

Engaging with the Past: Lessons from the History of Modern Languages at the University of Adelaide



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Abstract Modern languages have been part of Australia's tertiary education system ever since the country's first universities were created in the nineteenth century. Their collective and individual fortunes, however, have waxed and waned at various points during that long history. Taking the University of Adelaide as an example, this study seeks to identify some of the key factors, both systemic and local or individual, that have had an impact on the fate of modern languages over the extended period of their history at the institution. This will in turn point to possible ways of negotiating the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

Keywords History of languages · Australian universities · Modern languages · Tertiary education · University of Adelaide · British tradition · Curriculum development

1 Introduction

In the jungle of the modern university system, the struggle for survival can be a serious drain on people's time, energy and morale, particularly for those in the smaller disciplines such as languages, whose position seems to come under scrutiny every time there is a funding squeeze. It is nevertheless worth reminding ourselves that languages have been taught in Australia's tertiary education system, in some form or other, since the first universities were founded in the nineteenth century. While it is true that this history is not in itself justification for the continued existence of language programs, especially in the minds of administrators for whom tradition counts little compared to the budget bottom line, it can be therapeutic to step back

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from the exigencies of the present and to consider the broader historical perspective—partly to reassure ourselves of the enduring place of languages, notwithstanding their ups and downs, but perhaps also to derive some solace or even lessons from that long and respectable tradition. As Wallace Kirsop reminds us (1991, p. 312), “reflecting on our past is a way of making sense of our present and defending our future.” In order to defend that future, he adds: “We need to know, and to be able to explain, what we are doing.” Taking the University of Adelaide as a case study, the aim here is not to present a history of modern languages at the institution—a task that is beyond the scope of this essay and that has already been the subject of an extended study (Fornasiero and West-Sooby 2012)¹—but to trace the fluctuating fortunes of languages over that broad history with a view to identifying some of the factors behind the various highs and lows. In this way, some intersections between past and present may come to light.

2 Founding Context: The Influence of Tradition

The history of languages at the University of Adelaide dates back to the very origins of the institution, which in 1874 became the third of four universities to be established in the colonies during the nineteenth century, the others being the Universities of Sydney (1850), Melbourne (1853) and Tasmania (1890). In that pre-Federation context, the model on which these fledgling universities were based was that of the British education system, where a training in classical languages was highly valued. Accordingly, when teaching for the Bachelor of Arts began at the University of Adelaide in 1876, Latin and Ancient Greek were an integral part of the curriculum, in addition to the other traditional subject areas, namely Philosophy, Mathematics, English Language and Literature, and the Natural Sciences.²

It took another decade before the BA rules changed to allow students to count the study of French and German towards the degree (from 1887 onwards), but modern languages were nevertheless part of the University’s remit from the outset by virtue of its responsibility for the matriculation process. For the very first matriculation examination, in 1876, French and German were granted the status of “special subjects”, alongside Latin and Ancient Greek. Italian was added in 1882. The University’s Education Committee determined the syllabus, set the examination papers and made provision for marking them. French and German likewise featured in the various school-level examinations established during the first decade or so of the University of Adelaide’s existence: the University Primary Examination,³ the

¹ Much of the factual information presented here derives from that account.

² See Newbold (2012) for an account of the history of Classics, including the teaching of classical languages, at the University of Adelaide.

³ This examination was established in 1878, based on the model of the Oxford and Cambridge Local Examinations. The five Divisions in which students needed to demonstrate their level of general education were as follows: Division A—The History of England and English Literature;

Junior and Senior Public Examinations, the University Scholarships Examination, among others. Modern (European) languages were thus part of the landscape of the university from its beginnings, albeit at the margins.

The numbers of students presenting for these examinations in French and German provide a measure of the popularity of language study at pre-university level, and perhaps foreshadow the momentum that soon gathered for the inclusion of French and German in the BA curriculum. 1881 is a good reference point, as this was the year in which women were admitted for the first time as undergraduate students at the university. In that year, 4 boys and 10 girls presented for the French papers at the matriculation and University Primary examinations, with 26 boys and three girls presenting for the German papers. The numbers for the period 1881–1883 are summarized in Table 1:⁴

The commencement and pass numbers for the BA in 1882 help to contextualize these figures. So too do the matriculation statistics: there were 58 matriculation candidates in 1881 (of whom 38 were successful) and 48 in 1882. It is interesting to note, in passing, the strong interest in German in these early years—a reflection, no doubt, of South Australia’s unique German heritage—and also the dominant numbers of boys in German whereas for French girls are most strongly represented. This gender distinction would become something of a trend during the longer history of the two languages.

A considerable amount of expertise in foreign languages was readily available among the staff of the university, and that expertise was regularly called upon during these early years, with the university often providing examiners to mark the final papers in French, German and Italian. Some teaching (of French) was also conducted by senior members of staff in the Faculty of Arts as early as 1884, though instruction in modern languages and literatures remained sporadic until dedicated appointments were made. To sum up this foundational period, then, it is fair to say that modern languages enjoyed something of an ambivalent status. On the one hand, their prominence in pre-university examinations shows that they were highly valued

Table 1 Enrolments for language examinations, University of Adelaide, 1881–1883

| Matriculation + University Primary Examination | 1881 | 1882 | 1883 |
|--|-----------|----------------------|-----------|
| French (boys/girls) | 14 (4/10) | 17 (6/11) | 26 (4/22) |
| German (boys/girls) | 29 (26/3) | 33 (33/0) | 14 (10/4) |
| BA | | 4 commenced | |
| | | 3 passed first year | |
| | | 1 passed second year | |
| | | 2 passed third year | |

Division B—Latin and Greek; Division C—French and German; Division D—Mathematics (Arithmetic, Algebra, Geometry); Division E—the various science disciplines.

⁴Information presented in this paper on enrolment numbers, staffing and curriculum has been derived principally from the following sources: the annual University calendars, University Council papers and Edgeloe (1990).

and considered important to a well-rounded education—and in this, as Jim Coleman has observed in his brief history of the introduction of modern languages in the British university system, they no doubt benefited from the “reflected prestige” of the study of ancient languages (Coleman 2001, pp. 121–123), which also provided the model for curriculum content and teaching methodology (heavily based on the written language through grammar and translation). Conversely, modern language study in these early years was not a core activity of the University and remained at the fringes of its preoccupations.

3 Integration: Curriculum Development and Advocacy

It was through the process of institutional curriculum development at degree level that languages took the first steps towards proper integration into the University of Adelaide’s mainstream teaching. A number of undergraduate degrees came into effect during the 1880s, and in all cases modern languages were listed as a pre-requisite for entry to the degree or for the degree to be conferred, or else as an optional subject within it. This was the case for the Bachelor of Science, which allowed space in its first-year curriculum for the study of French and German when it was introduced in 1882. While most science students continued to study Latin and Greek, this initiative is worth highlighting as it was only in 1887 that modern languages were allowed to count towards the BA.⁵ For entry to the Bachelor of Medicine, which commenced in 1886, one of the five requirements was a pass in either Greek, French, German, Italian or “any other Modern Language” at the Preliminary Examination of Medical Students.⁶ In 1887, the newly introduced Bachelor of Music required students to achieve a pass in “one other language” at the Senior Public Examination—not to enrol in the degree but to take it out. It is clear that, in opening up space for modern languages, this expansion of the institution’s degree offerings paved the way for their subsequent integration within the University’s core teaching activities.

While this development could be attributed to a general acknowledgement of the value of language study, it also owed much to the influence and advocacy of some of the University of Adelaide’s leading figures. Several of the institution’s distinguished scholars had expertise in French or German—or both—and were more than

⁵In their first year of study, students in the Bachelor of Science had to pass two of Latin, Greek, French or German. As the records show, however, most science students in those early years chose to present for examination in Latin and Greek. It is only in the 1886 Calendar that we find French and German examination papers for the BSc, which suggests that there were no candidates prior to that (University of Adelaide 1886).

⁶This examination required students to sit for papers in English, Latin, Elements of Mathematics, Elementary Mechanics of Solids and Fluids, and one of a number of optional subjects: Greek, French, German, Italian, any other Modern Language, Logic, Botany, Zoology and Elementary Chemistry (University of Adelaide 1887).

willing to contribute to the advancement of the cause of modern languages by taking responsibility for the various examinations, at pre-university then at university level. The Elder Professor of Mathematics, Horace Lamb, served as examiner for German from 1882 to 1885 before handing over the baton, on his departure, to Edward Vaughan Boulger, the Hughes Professor of English Language and Literature, and of Mental and Moral Philosophy, who was also the examiner for French. Boulger subsequently took responsibility for the French and German examinations at the BA level, once they were permitted as third-year subjects for the degree in 1887, having become the first to offer classes in French at the University, in 1884. His successor as Hughes Professor of English, William Mitchell, similarly served as examiner for French and German. His commitment to languages was evident in his first public speech, in which he expressed the view that their study led to an enhanced appreciation and mastery of English. This support was pivotal, as Mitchell subsequently became Vice-Chancellor (1916–1942) then Chancellor (1942–1948) of the University. Others to take on stewardship for languages during the 1880s and 1890s included the University Registrar, John Walter Tyas, and members of Council, such as Horace Lamb, Adolph von Treuer and John Anderson Hartley, who also served as Vice-Chancellor (1893–1896). Languages at that time had friends in high places.⁷

Minutes of the various University committees bear witness to the commitment and advocacy of these influential figures. Boulger, who was appointed to the University in July 1883, wasted no time in pushing the languages barrow, and he found in Hartley a like-minded colleague. The Minutes of the Special Council Meeting held on 9 May 1884 record that it was Hartley who moved: “That it is desirable for the University to give instruction in French and German and that the Education Committee be requested to report whether it is possible to make arrangements for classes in these subjects.” (University of Adelaide 1884a) This motion was duly discussed at the Education Committee meeting held on 13 June 1884, at which Hartley conveyed Boulger’s generous offer to provide classes himself:

Mr Hartley said that Professor Boulger had expressed to him his willingness to give instruction in French and German in the first instance in order to try the experiment of founding such classes and *that* without raising any question of payment. Mr Hartley suggested that the fees paid by students should be paid to the lecturer or teacher as an honorarium. After some discussion it was resolved to recommend that the idea of forming a German class should be postponed for the present but that a class for French shd [sic] be established under Professor Boulger—the success (or otherwise) of which would be a guide as to the future establishment of a German class (University of Adelaide 1884b).

Boulger would have preferred the University to hire dedicated language teachers, but in offering to deliver classes himself, his plan was to generate sufficient interest and demand for such appointments to become necessary in the short to mid term.

⁷The level of scholarship in French and German that these men possessed is attested by the curriculum for which they had stewardship: in addition to grammar and translation, the curriculum in both languages included philology, literature and the national histories of France and Germany. See Fornasiero and West-Sooby (2012, pp. 140–141) for a more detailed description.

4 Becoming Mainstream: Funding and Serendipity

Boulger's strategy met with mixed success. On the one hand, the evening classes in French, after some initial difficulties, attracted sufficiently good numbers of students over the ensuing years for the University to extend the experiment, hiring local native speakers on a casual basis to teach both French and German. This, together with the continuing strong numbers of language students at matriculation level, demonstrated a good and consistent level of demand. On the other hand, the University continued to defer its decision on making dedicated full-time language appointments. By way of illustration, the Education Committee convened on 19 August 1885 to discuss the question: "Whether it were practicable to give instruction in Modern Languages—and whether it were desirable to make two modern languages optional instead of Greek in the Arts course" (University of Adelaide 1885), but this resulted merely in a decision to defer the matter and to ask the Registrar to seek information on what was being done in this regard at the Universities of Melbourne and Sydney, and in New Zealand. It appeared, as the French expression has it, that it was "urgent to wait".⁸

The situation changed just before the turn of the century, thanks to an injection of funds and a dash of serendipity. On the funding side, one of the founding fathers of the University of Adelaide, Sir Thomas Elder, died in 1897, leaving a significant bequest to the University's School of Medicine and School of Music. This sudden influx of money provided the institution with some much-needed flexibility for new initiatives in other areas as well. In that same year, a German scholar of some note arrived in Adelaide to assume duties as Pastor of St Stephen's Lutheran Church in Pirie Street. Through his work at St Stephen's, Ernst Johann Eitel, or Ernest John Eitel as he was also known, soon developed links with the local German-speaking community, which in turn brought him to the attention of the University. The combined circumstances of Eitel's arrival, his distinguished background, the sudden availability of funds, and the continued demand for language study led the University in 1898 to offer him an appointment as part-time lecturer in German—an offer he duly accepted.

Eitel's intellectual path to this position was somewhat unusual. His background was in theology, but he developed a deep interest in the language and culture of China during his many years of missionary service in that country. He also served as head of the Education Department in Hong Kong before leaving for Adelaide. This engagement with education, language and culture (albeit Chinese) was in some sense a form of preparation for his new duties as lecturer in German. Eitel certainly approached the task with diligence, in any event, and even a degree of innovation,

⁸In their "Short History of the Teaching of French in Australian Universities" Ivan Barko and Angus Martin note that there was a similar hesitation surrounding the nature of modern language teacher appointments at the Universities of Sydney and Melbourne: "From the outset the concept that modern languages can be taught on the cheap was embraced by the powers that be. Underlying this idea there was the covert feeling that the teaching of modern languages was not an academic discipline." (1997, p. 23)

introducing a new emphasis on literary criticism that strengthened the German syllabus.

During Eitel's tenure, which commenced in 1899, modern languages began to move from the periphery to the centre of the University's operations, as their place within the BA evolved. French and German had previously been "half subjects" for the third-year examination, but from 1907 they became full-scale individual subjects, to be completed over 2 years. Importantly, from 1909 onwards, a new emphasis on the use of the target language was signalled: as specified in the syllabus entries at that time, lectures for both French and German were delivered in those languages, and students were required to use them to answer all examination questions (with the obvious exception of translations into English). This use of the target language as the language of instruction soon became enshrined as a practice, and has endured to this day in the teaching of modern European languages.

Eitel died in 1908, at the age of 70, and, for reasons that are not made clear in the archival documentation, he was not replaced. It was only at the end of the war that fresh appointments were made in modern languages, first in French, then in German.

5 Consolidation and Expansion: Stewardship

In 1918, John Crampton took up a position as "Lecturer in French language in the University and Teacher of French in the Elder Conservatorium" (University of Adelaide 1918). Two years later, Adolf John Schulz, who, as Principal of the Teachers' Training College, had been part-time lecturer in Education since 1910, was given the additional responsibility of teaching the two-year course in German.⁹ The timing of these appointments is interesting, coming as they did at the end of the war. It is tempting to surmise that Crampton's position owed something to the connections that had been forged between France and Australia. This may have had some influence; however, the records suggest that educational reasons were the primary motivation for creating this position. Conversely, it might seem that the war would have mitigated against an appointment in German. There were some who argued for the usefulness of "knowing the enemy", but South Australia's strong German-speaking community and the legacy of Eitel would no doubt have been contributing factors. Be that as it may, under the stewardship of these two new staff members, the position of French and German in the University curriculum was finally secured. The differing career trajectories of Crampton and Schulz, however, resulted in contrasting fortunes for the two languages during the middle decades of the century.

In contrast to Schulz, who remained primarily engaged in the field of education and teacher training, Crampton was able to focus all his energies on language teaching and on the development of the French curriculum. A graduate of the University

⁹For more details on Schulz's personal and professional life, see Penny (1988).

of London, where his training was almost certainly in the Classics (Edgeloe 1990, p. 11), he had also studied at postgraduate level in Paris. The various changes he made to the syllabus led to a strong and steady growth in enrolment numbers that further consolidated both his position and the place of French within the BA. The introduction of a third-year French course in 1924 marked a significant milestone, as it allowed Crampton to relinquish his language teaching duties at the Elder Conservatorium and to devote his entire attention to the teaching of French for the BA. Another major change—and a break with the tradition bequeathed by the teaching of ancient languages—was the addition to the French curriculum of an emphasis on the spoken language. This may be a result of his experience as a student in France, which would have reinforced the importance of practical language skills. Crampton added the study of phonetics to the first-year syllabus, and students in both first and second year were required to undertake a conversation test as part of the end-of-year examination process. In 1927, students for the first time attended group tutorials “for exercises in oral French, including conversation, reading, and dictation”. As Barko and Martin observe, Crampton’s emphasis on the living language, together with the study of historical grammar and literature, “was consistent with ‘best practice’ at the time” (1997, p. 46).

Significantly, when the growth in student numbers justified a second appointment in French, the University formally designated that the development of speaking skills would be the core duty of the successful candidate. The appointee in question was none other than John Crampton’s only daughter, Hope, who joined the staff of the University in 1930 as Assistant Lecturer and Tutor for French. After graduating from the University of Adelaide with an MA in comparative literature on Shelley and Leconte de Lisle, she had spent two years studying in Paris, where she was awarded a Diploma from the Institut de Phonétique. Her extensive in-country experience thus provided her with a solid grounding in language study, to complement her literary training. In order to foster students’ oral skills, one of Hope’s main duties was to establish a “French Language Club”, which she promptly did during her first year in the job. The Adelaide University French Club has its origins here. In those early years, attendance at the weekly meetings of the French Club was compulsory and its activities were a core part of the curriculum.¹⁰ These activities were less formal in nature and included what we would call today role-play exercises and the performance of scenes from plays. This can be seen as the beginning of another enduring tradition: the annual French Club play. Understandably, the dynamic nature of the French curriculum at that time combined with Hope Crampton’s lively and innovative teaching generated much enthusiasm among students for all things French.

During the time of the Cramptons, French began to flourish. German, on the other hand, stagnated during the middle decades of the century. The two key factors in these contrasting fortunes were personnel and curriculum development. On the

¹⁰Attendance at French Club remained compulsory at undergraduate level until 1958, three years before Hope Crampton’s retirement.

staffing side, not only did French benefit from full-time positions, but the incumbents were local personalities who were active in the cultural life of the town. John Crampton was certainly in this mould, and when he retired in 1937 his replacement, J. G. (Jim) Cornell, involved himself with even greater energy in those “outreach” activities. Cornell had completed an Honours degree in French at the University of Melbourne in 1925, studying under the charismatic Alan Chisholm. This was significant, as Cornell’s teaching at Adelaide would bear all the hallmarks of Chisholm’s influence: a rounded approach based on a solid grounding in practical language skills and philology, but with a particular emphasis on the study of French literature and culture. Like his predecessors, Cornell had also studied in Paris (1927–1929), earning a Licence ès Lettres from the Sorbonne and graduating at the top of his class. The appointment at Adelaide and elsewhere in the country of Australian-based scholars, many of whom, like Cornell and the Cramptons, had studied in Europe, was an important development which contrasted with the earlier tendency to hire native speakers.¹¹ As Wallace Kirsop notes, the rationale behind this was the notion that language teachers were “cultural mediators” who helped to interpret foreign cultures for Australian students. While this exclusivist position later softened, through the appointment of French “lecteurs”, for example, which Cornell instigated at Adelaide, there is still a sense in which language departments need to be mindful of the duty of explaining other cultures to Australians “from a local vantage point” (Kirsop 1989, p. 6).

The French curriculum expanded rapidly during the period of Cornell’s tenure, through a combination of personal initiative and institutional change. At the individual level, building on the momentum generated by Crampton’s curriculum developments, Cornell established an Honours program in 1939 followed by an MA program in the 1940s. On the institutional level, Cornell’s arrival in 1938 coincided with significant changes to the rules of the BA. The new regulations required students to complete two major sequences, of three courses each, leading to increased enrolments across the board. One of the ten courses for the Ordinary BA also had to be a language other than English. Candidates for BA Honours had to have passed first-year Greek, Latin, French or German. A pass in at least one course in a modern European language was a pre-requisite for Honours in English, and the ability to translate from French, German or Italian into English was required for Honours in History and Politics.

In the case of French, these developments had a profound effect, not only on enrolment numbers but, just as importantly, on the level of respect the discipline enjoyed. A concrete manifestation of this new-found status was the promotion of J. G. Cornell to Professor of French in 1944. The Honours cohorts in French during this period are a further sign of the discipline’s prominence within the BA. When

¹¹ Kirsop elsewhere makes the point that many native-born Australians who studied in France or Germany were not afraid to challenge the models they had encountered there: “The paradox is that in a discipline [French] that can be peculiarly subservient to foreign models people have dared to think for themselves and to want to reform aspects of the way things were done in the Old World.” (1991, p. 309)

Honours in French was first offered, in 1943, two students enrolled. This figure might seem modest by today's standards but it takes on more significance if we consider that, in that same year, there were only two other Honours graduates in the entire Faculty (both in Political Science and History). The flourishing fortunes of French also led to an increase in staff numbers, which had risen to five by 1951.

During all this time, the reliable Schulz, as a part-time lecturer, kept a steady but modest teaching program running virtually unchanged, with the classes for German I and German II remaining combined for almost the whole period from 1920 to the early 1950s. Student numbers give an indication of the growing disparity between the two languages (Table 2):

The numbers in English for 1927 help contextualize these figures. If we recall that at this time English, French and German were grouped together under the banner of "Modern Languages and Literatures", the failure of German to keep pace with its two "companion" disciplines becomes even starker.

It seems unfair to attribute this stagnation of German to Schulz, whose main duties lay elsewhere. It is unclear whether the low demand for German was the result or the cause of the University's failure to make a dedicated full-time appointment in German. The strong anti-German sentiment that developed during and after World War I, and which was rekindled with the outbreak of the Second World War, would certainly not have helped the cause. One might expect that German enrolments would have benefited from the strong German presence in South Australia. However, the young men and women from that community frequently went to Germany to study. This was particularly the case for the trainee pastors in South Australia's Lutheran community. Whatever the reasons, German maintained only a modest presence within the University during a time when French underwent significant expansion.

This situation changed following the appointment of Albert Percival Rowe as Vice-Chancellor in 1948. Although he became a contested figure, Rowe was responsible for an expansion program that saw considerable increases in staff and student numbers. German benefited from this ambitious program with the creation in 1949 of a full-time position of Senior Lecturer, to replace the part-time position occupied

Table 2 Student enrolments in French and German, University of Adelaide, 1923, 1924, 1927

| Pass Students | 1923 | 1924 | 1927 |
|--------------------------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|
| German | German I: 3 | German I: 1 | German I: 3 |
| | German II: 3 | German II: 1 | German II: 3 |
| French (BA only—others in BSc) | French I: 27 | French I: 34 | French I: 30 |
| | French II: 10 | French II: 15 | French II: 18 |
| | | French III: 7 | French III: 9 |
| English | | | English I: 52 |
| | | | English II: 21 |
| | | | English III: 10 |

by Schulz.¹² It was 2 years before the position was filled, and another year again before the successful candidate began teaching (1952), but the appointment of Derek Van Abbe—not as Senior Lecturer but as Reader in German—proved to be the turning point for German at the University. Not only did Van Abbe completely rejuvenate the German curriculum during his 10 years at Adelaide, but his prolific publication output, at a time when research publication was not an established expectation, brought significant prestige to the discipline. As far as the curriculum was concerned, Van Abbe was quick to make up the ground that German had lost to French, adding German III in 1952 and an Honours program in 1955. With a bolstered curriculum, enrolments in German finally started to increase. Other initiatives added to that momentum. In 1954 Van Abbe offered a course in “Scientific German” which allowed staff and students to attain a reading knowledge of the language for study and research purposes. On the strength of that experiment, he introduced a mainstream beginners course in German in 1959, well before such courses became the norm in Australian universities. French at Adelaide did not follow suit until 1973. With a creative and respected figure at the helm, German was now showing French the way forward.

Further appointments in German soon followed, beginning with Brian Coghlan in 1953 then Hendricus (Henk) Siliakus in 1955. Both were graduates of the University of Birmingham and both had a significant impact on German, and on modern languages more generally, over the ensuing decades, albeit in very different ways. Coghlan was a scholar of literature and music, in particular Wagnerian opera, his work in this area earning him a solid reputation as a musicologist. Thanks to his interests in German culture, he quickly developed strong connections with the State’s German-Australian community and was an active member of the South Australian branch of the Goethe Society. Like his counterpart in French, Jim Cornell, he played a prominent role in the local theatrical and musical scene, serving as President of the University Theatre Guild and as a member of the University Music Society. Coghlan’s appointment as the first Professor of German in 1962, following a brief stint at the University of New England, brought considerable prestige to the discipline. Siliakus, for his part, was instrumental in modernizing the teaching of modern languages at the University of Adelaide. He was the driving force behind the creation of the institution’s first language laboratory in 1964, whose operations he guided from its beginnings in 1965 until his retirement in 1989. By the early 1970s, the ground had shifted: staff numbers in German had grown to nine, whereas French had stalled at seven.

The varying fortunes of French and German during the 50 or so years from the end of World War I to the start of the 1970s can be attributed to a number of factors, but principal among them was the importance of having an imaginative and energetic figurehead, and preferably one with a public profile. By seizing or creating opportunities for curriculum development and teaching innovation, and by taking a

¹²Schulz retired from the bulk of his duties in 1948 but kept the German program going until the arrival of his successor in 1952.

leading role in what we now identify as “outreach” activities, key players such as John Crampton, Jim Cornell, Derek Van Abbe and Brian Coghlan succeeded not just in consolidating the position of French and German within the institution, but also in enhancing their prestige and bringing them to prominence.

6 Ebbs and Flows: Systemic Pressures

Those who followed in the footsteps of those influential figures have often needed to show the same kind of drive and initiative in order to negotiate the opportunities and challenges that have arisen within the tertiary sector in Australia in the latter decades of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. While modern languages were in a reasonably strong position at the University of Adelaide, as elsewhere, from the 1960s to the 1980s, some systemic challenges did confront them. Chief among these was the change to university entrance requirements in the late 1960s, which meant that a pass in a foreign language at matriculation level was no longer needed for enrolment in the BA or any other degree. This led to a dramatic drop in the numbers of students studying modern languages in secondary schools. In response, university language departments began to introduce *ab initio* courses of study, where these did not already exist, in order to shore up numbers. Curriculum content also began to change, whether in reaction to the need to attract numbers or simply as part of the *Zeitgeist*. During the 1970s, courses in French and German at the University of Adelaide featured the study of cinema, comparative literature, applied linguistics, practical drama and contemporary society. The study of literature remained a central part of both programs, but these began to take on a thematic flavour, instead of the traditional period-based model, and non-canonical texts entered the syllabus—from Austria, East Germany and the broader Francophone world. Whether they grew out of necessity or were the product of a new and broader perspective on the disciplines, these developments were all positive.

The 1970s also saw the establishment at the University of Adelaide of new language disciplines, notably Chinese and Japanese. This was the first of several initiatives that produced an expansion in the number of modern languages available for study. The spur for this was a student petition in the early 1980s protesting against the absence of Italian at the University of Adelaide.¹³ When staff in Italian at Flinders University became aware of this, they offered to provide classes on the Adelaide campus. This sowed the seed for what would later become known as the “Outreach Program”, which formalized reciprocal language teaching arrangements between Adelaide and Flinders. One of its features was that staff, not students, travelled across town. Thanks to this and a variety of other collaborative arrangements, students at the University of Adelaide from the mid 1980s through to the end of the

¹³ Tuition in Italian had been offered to students of Music ever since the establishment of the Elder Conservatorium in the 1880s but, unlike French and German, Italian did not transition into a fully fledged BA subject.

1990s had a considerable range of languages from which to choose: Italian, Spanish, Modern Greek, Latvian and Indonesian through the Outreach Program; and Arabic, Polish, Ukrainian and Russian as a result of institutional cooperation with a number of universities (Macquarie, Melbourne, Sydney). Notwithstanding the administrative difficulties that these arrangements occasionally entailed, this looks in retrospect like something of a golden age for modern languages. It is perhaps no coincidence that this period also corresponds to a certain political bipartisanship with respect to multiculturalism and the place of languages, which was exemplified by the Australian parliament's endorsement in 1987 of Joseph Lo Bianco's landmark National Policy on Languages.

In reality, however, the situation of a number of those languages at Adelaide was fragile, with limited student enrolments and small staffing contingents. When funding pressures began to affect the system, that vulnerability was exposed, often with dramatic effect. The recent history has indeed been less rosy. Paradoxically, as we know, student numbers in the tertiary sector increased significantly in the 1990s, but funding became tighter and staffing numbers began to diminish. At the end of that decade, the University of Adelaide lost its Vietnamese program. The vagaries of Commonwealth funding arrangements also led to the Outreach Program with Flinders being wound back. Staffing complements in French, German, Japanese and Chinese began to shrink on the back of retirements and other departures, despite increases in student load.

The story of languages during the last 20 to 30 years is, however, not all doom and gloom. In 1991, the French Department, whose existence had been questioned by the Faculty but was staunchly defended by the Dean, filled two vacant positions with scholars whose research interests in modern and contemporary literature strengthened the publication record and curriculum offerings in French. They subsequently embarked on new research—on French exploration in the Indo-Pacific in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—that highlighted the deep historical links between Australia and France. This work, which has had significant public outreach, was supported by two Australian Research Council grants as well as by the French Embassy in Canberra. Other appointments during the last two decades have added new dimensions to the research profile which likewise enhanced the reputation of the Adelaide French Department and strengthened its position. More ARC success has come in 2018. The situation in German, meanwhile, deteriorated following the departure during the 1990s of its two professors and the subsequent reduction in staff numbers, which put greater teaching pressures on those remaining. The result was a decline in German's research reputation—though the recent appointment of two emerging scholars provides hope for an up-turn. A similar story can be told for the university's Asian languages. As Colin Nettelbeck, John Hajek and Anya Woods (2012) have noted, the increased casualization of language teaching and the erosion of senior positions have had a significant impact on the level of leadership in languages. This only makes it more important for those left standing to rise to the challenge and work to establish a strong research agenda, especially in a context where the quality and impact of research have become national and

institutional priorities (Lo Bianco 2012). Students pay the bills, but research earns respect.

Enrolment numbers of course remain an imperative, precisely because they do provide the funding base. Despite the systemic pressures, or perhaps in response to them, the competition for student numbers has led to many important curriculum initiatives over the last 20 years. At the course level, the diversification of offerings that emerged during the 1970s has continued apace, as language departments have sought to cater for an ever more diversified range of student motivations. Paradoxically, as staff numbers have contracted, the range of course topics has expanded. This has been reflected in the research interests of staff, leading to a fragmentation of language disciplines, as various commentators have observed in the case of French (Kirsop 1989, p. 5; Forsdick 2012; Hainge and Rolls 2014, p. 272). Languages at Adelaide have not escaped that trend. At the program level, following the lead of the University of Melbourne, languages staff at Adelaide successfully argued for the introduction in 1998 of a Diploma in Languages, to allow students with insufficient room in their Bachelor degree to undertake a major sequence in a language. This was specifically aimed at students enrolled in degrees outside of the Arts Faculty but also proved popular for Arts students wishing to add a language major to their degree studies. A Bachelor of Languages was introduced as a niche degree in 2011 and has proven to be more than viable. Finally, while the number of languages offered has decreased, Spanish was established as a discipline in 2009 and has been a valuable addition to the “language ecology” at the University.

7 Conclusion

Over their long history, modern languages at the University of Adelaide, despite their ups and downs, have demonstrated their resilience. Institutional and systemic factors have at various times had a decisive influence on their fortunes, for better and for worse. On the other hand, history has also demonstrated the positive impact of strong advocacy and leadership, both within and beyond the confines of the institution. If there is any lesson to be learned from this extended history, it is perhaps that, while systemic changes may be largely out of our control, languages staff need to roll with the punches, bunkering down when times are tough but also seizing opportunities when they arise and even initiating them, with imagination and vision. Further challenges no doubt await languages in the future, and programs may indeed come and go, but history suggests that universities in Australia have not finished with languages yet!

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