

Interview with Associate Professor Sharon Harvey, AUT
Head of School, School of Language and Culture;
Deputy Dean (Research), Faculty of Culture and Society

Briefly describe your own language learning and teaching journey and your current research.

I'm typical of my age group for many New Zealanders I guess (late fifties) in that I grew up in an English monolingual household. At school I learned French and Latin. I learned Serbo Hrvatski (Croatian) while living in the former Yugoslavia in 1980, and Japanese while living in Japan in the early 1980s. At university I've taken further papers in Māori and Japanese.

In my roles at AUT I've had the great privilege to work with speakers of many languages and cultures, especially while teaching English language and workplace literacy. I've also travelled extensively in my work, particularly in Asia. Most recently though, I have a research relationship with the University of Tromsø in Norway and I'm getting plenty of exposure to Norwegian (and a little Sami) in the process.

My key research areas are languages policy and languages in education. These two areas overlap quite a bit. For example, in our current evaluation of the Asian Languages Learning in Schools (ALLiS) programme it is important to consider ALLiS as language policy alongside its effects on practice in the day to day interactions between teachers and learners. Policy has effects on practice, sometimes intended and sometimes unintended.



Can you sum up the key message of your keynote at NZALT conference in two sentences?

My two key messages (not sentences sorry) from my NZALT keynote were:

With the introduction of a new Learning Area: Learning Languages in the 2007 revised national curriculum there was a new expectation for teachers to incorporate intercultural communication (ICC) with language teaching. It was a great idea and at the forefront of thinking at the time (and still today). ICC and other aspects of the new Learning Area borrowed from the Council of Europe work on languages and principally the work of Professor Mike Byram. However, as in other countries, the change in policy was not widely communicated which meant it has taken a long time for it to be integrated into pre-service and in-service education for language teachers. There are still many language teachers in New Zealand who do not really understand intercultural language teaching and do not plan for it in their language classes. This is not their 'fault' but rather the outcome of a very deregulated educational system, particularly when it comes to languages education.

The most interesting savoir of Byram's model has become that of critical cultural awareness (savoir s'engager). In my opinion this can be taken even further to a decolonising critical cultural awareness where students are encouraged to examine the historical and power relationships in their interactions and consider how their own communication may be shaped by these powerful discursive constructions that fix to us and our languages through time and space (viz the work of Alistair Pennycook).

(continued)

(continued)

What is the overall picture of languages at AUT and what are the outlooks for languages and the department at AUT?

As New Zealand's largest polytechnic at the time AIT started offering undergraduate degrees in the 1990s. The first BA major was in Japanese, drawing on twenty years of teaching communicative Japanese from the 1970s. From there we added Mandarin as another major and Spanish as a minor. We also teach New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) Interpreting as a degree major and offer NZSL as an elective. Recently we have offered beginner courses in Korean and Samoan. We'd like to see more Pacific languages and are working at teaching Cook Islands Māori as well. We try and be as flexible as possible and offer Mandarin online and some languages during summer school. We also offer Translation and Interpreting as separate degree majors. English is of course a language too, and something our School focuses on. We have English as an Additional Language (EAL) courses for newly arrived refugees through the Refugee Education Centre at Mangere and academic English in preparation for degree level courses. Te Ara Poutama (AUT's Faculty of Maori Development) has taught te reo Māori for more than thirty years.

We think there needs to be more attention to students' existing plurilingualism in the education system and we are thinking hard about how to do that. It would be great to see students getting more opportunities at university to reflect on their own family histories and trajectories in terms of languages. They also need explicit strategies to think through how they and their children can retain the languages they still have.

What do you tell prospective students to encourage them to take Languages at Uni?

Our key message is about being a great New Zealand citizen who can communicate effectively and compassionately in superdiverse Aotearoa. If students can do this they'll be effective 'global citizens' as well.

Of course we also talk about taking languages majors alongside other majors, like Business or the Social Sciences, because languages do give our students the employability 'edge' in a competitive employment market where intercultural competency is especially valued. And we tell our students that languages give them an in-depth entrée into cultures and countries that they would never have access to otherwise!

From an NZSL perspective, there is no easy progression from learning NZSL in high school. Our majors are quite suitable for school leavers but few are aware of the possibility unless they already have a connection to the Deaf community. So, more for us to do here....

What promotional activities does the School of Language and Culture at AUT do?

In terms of promotion of our language classes we mostly try and 'get involved'. We run Japanese speech competitions and trivia evenings for secondary schools, we provide taster classes in NZSL and we are the testing Centre for Spanish proficiency for the Instituto de Cervantes. We make social media videos showcasing our clever and enthusiastic students. And we have encouraged more uptake of NZSL with zero fees for summer school.

(continued)

(continued)

How do you see the secondary and tertiary sectors working together currently?

Our languages academics have good contact with secondary teachers through the respective teachers' associations e.g. NZAJLT, NZCLTA and STANZA. Our languages staff regularly visit schools and provide AUT campus tours and seminars as and when requested. The Japanese team has also engaged in long term mentoring of Japanese language students at a nearby secondary school while the Mandarin team are delivering a first year Mandarin paper over the net to an Auckland secondary school. Languages teachers in schools also undertake masters degrees and even PhDs with us to further their professional development in languages education.

Do you have any future plans, ideas, or visions regarding the cooperation between secondary and tertiary education?

We are always thinking about how to have better connections and cooperation with schools. It may be that we could offer more in terms of professional development opportunities (both pedagogical and language proficiency) for teachers. We have invited language teachers to AUT for various symposia exploring, for example ICC, new pedagogical techniques and approaches, and feedback on our research evaluations. One of our problems is that we are a School of Language and Culture rather than a School of Education so some of this comes back to University organisation as well. I don't think we are the only university where many of the applied and socio linguists, as well as language teachers are not in a School of Education.

One thing that has been quite effective in terms of our ALLiS research is the role of the Cluster Coordinators who coordinate languages between primary and secondary schools. These people have the job of organising regular meetings, arranging professional development, considering and selecting materials and resources across the sectors and building language learning pathways. I think some explicit and resourced coordination between the sectors would be a great idea. There's also nothing to stop us (universities and schools) getting on with liaison between sectors ourselves.

In terms of students, it may be that they need much more exposure to university language learning classes and courses so that they understand what is involved and the way they can combine courses to include languages they have been successful in at secondary school. So there is perhaps more we can do there. The work in the United Kingdom on Routes into Languages <https://www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/> is worth watching in this regard.

What advice do you have for schools/senior leaders to better support the Learning Languages curriculum area?

It would be great if schools could spend more time exploring with students why language skills are so vital in a superdiverse, multilingual society like New Zealand, and more specifically, in any career. It's surprising the number of people who still think languages are only required for teachers, translators, and diplomats. We wonder whether students get the opportunity at school to think about why it might be important for an engineer, accountant or scientist to learn a new language and the intercultural competency that goes with that? These so-called 'soft skills' may be the key to global peace and understanding!

(continued)

(continued)

On a practical note school leaders may need to recognise that language learning resources are now mostly digital and are changing and improving very quickly therefore resource budgeting should match these changes. Also, some reconsideration of the bureaucracy involved in taking students out of school for a day would be helpful. Visits from schools have dropped by about 80% due to the paperwork required to afford students this opportunity. There may need to be increased awareness that language learning is a discipline that takes more time than other similar level subjects.....

In addition, the curriculum itself may need to change again, in order to recognise, foster and give credit for students' existing multilingualism. It doesn't make much sense to emphasise learning new languages while ignoring the linguistic skills students' bring to school.

What advice do you have for teachers on how to turn theory into effective practise?

Firstly, teachers need to have regular, up to date access to developments in the theoretical underpinnings of language acquisition and language pedagogy. I don't think it is always easy for them to get the time and money to take advantage of what's available. There is a feeling in some quarters still, that having language proficiency is enough to teach a language. So more explicit awareness of what the profession needs as an ideal to work towards, might be important.

The introduction of ICC through the revised curriculum is an example of good policy development not followed up by sufficient attention to pedagogical support for teachers across the country.

What are your ideas for raising the profile in society of language learning, use and maintenance in NZ?

As academics we definitely have a role to engage in languages' advocacy work. I and others have tried to do this in terms of a national languages policy. Some are able to raise the profile of languages by simply 'doing what they do'. For example the profile of NZSL interpreting was raised considerably when people saw how important it was during the Christchurch earthquakes. More recently it's been included in the Prime Minister's post cabinet briefings and question time.

Anything else you would like to add?

We have seen big changes in New Zealand society in a relatively short period of time: we know we are very multilingual, ethnically diverse and the Treaty of Waitangi may be even more salient than it has been in the past. It is important our schools and universities keep up and prepare our students for our superdiverse society. This means giving more educational attention to the languages our students already have as well as adding to their plurilingual repertoires by providing them with the opportunity to learn additional languages. However, it is important that a whole-of-education approach is taken to learning languages. This needs to include attention to English, Māori, subject languages, community languages and students' existing plurilingualism. What happens in one part of the system affects what happens in other parts and we need to keep considering and evaluating the whole system as changes are made. Personally I would love to see all New Zealand children at least trilingual in Māori, English and one other language.....