as media portrayals reinforce in films such as *Bande de filles* (dir. Sciamma, 2014), *Divines* (dir. Benyamina, 2016) and *La Haine* (dir. Kassovitz, 1995). Members of the focus groups likewise frequently judged Contemporary Urban Vernacular French features negatively, even where their judgement was based on incorrect assumptions about the speaker's linguistic background. This work is potentially important in a number of contexts, such as how speakers of Contemporary Urban Vernacular French are judged by educators, the police and wider society.

The diverse insights gained from close textual reading, archival work, interviews and focus groups illustrate the complexity of linguistic rights and the need to eradicate linguistic inequalities. Traditional historical narratives, based on a simple association of language and nation, have tended to eradicate the multilingual reality and tell the story of the rise of a single national language (RQ1). Yet the standardization of minority languages, bringing with it the

27 S3 PhD student Merryn Davies-Deacon (2020) found that, in the Breton context, the dichotomy posited in most academic work between "traditional" and "new" speakers is in fact much more complex in contemporary practice. Analysis of the corpus collected for the project (radio, newspaper and Facebook sources) suggested that there are multiple practices, which are heavily influenced by factors including medium, text type and register, as well as personal ideologies and attitudes. Moreover, in some cases, there were high levels of communication and mobility across the "divide".

28 The research was conducted by Janice Carruthers (S3, strand lead) and PDRA Daniel McAuley (Queen's University Belfast).

29 Similar varieties are found for other languages, including Multicultural London English (Cheshire et al. 2011).

promise of greater opportunities for education, jobs and access to services, also challenges the very diversity at the heart of the coexistence of languages and dialects in a nation-state and leads potentially to the loss or stigmatization of non-standard varieties (RQ2). Once again, we see the complexity of the relationship between multilingualism and identity (RQ3): those listening to Contemporary Urban Vernacular associate—often incorrectly—certain linguistic features with particular origins, whereas for users of Contemporary Urban Vernacular, who include monolingual French speakers from monolingual backgrounds, peer-group identity is dominant. All this means that there is a need to ensure that languages are considered as part of wider discussions of equality, diversity and inclusion, including in the formulation of public policy.[30]

6 CASE STUDY 3: LANGUAGES, HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The researchers in S6 explored two areas of multilingualism, health and wellbeing, which are important issues for society. In relation to both the study of bilingualism and cognition (Bak 2016; Long et al. 2019) and the examination of the lived experience of autistic children (Howard et al. 2020; 2021), working in an interdisciplinary team alongside specialists in sociolinguistics combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies transformed the approach and the findings of the research.

In the first case, the researchers[31] investigated the cognitive benefits of multilingualism in a number of different ways. In a first set of studies, the researchers built on emerging work that demonstrates the positive effects of multilingualism on brain diseases, including slowing down the onset of dementia (Alladi et al. 2013) and aiding better recovery from stroke (Alladi et al. 2016; Paplikar et al. 2019).[32] Health and social care for the elderly is a major societal concern, which also has many economic consequences ranging from the cost of providing medical care to the lower labour market engagement of carers. There were two interesting developments born out of the research being embedded in an interdisciplinary programme with a strong arts and humanities dimension. In a study of language learning in patients with the diagnosis of dementia and their carers, attention was paid to effects on the participants' wellbeing. Significantly, participants reported a positive effect of language learning on their self-esteem and social wellbeing (Mendoza et al. 2021). Furthermore, research was translated into a cultural output. Related to the research question as to whether both languages are affected equally in multilingual people who develop dementia, a semi-autobiographical theatre play, "Remember Us", was developed (first performance Glasgow, June 2019). The play concerns a Gaelic-English bilingual woman moving, as her dementia develops, to use only Gaelic, even with people who do not understand it, including her own husband. The play raises issues of social inclusion/exclusion, language identity across the lifespan and assessment and care needs of multilingual patients. In a virtuous circle, the play has in turn led to a systematic study about language change in later life, in stroke and in dementia.

In a second set of studies, the researchers considered whether the benefits associated with multilingualism—in terms of cognitive flexibility—are also available to those who learn additional languages either at school or later in life through language classes or apps. In a new study (Long et al. 2019), the researchers examined the effects of age and language knowledge in a group of over one hundred Gaelic learners. Positive effects on attentional switching were recorded in all age groups (participants ranged from 18 to 85 years), and for beginners as well as advanced learners. This showed that the positive effects of multilingualism described in previous studies are not dependent on perfect knowledge of the languages in question, but rather on practice and patterns of use, so that language learning can produce positive effects comparable to those identified for bilinguals. Moreover, the positive effects are independent of the language chosen, suggesting that the size of the language community or the prestige

30 There are some powerful examples of this approach in Alison Phipps's work in migration and refugee studies and her focus on cultural justice, socially engaged research and a move away from the Global North to the Global South (see, for example, Phipps and Ladegaard 2020; Phipps 2022); or in Sarah Craig's and David Gramling's work on linguistic rights and justice for asylum seekers within the AHRC's Researching Multilingually at Borders project (Craig and Gramling 2017).

31 Thomas Bak and PDRA Mariana Vega-Mendoza (University of Edinburgh).

32 This research is still contested, although there is a growing body of evidence to support these claims.

of the language do not play a role when it comes to cognitive and health effects of language learning.

In the second case, the researchers[33] and their colleagues examined whether children with autism growing up in a multilingual family would be better brought up monolingually, as is often advised by schools and health practitioners.[34] According to the National Autistic Society, autism is a lifelong developmental disorder that affects one in a hundred people, and clearly providing families with the correct advice is crucial for their wellbeing.[35] Many multilingual families with autistic children find themselves faced by a dilemma: the choice between their heritage and cultural preference (which leads to educational and health-care paths that include maintenance of the home language) and an autistic child's educational and speech and language therapy needs (which are often better served by professionals using the community's dominant language). The team's research showed that multilingualism does not have a negative effect on the linguistic, cognitive or social development of autistic children; on the contrary, it has a positive effect on family wellbeing and socialization skills (Uljarević et al. 2016). Here too, research further focused on the lived experience of children with autism (Howard et al. 2020; 2021).

In both cases, thanks to the input from researchers in the humanities, the researchers were inspired to complement quantitative, statistically based analyses between groups of neurotypical and neurologically diverse groups with qualitative research focusing on the benefits of multilingualism for the individual and their lived experience (RQ1). In the case of the work on autism, the emerging findings of this research enabled the researchers to recommend making more resources available to allow equitable access to important educational and therapeutic services for multilingual speakers. Working with senior members of the Royal College for Speech and Language Therapists, these recommendations were incorporated into the updated national Clinical Practice Guidelines for the UK. Currently, multilingual families experience conflicting pressures as to whether to encourage use of the language of the home and family alongside English or to encourage monolingualism in English in the hope of receiving better services for their child. This of course also raises important questions of identity (RQ3) and a potential sense of isolation of the autistic monolingual child unable to engage fully with the multilingual wider family. In both studies, multilingualism was shown to have a positive effect on wellbeing (RQ2). In terms of impact, it was not just the quantitative, "scientific" data that were effective; also important were the stories of individual autistic children and their families that encapsulated the difficulties of maintaining their home language and how they might be supported, or the play generated by the research on dementia which spoke directly and movingly to the audience about language attrition and its effects on the family.

7 CASE STUDY 4: LANGUAGE LEARNING, SOCIAL COHESION AND WELLBEING

The final case study concerns a multilingual education programme devised for schools by researchers in S4[36] to raise awareness about multilingualism across a range of social contexts (Fisher et al. 2020; Forbes et al. 2021). The programme, We Are Multilingual, integrates research findings from other parts of MEITS, including work on the linguistic landscape and the cognitive benefits of multilingualism.[37] Students were divided into three groups: a control group with no intervention; a partial intervention group who were given knowledge about multilingualism and follow-up activities to help them engage with the knowledge presented; and a full intervention

33 Napoleon Katsos, Jenny Gibson and PhD student Katie Howard (University of Cambridge).

34 In Kenny et al.'s (2016) study on the terms that should be used to describe autism, the terms "on the autism spectrum" and "autistic" were preferred by the autistic community, while professionals were much more reluctant to use the term "autistic", and preferred "person with autism". However, as their study reports the views of adults, it may be injudicious to assume the terminological preferences of children with an autism diagnosis without consulting them. As a result, the terms autistic child/child with autism are used interchangeably here, while acknowledging that more research is required to identify the preferable term.

35 www.autism.org.uk/?gclid=Cj0KCQiA8ICOBhDmARIsAEGI6o3aoKU1IRv0udjraVLUKjlCpa7qNHFFyqo3j8Cm-s6MmcRTi7cAgs0aAoKyEALw_wcB. Accessed 23 June 2022.

36 Michael Evans, Linda Fisher (strand lead) and Yongcan Liu, PDRAs Karen Forbes, Angela Gayton and Dieuwerke Rutgers and PhD student Harper Staples (University of Cambridge).

37 We Are Multilingual (www.wamcam.org). Accessed 23 June 2022.

group who were not only given knowledge about multilingualism, but also identity-focused activities to encourage reflection and reflexivity (Forbes et al. 2021: 438–9).

As part of the programme, students consider the benefits of linguistic diversity and understand the role of languages in facilitating social cohesion in the school and wider community. For instance, to raise students' awareness of how people use languages differently in the community and to help them understand how the visibility of languages relates to a sense of belonging, they undertook an activity on the linguistic landscape. The partial intervention group watched a video clip about linguistic landscapes in Tokyo and then discussed how the presence or absence of languages might make certain groups feel included or excluded. Students in the full intervention group contributed their own photos of the linguistic landscape of their local area and were encouraged to reflect on their personal sense of belonging in the community (Forbes et al. 2021: 450).

Questions of individual identity are complex and subjective, but the MEITS programme with school students in seven state-funded secondary schools across the East of England and London showed that identity-based interventions can be effective. The research demonstrated that a student's willingness to identify as multilingual can, but does not necessarily, map on to aspects of diversity (e.g. cultural and linguistic diversity). For example, a bilingual English and Polish child may be unwilling to identify themselves as multilingual so as not to be seen as different. Conversely, an English-speaking child may choose to identify as multilingual because they are able to say a few words in French. The data suggested that students who identify themselves as being multilingual are more positive about the value of languages, are more likely to report a willingness to continue language study in the future and have a higher perception of their ability. In other words, adopting an identity-focused pedagogy in the languages classroom can positively affect students' willingness to identify themselves as multilingual, which, in turn, can lead to improved self-efficacy and attitudes towards language learning and maintenance. Multilingual identity is shaped by a combination of a learner's experiences (contextual and historical), evaluations (individual and relational) and emotions about linguistic diversity and multilingualism (Fisher et al. 2022). It seems that raising awareness of pupils' own multilingual identity also enhances their awareness of the beliefs about languages of those around them, and that they may, in turn, influence others' beliefs about languages (Forbes et al. 2021: 443). Moreover, following the intervention, pupils in the full intervention demonstrated a greater sense of pride in relation to each of their languages (Forbes et al. 2021: 444).

S4's work had questions of identity at its heart and once again the findings demonstrated the complexity of the relationship between identity, multilingualism and diversity (RQ3). The classroom intervention raised awareness about multilingualism across a range of social contexts and asked learners to consider how they, as multilingual individuals, are positioned within them (RQ1). Schools across the UK are becoming increasingly linguistically diverse, due to a growing number of EAL students, yet there is a decline in uptake of foreign language study beyond the compulsory phase (RQ2). This creates challenges in terms of raising the profile of languages (whether home or learned languages) and how to support multilingual learners in schools. However, there are also opportunities here that it is important to highlight: S4's research showed an important link between identification as multilingual and attainment, not just in languages, but across a range of school subjects (Rutgers et al. 2021).

8 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

The experience of MEITS has demonstrated the value of creating a new narrative about ML as a discipline that has important things to say about key issues of our time and major societal questions. Issues such as conflict resolution and peacebuilding, linguistic rights and the combating of inequalities,[38] health and wellbeing and social cohesion need to be addressed by interdisciplinary programmes, to which Modern Linguists can contribute their intercultural competence, skills in close reading and analysis, creativity, etc., so as to help solve them. In this challenge-led research, in which the grand questions drive the research, Modern Linguists can above all bring insights from different languages, cultures, societies and periods of history

38 Related, of course, to the UK government's current Levelling-up agenda; see note 16.

to offer fresh perspectives and new comparative findings.[39] Indeed, it is essential for Modern Linguists to articulate the central role they can—and must—play in addressing major societal issues, if the seeming endless spiral of decline in languages in schools and universities is to be halted and if government and society are to begin to value the contribution of Modern Linguists in the same way as that of our STEM colleagues.

Specialists in all the subdisciplines listed by the REF panel (section 1) have key roles to play in this. Put differently, ML sits at the centre of a nexus of approaches (linguistic, cultural, socio-cultural, socio-historical, etc.) which allows Modern Linguists to approach such challenges creatively. In particular, there are benefits from a greater integration of language and culture specialists and the creation of a more unified narrative about what languages bring. Language without culture is insufficient, but conversely cultural knowledge that is not accessed through language knowledge risks being viewed through Anglophone concepts and perspectives and thus being diminished. There is thus a need not only for language researchers from a range of (sub)disciplines to collaborate on grand challenges, but also for language researchers to engage in broader interdisciplinary teams tackling major issues and to promote language-led research, which has to be at the heart of ML, since it is what gives unity and purpose to the discipline.

The MEITS experience demonstrated that this challenge-led research is, then, best nurtured in interdisciplinary settings. With challenge-based research, the disciplines represented in the team are dictated by the nature of the research questions. There is therefore no need to agonize—as some have done (see Hutchings 2020)—as to whether ML should pivot more towards arts and humanities or the social sciences, an entirely false choice. In MEITS, arts and humanities (literature, culture and film, history of ideas, sociolinguistics), social sciences (education, applied linguistics) and the "hard" sciences (cognitive neuroscience) all had something important to say in relation to our RQs.

The interdisciplinary framework did not just enhance our methodology, as discussed in Carruthers and Fisher (2020), although this was clearly significant. For instance, the integration of qualitative, humanities-based approaches into the more quantitative strands was particularly gratifying for those from more traditional ML backgrounds, such as the incorporation of first-person perspectives and ethnographic techniques (interview and focus groups) into the work on language and cognition in S6, which had previously been entirely quantitative. Perhaps more importantly, however, working in an interdisciplinary team gave us a deeper understanding of major themes and concepts, and magnified the findings of each strand in contributing to the whole research endeavour. As the discussion above has shown, common themes relating to the RQs emerged from work drawing on very different disciplines. In relation to RQ1, these include enhanced knowledge of the complexity of the relationship between the individual and society and the benefits of changing the perspective from society or nation to the individual and their lived experience; the need to question the simple association of languages with territories, ethnicities or religions or of language and nation; and the centrality of questions about the relationship between the individual and society to policy questions around the rights of individuals and the ideologies of wider society. A recurring theme was the need to challenge simple dichotomies, for example, the binary between "traditional" and "new" speakers. Indeed, in S4, the fundamental dichotomy between monolingual and multilingual from a societal viewpoint was questioned through disrupting traditional understandings of what it means to be multilingual. With respect to RQ2, the challenges and opportunities associated with multilingualism were seen repeatedly to mirror each other: in understanding the challenges, we are thus better placed to find solutions. For instance, there is tension between the benefits which multilingualism can bring to population health (e.g. delayed onset of dementia, better recovery after stroke, improved family wellbeing for families with children with autism) that have to be weighed against the demands of assessment and care provision in more than one language for patients with dementia or recovering from a stroke or for multilingual children with autism. Similarly, the creation of standardized forms for minoritized languages—which might be considered an essential stepping stone towards giving them legitimacy and status—may be contested by "traditional" or "native" speakers who in some cases dismiss the new

39 This challenge-based approach could also be fruitfully used in schools, for example in project work, thereby reducing the current gap between how ML is taught in schools and universities.

norms as "artificial" and lacking authenticity. Creating an authoritative form of the minoritized language can lead to further alienation of an already peripheral group if they do not accept or speak the more recent formally recognized standard variety (Ayres-Bennett and Bellamy 2021: 12). Regarding RQ3, once again, the complexity of the relationship between multilingualism, identity and diversity emerged from much of the work and the need to move beyond simple associations. However, while the work of all the strands showed multilingual identity to be complex, fluid and subjective, different kinds of intervention were seen to be effective, whether this relates to ML learning in schools as in S4 or teaching the Irish language in NI as a mechanism to encounter shared heritage and create or reinforce an appreciation of shared space. This is not to say that it was always possible—or even desirable—to find common ground, but even where full integration was not possible, the intellectual encounters and dialogues which naturally occurred in team meetings and the challenges to received wisdoms and approaches from those outside the (sub)discipline were liberating and empowering. Moreover, our intention is not to deny the importance of disciplinary work. Indeed, within the MEITS team we fought hard to respect disciplinary conventions and to allow the interdisciplinarity to develop bottom-up through shared working, finding common ground and, if possible, integration, while also recognizing that there were limits to this (Carruthers and Fisher 2020).

Another key element of the work of MEITS was the co-creation of research with non-HEI partners. An obvious example was S4's collaboration with schoolteachers across the East of England and London, who delivered the interventions and helped shape the materials. These co-created, research-informed teaching resources are now freely available online for schools nationally to use. Other examples include S6's partnering with Lingo Flamingo, a Glasgow-based social enterprise, to look at the long-term impact of language learning on patients and carers in combating loneliness, and with the Royal College for Speech and Language Therapists to produce evidence-based guidelines for the assessment of multilingual clients, as discussed in section 6.

All four OWRI projects built on the legacy of the Translating Cultures major projects that moved beyond national philologies and "transnationalized" ML (see, for instance, Burns and Duncan 2022), but went further in adopting a holistic attitude towards languages. In MEITS, studies were conducted that focused on the UK's indigenous languages, community languages, languages that are well embedded in the UK's schools and universities and lesser-studied languages. The juxtaposition of languages within and across strands also led to genuinely novel collaborations. For instance, a cross-strand workshop in Belfast on conflict and conflict resolution brought together in fruitful dialogue MEITS researchers on Ukraine and NI with researchers and practitioners working on conflict zones in Africa, South America and Asia. A different example was the broadening of work on the sociolinguistics of ML to encompass Chinese studies, applying and modifying an existing ML research paradigm. The traditional organization of language units, which has tended to limit ML to national European languages, has militated against such collaborations and comparative work across a breadth of contexts and periods. Although many Modern Linguists now find themselves in Schools of Languages and Cultures, there is still a tendency for sub-units to be organized around national and monolingual frames.[40] While calls to reconsider institutional structures may be met by a sense of fatigue and déjà vu, if ML is to embrace indigenous, community and non-European languages, it is perhaps again timely to reconsider whether the status quo is helping to promote languages fully.

Multilingualism is, of course, a topic that lends itself to an interdisciplinary approach and research on a broad range of languages. Above all, research on multilingualism can contribute to addressing major issues such as health and wellbeing and social cohesion. Yet it is not difficult to think of other major issues where ML is centrally placed to make a contribution, including legacies of empire and colonialism,[41] modern slavery, the promotion of so-called "Global Britain" in the world and Levelling-up. If we want our research to have impact, we need to engage with government priorities of the day and to be agile in being able to respond to emerging—however ephemeral—policy initiatives, while also trying to set the agenda and

40 There are, of course, some notable exceptions, perhaps particularly relating to Slavonic studies (vs Russian).

41 On "decolonizing multilingualism", see Phipps (2019), and on recent efforts to "decolonize the curriculum", see Ford and Santos (2022). This work, which is still in its infancy, seeks to challenge the narrow methodological nationalism which has traditionally characterized ML departments and to engage with different languages, thereby decentring Europe.

sensitize policymakers to the role that languages play in portfolios across government. It is perhaps particularly where the issues are most controversial and painful or have been swept metaphorically under the political carpet that analysis of them in works of culture in different languages and produced in different times—the traditional bedrock of ML—has something powerful to say.

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