# GFL
## German as a foreign language

**The Challenge for German in English Secondary Schools:**

**A Regional Study**

Mark Payne, Sheffield, UK

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Statistics point to a steady decline in German exam take up at GCSE and A-Level in England, with a knock-on effect within Higher Education. Focusing on the secondary school system in England in particular, issues around the position of German have been considered within the broader debates on language diversification in relation to decisions based upon economics, politics, education and linguistics. This has all been set against the background of the hegemonic position of French in English schools. However, data drawn from some 50 secondary schools and 86 language teachers underline that it might not be all 'doom and gloom'  Indeed, there are schools where the teaching and learning of German is positively thriving. Such schools might point to possibilities for ensuring the survival of German within the curriculum.

## 1. Introduction

> GCSE league tables published on Wednesday show how the popularity of French, German, Spanish and other languages has plunged to a new low in state schools. Official figures reveal a minority of pupils gained A* to C grades in languages at the vast majority of secondaries in England ('Languages in Decline', The Telegraph, 2011).

> German is very successful in our school. We have the languages on a rolling system in Year Seven ... it keeps the languages as important and popular as each other (Head of Languages, Regional Partnership Secondary School).

It would appear that Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) as a subject in state schools in England are in decline. The first quote above sums up something of the prevailing mood. But it might not be all doom and gloom. There appear to be bright patches represented by some schools as evidenced in the second quote. Overall, it is fair to say that the position of MFL in schools is in a state of flux. Making languages optional post-age 14 and, at about the same time, introducing languages to primary schools, indicates something of the less than joined-up thinking behind MFL policies in England (Henry and Shaw 2002; Pachler 2002). In the latest twist, just as it seems that language learning in the state sector may be in terminal decline, there is a proposal for a 'new' initiative,

the English Baccalaureate, that will include a language in the 'E-Bac' 'basket' of subjects (Blake 2010).

It is difficult, then, to get some clarity and to understand just what is happening in English secondary schools. It may be that the current situation is simply part and parcel of language diversification which sees language as part of the school curriculum ebb and flow in relation to often non-linguistic status planning issues (Kaplan and Baldauf 1997) such as Government directives, educational policy or language popularity. It may be that other issues have come into play in recent years and moved the debate on, such as the expansion of English as a lingua franca (Seidlhofer et al. 2006), which may undermine the motivation for English native speakers to learn another FL.

In this paper I attempt to shed light on the state of German in English secondary schools by focusing on one region in England in particular. For context, I draw on examination data for languages and revisit, briefly, the 'traditional' debate on language diversification. Following that, I discuss findings from empirical data from some 50 schools and 86 teachers in a region in the North of England. I then attempt to draw some conclusions

## 2. Findings from German examination data

In 2010, a total of 5548 pupils (2009 = 5765 pupils) took a German A-Level ranging from Grades A* - U (the A* grade is new this year) (BBC News 2010). This represented 0.6% of total A-Level entries. For French, one of the main foreign languages learnt in English schools, 13,850 pupils (2009=14,333) took the A-Level exam (1.6% of total cohort) (BBC News 2010), down from last year but still healthier than the German situation. For Spanish, 7629 pupils (2009=6089) took A-Level, representing 0.9% of the total cohort, an increase on last year of 1540 pupils and seeing Spanish firmly overtake German as the second FL in English schools (BBC News 2010). And just to put languages in context, from the current cohort of A-Level pupils, 30,976 pupils (2009=29,436) took physics A-Level and 13,744 (2009=13,392) took political studies (BBC News 2010). The National Centre for Languages (CILT) provides an excellent breakdown of A-level results from 1996-2009 and GCSE results from 1994-2009, with commentary (CILT 2010a). During this period, A-Level results for German have fallen from a high of 9036 entries in 1996 (CILT 2010c).

Looking at GCSE results, the year 2001 was a high point for German GCSE entries with 130,627 pupils taking the German exam (French for 2001 = 321,207; Spanish =

45,629). Since then, there have been year on year falls to the figure of 68,300 German entries for 2009 (French = 167,300; Spanish = 57,300) (CILT 2010b).

In terms of German studies at University-level, the data are somewhat obscured. There are various types of language degree (e.g. single honours, dual honours) and language can be taken in combination with other subjects. Furthermore, the CILT data on which I draw are for UK institutions, not just England. It must also be remembered that students studying at Higher Education institutions in the UK can also come from outside of the UK. According to CILT data for the period 2002/3-2007/8, results show that for first degrees, German studies declined from 3,330 to 3,105 (-6.9%), for other undergraduate credit and diploma courses it declined from 1,555 to 1,220 (-21.7) and for postgraduate courses it declined from 255 to 200 (-22%) (CILT, 2010d).

This is only a 'broad brush' overview of the statistics. But what is clear is that German has declined in terms of numbers of A-Level entries. Feeding into A-Level, there has been a decrease in the numbers of German GCSE entries over the years presented. And feeding forward from A-level, there has been a decrease in undergraduate and postgraduate study of German.

## 3. Language diversification

This study is an extension of the work on language diversification that was particularly prevalent in the 1980s and 1990s in the lead up to increased European integration (Chambers 1995; Department of Education and Science 1991; McCrory 1990; Moys 1998; Phillips 1987; Phillips 1989a; Phillips 1989b; Phillips and Filmer-Sankey 1989; Powell 1989; Rix and Pullin 1989; Rouve 1989; The European Union 1992; Westgate 1989). I have continued this work in some part in my research on language diversification and language planning (Payne 2001; Payne 2004; Payne 2007a; Payne 2007b; Payne and Evans 2005). However, it would appear that no significant studies on language diversification in English schools have emerged since.

To consider the current place of German in the curriculum and the pressures it may be under, it may be helpful to briefly reiterate the 'historic' issues and debates around language diversification in British schools. After considering the hegemonic position of French, I address issues surrounding diversification under the headings 'political and economic issues', 'educational and linguistic issues' and 'lack of engagement issues'. The ultimate freedom of choice of languages available to secondary schools is made

explicit. According to the National Curriculum, the study of languages 'may include major European or world languages, such as Arabic, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Mandarin, Russian, Spanish and Urdu. Schools may choose which languages they teach' (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) 2007: 166). There is plenty of language choice, then, to provide for diversified programmes of MFL. Indeed, one could assume that many different types of MFL programme comprising a wide range of languages would be prevalent in English secondary schools. However, as Anderson pointed out: '[i]n practice, the number of these languages taught to any significant degree within mainstream schools is very limited indeed' (2000: 56).

## 3.1. The Hegemonic Position of French

My research has highlighted a prevalence for MFL programmes based upon French as the first FL in English schools, with German and Spanish making up provision, more or less in competition for the 'runners up' slot (Payne 2001). In the first instance it is mainly due to historical and geographical reasons that French enjoys a privileged position as the prime MFL in England (Brumfit 1995; Hawkins 1981; Westgate 1989). Furthermore, France exerts a continuing influence as a day-trip and tourist destination as well as a popular second-home destination, albeit for a small minority of the population. However, for French to maintain its pre-eminent position in English secondary schools other variables must be considered such as the supply of French-trained staff and the availability and affordability of resources. With more staff and resources behind it, it is inevitable that French will be the pre-eminent foreign language taught in UK schools. Indeed, there is little to add to the debate around the hegemonic position of French as far as this paper is concerned.

## 3.2. Political and Economic Issues

> (…) successful economic integration will depend in the future critically on political partnership. That much is certain from Maastricht. And successful political partnership requires the kind of broadly based cultural insight and empathy that derives from language knowledge rooted firmly in the curriculum at all educational levels. (Reeves 1997: 37)

Politics and economics are inextricably linked, particularly where Britain's relationship with Europe is concerned. And in terms of languages, it can be difficult to separate the political and economic justifications for diversifying language provision.

A political argument for FL diversification, for example from the British perspective towards Europe, sees language provision diversified in order to provide more speakers

of different languages to help us forge closer ties with our European neighbours. This would ease the path towards European integration and the forging of a close-knit European super-state. The range of languages taught in schools could be broadened to match those of our political 'allies'.

The economic argument operates at two levels. On an individual level, learning a FL may increase personal job opportunities. At the national level, improved language competence across the (working/productive) population may increase global economic opportunities. Therefore, provided it is known which languages will provide which opportunities for each level, language provision can be diversified and tailored to match. Europe provides a strongly political motive for promoting language learning (Anderson 2000). The European Commission actively promotes linguistic diversity '(…) the ability to understand and communicate in other languages is a basic skill for all European citizens' (Commission of the European Communities 2003: 3). The main strategy for achieving linguistic diversity is through the initiative 'Mother tongue plus two other languages: making an early start': 'Native speaker' fluency is not the objective, but appropriate levels of skill in reading, listening, writing and speaking in two foreign languages are required, together with intercultural competencies and the ability to learn languages whether with a teacher or alone (Commission of the European Communities 2003: 8).

Building up 'plurilingualism' is seen as essential for realising one of the overarching ambitions of the Council of Europe embodied in the 'free movement of its citizens, capital and services' within the 'common home' (Commission of the European Communities 2003: 3). Of course, the UK has a somewhat peculiar relationship with the EU manifested as less than complete integration where certain powers of veto are retained and, as such, certain elements of EU legislation, initiatives and directives are not applied (e.g. the Euro currency). It also remains unclear how far European initiatives in languages influence English language policy. That said, calls for linguistic diversity and language learning, such as those reproduced here, may have some influence in the UK. For example, MFL was introduced into English primary schools as an 'entitlement' from 2010 (Department for Education and Skills 2004), perhaps heeding calls from Europe '(…) to improve the mastery of basic skills, in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age' (Commission of the European Communities 2003: 7).

The standpoint of the British government towards language diversification is, I would argue, business orientated. Nigel Reeves, in his article sub-headed 'UK plc' concludes from a series of reports focusing on languages in business and industry

> (…) that there is a correlation between the employment of linguistically qualified personnel and exporting success, and the converse, namely that an absence of linguistic expertise can result in lost business. (Reeves 1997: 36)

This view was based most probably on the results of an earlier large-scale study to investigate the language needs of British industry (Hagen 1988). Thirteen surveys were carried out across eleven regions in England and Scotland with five main objectives (paraphrased):

1. To provide an industrial and commercial profile of the region.

2. To evaluate the foreign language needs of firms in the sample.

3. To provide an indication of the pattern of FL need.

4. To investigate companies' use of foreign languages.

5. To evaluate the effect on the relative importance of different languages from patterns of predicted trade. (Hagen 1988: xv-xvi)

Hagen's study produced a number of key findings. He found that nearly three-quarters of all firms surveyed had used one or more foreign languages in recent years (Hagen 1988: xix) indicating the potential demand for workers with language skills. In terms of the languages needed, he found that:

> Three regional surveys put the need for German higher, or equal to, that for French (…) nonetheless, fewer than a quarter of the aggregate sample of firms in ten surveys needed French. The other three-quarters need mainly German, Spanish, Arabic, Italian, Japanese, Russian and Chinese. Other languages in lesser demand include Dutch, Portuguese, Swedish, Norwegian and Farsi. (Hagen 1988: xxii-xxiii)

Having established that a range of modern languages may have been necessary for helping forge European political integration and increasing economic competitive competence on both individual and national levels, the question still remains in the UK as to which languages schools should provide and which languages pupils should learn. Moving forward from Hagen's findings, the argument for language competence as a positive factor in relation to competing in business is still strong (The Nuffield Languages Inquiry 2000; Williams et al. 2002), but the language focus has changed. Now it appears that Mandarin Chinese is the language of the future in relation to UK business as China gains economic dominance (BBC 2011; Ping 2009), as well as in the wider Anglophone world (Bamboo Learning 2009). Political rationale for language

learning would suggest that the languages of the European Union remain important, underlined by the Eurocentric focus of the MFL curriculum in England, and Hagen outlines a range of languages that are (were) sought after by British businesses. There are two points that can be made. Firstly, on the basis of his evidence, it would seem that English and French alone are not enough to fulfil UK political and economic aims, especially in the globalised world. Secondly, the argument for diversification on both a political and an economic basis is convincing but there is still no guidance as to exactly which languages schools should be offering at what stages to which ability pupils.

## 3.3. Educational and Linguistic Issues

Broadly speaking, the educational argument for learning something, in this case a modern foreign language, focuses on intrinsic reasons for doing so related to matters of interest, enjoyment, personal enrichment and general educational growth (James 1979; Williams 2000). However, in the current standards or performance orientated educational climate, educational reasons for learning are generally linked to success in a subject with the emphasis on achieving good exam results. I am not denying here that enjoyment and success are strongly linked. If I enjoy doing something then I will probably get good, and be good, at doing it, and if I am really good at something then I will probably also enjoy it. But the so-called educational focus for learning, particularly in the field of MFL, has seemingly moved away from notions of personal enjoyment towards 'chances of success' (Anderson 2000: 65). To this end, that of success in learning foreign languages, linguistic debate has often centred on language difficulty. One reason cited for diversifying foreign language provision is that some languages are easier to learn than others. If pupils could be taught those languages that were perceived as easier, then they would be more likely to achieve success in their learning (and get results). Conversely, difficult languages could be avoided for certain types of learner.

James (1979) addressed the difficulties of languages by calculating the 'language distance' from English for each of the 5 mainstream languages taught in English secondary schools: French, German, Italian, Spanish and Russian. He considered the languages with regard to phonology, grammar, lexis, orthography, and spelling, scoring each language from 1-5 for difficulty with 1 being easy and 5 being difficult. According to James's theory, the subjects are ordered, from difficult to easy, as follows; Russian, French, German, Spanish and Italian (James 1979: 19-22). Apart from Russian, this appears to correspond with the prevalence of the teaching of these languages in schools,

i.e. French is most widely taught and is also the most difficult. Although a more subjective viewpoint, based on experience rather than empirical research, James's study makes an interesting observation. What must be underlined is that James's work is based upon English-speaking learners of MFL and thus does not consider the issue of mother tongue speakers of other languages learning MFLs. This is an issue that Hawkins addresses with his theory of language distance (Hawkins 1981).

Hawkins argues that difficulty is 'an elusive concept' (Hawkins 1981: 78). He maintains that distance from English does not necessarily coincide with a degree of difficulty; it might be easer to cross a given linguistic distance in one direction than another, for example within the Romance languages from Spanish to Italian. Hawkins divides the question of difficulty into two chief sources of error in learning a foreign language:

1. The contrasts between languages which lead to 'inter-language' interference.
2. The 'intra-language' interference or overgeneralization from rules met in the course of the early journey into the language (Hawkins 1981: 78).

Hawkins's theory of inter-language interference is based upon a similar premise to James's work, that it is not only possible to compare different languages in relation to one's own mother tongue but also to compare the languages with each other. In this manner it is possible to theorize that some languages are closer than others (Hawkins uses the examples of English, Chinese and Danish). This is of particular relevance when one considers that there are learners of French in England, for example, whose mother tongue is not English. Many schools in London and other large cities have multicultural, multiracial and multilingual student bodies. For example, two schools sampled for my PhD research had the following profiles:

> School A has 1553 pupils, 194 in the Sixth-Form. 40 per cent of the pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds. Apart from English, the major languages spoken by pupils in the school are: Panjabi 333 pupils; Gujerati 82; Urdu 56; and Bengali 6 pupils.

> School B is a large 11-18 specialist language college in London. It has 1230 pupils, 185 in the Sixth-Form. Many languages are spoken by the pupils and, for over half, English is not the mother tongue. From 33 languages spoken by the pupils, the most salient are Gujerati, Urdu, Cantonese, Somali and Arabic (Payne 2004: 161).

Does the native speaker of Panjabi, say, find learning French easier than the native speaker of English? Put another way, what is the linguistic distance between Panjabi

and French and has it been a consideration of teachers of MFL in multilingual schools? As one of my respondents pointed out,

> 'Pupils often choose according to what their friends do, whether they like the teacher and what their parents want them to do. A lot of parents now insist, for instance, that their not so able children do GCSE because it's part of the E-Bac, especially Somali and Pakistani parents' (TR).

With perhaps more emphasis on pupil voice and choice coupled with parental rights in the area of education, there is perhaps less requirement for language teachers to engage in discussions around, say, language distance and other linguistic issues in relation to pupils and their language learning. It would appear that decisions in relation to language learning may often be based upon non-linguistic matters, such as friends' choices, parental wishes or other reasons.

However, Hawkins also makes the point that 'degree of distance does not always coincide with degree of difficulty' (Hawkins 1981: 82). It may be the case that the stark contrast between the taught language and the mother tongue actually facilitates learning. Intra-language contrasts or 'analogical error' refers to those intrinsic aspects of the learnt language that are particularly tricky to overcome and so prove difficult for the learner. Hawkins admits that it is difficult to quantify languages in terms of their analogical inconsistencies, and such inconsistencies may appear later in some languages. However, based upon personal experience, by comparing intra-language contrasts he argues that 'French comes first in order of analogical inconsistencies. Spanish certainly has strong claims to be considered easiest in the early stages, with German second' (Hawkins 1981: 83).

According to this theory, in order to maximize success in language learning based on the three examples (notwithstanding other variables such as pupil ability, resources and staff), Spanish would be the first choice language learnt with German offered in second place and French last. Caroline Filmer-Sankey (1989) has argued that the way in which a language is presented to the learner is as important a factor in determining how difficult the language appears as the intrinsic difficulty of the language itself. Filmer-Sankey bases her arguments on findings from the Oxford Project on Diversification of First Foreign Language Teaching (OXPROD). This project investigated pupils' attitudes by means of a questionnaire targeting approximately 1000 first-year pupils in the project schools in March 1988. The questionnaire covered the following areas:

-Pupils' general attitudes to and enjoyment of French, German and Spanish.

-Their views on the usefulness of the language they were learning.

-Their perceptions of the difficulty of the language they were learning.

-Their attitudes to the country and people of the language they were learning.

-Their enjoyment of language learning activities.

-Factual information about their contact with the foreign country (Filmer-Sankey 1989: 99).

Her conclusion, reported in brief here, was that in terms of these six areas, 'the three languages could be ranked in the order German-Spanish-French, pupils on the whole being shown to be most positive about German and least positive about French' (Filmer-Sankey 1989: 100). And furthermore: 'A higher proportion of the pupils learning German than of those learning French enjoyed it rather than not and similarly, more of the pupils learning German than of those learning French perceived it to be easy rather than not' (Filmer-Sankey 1989: 100). Filmer-Sankey also notes some positive bias to the attitudes of the boys towards German; 'when the views of specific *groups* of pupils were examined, it was found that boys learning German were the most positive of all' (Filmer-Sankey 1989: 100). Having said this, Filmer-Sankey is keen not to promote one language over another: 'the aim… is not to laud one language above any other' (Filmer-Sankey 1989: 86), and in presenting qualitative quotes from respondents it is clear to see that pupils express a range of both positive and negative views towards learning French, German and Spanish.

To conclude, it would appear that educational arguments for language-learning in the UK have been largely subsumed by utilitarian principles, particularly centred on business priorities and 'chances of [exam] success'. To this end, attempts have been made to understand which languages are easier or more difficult for pupils to learn, with the emphasis on English L1 speakers. It may seem a relatively straightforward proposition to match pupils' perceived linguistic abilities to the learning of a specific modern language by applying the theory of language distance. However, 'distance' may be difficult to determine depending upon a number of variables including intra-language contrasts, the pupils' base language if it is not English, and both pupils' and staffs' perceptions of the learning process. The theory of language distance and, indeed, the educational/linguistic arguments presented here, provide little real guidance as to which languages schools should be providing for their pupils.

## 3.4. Lack of Engagement Issues

There is little doubt that the teaching and learning of MFLs in English schools in general has declined in recent years. DCSF figures state that in 2010 less than half of Key Stage 4 (KS4) pupils in England were entered for a modern foreign language GCSE examination (CILT, 2010b). The number has declined steadily since the 68% entered in 2004, the last cohort to sit GCSEs before languages were made non-compulsory post-14. In some areas of England, schools are removing language learning from the KS4 curriculum altogether. The Languages Review states that 'in 2006, there were over 40 schools where no pupils were taking a language' (DfES 2006: 9).

Moving beyond language diversification and language choice, there is the issue of pupils simply not wanting to study languages, regardless of any choice. Graham provides indications as to why pupils choose not to study a language at GCSE, 'the uninspiring nature of a GCSE syllabus that emphasises transactional language above creativity' (2003: 16) being one of them. The QCA (2004) backs this up: 'some topics - such as ordering food and writing to pen-friends - were uninspiring.' Pupils may fail to see the link between languages and their everyday life and many are choosing more 'practical' subjects over languages, which are viewed as being of more use to them. Similarly, it has been argued recently that Universities are favouring 'STEM' subjects (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) over languages when it comes to offering University places. Vasagar and Shepherd (2010) state that results appear to show a sharper awareness of demand for single sciences both from universities and employers. Last year, the Confederation of British Industry said businesses should expect to offer golden handshakes to students who did science and engineering. Pupils who are thinking ahead to University options may feel that languages are less useful when attempting to acquire a place on popular courses. If pupils are being encouraged to study these subjects over languages, as stated previously, this will have a detrimental effect on the number of pupils opting for a modern foreign language at GCSE. Graham also cites 'the fact that English is so widely spoken in the world' (Graham 2003: 16) as a reason why pupils fail to identify with the need to speak a foreign language and why languages aren't widely chosen by pupils in England at GCSE level.

## 4. A Regional Study

Apart from certain bright spots, such as some of the positive views expressed by pupils towards German in Filmer-Sankey's research, the picture painted so far is fairly bleak.

The teaching and learning of modern foreign languages in schools would appear to be in general decline and the position of German would appear to be under threat in particular. That said, there are schools also where German is positively thriving. In this section, based upon empirical questionnaire research, I will present some of the findings that shed light on the German situation in one region in the North of England. I will frame the findings and discussion around the three types of school that emerged, and themes surrounding diversification.

The University of Sheffield is situated in the county of South Yorkshire (falling within the 'Yorkshire and Humber' region), an area that encompasses both former mining towns facing high unemployment and social issues possibly connected therewith (relative poverty, crime, drugs etc.), and very middle class areas with relatively wealthy inhabitants, often employed as professionals (doctors, lawyers, teachers etc.), largely untouched by many of those post-industrial issues (Communities and Government 2011). It is obvious that the socio-economic pupil profiles of secondary schools across the region will vary: 'a third of Sheffield's households live in the 10% most deprived wards in the UK' (Winkler 2008). My postgraduate trainee language teachers (usually a cohort of 36) are placed in 'partnership' schools across the region for their teaching practice. In order to accommodate trainee teachers of lesser-taught languages in English schools, such as Japanese, Mandarin and Russian, there are some schools in other regions in England drawn into my partner 'cluster', such as one near Liverpool, one in Nottingham and one in south London. The majority of partnership schools, however, are in South Yorkshire.

University partnership schools are those that are contracted to work in conjunction with us to host trainee teachers, usually on a rolling three-year cycle. They are predominantly state maintained secondary schools spanning either the age ranges 11-16, or 11-18. Some are faith schools with a Christian ethos; one is a boys' grammar school in which the pupils sit an entrance examination at age 11; many are 'specialist schools, that is, they have a particular curriculum specialism such as 'Performing Arts' or 'Modern Languages' (see Specialist Schools and Academies Trust 2007). We also have a few independent schools within the partnership that are private schools that do not receive government funding, relying instead on parental fees. In all, it is a diverse group of schools that may reinforce the view that, in England, the days of the 'bog standard' comprehensive school are over (The Guardian 2011b).

The intention with my research was to gain an understanding of what was going on in one region, through its schools, in relation to the provision, teaching and learning of German. In order to do this, I decided that an emailed questionnaire to key language contacts in each school would be the most appropriate way forward. Key language contacts are language teaching colleagues across the partnership schools, some are heads of department, some are mentors to trainee teachers and some are former students now employed as language teachers. I have multiple contacts in some schools, and email contact can be seen as quick and efficient, particularly in contacting specific groups e.g. professionals (Van Selm and Jankowski 2006). I sent an online 'Survey Monkey'[1] questionnaire to 86 language teachers across 50 regional partnership schools and received 29 responses, an individual response rate of 34%[2]. The survey questions were:

1. Is German taught in your school?

2. If German is NOT taught in your school, when was it last taught there?

3. Why is German no longer taught in your school?

4. Please explain in more detail the reasons for the demise of German in your school. There may be other reasons or particular circumstances in your school.

5. If German is taught, across which year groups is it offered?

6. How many pupils were entered for GCSE over the last three years?

7. How many pupils were entered for A-Level over the last three years?

8. Why do you think German is successful in your school?

9. Please provide more detail about why languages continue to thrive in your school.

10. Please comment upon the situation regarding the teaching of German in general and how you think things will look in a few years from now.

The study employed an essentially exploratory, data driven method, akin to 'Grounded Theory', whereby theory emerge from the data; the data are scrutinized for emergent issues and themes and the 'theory' is derived (Charmaz 2000; Strauss and Corbin 1997).

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[1]  Survey Monkey is a website which allows for the design and dissemination of surveys. The survey can be sent out to respondents via an email link. See: http://www.surveymonkey.com/

[2]  It could be argued that this rate is not statistically significant, but as this is not intended to be a quantitative scientific study, rather a more in-depth case study, I would argue that this is not relevant here.

On reading and re-reading the survey responses and highlighting salient themes and issues, three basic categories of school emerged. There were those where German was no longer taught but had been so until fairly recently. There were those where German was seemingly in decline. And the third group was those where German was positively thriving. I will deal with each of these in turn and draw out the main characteristics for each. Where respondent quotations are used, I reference these as 'Teacher Respondent' (TR); some quotations are used more than once to emphasise various points. The respondents were automatically anonymised through the survey return system.

## 4.1. Schools where German is no longer taught

Staff in these schools lamented the loss of German. As one teacher said 'I feel that I have wasted half of my degree, although I really liked it and wish it wasn't the case' (Teacher Response, TR). There appeared to be four main reasons for the lack of German in the languages curriculum:

1. It was a Head teacher or management decision
2. It was a Language Department decision
3. There was a lack of take-up of German by pupils
4. It was squeezed out by another language

In terms of the Head teacher or school Principal, and the management team, evidence showed that a curriculum subject could fall out of favour relatively quickly. In one school, for example, the respondent pointed out that 'the Head teacher wants the faculty head to start to look at Arabic and Mandarin as developing MFLs' (TR). Whilst not a language-unfriendly initiative, this decision 'served notice' on German teaching in this school, an unfortunate by-product of increasing language diversification with limited resources. The more languages that are introduced, the more the competition between the languages can increase. And if the senior leadership in a school states any form of preference, in this case for Arabic and Mandarin as 'developing MFLs', i.e. those with a curriculum future, then within two years (two school cohorts), a language can be seen as unsustainable. This argument does cut both ways though, and the senior management of the school can 'guarantee' a language its place in the curriculum. A statement such as: 'We are now getting more support from the Head and SLT' (TR) implies some form of 'guarantee'.

Where language provision is concerned, the Head of the languages department or faculty will have a huge influence in the school. Previous research shows that the linguistic preferences of a Head of the Languages Department will shape the language provision of that department above other considerations (Payne 2004). It stands to reason that if the head of a languages department is a Hispanist, then it is likely that Spanish will be  a language that is actively promoted (see: Payne 2004). Why would a head of department jeopardize their own livelihood by undermining the status of the language they teach? In formulating policy, the Head of Languages will probably seek the views of the heads of the various languages, such as the Head of German, Head of Spanish and so on, in relation to language matters, dependent upon the management structure of the department. On reaching consensus, a department can have a far-reaching impact on language provision, both in terms of the positive:  'Lots of the credit goes to staff, especially to the Head of German'; 'As a department we work hard to promote the importance of languages' (TR), and the negative, from  German language perspective: 'We see Spanish as more important' (TR).

No matter what steps are taken by Head teachers, Heads of language departments or specific language teachers to promote language learning in schools, if pupils do not opt for a language (provided there is a choice) then that language may wither and die as a school curriculum subject[3]. It is clear that choice is desirable for pupils, as one of my respondents said: 'pupils enjoy the choice' (TR) (and see: Payne 2007a). Evidence shows a strong pupil 'effect' in relation to the 'survivability' of languages in schools: 'German is gaining numbers year on year' (TR) and: 'Numbers in current Y10 are up again (33)' (TR). It is clear that healthy pupil numbers is crucial to the survival of German, and other languages, within the curriculum. Without pupil numbers to support viable classes a subject will soon be removed from the curriculum: 'German is now being phased out as we cannot support small groups' (TR); and 'low numbers are seen as financially unviable' (TR).

Where there are limited resources coupled with pupil choice, there may be one language that could be perceived as under threat, unless there is 'managed choice': 'we have the languages on a rolling system in year 7' (TR). Of course, as argued above, it may be senior management, Head of department or departmental 'agendas' that influence

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[3]   This would be the same for any subject; teachers are not usually employed to teach nobody.

language survival. Whatever the reasons, a language may be 'squeezed out' by another. In relation to German, one respondent stated:

> 'I think it is under a little threat since Spanish is a huge demand at the moment and not many will be taking up German to A-Level. So the number of students will be shifted to Spanish more in the future' (TR).

But to be fair, it is not just German that could be threatened: 'At our school German is holding its own and has overtaken Spanish in numbers in Years 10 and 11. It is French which is falling by the wayside' (TR). I do not take any pleasure from seeing German oust another language from the curriculum, by the way, I would prefer to see all MFLs in schools valued and promoted equally.

We do not know the reasons underpinning much of the decision making in schools. But it may be the case that all four of the reasons listed are interrelated. That which happens at Head teacher level may have been passed down from the level of regional or national government. Schools could be sanctioned by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) for example, if language numbers are low: 'Head teachers worry about Ofsted telling them off for running subjects that are not value for money' (TR). As stated above, decisions taken about language teaching and learning are often unrelated to linguist issues.

There is a certain interdependency within a language department as languages are usually grouped together under the generic title 'Modern Foreign Languages'. So, if Spanish is introduced it may lead to many of the circumstances outlined above. Some view Spanish as the 'easier' of the traditional FLs taught in schools, hence a decision not to teach German (by the management) may be because there is a desire to introduce Spanish. A Head of Languages is under pressure, normally, to get 'results', hence the decision to introduce Spanish over, say, German, may be taken at Departmental level. If Spanish is viewed as 'easier' by staff, then this will undoubtedly filter down to pupils and parents (language teachers may be in competition with each other for pupils so Spanish teachers may reinforce the 'easy' message) hence a lack of 'take-up' of German. Once languages are put in competition with each other, vying for pupils and resources, the management and staff have a major role to play in determining pupil choice. It is not uncommon for pupils to make subject choices based upon who their favourite teacher is; the language itself becomes a secondary consideration.

Once a subject has been lost from the school curriculum it is a major undertaking to have it reinstated. As staff move on or 'reskill' and as resources become out of date, lost

or subsumed by another language's resource priorities, it is difficult to make the argument for reintroducing a language to the curriculum. And with more 'relevant' languages on the horizon, such as Mandarin (for business), the case for reintroducing German into those schools where it has declined, is almost impossible. The message is clear: maintain German rather than lose it.

### 4.2. Schools where German is in decline:

There are many schools where German appears to be in decline. At the same time, in these schools another language, usually Spanish, will be in the ascendancy: '… Spanish is a huge demand at the moment…' (TR). Of course, there may also be an increasing lack of engagement with languages in general. Or both an increase in another language combined with a lack of engagement with languages in general which sees a double blow for, in this case, German. Issues fuelling a decline in German are: 'the rise in other languages' (TR), 'a decline in numbers at A-Level (TR)', 'German is seen as less valuable…pupils don't like it (TR)'and '[there is] bad behaviour in lessons (TR)'. As already stated, when one language is in the ascendancy another may be suffering the opposite, or pupils will simply not be taking any languages. As a language gains in popularity, numbers rise and resources increase. Possibly, exam results also get better thus attracting the better and brighter pupils. The less bright have to go somewhere else; e.g. another language or curriculum area. If teachers see their languages and, ultimately, livelihoods under threat, it may be that teacher morale and performance drop, hence leading to some of the situations highlighted in the quotes above such as 'pupils don't like it' (TR). It is this situation and these schools where German is in decline that alarm me the most. Languages must somehow be 'sold' as equal in value to both the pupils and parents by the department and school as a whole and none allowed to wither on the vine, trapped in a slow downward spiral. As one of my respondents said: 'The last German group will cease 2013' (TR). But how best to address this? One answer may be to look at the third category of school, that where German is thriving.

### 4.3. Schools where German is thriving

It would seem that schools where German is thriving are generally 'happy' places linguistically. Languages are valued, the Head teacher and senior team are engaged with language learning, there is a value and place for language learning in pupils' lives, there

are plenty of trips to Germany and parents are supportive. Some teacher responses are indicative: 'It is a specialist language school' (TR). This would be a school described as a 'Language College', with languages a high-status subject and curricular focus (see e.g. Department for Education and Skills 2001). A further respondent said: 'We get support from the Head and Senior Leadership Team'. As argued above, 'sponsorship' of the language department from the senior management is crucial in ensuring that languages thrive. Further comments include: 'The Head of German and German teachers bring lots of enthusiasm and excellent teaching', 'We run four German trips per year' and 'Languages have always been strong; pupils enjoy the choice' (all TRs).

The schools where German thrives appear to have built up years of experience and established a culture of excellent German teaching and learning. A main emergent theme is the strength of the staff in terms of the leadership and teaching. Underpinning this is the support of the Head teacher. Running successful language trips regularly to Germany appears to be a fundamental component of a successful and healthy German course: 'I put a lot of it down to successful trips'; 'We supplement this [excellent teaching] with trips e.g. Christmas markets' (TRs) (see also e.g. Fisher and Evans 2000). Other forms of language trip were also mentioned, such as 'to the theatre' (TR) and 'to the language department at the University' (TR). The follow-up work was also important: 'we have displays showing the trips, we set up email pen-friends' (TR).

What is not highlighted here is the potential competition from other languages. It is clear that German in those schools where it is thriving is not suffering so heavily from the competition of, say, Spanish, nor the issue of language disengagement. One area for further research is the point where a school 'tips' from the positive situation as highlighted in this section, to the position at which it starts to decline.

## 5. Conclusions

As outlined in the review section on language diversification above, the main issues to consider, traditionally, in respect of language provision and choice in schools are: the hegemonic position of French; political and economic issues; educational and linguistic issues; multilingual and multicultural issues and issues around lack of language engagement. However, it would appear that much of what influences the teaching and learning of German (or not) in the regional case outlined within this paper falls outside of these parameters for diversification. Taking each of these in turn, firstly, the position of French is hardly mentioned as an issue across all 50 schools. As I have stated, the

position of French in the UK is traditional, entrenched, and fairly stable when set against the 'competitive' discourse that marks out, say, the relationship between German and Spanish in schools; it is almost a 'non-issue' here.

In terms of political and economic issues, there is little mention of 'Europe' the 'Council of Europe', 'plurilingualism', 'European integration' or issues around 'business relevance'. Indeed, a different form of instrumentalism overrides all this; the quest for 'results'. As one of my respondent said: 'Softer subjects push us out as we are seen as difficult' (TR). Where schools seek to enhance their league table position, they may encourage pupils to opt for perceived 'softer' or 'easier' subjects such as 'sport' or 'drama' to ensure that an appropriately measurable grade is attained, usually in the GCSE range A*-C (BBC 2007). It would appear that examination results and school league table positions may be more pressing than, say, the aspirations for educating plurilingual European citizens who are able to take direct advantage of free movement and employment within Europe, equipped with their 'Mother Tongue plus two'. Indeed, school league tables remain central to government educational policy:

> 'Performance Tables will continue to sit at the heart of the accountability system. Headline performance measures reflect Government priorities and it is important that schools and the public understand how individual schools compare against national standards'(Department for Education 2011, p.2)

and they are an annual fixture in the national press (see e.g. The Guardian 2011a; The Telegraph 2011).

One would assume that educational and linguistic issues would be at the forefront of guiding teaching and learning languages in secondary schools. To a degree, this is confirmed by the research here, particularly where the focus is at departmental level e.g. as captured in the quotes in the above section 'Schools where German is thriving'. But it is also clear that non-linguistic and non-educational issues predominate in terms of how schools are managed and how government policy is put into effect. For example, no matter how linguistically and educationally strong the argument is for a group of pupils to learn German, or another language, if the class size is too small it may contravene Ofsted guidelines on 'value for money'. In terms of the 'linguistic' dimension, it is confirmed here that Spanish is often seen as easier or more popular. But this is seldom framed in terms of departmental debates around 'language distance', 'Language interference' or 'language difficulty'. More often, it is simply an unplanned or un-researched linguistic-based outcome, such as when German is 'perceived' as difficult

(by teachers, pupils and parents), Spanish 'perceived' as easy (by teachers, pupils and parents) and thus more pupils opt for Spanish. There are issues around the languages that pupils see as easy or hard but there is little in-depth consideration of these. For example, in terms of language distance, none of the respondents has raised the issue of which pupils might be suited to learning which language based upon what their mother tongue is. And this links into the issues surrounding multilingualism and multiculturalism. There was no mention of these issues from any respondents. One could assume that all pupils taught in these schools were English mother-tongue pupils, but they are not (see e.g.: Sheffield City Council 2011). The situation persists in which 'modern languages', 'English' and 'community languages' are perceived as three distinct, unrelated areas. Even in a multilingual school, there is more likely to be debate around which language to teach between, say, German and Spanish, than there is around which speakers of which community languages as mother tongue languages might benefit from learning which particular European language.

The issue of 'lack of engagement' is something relatively new, not part of the 'traditional' language diversification debate (see above). From a position of 'languages for all' (Department for Education and Skills 2002), we now have the situation where pupils can opt out of language learning. This sees 'disengagement' as a real language 'choice'. Instead of French, German and Spanish being in competition with each other for pupils, there is now a fourth option: no language. This introduces real dilemmas for the teaching and learning of all languages. The league tables are hugely important for most schools and many schools now 'play the game' to maximize their position. Focusing on league table positions means that it is in a school's best interests to only enter pupils for exams who can actually pass exams, and even then achieve a particular minimum grade. If a pupil looks like they may struggle in a language, the possibility is now there for 'disengagement' from language learning altogether. I would argue that 'lack of engagement' should be a consideration in any debates about language diversification.

Considering the overarching focus of this paper, the challenges for German in England's schools are overwhelmingly large. There is competition from a number of sources, including other languages, other subjects and disengagement. There is the question of staffing and resources. Perceptions, particularly of the attractiveness of Spanish and the difficulty of German, remain. The impact of league tables is a major influence in all curriculum issues. Head teachers and regional and national governments

influence the teaching and learning of German in schools, even if indirectly and for non-linguistic or non-educational reasons.

But there is also still a lot of positive news in relation to the teaching and learning of German in England's schools, as evidenced in this paper. Where it is well-taught and well-supported, it appears to thrive. Where there is a focus on visits and an engagement with the country and real German people, it acts as a positive force. But this is obvious. Where more energy should now be focused I would argue, is on the schools where German is threatened or declining. That remains an issue for further research and development.

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**Biographical details**

Dr Mark Payne is a lecturer in Education at the University of Sheffield. He is a former secondary teacher of German and Spanish and currently co-ordinates the Modern Language Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). His research interests include language teaching and learning, second language acquisition and language planning.