

Why study languages?



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Introduction

In this course, you will explore how learning languages and finding out about other countries can be both useful and fun. You do not need any knowledge of foreign languages in order to begin.

There are ten sections. You can choose which ones you want to study and you can work through them in any order.

- **Section 1: Careers in languages** – some ways you can use the ability to speak other languages in a job or a career.
- **Section 2: Languages and the work environment** – an exercise in doing business in a foreign country and a foreign language.
- **Section 3: Studying languages** – what it would be like to continue to study languages after compulsory education.
- **Section 4: Language study skills** – how to improve your writing and speaking language skills.
- **Section 5: Language and culture** – ideas for three short plays or sketches.
- **Section 6: International Christmas** – an exploration of the many and different Christmas traditions around the world, as an example of the connections between language and culture.

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Learning Outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- give examples of how language is related to culture in local, national and global contexts
- describe some traditions related to different cultures, using words from the relevant languages
- explain the importance of learning languages and being aware of cultural differences
- develop strategies for improving foreign language writing and speaking skills
- identify the opportunities for studying languages at school and post-compulsory education.

1 Careers in languages

1.1 Careers advice

This section will help to make you aware of career opportunities within a variety of employment sectors, and highlight the importance of learning languages for your career.

Activity 1 Quotation

You should allow 10 minutes

'The best careers advice is: "Find out what you like doing best and get someone to pay you for doing it.'"

Write down what you think this quotation is trying to say. Make some notes on how you think this might apply to languages and language learning.

Provide your answer...

Most people would agree that being paid to do something you love is a good thing. However, you need to be thinking about whether this is good careers advice.

Those who think that this is good careers advice would argue that being paid to do something you love means that your life and work won't be an obligation, but a joy. It would be better to have a good life than just earn lots of money.

Others may disagree, believing that this is unrealistic. They may be of the opinion that we have to do things we don't like to be able to pay the bills. If you are always looking for someone to pay you for what you love, you'll end up unemployed too often.

Others would think the statement is too vague. They may agree about finding something you love to do, but may disagree that it is the best career advice because it doesn't give any clear direction as to how you would go about achieving it.

Activity 2 Variety of possibilities

You should allow 10 minutes

Learning languages opens up many more career options than being a language teacher. Opportunities exist in translation and interpretation, in addition to careers abroad. A knowledge of languages is beneficial in many other sectors.

Write down four careers that you think may involve the use of a foreign language.

Provide your answer...

Some possibilities you may have thought of:

- business services
- contact centres
- financial services
- media
- travel and tourism
- central government
- engineering
- marketing
- technology
- voluntary and charitable sector.

Activity 3 Translation mishaps

You should allow 20 minutes

Have a look at the notices below and see if you can work out what each one is trying to say. As a native speaker, you may find them amusing because of the incorrect grammar.

'It is forbidden to steal hotel towels please. If you are not person to do such thing is please not to read notis.'

'Please to bathe inside the tub.'

'To move the cabin, push button for wishing floor. If the cabin should enter more persons, each one should press a number of wishing floor. Driving is then going alphabetically in national order.'

'For your convenience, we recommend courteous, efficient self-service.'

'It is forbidden to enter a woman even a foreigner if dressed as a man.'

'Specialist in women and other diseases.'

'Order your summers suit. Because is big rush we will execute customers in strict rotation.'

'Ladies may have a fit upstairs.'

'It is strictly forbidden on our black forest camping site that people of different sex, for instance, men and women, live together in one tent unless they are married with each other for that purpose.'

'Teeth extracted by the latest Methodists.'

'Stop: Drive Sideways'

In doing this activity, you will have seen that even though you may be laughed at, and even with bad grammar, you will generally be understood in context.

Activity 4 English nuances

You should allow 10 minutes

How would you explain the following phrases to someone who is not British, but does speak English?

- 'Taking the mick'
- 'Cheeky'

There are many different ways of explaining these phrases. You may have explained that 'taking the mick' means to tease or mock someone. You may have described 'cheeky' in terms of a person who is rude or disrespectful, or someone who is just being a bit playful.

Activity 5 Lost in translation

You should allow 10 minutes

There are many online translators and dictionaries available to help you to translate words and phrases from one language to another. However, many companies still need fluent speakers to help convey the intended meaning. This is particularly important in the context of cultural understanding behind phrases or idioms that may seem a bit odd.

Have a look at the poem extract below, which has been literally translated from the Persian language. Try to think of reasons why the translation may not work.

'If that Turk from Shiraz
were to capture my heart
I would give away Samarkand and Bokhara
for her Hindu mole.'

These lines come from a much longer poem, written by a 14th century poet. In its original language, Persian, it comes across as very exotic, lyrical, musical and evocative. We may look at the lines from a Western perspective and try to understand it in terms of our own culture and experience. As we have seen in the previous activity, knowledge of a culture can help you to understand the hidden meanings of certain phrases. We may not have understood the significance of the image of the Turk, or the relevance of the place names. Again, in the Persian, a mole may be considered a thing of beauty, which may not be the case in Western cultures.

This is an alternative translation, which attempts to convey the sentiment and meaning of the poem a bit more accurately, using Western place names and terms.

'It that American in Venice
Were to coo "I love you too ..."
I would barter Babylon and Rome
for her Japanese tattoo.'

Activity 6 Create career connections

You should allow 10 minutes

From what you have learnt so far in this course, try to write down three ways in which speaking more than one language could benefit your career.

Provide your answer...

- People are most comfortable communicating in their native tongue.
- Even if you think 'the whole world is learning English', most would prefer to do business in their first language.
- If you speak the same language, you have a connection on which to base your professional relationship.
- You are more likely to understand your customers if you can communicate in both languages.

1.2 Be a knight in shining armour

In your own country or abroad, being bilingual puts you in the position to be an ad-hoc translator. Even people who speak English are often not saying what they mean to say because of translation errors. It's generally fun to be able to help others. Not only does someone else benefit, but most speakers appreciate that their linguistic knowledge is being put to good use.

1.3 Function among locals

There are often situations where not being able to speak a language can hold some people back from taking a job transfer abroad. If you have language skills, you will be a lot more confident about day-to-day tasks, if you are living abroad. Even if your job does only require you to know English, you will adjust a lot easier if you do know the local language. It can help with shopping, buying a house, or sending your children to school. It can also help you to make friends.

Activity 7 Where do you want to go?

You should allow 15 minutes

Think about your own career or careers that you are considering for the future. Do any of these involve languages? Write your thoughts down and include as many details as you can about your aspirations for the future.

Then think about how languages can help you get there. Regardless of the profession you've chosen, try to think of ways in which knowledge of languages may be able to help.

This activity will have helped you to think about your career objectives, and to realise how versatile language skills can be.

1.4 Sample professions

Listed below is a small selection of possible careers in which languages could come into play. Have a think about whether these would be areas you would enjoy working in.

Localiser: Someone who takes a product, like software, and adapts it to a specific locale, target market or language group.

Voice-over: The language professional's voice adds a re-voicing that is a type of narration, commentary or dialogue.

Assistant Volunteer Coordinator: This person would report to the volunteer coordinator, responsible for further developing, managing and evaluating the volunteer program, both domestic and international.

Activity 8 Case studies

You should allow 15 minutes

Have a look at the case studies below. These present professions that you may be interested in yourself. In both cases, the professionals didn't know what they wanted to do while they were still in education. They had an interest in languages, which they pursued. Then, once they acquired the skills, they did a bit of travelling, taught English and figured out what they actually wanted to do with the skills and knowledge that they had acquired.

Case Study

- **Name:** Martin
- **Job Title:** Language Travel Consultant
- **Company:** LANACOS Language Courses Abroad, Sevenoaks
- **Background:** Learned Spanish at home and German at school to O level (GCSE equivalent)
- Studied French at school and then combined it with international business, Society and Government at university
- Spent two years teaching English, French and Spanish in Japan and learned Japanese taking the Japanese government exams

Case Study

Name: Peter

Age: 24

Job Title: Operational Officer for SIS (MI6)

Background: Studied Modern Languages at Edinburgh University, which included a year abroad. He wanted a break after his studies so he took a gap year and spent 6 months teaching English in the Far East and 6 months travelling, before returning to the UK to find a full time career.

“I had never considered SIS but the more I learnt about it the more intriguing it seemed - it offered the chance to get under the skin of people and places, and find out what happens behind the scenes.”

Having looked at the case studies, and reflecting on what you've learnt in this section, try think of a few more possible professions that would be enhanced by knowing of a language.

2 Languages and the work environment

This section aims to work further on investigating career possibilities open to people with knowledge of modern languages.

These are headlines of news stories that stress the importance of language.

- 'Japanese pharma giant chooses UK for European hub.' Esai – Japan's fourth largest pharmaceutical company – has chosen Hertfordshire as the home of their pioneering European base.
- 'Companies to prioritise international markets in search for growth.' A major new survey by the Economist Intelligence Unit finds that businesses will focus on international over domestic markets in the next three years.
- 'To understand overseas customers better, get local, new report tells multinational'
- 'Executives within multinational firms agree their organisations would perform better if they gave more control to local managers in overseas markets', finds a new Economist Intelligence Unit survey and report commissioned by UK Trade & Investment.

Activity 9 Business partners

You should allow 30 minutes

You are a representative from a British company visiting a possible business partner abroad for the first time. The aim of your visit is to set up an import / export project. This means that the project is aiming to bring products from abroad into the UK (import) and sell products made in the UK to other countries (export). You will need to learn about the country and its products. In addition, you will need to learn a few basic sentences to communicate with your business colleagues abroad in their own language.

Have a look at the BBC languages website. Choose **one** language from the menu on the left, preferably one you have never studied before. Explore the different dialogues, sentences and situations and write down five to seven sentences that you can use with your business colleagues.

Decide on a country that uses the language you have chosen. Then do some research on the internet to find out some information about that country. Look for information in the following areas:

- local products available in the country
- people and customs
- food
- weather
- any other important features.

Now think about the phrase 'English is not enough'. What do you think this means?

Provide your answer...

The phrase highlights the importance of learning languages.

75% of the world's population does not speak English.

60% of Britain's trade is with non-English speaking countries.

65% of people in Britain speak only their own language – every other country in Europe has a wider knowledge of languages.

3 Studying languages

This section will encourage you to think about language courses that lead to recognised qualifications.

Activity 10 Quotation

You should allow 10 minutes

'The recipe for perpetual ignorance is: be satisfied with your opinions and content with your knowledge.'

Write down what you think this quotation is trying to say. Make some notes on how you think this might apply to languages and language learning.

Provide your answer...

This phrase could be paraphrased, 'In order to remain clueless about the world, be happy with what you already know and think'. Do you think that anyone would want to follow this recipe? Think about what the speaker is actually trying to encourage.

Activity 11 Finding language courses

You should allow 30 minutes

You may be thinking about studying for a language qualification. It's worth looking at the different courses and levels of study available to you. This takes some research, as there are a number of factors to take into account. These include the following:

- the language you want to study
- how much time you have to study
- how you want to study – in a class, or private study
- the level you want to study – short course, GCSE, A Level, university course
- the cost of the course
- the location of the course and how far you are willing to travel.

Bearing these considerations in mind, have a look on the internet for language courses that may be interest to you, taking note of their cost and location. Look at local or national maps and calculate how long it would take to travel. If you can get hold of prospectuses, have a look through those too.

4 Language study skills

This section will help you to improve your writing and speaking skills.

Activity 12 Mind mapping ideas

You should allow 40 minutes

Have a look at the Skills for OU Study website for information on mind mapping.

Read through the information on the website, which will explain what mind maps are, and how to create them. Mind mapping is a tool that is used in all areas of study, not only languages.

Put together a mind map focusing on useful vocabulary related to a main central topic.

The first thing you need to consider is the language you want to work with. Then choose one of the topics from the list below:

- accommodation
- house and home
- self
- careers
- free time
- food and drink
- health
- shopping
- school
- transport
- holidays.

Imagine that you need to put together some information for a presentation on useful vocabulary in the topic you've chosen. Use language books, dictionaries or online information to gather your information. Put your ideas together for your chosen topic in a mind map. This will help you to learn how to structure the information you find in the most effective way.

5 Language and culture

This section aims to help you reflect on the importance of cultural awareness, and to make you aware of the cultural differences associated with different cultures and societies. It will also encourage you to reflect on your own culture and the perceptions others may have of your society.

Activity 13 Writing a play

You should allow 40 minutes

For this activity, you are going to be writing a short play, based on one of three scenarios. Pick a language you are happy using, and use any resources that you think might be useful – websites, dictionaries, books, friends and family. The important thing is that you research the topic as well as you can.

Choose from one of the three following scenarios. Notes and guidance on what to include in your play are included in each document.

Play 1: Introductory level

[View document.](#)

Play 2: Intermediate level

[View document.](#)

Play 3: Advanced level

[View document.](#)

The beginning of your play could be 'introductions', although you may want to choose a different way of starting. It is up to you to use your own initiative.

Try to give the ending of your play a 'positive conclusion'.

It is important that you adopt names for your characters, taking into account where they are from.

6 International Christmas

This section aims to raise your intercultural awareness, by exposing you to the many and different Christmas traditions around the world. It will encourage you to discover the connections between language and culture and engage you with online communications and research. You will also be given the opportunity to use your own creativity as a learning tool.

Please note that Christmas has been chosen as an example of a festival which is celebrated in different ways in different countries. The activities form a useful starting point from which to explore cultural variation. This is equally true of other religious festivals.

Activity 14 British Christmas traditions

You should allow 15 minutes

Think about British Christmases and try to answer the following questions.

- Which day do you think is the most important day at Christmas?
- What do people do on that day?
- When do British people exchange presents?
- What food is normally eaten at Christmas?
- How do people in Britain decorate their houses at Christmas?

The most important day is Christmas Day, which falls on 25 December.

This is a public holiday. For many families, this is a time to get together for a Christmas meal or celebration. If people are religious, they will normally attend church during the Christmas period.

Christmas presents are exchanged on Christmas Day.

A traditional Christmas meal could consist of a light starter, followed by turkey or goose, roast potatoes, roast parsnips, sprouts, chestnuts, red cabbage, vegetables, gravy, stuffing, bread sauce, cranberry sauce, party sausages wrapped in bacon, Christmas pudding or cake, mince pies with brandy butter, Yule log, cheese and biscuits.

The main decoration is a Christmas tree, often decorated flowers, lights, tinsel, baubles, etc. The house may be decorated with internal and external fairy lights and other decorations. Christmas cards are also put on display around the house.

Activity 15 'Merry Christmas' in different languages

You should allow 20 minutes

In the list below, you will see 'Merry Christmas' written in a range of languages. Do you recognise any of the them?

Do you know in which countries these languages are spoken?

Kala Christouyenna!

Buone Feste Natalizie
 Linksmu Kaledu
 Wesolych Swiat Bozego Narodzenia or Boze Narodzenie
 Feliz Natal
 Sarbotori vesele
 Pozdrevlyayu s prazdnikom Rozhdestva is Novim Godom
 Nedeleg laouen na bloavezh mat
 Bon Nadal i un Bon Any Nou

The following websites may help you, and provide some interesting additional information:

<http://www.santas.net/howmerrychristmasissaid.htm>

<http://www.factmonster.com/ipka/A0877712.html>

<http://www.omniglot.com/language/phrases/christmas.htm>

Answer

Answers

Kala Christouyenna!	Greek
Buone Feste Natalizie	Italian
Linksmu Kaledu	Lithuanian
Wesolych Swiat Bozego Narodzenia or Boze Narodzenie	Polish
Feliz Natal	Portuguese
Sarbotori vesele	Rumanian
Pozdrevlyayu s prazdnikom Rozhdestva is Novim Godom	Russian
Nedeleg laouen na bloavezh mat	Breton
Bon Nadal i un Bon Any Nou	Catalan

Activity 16 International Christmases

You should allow 40 minutes

Look at the list of languages below:

- Greek
- Italian
- Lithuanian
- Polish
- Portuguese
- Rumanian
- Russian
- Breton

- Catalan.

Pick a country where one of these languages is spoken. Now try to find out as much as you can about Christmas in that country. Use reference books and/or the internet.

You may find the following websites helpful and interesting. They provide information on what Christmas is like in different countries.

Italy: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/italian/christmas/index.shtml>

France <http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/french/christmas/index.shtml>

Germany: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/german/christmas/index.shtml>

Spain <http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/spanish/christmas/index.shtml>

Christmas traditions around the world: <http://www.santas.net/aroundtheworld.htm>

The Christmas Archives <http://www.christmasarchives.com/index.html>

Christmas ideas for modern languages: <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/mfle/creative-teaching/christmasideas/index.asp>

Information and Christmas recipes from Denmark, Mexico, Sweden and Switzerland: <http://www.thecookinginn.com/tcirecipes/xmasworld.html>

TES resources: <http://www.tes.co.uk/resourcehub.aspx?navcode=70>

Ask yourself the following questions:

- How do people celebrate Christmas Day in your chosen country? Do they also celebrate on any other day during the Christmas period?
- Do they exchange presents as we do in the UK?
- Are there special foods people eat in that country at Christmas? How is it prepared?
- Do people decorate their houses at Christmas? What kind of decorations do they have?
- Choose one decoration and describe it (you might even want to try and make it yourself). Use a drawing to illustrate what it looks like.
- Identify five words in the foreign language which are related to Christmas.

Conclusion

This free course provided an introduction to studying Languages. It took you through a series of exercises designed to develop your approach to study and learning at a distance, and helped to improve your confidence as an independent learner.

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