

The Complex and Changing Face of Higher-Education Language Teaching in the Republic of Ireland.

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Abstract.

The landscape of language learning and teaching in higher education (HE) in Ireland is complex and varied. Between institutions, a diversity of organisational structures are identifiable and, even within institutions, it can be seen that the provision of language education can vary significantly. In this paper, we present an overview of complexity within language education in Irish higher education which we investigated as part of our scoping exercise for the Higher Education Language Educator Competences (HELECs) project. In order to manage this complexity, we have taken a number of different approaches to gathering and analysing relevant data. Firstly, we attempt to ascertain which languages are offered and the programmes within which they are available. We rely here on data gathered by Post-Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI) and published on the Careers Portal website. Secondly, we present an analysis of the structure of language provision units within Universities and Institutes of Technology (IoTs). These data are publicly available through the institutions' websites. Thirdly, we provide a detailed examination of the complex constellation of staff profiles involved in language education at four institutions representing the categories of higher education institutions (HEIs) in the system. We interrogate language units' websites to obtain this information and augment it with data gathered through the HELECs project. In presenting these data, we aim to provide an overview of the landscape of language teaching and learning in HE in Ireland. In conducting this data analysis, we identify areas of concern for the sector including: the visibility of languages within HEIs; the multiplicity of professional identities of those who teach language in HE; and issues of precarity of employment and career progression in HE language education.

Keywords: Degree programmes; Language learning; Organisational structures; Staff categories.

1. Introduction.

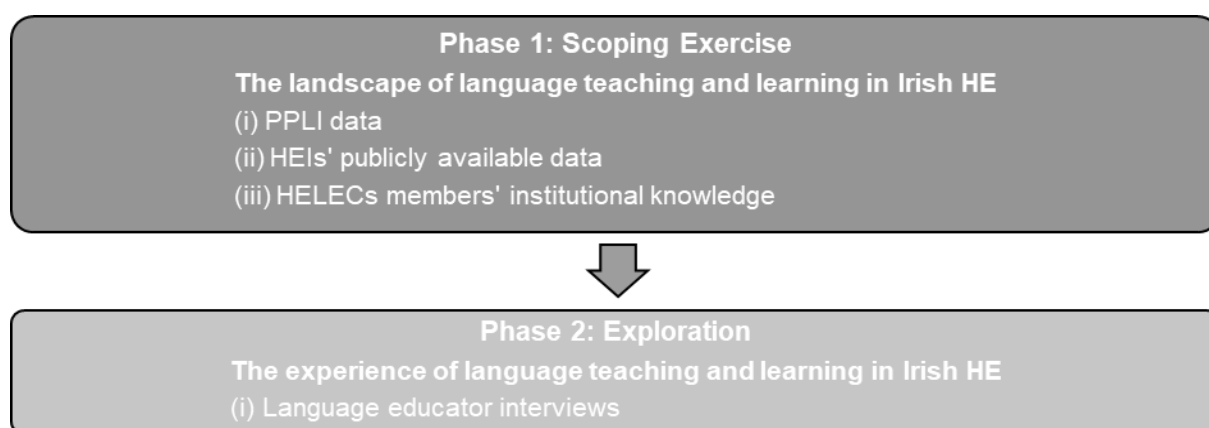
The In 2017, after a lengthy and comprehensive consultation period, the Department of Education and Skills published Languages Connect - Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017–2026, a policy document which aims (a) to improve the quality of language education provision across all levels of Ireland's education system, and (b) to dramatically increase the number of students learning a foreign language in higher education institutions (HEIs) by 2026, from 4% currently to 20% by the end of the strategy period. With the exception of some studies focused solely on Institutes of Technology (IoTs) (c.f. Carthy, 2019; 2018; Berthaud, Walsh & Brogan, 2018), to-date, no data have been published about the provision for language learning at universities, and certainly none bringing together data from both sectors of Irish higher education. In this article, the complexity of language provision in Universities and IoTs in Ireland is analysed as part of the Higher Education Language Educator Competences (HELECs) research project, an inter-institutional project, funded by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, investigating the range of language teacher skills needed in higher education (HE), with the aim to develop an empirically informed professional development framework. The article begins with an outline of the languages and programmes offered, followed by an analysis of the structure of language provision units within universities and IoTs, and importantly a detailed examination of the complex constellation of staff profiles involved in language education at four HEIs within the Republic of Ireland. In order to bolster the representativeness of this sample of four HEIs, two institutions were from the National University of Ireland (NUI), one was a non-NUI university, and one was an IoT. The data underlying this article are based on publicly available information published on HEIs' websites, augmented by institutional data collection from four stratified sample HEIs across the university-IoT divide, as well as data from the Academic Year 2020/21 provided by the Post-Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI), a dedicated unit originally set up in September 2000 with a remit of diversifying, enhancing and expanding the teaching of languages in second-level schools throughout Ireland, and has responsibility for implementing key actions in the Languages Connect Strategy (PPLI, 2022). The rationale for utilising publicly available information published online is two-fold. Firstly, universities do not share confidential and sensitive information around institutional arrangements of language units, their staff, and students. Secondly, analysing the content within publicly available information and its presentation alongside the data collected through interviews with stakeholders at 4 stratified

random-sampled HEIs provides significant insights into the ecological and ideological standpoints on foreign languages institutionally. The strata comprising the sample were institution type within the university sector (i.e. NUI Vs non-NUI), geographical spread (i.e. greater Dublin area and other urban centres) and representation from the Institutes of Technology (now Technological Higher Education sector).

2. Methodology.

The empirical research within the HELECs project was conducted in the Academic Year 2019/2020 and comprised three phases, two of which provide the data analysed with article.

Figure 1: HELECs empirical research phases.



As this article will elucidate, the language teaching and learning landscape in Irish higher education is complex and varied so that the need to survey the landscape emerged as a vital starting point of the research project. Therefore, the initial phase of the project's data collection and analysis aimed to map language teaching and learning in HE in Ireland. It was immediately apparent that structures and practices vary widely between and even within institutions. Consequently, the official websites of the HEIs where languages are offered as well as the data gathered by the PPLI (2020) regarding the programmes on which languages are offered were interrogated. The HELECs team members then investigated their own institutions to gather the more granular data by mining intensively the institution's publicly available information. This involved extensive searching to locate information on each HEIs' language provision through their web presence, prospectuses and other marketing materials and institutional

documentation including module descriptors, compiling the mined data in a shared document and organising the data using the key variables outlined below in Sections 3, 4 and 5. This was then further augmented by each team member's own institutional knowledge. This process was conducted at each of the four sample institutions, which as highlighted earlier, were representative of the constellation of institutional typologies characterising the system. Particular areas of complexity identified in the data were:

- the array of degree programmes and disciplinary areas within languages are offered;
- the types of units within which languages are housed;
- the management structures within language education;
- the plethora of designations for language educators;
- the diverse qualifications and disciplines characterising language educators' profiles.

The second phase of the data collection aimed to explore the experiences and perceptions of key stakeholders regarding the competences of HE language educators. The primary focus here was the language educators themselves as they are best placed to identify the competences that they possess and aspire to develop. Full approval was obtained from each of the four participating HEIs' respective Ethics Committees for interviews to be conducted. A total of nineteen language educators from the four project partner institutions were interviewed. Interviews explored the typology of language educator roles and duties and responsibilities associated with each role, educator roles, educators' educational backgrounds and experience, the competencies identified as vital and opportunities for professional development and career progression within their roles. The research participants were interviewed by a HELECs team member from another institution in the sample to avoid any potential conflict of interest and ensure that research participants did not feel inhibited in their responses. A summary of the language educator interview participants can be seen in Table 1. Seven languages from the language teaching and learning landscape were captured in the interview study including Irish, the European languages which are traditionally dominant in the Irish education system (French, Spanish and German), less commonly taught languages (Italian and Chinese) and one minority language (Basque). The range of participants' role designations is also worth noting. A total of ten different titles were captured in interviews with educators including academic roles where the educator's main focus is on work other than language teaching, teaching-focussed roles where the educator is concerned mainly or exclusively with the provision of language and '*other*'

roles which are generally temporary positions used to cover language teaching which cannot be delivered by permanent and/or otherwise contracted staff members. Furthermore, it is important to note that three research participants interviewed under the ‘*Academic*’ category were either current or former heads of language units, and therefore in a position to provide managerial views.

Table 1: Profile of language educators interviewed by HELECs.

Academic	Teaching-focused	“Other”
Professor	College Language Tutor	Part-time
Assistant Professor	(University) Tutor	PhD student
Senior Lecturer	Lector/Lektor	
Lecturer (above the bar)	(externally funded)	
Lecturer (below the bar)		

Interviews lasted approximately one hour and interviewers used a guided interview approach where the participants had received the interview guide one week in advance of the interview. Consent forms and participant information leaflets were also provided to and signed by each participant. Interview data was transcribed and then analysed in NVivo following a conventional approach to Content Analysis, where codes were derived and defined during the data analysis with no imposition of existing hypotheses.

2.1 What languages are offered?

In this section, the language programmes that are offered at HEIs in Ireland are outlined. We have drawn on an extensive survey of language degree programmes conducted by the PPLI. It is our understanding that the data were gathered by examining HEIs’ websites and contacting relevant individuals within each HEI (e.g. Heads of Department/School) who were able to provide more refined detail on the language provision available in their respective institutions.

Some limitations of the data include the fact that terminology may vary from HEI to HEI, for example, in most universities, a ‘*major*’ would be a subject for which a student would take at least 30 ECTS in their final year. However, in IoTs a ‘*major*’ is seen as a compulsory element of a degree programme. We have attempted to simplify the data so that it can provide a comprehensible overview of the landscape, however in doing so, we necessarily eliminate some of the granular detail within individual degree programmes. We cannot, for instance, comment

on the content of courses beyond the language provision element. Many language degree programmes also encompass literature, culture, linguistics and media studies but we do not address these elements. We focus on the provision of languages within undergraduate degree programmes (level 7 or 8 of the National Framework of Qualification¹); as these constitute most of the language learning in the HE system. We also discuss the provision of languages on a minor basis and identify Institution-Wide Language Programmes (IWLPs) where they are available and indicate other extra mural options for language learning at higher-education level.

Our investigation of higher-education provision in languages reveals that the language offering as major within degree programmes in the system is spread across the seven universities, Ireland's only Technological University (TU) at that point in time (TU Dublin) and only four IOTs, all of which are publicly funded. Figure 2 offers an illustration of PPLI data on the HEIs that offer languages as part of a major degree programme in the AY2020/21. The languages most frequently offered as major subjects are French, German, Irish and Spanish, which is consistent with the numbers of students taking languages for the Leaving Certificate (State Examinations Commission, 2019). Both Spanish and German are offered at ab initio level while French is usually only offered at Post-Leaving Certificate level or equivalent qualification in French (with the exception of MU). Chinese is the most frequently offered non-European language; while Japanese is offered to a lesser degree.

Turning to the language offering on a minor subject on degree programmes at the HEIs captured in the PPLI data, it is our understanding that these are offered as integral parts of the degree programmes and are distinct from the Institution-Wide Language Programmes which will be discussed below and under Section 4. Languages in this category mirror the provision of languages as a '*major*' with the addition of a wide range of smaller languages e.g. Greek, Catalan, Dutch, Basque, Hebrew etc. The majority of the degree programmes where languages can be taken as a major are Bachelors of Arts programmes including pure language programmes (e.g. Applied Languages at UL, World Languages at UCC), General Arts (Intl) programmes, and Business and Commerce.

¹ <http://www.nfq-qqi.com/>

Figure 2: Languages offered at HEIs as a major within a degree programme.

	Universities								Institutes of Technology ²			
	DCU	NUIG	MU	TCD	TU Dublin	UCC	UCD	UL	CIT	IT Sligo	LYIT	WIT
Irish												
French												
Spanish												
German												
Italian												
Chinese												
Japanese												
Korean												
Portuguese												
Russian												
Polish												

Languages offered as a minor or elective are most commonly found on Business and Arts degrees, with languages in a “*minor*” capacity being twice as common on Business (10 programmes) than Arts (6 programmes). In the context of extra mural, evening courses and IWLPs, UCD is the only HEI that has a language centre³ dedicated to providing an IWLP within which courses are offered in a wide range of languages e.g. Arabic, Chinese, English (for general and academic purposes), French, German, Irish Sign Language, Italian, Japanese etc.

As can be seen from the above description of programmes including a language component at the various HEIs, language educators are dealing with students from a wide variety of disciplines and with a range of objectives for their language study. Within Arts programmes, we can presume that, as well as general proficiency, students also require training in how to approach literary texts, discuss film and other media, and take part in discussions in the target language. Students who take a language within a Business, Tourism or Law degree, however, may have very different aims for studying language, and may be focussed on proficiency in the context of

² CIT is now Munster Technological University (MTU), IT Sligo and LyIT have become part of Atlantic Technological University (AIT) and WIT is part of South East Technological University.

³ A ‘*language centre*’ is understood here as a unit within a university that is focused on the provision of language teaching services e.g. evening courses. It is oftentimes a distinct a separate unit from academic language departments/schools.

the workplace. IWLPs offer further complexity in that these are administered to students in all programmes across the institution. This requires language educators to deal with a multiplicity of needs within one classroom and potentially a variety of proficiency and motivation levels. These data further highlights the specific case of language education in HE and demonstrates the myriad competences that a language educator needs to possess.

3. Where is language teaching housed?

In this section, a focus on the organisational structures of language units within HEIs offers some insight into the status of languages within HE while supplying important contextual information to our forthcoming discussion of the variety of language teaching staff and their educational backgrounds in Section 5. Furthermore, in the context of managerial structures around language education in HE, more often than not, leadership of the language provision may fall to staff whose focus is on disciplines other than language education.

As is the case with other aspects of language provision, the organisational structures within HEIs is complex and varied. We have attempted to organise the diversity of the landscape by firstly addressing the provision of so-called “*modern languages*”. This usually includes the most commonly taught ‘*foreign*’ languages in Ireland, French, Spanish and German, but may also encompass Asian languages, minority languages and sometimes Irish. As Irish is more often housed in its own unit, separate to the other languages, we address this separately. We then describe the situation at the Institutes of Technology where the provision of languages differs significantly from universities; the organisation of languages often takes place outside of a clear departmental or school organisational structure as it is traditionally understood (c.f. Berthaud et al., 2018, p. 13).

The data for this section has been gathered from the HEIs’ official websites and interpreted by the team who have a broad knowledge of the landscape from institutional experience. Where the information on these websites is not up to date (as accessed in October 2019) or not readily accessible, some imprecision is inevitable. We have concentrated on the two main types of HEI in Ireland, university (including TU Dublin) and IoT. Private HEIs and HEIs with specific foci (such as teacher training colleges or HEIs funded by government agencies other than the Department of Education) have not been included. However, we are confident that the discussion of the university and IoT sectors will provide a reasonable overview of the issues involved.

3.1 Foreign-language units in universities.

There is high degree of heterogeneity in terms of the organisation of language provision units in both systems, but particularly at the seven universities and one TU. However, at each university there is a School of Languages within which language, culture, linguistics, literature and other subjects are taught. At some universities, the individual languages within the School are designated '*subjects*', '*disciplines*', '*departments*' or '*sections*'. The School is the digital access point through which information on language teaching and learning is accessed, and shapes the identity of language provision staff. At others, the Department of a specific language seems to be the stronger identity with the School being an umbrella for the language departments.

The model which forefronts the School can be seen at the School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies (SALIS) at DCU. In this case, the individual languages are not listed at all on the School website but can only be accessed through the module information under the description of undergraduate degree programmes. Staff within the School are listed on the webpage as academic, administrative or research, but no language affiliations are evident.

NUIG is identified as a weaker version of this model: there is a strong school identity and there are no language departments per se. However, the languages within the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultures, known in this case as disciplines, have a strong presence on the website and a seemingly differentiated identity. In addition, it should be noted that language is also provided within NUIG by Adult Education and Professional Development which runs evening Diploma courses in French, Irish, Italian and Spanish.

At UL, there is a similar emphasis on the School but in this case the constituent languages (French, German, Japanese and Spanish) are listed on the School webpage as '*sections*' and staff are categorised by the language they teach or research in. Each section also has a section leader whose research interests are largely anchored in the language and culture they teach and relate mainly to literary or cultural studies.

UCD presents a similar context in that the School has a strong presence, but the language disciplines retain their respective identities. The separate Applied Language Centre offers the Institution-Wide Language Programme, the director of which has research interests in language education and Second Language Acquisition.

The School of Languages, Literature and Cultural Studies, TCD; the School of Languages,

Literatures and Cultures at UCC; and the School of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures at MU are divided into language ‘Departments’ at UCC and ‘Sections’ at MU⁴ with strong respective identities. Exceptionally, at MU the Head of School position is a five-year term, advertised publicly and is consolidated into a specific academic post of Professor of Modern Languages, Literature and Cultures. MU offers an IWLP which is housed in its language sections, however this has been reduced in scale in the academic year 2019/2020. UCC offers a ‘*Languages for All*’ programme which allows students of specific programmes (such as Law, Computer Science and Public Health) to take language for credit within their degree programme. These are also administered by the language departments.

The School at TCD stands out as the only School of Languages which incorporates Irish as one of its departments. TCD also has a School of Linguistics, Speech and Communication Sciences which includes the Centre for Language and Communication Studies (CLCS). The disciplines of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics as well as the teaching of the IWLP (“*Trinity Electives Programme*”) are housed in CLCS, while the focus within the School of Languages is on Literary Studies, though language is also taught in that context.

3.2 Irish-language units in universities.

The position of the Irish language within the Irish education sector has traditionally been kept separate from the modern/foreign languages. This is evident from the minimal reference to Irish in the Languages Connect document and from the differences in the teaching of Irish and other languages at post-primary level as referred to by David Little (2003) in his paper for the NCCA. The discreteness of Irish language provision is also evident from its non-integration into Schools of Languages at most universities.

TCD and NUIG are the only universities in Ireland which have an Irish department within its School of Languages, etc. At UCC, there is a School of Irish Learning, separate from the School of Languages, which incorporates the three departments: Modern Irish, Early and Medieval Irish, and Folklore and Ethnography. The Department of Modern Irish is responsible for the degree students’ language proficiency as well as modern literary and cultural knowledge. UCD School of Irish, Celtic Studies and Folklore brings together the disciplines of Modern Irish, Irish Folklore, Celtic Civilisation, Early Irish, Welsh and Irish Studies. Irish at UL is situated within the

⁴ While departments are generally independent units with control over their own decision-making and financial affairs, ‘sections’ are distinctive units under a School structure with some devolved decision-making power, but without financial independence.

School of English, Irish, and Communication where Irish language and literature are taught to degree level, and the Aonad na Gaeilge, which is responsible for the promotion of Irish at the university, is affiliated with the School.

The School of Celtic Studies at MU comprises the Sections of Early Irish, Modern Irish, Irish Cultural Heritage and the Centre for Irish Language. It also has an Office of Irish which is separate from the School and has responsibility for promoting Irish at the university. The Irish language centres (Ionad na Gaeilge Labhartha at UCC and Larionad na Gaeilge at MU), offer the IWLP for Irish. DCU has a School of Irish (Fiontar & Scoil na Gaeilge) which is not affiliated with SALIS, as well as the Office of Irish, the latter having similar responsibilities as those of the Office of Irish at TCD and MU, and the Ionad at UCC.

3.3 Language provision in the IoT/Technological University sector.

Turning to the Institute of Technology (IoT)/TU sector, according to the THEA, *“Ireland’s technological higher education institutes are flexible and dynamic institutes focused on: Teaching and learning; Purpose-driven research and development, business support and incubation; and Civic engagement/public service.”*⁵ At the time of collecting the data, there were 11 Institutes of Technology in Ireland and one technological university⁶. Of these, from our analysis of the PPLI data and additional investigations through institutional websites, Technological University Dublin, Cork Institute of Technology (now MTU), Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (now ATU), Letterkenny Institute of Technology (now ATU), Sligo Institute of Technology (now ATU), Institute of Technology Tralee (now MTU), and Waterford Institute of Technology (now SETU) offer language modules in one form or another.

TU Dublin has a School of Languages, Law and Social Science within which languages are offered on a number of programmes. It does not appear through publicly available information on the institutional website to have individual language departments. However, each language has a *‘lead tutor’* who is a lecturer in that language. At WIT (now SETU), there is a School of Humanities, within which, up to recently, there was a Department of Languages, Tourism and Hospitality, now the Department of Arts.

At CIT (now MTU), the languages appear (from publicly available information on the institutional

⁵ <http://www.thea.ie/the-sector/>

⁶ Since this research was conducted, 9 of these have merged to form Technological Universities as indicated in brackets.

website) to be housed within the School of Business and particularly in the Department of International Business and Marketing. There are no individual language departments and the Head of Department is cited as the coordinator of language modules. Similarly, at LYIT (now ATU) languages are situated within the School of Business. However, in this case there is a Department of Law and Humanities where there are three areas of study available: law, sport and languages. At IT Sligo (now ATU), the language courses are situated within the School of Business and Social Sciences and the Department of Marketing, Tourism and Leisure.

In IT Tralee (now MTU), the language provision seems (from publicly available information on the institutional website) to be in the form of a language centre which is not situated within a particular School or Department. The languages are offered on an Institution-Wide basis so that they do not service any particular discipline. DKIT also offers languages on an IWLP basis. The language offering is, however, housed within the School of Business and Humanities. At GMIT (now ATU), the languages offered are housed within the International Office and it appears that they service particular programmes.

It is important to note that at the time of writing this article, IOTs were in the process of consolidating and transitioning to TU status. The data and analysis in this article may, therefore, serve to inform the future provision of language teaching and learning in new TU sector.

3.4 Summary.

This variety of organisational structures with differing levels of visibility for languages makes for a complex reality creating challenges depending on the extent to which the critical mass of language offerings is consolidated and strengthened within its own unit or as a sub-unit (i.e. not reflected in the labelling). This in turn lends less visibility and strength to language teaching and learning at an institutional level. Decreasing levels of visibility of the language provision within their housing units appears particularly dominant in the technical university and IOTs in which languages are often described in popular professional discourse as "*being in crisis*" and "*fighting for survival*".

4. Who is teaching languages?

In order to understand the context of HE language teaching in Ireland, it is important to discuss the staff who are responsible for language provision. This is much more complex than one might think, and we would argue that it has a profound effect on the teaching and learning of

languages. In this section, we provide a brief outline of the nature of staff who teach language at the various HEIs. We have gathered publicly available information on staff from the HEIs' websites in addition to collecting more detailed primary data through interviews with various stakeholders from the four partner institutions (see Figure 2) to highlight some of the complexities.

We have identified three main categories of staff who teach language in HEIs:

5.1 Teaching-focused staff

5.2 Academic staff

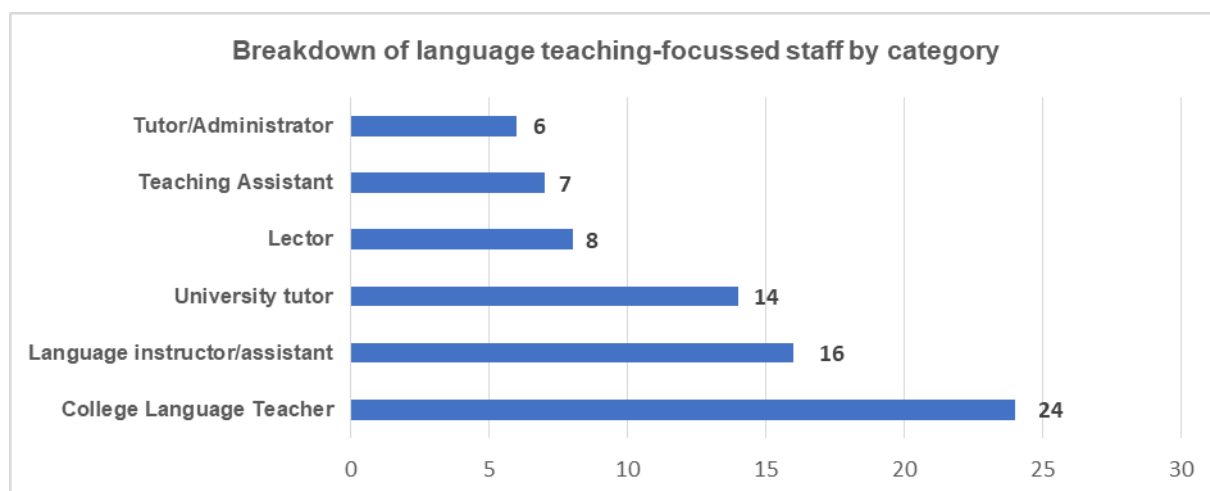
5.3 "Other" staff

Detailed data from the four HELECs partner HEIs shows the following breakdown of staff. From the data, there appears to be an almost even split between academic staff (42%) and teaching-focused staff (44%) engaged in language teaching, with 14% are categorised as '*other*'. These categorisations will be explained in the following sub-sections.

4.1 Teaching-focused staff.

This category pertains to staff whose primary responsibility is teaching and teaching-related administration. Such staff are not required to engage in research as part of their duties. Figure 3 provides a breakdown of the categories of language teaching-focused staff at the four HELECs partner HEIs. It is worth noting that none of these is represented at WIT which does not have a teaching-focused staff category. As can be seen from Figure 3, six teaching-focused roles were identified among language educators at the four HEIs investigated according to the available information published on the HEI's website.

College Language Teacher, Tutor / administrator, University Tutor and Teaching Assistant are designations for similar roles at the three universities. However, review of the publicly available salary scales for all universities suggests that there is huge variation in the contractual arrangements of these staff categories where some universities offer specific scales for language teachers and others have a general teaching-focused scales. The number of points on these scales also vary from 2 to 10 and the opportunity for progression differs at various universities.

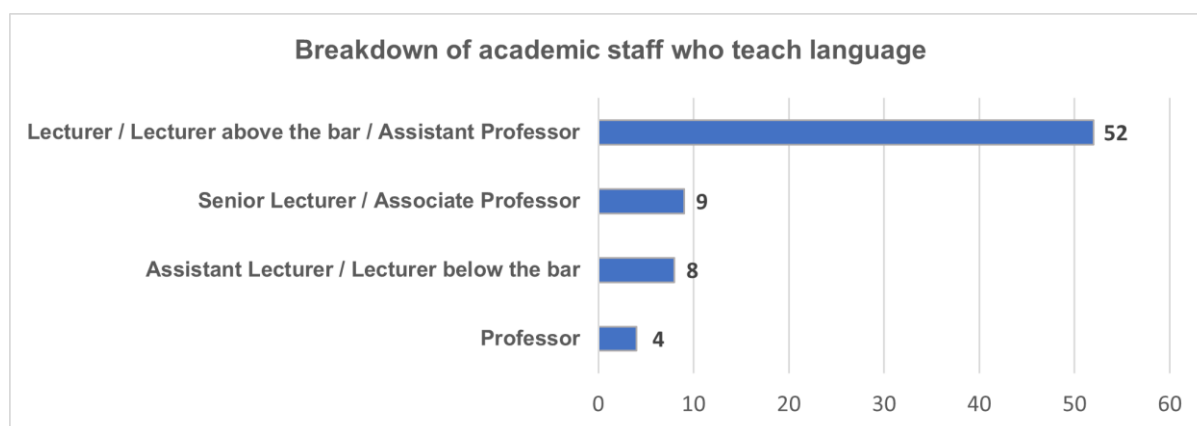
Figure 3: Language teaching-focused staff at the four HELECs partner HEIs.

A further category of staff which can often be found in language departments are those that are externally funded. Often called “*Lector*”, this category relates to teaching-orientated posts that are either partially or fully funded externally. Examples of such posts include, in the case of German the DAAD-Lektorat, the Austrian ÖAD Lektorat, in the case of French bilateral university agreements with Francophone universities in the form of a *lecteur/lectrice*, and in the case of Spanish the Catalan-government *lector/lectora*. The Confucius Institute based at UCC also provides lectors to those Irish HEIs that currently offer Chinese Studies. Such posts are strongly language-teaching orientated and the level of involvement of the *lector/a* in content teaching and administration ranges from School/Department to School/Department and HEI to HEI. Such posts often have a maximum teaching load of 10-12 hours per week, the individuals are not expected to be research active, and the contractual agreement between the HEI and the funding organisation for each *lector* post is normally limited to anywhere between two and five years.

4.2 Academic staff.

This category relates to staff for whom engaging in research is a key component of their role alongside teaching and administration. A significant proportion of language educators at the four HELECs partner HEIs are academic staff. We are aware that it is common at DCU, MU, WIT and UL for academic staff within the Schools and Departments of Languages to engage in language teaching. UCC seems to be an exceptional case within Irish HEIs in that lecturing staff do almost no language teaching. Figure 4 represents a breakdown of the status of academic staff who teach language at the four partner HELECs HEIs.

Figure 4: Breakdown of the status of academic staff who teach language at the four HELECs partner HEIs.

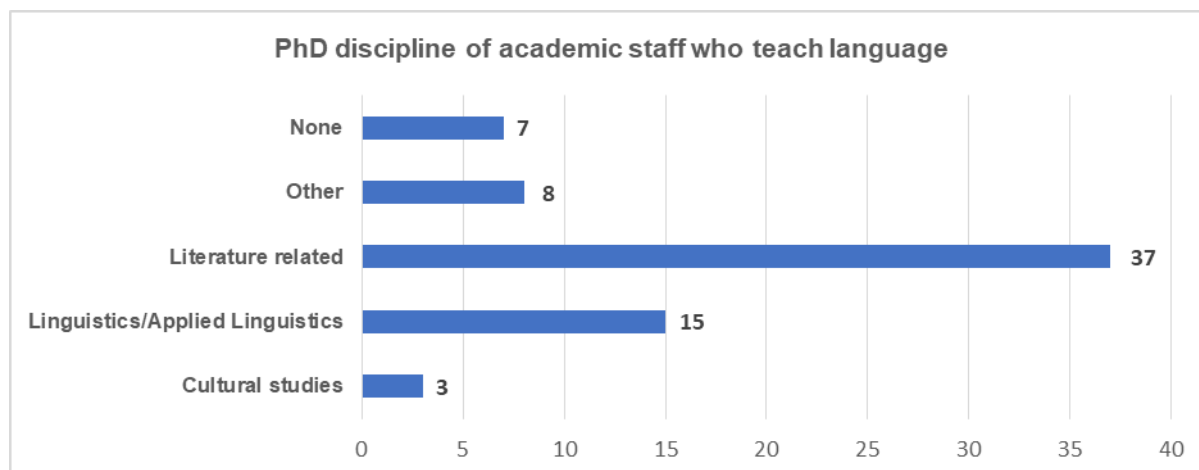


A clear trend is discernible in the data in that the vast majority of academic staff involved in the teaching of language in the system are at “*lecturer/lecturer above the bar/assistant professor*” level, the level at which staff secure tenure in the system. It is often also the more junior permanent position in the academic hierarchy and constitutes the largest proportion of the academic staff population at all universities. Nevertheless, it is also clear from the data that as academic seniority increases in the system, a lesser number of senior academics involved in the teaching of language becomes apparent suggesting a converse relationship between levels of language teaching and academic status. Delegating the teaching to the lower levels of academic hierarchy may have a perceptual impact within the system amongst stakeholders about the importance of language teaching.

Figure 5 illustrates the variety of doctoral disciplinary background of the academic staff who are recorded in the sample as teaching language. Here the academic staff sample size is 70 as three staff members’ details were excluded on the basis of clarity. Within the data, a strong dominance of Literature and Cultural Studies is apparent, accounting for 57% of the total academic staff sample. 12% of the sample are included under the “*other*” category comprising the disciplines of Folk Studies, Gender Studies, Intercultural Studies, Communications, Internationalisation, Philosophy, Traditional Music and Translation. Staff members with a background in Linguistics (which here includes Applied-, Socio-linguistics, lexicography and language teaching), account for only 21%. This suggests that language teaching is not limited to those academic staff members with training and/or interest in language teaching as an area of specialism and research. This raises the question as to whether academic staff who teach language in HEIs have the capacity to dedicate time and effort to upskilling in the area of

language teaching and learning. This highlights the need for CPD opportunities for such members of staff to develop their skills further and most importantly have their efforts accredited, recognised and rewarded within promotion and employability prospects.

Figure 5: Doctoral disciplinary background of the academic staff (n=70).

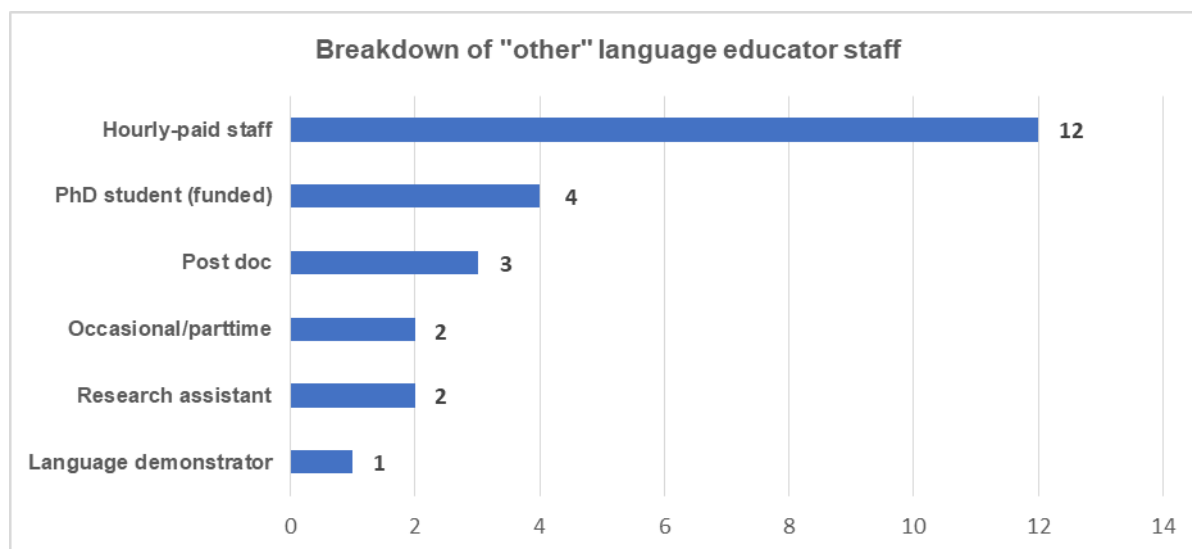


4.3 “Other” staff.

The “*other*” category of staff has been identified across the four HEIs which were examined for this report and relates to those staff members with precarious contractual relationships with the university for language teaching purposes but rather work on an hourly-paid (casual/zero-hour contract basis) or part-time basis (where a specific number of limited hours are explicitly outlined in a contract) (sample size = 24). The term “*other*” is deliberately chosen here to highlight the othering that occurs with these cohorts of educators in the system organisationally. This category is illustrated in Figure 6 and relates to general hourly-paid staff members, occasional staff members, PhD students who are in receipt of funding institutionally, nationally or internationally, post-doctoral researchers, research assistants etc. It is important to note that many individuals holding this type of employment have not been captured in our review as they do not always have an online presence, and because they are only employed on a needs basis from semester to semester to fill recurrent recruitment gaps. This invisibility of a substantial cohort on the frontline of language teaching at HE level is highly problematic, particularly given that these staff members are generally solely involved in language teaching and account for 14% of the language educator staff members we have identified in this study. This cohort has the most precarious employment conditions in terms of pay levels, continuity and stability of employment, status within the system, involvement in decision-making surrounding language

teaching etc. Anecdotal and personal experience suggests that it is this category of staff that are often called upon at the very last moment to enter the fray and plug significant shortages in language-teaching recruitment.

Figure 6: Breakdown of "other" language educator staff.



As stated above, this does not provide a comprehensive illustration of the myriad staff who teach language at HEIs on a part-time basis. These staff do not usually appear on the School's or Department's digital staff listings; staff turnover in this category may be high; and it is often difficult for these staff members to access any continuous professional development even when it is offered institutionally and nationally. Given their importance to the functioning of the system, their invisibility presents a significant issue and challenge in terms of recognition and support.

As demonstrated in this section, the status of language educators in Irish HEIs is complex. Language teaching-focused roles do not generally offer staff the opportunity for career development. Academic staff roles are focused on teaching and researching in related fields but we would suggest that lecturers are generally obliged to focus on researching and teaching in their specific discipline in order to progress in their careers so that language teaching may be a lesser priority for them. The use of part-time and postgraduate employment, featured here as the 'other' category, represents precarious and irregular employment for many of our language educators. Although language learning is a substantive part of many students' degree programmes, language teaching does not seem to be highly valued within the system.

Moreover, it is difficult to imagine how major expansions of language provision will be possible on a national level, as is outlined in Languages Connect, when the status of language educators is so undervalued.

5. Conclusion.

As can be seen from the above outline of language provision units at universities and IoTs, the landscape is extremely complex and varied. Each HEI approaches the provision of languages differently on an organisational level. This is a result of institutional autonomy and the structure of the programmes offered. The leadership of those involved in language education is an important missing component. In most cases, the head of the unit in which languages are situated is not an expert in language education. Within the majority of universities, the line manager for most language educators would seem to be an expert in a field of Literary and/or Cultural Studies, sometimes with a general teaching qualification as well. While these are vital and often core elements of the degree programmes, it is not clear how a cohesive plan can be executed for the expansion of language provision when few language educators have decision-making power. The context of the IoTs is further complicated by the fact that languages are often housed in units with no clear connection to language, such as Business or Law. In these cases, language provision appears to be an add-on and not a core component of the programmes offered. When language educators have little opportunity for promotion and no career progression pathway, the delivery and development of language provision may suffer indefinitely. Despite excellent educators' best efforts, the institutional structures may impede progress and innovation, and fly in the face of effective language policy and planning actions which clearly state that

“...the consumers of policy, who use or resist the languages dictated to them from the top down, have something to say from the bottom up...they need to be heard and incorporated in the formulation of policy...There is an urgent need to observe, study and interpret language experiences...[as] such an effort may lead to a more valid type of language policy.” (Shohamy, 2009, p. 188)

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