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Bringing the world home: Languages and Area Studies in Australian universities

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Abstract
If Australia is to remain a literate citizen of this rapidly changing world, we need to understand not just the anglophone West and the large-scale bloc politics of world regions but also the deeper forces that drive nations and regions. Language is essential to understanding of any given nation or region. But what do we find in our university language departments? Dwindling enrolments, dying courses, and frustrated highly qualified academic staff teaching beginners language courses. In this article I explore the connections between languages and area studies at our universities with a view to suggesting alternatives in the ways in which we present languages and their populations to our students.

Keywords: Language education, Area Studies, Globalization, Australian identity

Introduction

We Australians consider ourselves pretty well-informed about the world, even in comparison to Europeans and especially Americans. After all, most of us hold passports and as a nation we travel far and wide. But the war in Ukraine has brought home to me the gaps in our knowledge, even about Europe, let alone of the further reaches of the globe. If Australia is to remain a literate citizen of this rapidly changing world, we need to understand not just the anglophone West and the large-scale bloc politics of world regions but also the deeper forces that drive nations and regions. Yet current courses in global studies leave a lot to be desired when it comes to non-English-speaking regions. That is, to most of the world.

This has been my rationale over the past ten years or so for working closely with Bruno Mascitelli in particular to build *ANZJES* as a forum for Australian researchers to continue to work on, think about and publish their results and findings in a local journal that has international coverage. It hardly needs to be said that Europe and the EU are of immense importance to Australia, not merely in terms of trade balances but also for educational and cultural interchange. *ANZJES* was always a broad-based journal in terms of the disciplines and approaches covered: we pride ourselves on its breadth in coverage of everything from economic and political inquiry to social and cultural analysis. Coming from a languages school with a background in German literature, my particular interest was to maintain coverage of the latter areas and not to let the journal drift into EU Studies alone, important as that is for the journal's existence. Of course the focus is contemporary, but that makes it all the more interesting for me, given the lack of coverage of cultural matters and their socio-

political importance in this most sophisticated of global regions in terms of its self-representation across the artistic spectrum.

When Bruno invited me to contribute to this 30th Anniversary issue of *ANZJES* I decided to explore my involvement in the journal in terms of my concerns at the state of my own discipline at the University of Sydney and across Australia generally. The European Studies program at this university is situated in the School of Languages and Cultures and hence while the generalist units are taught in English, we have a strong commitment to language learning in allied majors. My commitment to *ANZJES* as an Australian research outlet and source of detailed academic and scholarly knowledge springs from my concern at the disengagement of tertiary language-teaching from the task of knowing and understanding the nations and regions of Europe, and indeed of the world, particularly as we move into new global configurations in the 2020s.

Language is essential to understanding of any given nation or region. But what do we find in our university language departments? Dwindling enrolments, dying courses, and frustrated highly qualified academic staff teaching beginners language courses … The tertiary-level teaching and learning of languages is in dire straits in Australia today. The statistics tell it all. Enrolments have been in free-fall since the seventies. We rank second last in a recent OECD survey of school-level second language study and only 9.5% of Year 12 students now take a language compared to 16.1% in 1982. At tertiary level with only 2.3% of domestic students taking a language in 2020, we are at a 20-year low, down from 3.8% in 2010 (Reeve & Prince, 2022). Many recent commentators focus on Asian languages, but the issue is not confined to one region or group of languages (Reeve & Prince, 2022; Dabrowski, 2015).

For me as a tertiary-level teacher and scholar of European Studies and in particular language, literature and culture, none of this is news. And yet the war coverage on TV, in the daily papers, and the responses of people on the street turn my attention to the wasted skills and knowledge bases in our university language departments. In this article I explore the connections between languages and area studies at our universities.

Language teaching programs in Australia

To begin with, let's look at the history of language teaching in our universities since the War.

From 1945 until 1989 the Pax Americana rendered Australia safe in the Cold-War global situation as an ally of the US during a time of relative world stability. During the post-war era Australia's ongoing reliance on British models enabled languages to survive primarily as cultural capital: they were the portals to classical European education and to personal self-knowledge. The national philologies provided the teaching model for "modern languages" (mainly French and German) at the university level, an approach that was dependent on students having reached a relatively high degree of linguistic skill by the end of their secondary schooling. Grammar and translation were prioritised in order to read literary texts. Little emphasis was laid on speaking competence (Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2009, p. 15; Lo Bianco, 1987).

With the accession of Britain to the European Community in 1973, Australia faced a world in which old securities were wearing thin. The alliance with the US preserved Australian security interests even as China began to emerge from its isolation after the

rapprochement between President Nixon and Chairman Mao in the early seventies. By the early nineties, ALP Prime Minister Paul Keating introduced a new model into Australian political thinking in the wake of the economic instability after the first Oil Crisis. Australians began to reposition themselves in an emerging Asia that was consolidating a new regional and global identity.

Multiculturalism reached its peak as the Australian-educated offspring of post-war migrants and their community groups began to agitate for the inclusion of their languages into the school curricula by the mid-seventies (Lo Bianco & Slaughter 2009, p. 19). Community languages were flagged as a national resource by Lo Bianco in the 1987 *National Policy on Languages*, "the first explicit language policy in Australia and the first multilingual language policy in an English-speaking country" (Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2009, p. 16). Languages of business and economic opportunity were also prioritised alongside dominant ethnic community languages and the traditional European languages of a humanities education: Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Modern Greek, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese and Spanish.

The 1987 Hawke government supported in principle the learning of Asian languages and Hawke's ALP successor Paul Keating introduced the National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) strategy in 1994. The Japanese program led the way in Australia's new self-perception of its role in Asia even after the economic promise of Japan faded (Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2009, p. 16). Federal governments continued to adopt the recommendations of several reports on Asian languages during the eighties and nineties with the result that by 1990 Japanese enrolments overtook French at the secondary level (Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2009, p. 23).

The community languages have not fulfilled their early promise. Lo Bianco and Slaughter use the term "subtractive bilingualism" to identify the effective loss of community-language fluency by the third generation (Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2009, p. 59). Greek schools attempt to maintain the language, but few students take Greek after completing HSC. The same situation applies to Arabic in the Muslim schools. Chinese has a large demand and uptake in secondary schools but experiences a dramatic falling off after the first year (Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2009, p. 45). Vietnamese has found little uptake at tertiary level and Indonesian continues to have problems attracting students.

Meanwhile the foreign language requirement for entry into Arts and Humanities degrees at Australian universities was discontinued across the states and tertiary institutions from the late sixties onwards. The consequence was a dramatic drop in enrolment numbers in French and German by the late seventies and the eighties. With the exception of the rise in Japanese enrolments, there was no corresponding rise across the Asian and community languages, so that by the time the post-war era came to an end, few of those Australian students who would progress into careers in teaching, writing, commentary, journalism, or the media had studied a language, even a traditional one such as French or German.

The university language departments tried to weather the loss of their advanced (i.e. post-Year 12) students from the seventies onward by introducing the Beginners' courses which today cater to the bulk of domestic language enrolments. In place of the national philologies that were now beyond the linguistic reach of so many students, universities would offer more Australia-focused foreign and community languages or LOTEs (Languages other than English) with attention to the broader social and

cultural components of language, community and identity. These changes took place in response to local and international pressures but resulted in a weakening of the literature, society and culture components of language majors and exposed academics in language departments to professional peripheralisation in Arts and Social Sciences faculties. They found themselves deprived of teaching in the fields of history, society and culture (since students could no longer manage complex literary and other texts), losing peer recognition in their specialisations and increasingly occupied with basic language instruction. The consequence has been that students are learning language skills in the language departments but moving to the larger disciplinary departments for their honours and postgraduate specialisations as historians, literary scholars, linguists and sociologists – and hence are missing out on this specialised instruction.

In 2007 Lo Bianco cited the decline from 66 languages on offer in 1997 to 31 at the time of writing, and many more have disappeared since then (Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2009, p. 56). Other previously healthy languages such as French and even Japanese are declining in numbers of staff and students. Some are teetering on the brink of collapse, others such as Hebrew and Greek are held together only by funding from their respective ethno-national community groups.

In the 2007 discussion paper, *Languages in Crisis: A Rescue Plan for Australia*, the Group of Eight Universities focused on the history of steadily declining enrolments and reduction of language offerings at the tertiary level. Not for the first time calls were made for major government intervention and incentives at the university level (such as bonus entry points) to encourage language study for the good of the nation. The most recent comprehensive overview, Lo Bianco and Slaughter's 2009 ACER Report, *Languages in Australia,* concludes that Australia needs a "comprehensive rationale for languages" preserving and moving beyond narrow or singular multicultural and elitist educational justifications in order to "develop a humanistic, cultural and intellectual legitimation" that at the same time maintains practical applications in trade, commerce and global interchange (Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2009, p. 59). Lo Bianco, himself a strong early advocate of community languages, stresses the unique preparedness of Australians for broad and deep language ability and awareness on the basis of the history of post-war immigration. However he does not engage with the failure of Australians to capitalise on this preparedness.

Most recently Indonesian language specialists Reeve and Prince place their hopes in the 2020 *Jobs-ready Graduates Package* which includes languages (albeit as a minor element) alongside science and other subjects that allegedly prepare students for employment and hence merit lower fees (Reeve & Prince, 2022). But this hope from the *deus ex machina* of government policy misses the point of the earlier ACER report. After all, we have been hearing the same thing since the first *National Languages Report* of 1987 and the situation has only worsened in the intervening decades. Successive reports and ongoing federal and state government policies of support have not had any major long-term effect on tertiary enrolments across the nation.

Policy is one thing; change is another and in terms of solutions these reports are less concrete. At the institutional level Lo Bianco and Slaughter identify issues such as lack of long-term planning, *ad hoc* responses to immediate issues of economic or other interest, shortage and poor preparation of language teachers, and above all, the predominant perception that foreign languages are unnecessary as English is the *de facto* world language (Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2009, p. 59). However there is nothing

new in these suggestions. And while short-term planning in schools is still a problem, preparation and training of language teachers has improved greatly since the seventies. The main problem is that Australians do not see the need to learn languages in a world where they can get by with their native English.

This is not to bemoan the loss of the national philologies. Times have changed and these changes took place in response to local and international pressures. Now, at what may well be the end of the transitional period that began in 1989, new regional power blocs have formed, and the world is changing dramatically. In Australia we are experiencing increased marginalisation in the wake of the emergence of China as a superpower and the competition for global superiority among the major powers, the US, China and Russia. We are finding ourselves in a world that we understand less and less, despite the extent of our tourism. As historian Mark Edele notes regarding the differences between contemporary International Relations and the historical view of the longer term, *"international relations scholarship [...] doesn't rest on detailed knowledge of any one time, place or culture; instead, it tries to construct universalising models to be applied to any case* (Edele, 2022). International Relations may explain the dynamics of the global power blocs and their consequences, but they do not tell us why Russians have felt it appropriate to go to war with Ukraine, for example. This latter knowledge is equally important for our understanding of the world, and we need to work together with university departments of Political Science and International Relations to engage more deeply with language and culture as a means of comprehending national societies and regional identities. Australians need to overcome the clichés of the past and engage knowledgeably with global change. They need analysis and understanding of the new Russia, China, Europe, India and Latin America in ways that they did not during the post-war era. As we move into the fourth decade of the "new world order," old alliances are breaking under pressure and new nationalisms are emerging, reforming the global order. The Australian journalists in London and New York are no longer at the centre of things. And while many of the globally mobile reporters for the international news services have command of languages relevant to their main areas of engagement, scholars and academics are required who command deeper knowledge and understanding of the socio-historical and cultural sources of tension and change.

Relatively few university faculties of Arts and Social Sciences have changed in order to effectively grow into and accommodate this new world order.

Language and Australian identity

One wonders after reading the various reports that have appeared since the 1987 *National Languages Policy why* Australians have proven so resistant to learning languages in the school and university systems and *why* community languages stagnate and decline so rapidly in this multicultural environment (Lo Bianco, 1987).

The fragility of languages in Australia is not merely the result of the failure of grammar teaching in the classroom or the wrong emphases in high-level government policy. The lack of a stable sense of identity, purpose and place is the result of more complex factors that go deeper to the heart of the nature of language and understanding of the world.

Commentators on Australian identity point to factors such as the declining post-war relationship to Britain and the increased dependence on US military and strategic power. The country was dependent on the British Empire and its attitudes, beliefs,

institutions and behaviours, and then forced to split allegiances in order to accommodate gratitude to the US for its protective role in the Pacific during the Second World War, relying on US culture and soft power during the post-war era and increasingly fragile as Britain cultivated its relationships with its neighbours and the European Union.

The influx of unfamiliar languages, behaviours and cultures that came with the mass immigration programs created angst among post-war Anglo-Australians. In the sixties and early seventies, before multiculturalism had taken hold, the sound of foreign languages in the streets of the suburbs would typically generate aggressive or wounded responses among Anglo-Australians. The typical response to hearing Greek, Italian, Serbian or Lithuanian spoken in public was “Why don’t they learn the language if they want to come here?” It may have been xenophobic, even racist … But underlying and fuelling the response was not a sense of cultural superiority; quite the opposite. It was hostility born of envy. Australians “don’t have a culture” was the other dominant trope of the times and it complemented the hostility towards the immigrant other. It was yet another version of the post-colonial “cultural cringe.” It wasn’t true of course. But when my parents, for example, heard and saw Greek people in the street speaking among themselves, carrying string bags with all sorts of strange foodstuffs, they were secretly envious. Because even these Greek migrants had “culture.” This sense of inferiority, of having missed out on something despite living in the “luckiest country in the world” permeated middle-Australian culture of the fifties and sixties. It was the classic “chip on the shoulder” of the time. (A telling joke of the era: “What is the definition of a ‘well-balanced Australian’?” “One with a chip on each shoulder.”)

That envy would gradually turn to appreciation, even enjoyment as multiculturalism opened up the cultures in Australia to each other and as Australians began to accept their own as well as others’ cultural attractions, even if only at the level of food. Australians began to identify in different terms. A herald of that change was Australian writer, Charmian Clift, with her weekly columns from the Greek island of Hydra in the middle-of-the-road evening newspaper, *The Herald* in the sixties.[1] I still remember my mother reading and enthusiastically talking about her, an Australian woman out there experiencing the world, sharing Greek culture, writing about it, creating the ongoing love-affair between Australia and Greece that extends well beyond the descendants of those early migrant families. Clift’s novels consolidated the experience into Australian literature; meanwhile her husband, George Johnston created the tragic icon of failure in the classic *My Brother Jack* (1964).

My memories of typical attitudes toward self and other in the Australia of the fifties and sixties point to underlying ambivalences which persist about foreign languages and cultures despite the plethora of reports and policy statements. “New Australians” learned to keep their languages to themselves and at home, and “Old Australians” continued to feel disconcerted by languages other than their own brand of Aussie English. (Indigenous Australians had not even begun to impinge upon these identity formations at that stage.) Each side, “old” and “new,” had become aware of the capacity of language to unsettle.

The policy of multiculturalism since the seventies, funded in the form of the Migrant Resource Centres and embodied in SBS radio and television from the early eighties

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[1] Clift and Johnston lived on Kalymnos from 1954-1955 and Hydra from 1955-1964. Clift’s articles appeared in the Melbourne *Herald* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* between 1964 and 1969.

under the rubric of "bringing the world back home," helped to bind multiple ethno-cultural identities into a sense of shared Australianness. It proved successful in creating an integrated and relatively tension-free Australian society, but it did not encourage engagement outwards with the rest of the world. Culinary multiculturalism was popular, avoiding engagement with aspects of cultures and value-systems that could potentially unsettle the narrative of happy coexistence. The history of hostility between Serb and Croat community groups in Melbourne from the sixties through the eighties was indication enough of the dangers. As a Greek teacher of history at my secondary school once remarked regarding Greek-Macedonian tensions, "some things are best left back there." Difference could be interesting and enjoyable at one level, but it could also remind people of old antagonisms and hostilities which found expression in their respective linguistic idioms. At that point, too, bewilderment set in for those onlookers who did not share the memories and knowledge of what happened "back then" and for whom this was just another manifestation of the problems that came with difference. We are seeing similar issues arising in parts of Europe, such as Sweden, where the traditional "high trust" society is suddenly confronted with difference. Multiculturalism was fine as long as it remained superficial, but old insecurities persisted.

For these reasons too, the dominant approach of the eighties, the community languages championed by Lo Bianco and the new Labor government, stalled. The ethnic communities kept their languages to themselves, retaining them through the Saturday schools where possible, but gradually losing them for the most part by the third generation. Many of the children of immigrants wanted to be "Aussies" and if that involved ditching a language that seemed hopelessly backward-looking, then so be it. Indeed the success story of the eighties, Japanese, was neither a traditional "modern language" nor a community language in any major sense and was never taught as one.

No amount of government policy will change deep-seated attitudes. If a country such as Australia cannot maintain community languages beyond the second generation, and the bulk of the population think that global English is just fine as a solution to world communication, then something deeper and more serious is at stake than misguided government policies. With their focus on economic rationales and ethnic community language "resources," the surveys, reviews and government policies that appeared in the wake of the 1987 *National Languages Policy* did not engage with deeper-lying issues of national identity in addressing Australian language education.

It is only at the university level among those whose specialisations are the languages and cultures of nations and regions that these issues of language, identity and global literacy can be conceptualised in the terms required, namely of understanding of the significance of the nexus of language and culture in the broadest sense to the understanding of global society. We academics have the linguistic skills and disciplinary training to frame issues in terms of the historical, social and cultural contexts that determine them, to formulate them in objective terms regardless of ethno-cultural identification, and to communicate them in their complexity.

Languages and Australian global literacy

China seems relatively well covered in Australian media, with detailed discussions of recent work by figures such as Peter Hartcher, Clive Hamilton, James Curran and others in the daily papers. But journalists and commentators are products of an environment where language skills are pushed to the background and global English

is dominant. University of Adelaide academic and China specialist, Mobo Gao, recently criticised Australian reporter Stan Grant, one of our best, for a badly informed and unhelpful article on China, citing in detail inaccurate judgements and ideologically driven conclusions (Gao, 2022). In a comparable vein, University of Technology Sydney Professor of Media and Communication Studies, Wanning Sun, points out that many of the so-called China Watchers regularly consulted by our journalists are themselves current or former journalists whose media-savvy confidence and articulacy disguise the fact that they "know little about China" (Sun, 2022).

Coverage of nations such as Italy, Greece, Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia and the smaller countries and regions of the former Yugoslavia, not to mention even Germany and France, is also limited and usually relies on syndicated or freelance contributions via the major English-language global news distribution companies. Perhaps the problem is born of complacency. Journalistic coverage of the European Union in the wake of Brexit has been consistently more closely allied to British than to European views and attitudes, reflecting Australia's anglophone perspectives on the rest of the world, at least in institutions such as journalism and the media, despite their presentation of themselves as global citizens. Ultimately the linguistic and socio-cultural proximity to Britain overshadows other perspectives.

Language is the defining factor. Detailed up-to-date information depends on knowledge of the target language. It is difficult to get reliable information without access to the various local news sources and without knowledge of how those societies function. We may live in an era of the "perceived predominance of English" (Lo Bianco 2009, p. 9), and the perception may even be justified in areas such as world trade, communication and sharing of relatively superficial knowledge. But as soon as you scratch the surface of world English, the inadequacies appear. International English is a convenient *lingua franca* but, shorn of its cultural specificities, it fails to plumb the depths of national or regional affairs. Neither superficial journalistic reportage nor generalised political theory is sufficient to explain why the war is happening in Ukraine, for example. Only by relating present events to their specific pasts and their contextual cultures can we begin to understand what is happening and why. Those students of university Arts and Social Sciences faculties who want to understand the complexities of world politics, societies, histories and cultures can be taught by scholars with the languages and understanding of nations and regions that enables them to explain the events that are unfolding in the newspapers now.

Area studies and languages education

As a university language academic and specialist in several European national and regional languages and cultures, I view this situation as one of wasted resources and opportunities. We language academics are a dwindling and under-utilised national resource that is still clutching at straws from the past. We have failed to move with the times. In terms of languages, we have stagnated and as a result they are dying out in our institutions. At the same time we have the resources to realign ourselves to the needs of the current global situation without sacrificing all that we hold dear in terms of our disciplines, namely the deep interaction between language and socio-cultural understanding. Only the languages academics themselves have the wherewithal to ensure that the epistemological nexus of language and society remains intact. We need to provide a narrative of what we do and why languages are needed. We need to build this narrative into the generalist courses that make up the bulk of humanities and social sciences degrees. We can do this best by incorporating our languages into

courses that enable students to understand the nation or region under study through a sustained and coherent narrative of how present society came into being, what were the determinants of its identity and how that identity impacts on contemporary political situations. There is no point lamenting the death of languages in Australian universities unless we can give students and their parents compelling and convincing reasons why they are worth studying. This is not happening mainly because school and faculty heads are unwilling to challenge the status quo of the course structures and the collegial arrangements of academic staff.

As the Cold War came to an end in 1989, various commentators announced the beginning of a new world order. Two in particular dominated during the mid–nineties: Francis Fukuyama with his thesis of the unification of global identities under the benign wing of liberal capitalism, followed by Samuel Huntington with a rather more hawkish view of future global tension as a product of cultural rather than political or ideological conflict. At around the same time, US political sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein chaired a committee of social and natural scientists and humanities scholars funded by the Gulbenkian Foundation to produce a report on the disciplinary organisation of the social sciences since the nineteenth century and to identify new directions for the organisation of knowledge over the following decades. The final report, *Open the Social Sciences: Report of the Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences* was published by Stanford University Press in 1996, and while (intentionally) controversial, made the point that the post-war model of social sciences and humanities teaching and research was exhausted. It no longer provided an adequate framework for understanding the emerging world order. The Report makes some rather grandiose claims regarding the nature of knowledge and the status of the disciplines, but nevertheless recognises, as Fukuyama and Huntington had done, that a new era was dawning and that new ways of mediating global knowledge and understanding might well be required that no longer adhered to the nineteenth-century models of the social sciences and humanities disciplines. The simultaneous appearance of the Gulbenkian report alongside Fukuyama and Huntington as heralds of a “new world order” suggested that political, social and intellectual change was occurring and that we needed to move with it. We didn’t. And we have been paying for it ever since as our languages and disciplines die out.

The current model of language teaching in Australian universities is broken and can’t be fixed. The Australian language departments have not managed to create a new and compelling narrative of what they are and what they do. And yet they offer a huge amount of expertise which is lying under–utilised in their respective language departments. At a time of re-orientation and change in the role and function of languages at Australian universities, scholars in the areas of cultures, histories, politics and societies can either act to provide this knowledge to the academic and general community and at the same time save their unique disciplines in otherwise primarily monolingual university environments. Or they can continue to participate in the ongoing disciplinary demise as they fill their workloads with base-level language classes in the majority Beginners streams.

A new model

Wallerstein et al. argued for a reorientation of the social sciences to the changing patterns of the modern world system. The report advocated a new *area studies* approach to the organisation of knowledge in the post-Cold War world. Working from a historical overview of the ways in which social sciences disciplines were constructed

as forms of knowledge between the eighteenth and the mid–twentieth centuries, the report argues that developments since the mid–twentieth century require changes in the way we construct, organise, present and disseminate knowledge as the systematic secular understanding of reality. In this process the humanities along with the social sciences have become more scientific in the sense of developing analytical and interpretative laws based on observation and deduction rather than religious authority or theoretical abstraction. Common to them is the collection of empirical data and the application of theoretical frameworks to constitute disciplinary knowledge.

The aim of this re-conceptualisation was to bring social sciences and humanities together, working within their disciplines on the basis of shared interest in a given area. In the language of the report, "area" indicates a large geographic zone with cultural, historic, and often linguistic coherence such as the Soviet Union had been, the United States, South Asia, Southeast Asia, China/East Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, Western (the EU) and Eastern Europe.

Wallerstein's report advocates area studies as the framework for contemporary interdisciplinary and shared sources and repositories of knowledge. Essential to this undertaking are increased cross- and interdisciplinary capabilities which require a fundamental change in the model of intellectual work from the individual to the group. Area Studies brings social sciences and humanities disciplines together in a comprehensive framework in which the anglophone West is no longer predominant but co-exists as a civilisation and a set of regions alongside others in the global context. Language, history, sociology, politics, literature, and cultural studies would together contribute to knowledge and understanding of areas while retaining their disciplinary epistemologies as ways of knowing. Systemic biases born of linguistic, post-colonial and other forms of power would be exposed and revised, and minority and hitherto peripheral perspectives included. The pluralistic universalism of area studies would accept coexistence of different interpretations of an uncertain and complex world and would entrench cultures as the frameworks for knowledge.

The aim would be a combined or selective set of area studies programs in which language study is immersed in the broader field of the global region as one essential factor in the understanding of the whole. This is not an issue of what to study, but rather of how to conceptualise, organise, and advocate it in such a way as to speak more directly to contemporary needs and requirements. But it will affect the way languages are offered at the tertiary level. It will take different forms in different faculty structures, but the fundamental principle of embedding language learning as a necessary skill for a knowledge-based society in the current global order will remain the same.

A possible first model for a school offering a range of languages would be to weave language study into a major program or programs, depending on economies of scale, offering discrete units alongside language acquisition and enabling students to specialise in one area such as European, Asian, Spanish/Latin American, Middle-Eastern or Sub-continental studies, or to choose a coherent mix of regional study areas relevant to their language study and skills. Core units in area studies methodology would be available to the whole cohort with the various language levels operating according to intake skills levels. Such a reconceptualisation of the languages as repositories of area studies knowledge, as opposed to linguistic skill, would maximise the impact of these departments, attract students to language learning by rendering it

inseparable from learning about those areas of the world that interest them and that are not accessible simply via English, and would improve the standing of the language schools which are currently perceived as little more than language acquisition units. Ultimately languages could become integrated parts of all majors, available to all students who want to study global regions, not just those offered by language schools.

Coming from language departments, demonstrating their unique understanding of the issues pertaining to their national and regional language areas, scholars can begin to heal a long-standing rift in Australians' perception of the role and function of language departments in the contemporary world.

My suggestions represent an opening move in the game of engaging Australians with languages and the world after decades of insecurity and linguistic neglect at the grass-roots levels. It is a concrete challenge to languages academics to save their disciplines: offer students the world and make them learn a language in return. They'll thank us for it in decades to come.

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