

3rd Annual Future of MFL in Education  
Conference || March 24, 2021

*Linguistics for Modern Linguists?*  
**Towards Pluralistic Languages  
Learning in Schools**

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# Introduction

1. Linguistics in schools: what and why
2. Linguistics in MFL project (joint work w/ Michelle Sheehan (ARU), Norma Schifano (Birmingham), Jonathan Kasstan (Westminster), Sascha Stollhans (Lancaster), Anna Havinga (Bristol))
3. Building equity in the classroom
4. Case study: gender and pronouns

# 1. Linguistics in schools

What and why?

'I appreciate my ability to speak a second language fluently much more than I did before, too, and I find myself picking up little differences in how people say things in French'

- Danielle

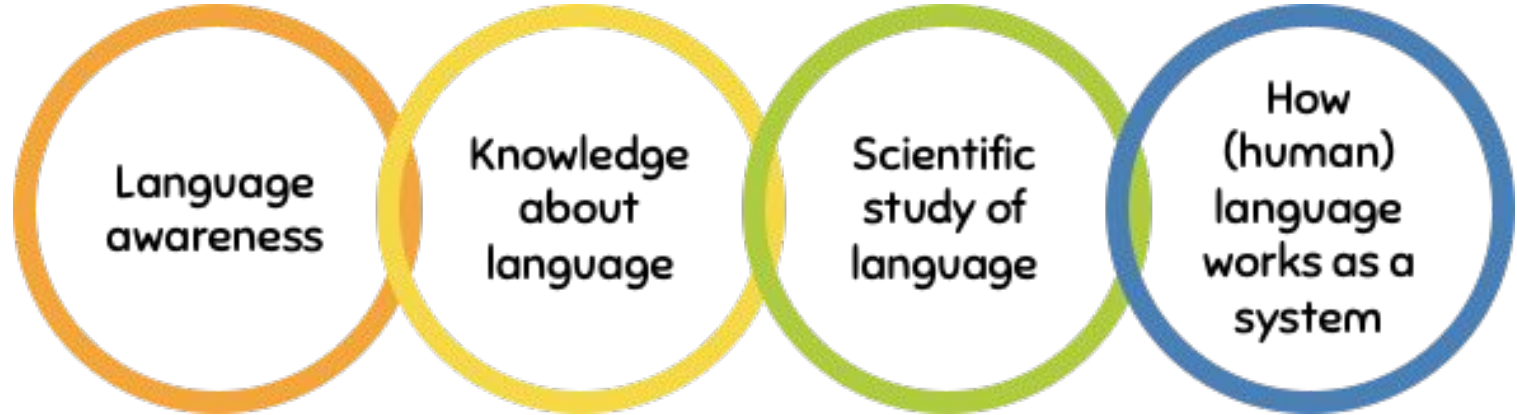
'Linguistics has made me more interested in learning new languages and has also made it easier than before'

- Valentin

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Loosen (2014:270-271)

# What is Linguistics?



# Descriptivism vs. prescriptivism

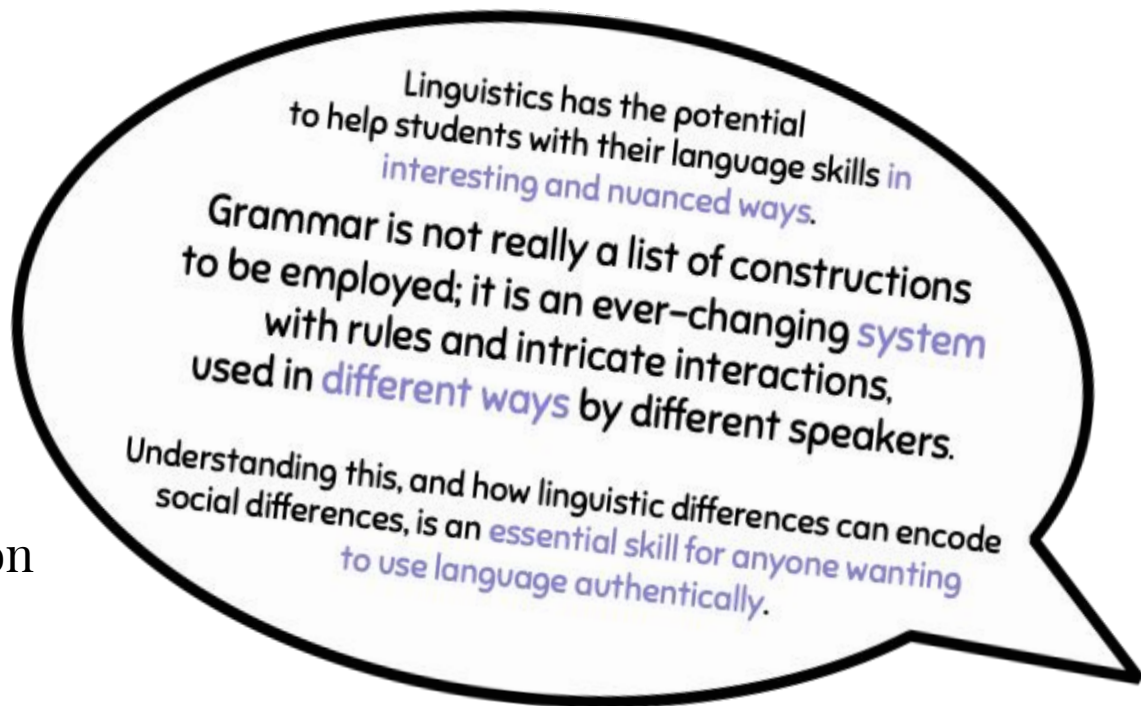
	Descriptivism	Prescriptivism
Perspective	<i>Describes</i> how language <i>is</i> used (without giving instructions/judgments)	Gives instructions/judgments on <b>how</b> language <i>ought</i> to be used
Attitude	impartial/no value judgment	instructional/value judgment
Standard(ised) expressions/ language	‘This word/expression is what people use (and is neither better nor worse than another)’	‘This word should be used to speak/write well/correctly’
Non-standard(ised) expressions/ language	‘This word/expression is what people use (and is neither better nor worse than another)’	‘This word should be avoided so as not to speak poorly/incorrectly’

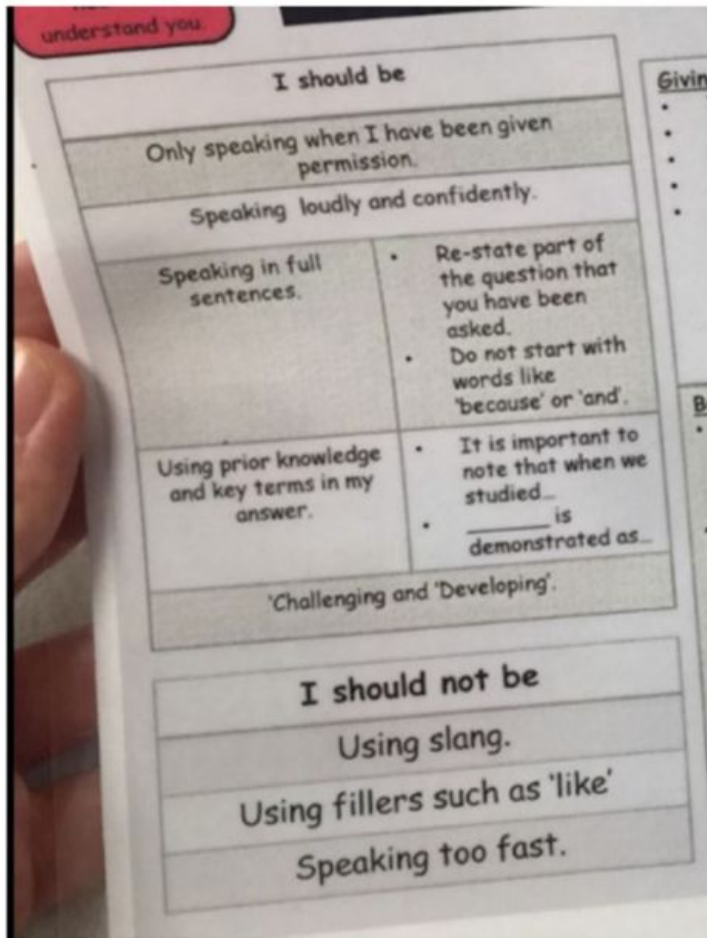
# Descriptivism in practice

- *Je ne sais pas* ≈ ‘I don’t know’
  - *Je ø sais pas* ≈ ‘I dunno’
  - *Chais pas* /ʃe.pa/ ≈ ‘Dunno’
- 
- *Se me cayó un diente* = ‘My tooth fell out’
  - *Me se cayó un diente* = ‘My tooth fell out’

# MFLs in UK

- Skills-focused
- Role of grammar
- (Non-)presence of language variation
- Wider context: attitudes towards language, linguistics, and education in UK





## Language, discipline and values

- It is everyone's responsibility to ensure areas are tidy—coats/packed lunches are not on floors, paper towels are picked up, common areas etc. are tidy.
- Staff should model behaviour—i.e. no chewing gum, **standard English should be used at all times**, dress should be appropriate, mobile phones should not be used.

(Cushing 2020)

FIGURE 1. Prescriptivism and surveillance in a classroom linguistic landscape.



# Why linguistics?

- New approach to language, language(s) and language practices
- “Science through language” and “language through science”
- Metalinguistic skills
- Equity, diversity and inclusion
- Student empowerment
- Cross-curricular learning
- Recruitment

Linguistics gives us an appreciation of the complexity that language is. I [was] fascinated by trying to discover patterns in how and why we do what was observed. That's one of my favorite parts of linguistics—being able to apply it to real life'  
- Gianna

# Linguistics in schools worldwide

- United States: LSA campaign for ‘AP Linguistics’
- Catalunya/Spain: *GRoC* initiative
- Brazil: *Projeto Linguística no Básico: ponte entre a universidade e a escola*
- France: *Projet Langues et grammaires en (Ile-de-) France*
- Germany: Initiative for Linguistics in Language Education
- Haiti: *Platfòm MIT-Ayiti pou yon lekòl tèt an wo*
- UK: LASER; CliE; Linguistics in MFL
- International: Linguistics Olympiad (IOL); *LISTEN!*

## 2. Linguistics in MFL project

[Linguisticsinmfl.co.uk](http://Linguisticsinmfl.co.uk)  
[@inmfl](https://twitter.com/inmfl)

Forthcoming paper: Sheehan et al. 2021.  
Rethinking the UK languages curriculum:  
arguments for the inclusion of linguistics.  
*Modern Languages Open.*

Joint work with Michelle  
Sheehan (ARU), Norma  
Schifano (Birmingham), Anna  
Havinga (Bristol), Jonathan  
Kasstan (Westminster), Sascha  
Stollhans (Lancaster)

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# Linguistics in MFL project

- *Multi-institution HE collaboration led by Prof Michelle Sheehan (ARU)*
- **Aims**
- **Interventions**
- **Findings**

[Linguisticsinmfl.co.uk](http://Linguisticsinmfl.co.uk)  
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The Linguistics in MFL Project has brought benefits to both my students and my own teaching practice. I was keen to explore how **study of linguistic form** can **engage students** and **improve their competence in second language acquisition**. Delivering the project in the summer term of Year 12 also provided a **valuable enrichment** to studies as students began to consider university choices.

My A level students engaged positively with the course materials, enjoying the **opportunity to learn about French as a language**. The discussions surrounding phonetics and morphology particularly in relation to verb endings had a **discernible impact on their pronunciation, deepening their understanding of the differences between written and spoken French**. I have also designed linguistics starter activities to enable students to become **more proficient at identifying patterns of language** and build word families.

*- Janette Swainston, Head of MFL  
(Longsands Academy, St Neots)*

# 3. Building equity in the MFL classroom

**Linguistics really delivers on equity -**

this came home to me as a really pressing need [given] how [MFL] uptake is narrowing to become the preserve of elite schools, and again as a huge opportunity highlighted by the fact that **anyone can 'do' linguistics in relation to their own L1**, thus **giving the lie to students who think it's 'posh' to talk about language.**

[The] talk has **inspired me to resurrect some materials** I used to use years ago to introduce L2 teaching, as I'm offering a 'Tongue Twisters' session on our 'Raising the Bar' day when we invite Year 6 students from primary schools in Ipswich to join us for a taste of sixth form life.

*- Claire Robinson, teacher (Suffolk One, state VI form college)*

# Learning and unlearning in MFL teaching

- ‘What don’t I know?’, ‘Why does this feel uncomfortable to me?’
- Relationship between educational experiences and languages
- *Glottophobie* (glottophobia)
- Some consequences of linguistic profiling and language policing
- Role of educators in dismantling prejudice



**Nelson Flores** @nelsonflores · 18h

Rather than trying to prepare our students for the “real world” why don’t we model in our interactions with them the possibilities of what a new world might look like?



2



16



78



# Back to *me se cayó un diente...*

NanaMadrid said: ↗

En España el hecho de que alguien diga 'me se', o 'te se' en lugar de 'se me' o 'se te' indica que es una persona de bajo nivel cultural.

Correcto, en todos los países de habla hispana es incorrecto y vulgar

Estaba pensando lo mismo. En la película el niño que lo dijo era un campesino de un pueblito.



**cacho**

Member

Argentino

Me refiero a que es propio de gente de clase baja, de un registro coloquial vulgar

Jan 25, 2010



Podría asegurar que en todos los países de habla hispana eso está mal y quien lo dice suele ser alguien de muy bajo nivel.



# Back to *me se cayó un diente...*

NanaMadrid said: [👤](#)

En España el hecho de que alguien diga 'me se', o 'te se' en lugar de 'se me' o 'se te' indica que es una persona de bajo nivel cultural.

Estaba pensando lo mismo. En la película el niño que lo dijo era un campesino de un pueblito.

Yes but then an adult said it too. The boy said to an adult " me se cayó un diente" and the woman responded "no se dice asi, se dice me se ha caido". although the movie is a comedy and it was meant as a joke i could see her talking like that because her character is a poor Indian peasant.

Ah, I see.

Actually, that's pretty funny.

## The dilemma?

‘how are we ever going to teach French/German/Spanish to our students if we discard norms of “correct” grammar, pronunciation, spelling and other linguistic forms?’

*‘how are we ever going to teach English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) for example, if we discard norms of “correct” grammar, pronunciation, spelling and other linguistic forms?’*

*adapted from* **Ndhlovu (2018:123)**

While this is a very real and legitimate methodological concern for [languages] teachers, it misses the crucial epistemological point.

**Why is it that [we] insist on teaching normative standard language practices in classrooms that are populated by students who use a diversity of language practices?**

[It is] difficult, if not impossible, to think outside the box of the ‘monolingual’ view of language teaching because **alternative and competing epistemologies and pedagogies of language are currently not being well received in educational and other social policy settings.** **This is where the problem is.**

*adapted from Ndhlovu (2018:123ff)*

# Preparing our students for the future?



**Nelson Flores** @nelsonflores · 18h



Rather than trying to prepare our students for the “real world” why don’t we model in our interactions with them the possibilities of what a new world might look like?



# 4. Case study: gender and pronouns

*amigues, elles, compañeres*

- How we present noun class paradigms
  - How we present pronouns
  - Neopronouns: usage; written vs. spoken; inclusive language; broader societal issues in TL countries
  - Student empowerment
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## + Spoken vs. written grammar

### ■ Suffixal and prefixal grammar in verbs

- The written language carries grammatical information in the suffix of the verb
- The spoken language tends to carry this information in prefixes: the subject pronouns do most of this work:

■ je donnais	[ʒə.dɔnɛ]
■ tu donnais	[ty.dɔnɛ]
■ il donnait	[il.dɔnɛ]
■ nous donnions	[nu.dɔnjɔ̃]
■ on donnait	[ɔ̃.dɔnɛ]
■ vous donniez	[vu.dɔnje]
■ ils donnaient	[il.dɔnɛ]

## + Verb morphology

### ■ Suffixal and prefixal grammar in verbs

- Similarly, in spoken French, gender and number are marked via the article before the noun, whereas written French marks gender and number at the end of the noun in the suffix:

■ <i>Le chat</i>	[lə.ʃa]
■ <i>Les chats</i>	[le.ʃa]
■ <i>La table</i>	[la.tabl]
■ <i>Des tables</i>	[de.tabl]



- Written verb morphology likely approximates 12th century French!



**'THE GRAMMAR OF  
SPOKEN AND WRITTEN  
FRENCH'**

# Neopronouns

## spanish/español/castilano/castellano

- **Pronouns that can be written and pronounced:**

- Ella/la/-a (binary feminine): "Ella es la niña linda"
- Él/el/-o (binary masculine): "Él es el niño lindo"
- Elle/le/-e (neutral): "Elle es le niñe linde"
- Ello/lo/-o (neutral, similarly to the english 'it' can be very offensive so please be careful and don't use it unless you are told to do so): "Ello es lo niño lindo"
- Elli/li/-i (neutral, cacophonous and uncommon): "Elli es li niñi lindi"
- Ellu/lu/-u (neutral, cacophonous and uncommon): "Ellu es lu niñu lindu"

- **Pronouns that can be written but not pronounced:**

- Ellx/lx/-x: "Ellx es lx chicx lindx" (I don't know who told you otherwise, but this can be used by both poc and white folks)
- Ell\*/l\*/-\*: "Ell\* es l\* niñ\* lind\*\*"
- Ell@/l@/-@: "Ell@ es l@ niñ@ lind@"
- Ell\_/l\_/\_-: "Ell\_ es l\_ niñ\_ lind\_"
- Ellæ/læ/-æ: "Ellæ es læ niñæ lindæ"

## Final thoughts

- Integrating linguistics into the curriculum
- Amplifying choice and broadening horizons

Forthcoming paper: Sheehan et al. 2021.  
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*Modern Languages Open.*


'Linguistics touches everything and is involved in any and every possible topic [...] This makes this one the class where really the questions or points of interest are limitless as to what people can do...

That kind of connection to humanity was what I learned from Linguistics, all things people have ever learned depended on language'

- James



# Thank you!

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