# 1 "Innovative language teaching and learning at university: enhancing employability" – an introduction

## Carmen Álvarez-Mayo[1], Angela Gallagher-Brett[2], and Franck Michel[3]

## 1.    Introduction

Welcome to the second volume in this series of papers dedicated to Innovative language teaching and learning at university. This publication follows in the footsteps of Cecilia Goria, Oranna Speicher and Sascha Stollhans, who hosted the 2015 conference at the University of Nottingham and edited the very first proceedings in the series, dedicated to the theme of "enhancing participation and collaboration" (Goria, Speicher, & Stollhans, 2016). InnoConf, as it has now come to be known, is a series of annual symposia primarily aimed at language-teaching practitioners in Higher Education (HE).

This initiative, originally launched in 2011 by Franck Michel and Andrea Wilczynski at Newcastle University, came to fruition to create a forum for all like-minded professionals eager to discover, share and disseminate good practices in the field of modern foreign languages. InnoConf has been met with great success over the years, and we are delighted to bring you this latest chapter in the series, dedicated to the very relevant and important theme of employability. As defined by Álvarez-Mayo (2016)[4],

1. University of York, York, United Kingdom; carmen.alvarez-mayo@york.ac.uk

2. SOAS, University of London, London, United Kingdom; ag62@soas.ac.uk

3. Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom; franck.michel@newcastle.ac.uk

4. See also Chertkovskaya, Watt, Tramer, and Spoelstra (2013)

"[t]he term employability as we know it has been around since the 1980s, when international corporations, global competition/trade and technology cemented the foundations for a new economic environment. The influx of new technologies set the pace of change, and has been shaping communication and trade ever since. We live in a global world where IT keeps on developing faster and faster, highly impacting in our lives and determining the employability skills required for a successful career. It is essential to understand this in order to develop the motivation and prowess required to be able to keep on evolving alongside" (n.p.).

## 2.    InnoConf16

On the 17th of June 2016 the VI Innovative Language Teaching and Learning at University annual conference: *Enhancing Employability*, was hosted at the University of York by the Department of Language and Linguistic Science and Languages for All. We were delighted to welcome as our keynote speakers Jocelyn Wyburd, Director of the University of Cambridge Language Centre since 2011 and Chair of the University Council of Modern Languages (UCML), as well as Lizzie Fane, founder and CEO of GlobalGraduates.com (formerly ThirdYearAbroad.com).

Speakers and delegates from across the UK and abroad were warmly welcomed to York and enjoyed a conference where educators and researchers in language teaching and learning came together to share best practices, reflection and inspiration, networking with like-minded colleagues and laying foundations for new and exciting projects and developments in language teaching and learning, driven by innovation and collaboration in higher education both nationally and internationally.

Jocelyn Wyburd opened the conference sessions with her keynote speech titled: *Transnational graduates and employability: challenges for HE colleagues.* Based on the research carried out for the British Academy's Born Global project, Wyburd highlighted "[the] demand for the skills [our] graduates in and with

languages can develop" (Wyburd, this volume, p. 11). The talk also explored some of the mismatches between student perceptions of their own skills and what employers are looking for, and highlighted how we as educators can support students in developing their awareness of their employability. The paper appears in this edited volume in which Wyburd has also contributed the foreword, further sharing her expert knowledge and experience on the main theme.

In the closing keynote speech: *Promoting mobility and supporting your outbound students through social media,* Lizzie Fane reminded us how much communication and technology have changed in the last ten years and stressed how important it is to share and access information efficiently and be able to quickly find what you need in the relentless and fast-paced 21st century media/ technology world. Fane offered us a first-hand peek at GlobalGraduates.com, the new website which has now officially replaced ThirdYearAbroad.com; a most valuable tool, helping "students to become Global Graduates through study abroad opportunities, work placements, volunteering, languages and international jobs during and after their degree course" (https://globalgraduates. com/pages/about).

## 3.     Organisation of the book and chapter overview

Following on from the great success in Newcastle (2011), Bristol (2012), Manchester (2013), Leeds (2014) and Nottingham (2015), in 2016 the main theme of InnoConf was Enhancing Employability. The conference programme was varied and consisted of 24 parallel sessions, broadly organised into four categories:

- Mapping the 'Global Graduate' landscape.

- Developing students' intercultural competence.

- Fostering employability in the classroom.

- Enhancing employability through digital tools.

Together with Wyburd's keynote piece, this volume contains a selection of 14 short conference papers organised under the four aforementioned headings.

### 3.1. Mapping the 'Global Graduate' landscape

Under this first heading, all contributors provide a distinctive overview of the skills employers are expecting from language graduates, and how language teaching professionals and their departments can adapt to engage with the working world and better embed employability into the undergraduate curriculum. **Wyburd**'s paper, presented in the previous section, is followed by **López-Moreno** who highlights labour market shortages of professionals with global skills. Reflecting on her own experience of managing international work placements, she illustrates how languages students acquire cross-cultural competence through international work experience but then fail to capitalise on this, preferring instead to focus only on their language skills. What students need, she argues, is to emphasise their qualities as global graduates with global mind-sets. **Leggott** shares in her paper some of her experience promoting student engagement and developing employability awareness, skills and knowledge among language students. Universities, local businesses and students of languages "can collaborate for mutual benefit, leading at times to recruitment solutions for the businesses and life changing career decisions for the students" (Leggott, this volume, p. 30). In this day and age, it is crucial for universities to embed employer engagement in the curriculum and beyond, and Leggott shares some interesting suggestions and examples. **Organ**'s paper offers some very valuable information on the benefits of work placements for the development of modern languages students in terms of experiential and intercultural learning. It also proposes a viable path towards helping languages students gain a better understanding of their employability potential through reflective practice.

### 3.2. Developing students' intercultural competence

Papers assembled under the second heading offer ways in which this crucial skill, which is extremely valued by employers, can be fostered and embedded into Modern Foreign Language (MFL) undergraduate programmes.

**Guadamillas-Gómez** demonstrates how students can improve their language and intercultural competence through participation in virtual exchange schemes. She showcases a telecollaboration project involving universities in Spain and the UK and highlights the professional skill benefits obtained by students taking part. **Parks** presents some of her research, conducted both in UK and US universities, on the link between content modules and the development of Intercultural Competence (IC) and criticality. Content modules, like literature, for example, foster a deeper understanding, awareness and knowledge of the language and culture at hand. Being able to study, compare and discuss the historical and political background in context, as well as linguistic styles and the use of language and metaphors, etc., will instill and cement deep translingual and transcultural competence, which is something highly valued by many employers. **López-Rocha and Vailes** share good practice and reflect on the importance of the promotion and development of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), especially among students about to go on their year abroad; "[t]his paper explores the content and perceived outcomes of a programme aimed at fostering the development of ICC prior to and during the Year Abroad" (López-Rocha & Vailes, this volume, pp. 67-68). López-Rocha and Vailes (this volume) purport that "a programme of this nature is necessary to foster skills involved in the promotion of intercultural citizenship" (p. 68), to ensure that the year abroad is a successful and meaningful experience – an experience of a lifetime that can certainly change and/or shape your whole life.

### 3.3.    Fostering employability in the classroom

The third section of this volume zooms in on innovative teaching and assessment practices designed to help students become more clearly aware of the transferable skills they are acquiring. In their paper, **Lagares and Reisenleutner** discuss the benefits of rotating poster presentations in boosting students' cognitive skills, motivation and engagement. **Federici**'s contribution reports on the transformative impact of enquiry-based learning approaches on the self-perception of MFL students through the development of critical and analytical skills. **Campbell** explains the reasoning behind the new model of assessment for the Institution-Wide Language Programme (IWLP) at the University of Leeds. As she points

out in the abstract, "assessment is a critical part of teaching and learning so it is important that students are encouraged to engage positively with it" (Campbell, this volume, p. 97). It is essential to keep up with the times to develop modern, meaningful, motivating and inclusive assessment that students will be able to share with prospective employees to showcase both their academic and digital skills. In their paper, **Almeida and Puig** make the case for literature teaching in enhancing students' employability skills. Drawing on extensive research findings, they underline the practical benefits of including literature in the languages curriculum. They also report on the development of an innovative project and the website, *Litinclass* which is aimed at expanding the teaching of literature and sharing good practices.

### 3.4.    Enhancing employability through digital tools

Finally, the fourth section of this volume showcases examples of innovative projects using online collaborative means to support learning and foster a wide range of transferable skills. In her contribution, **Plutino** reports on the TwitTIAMO project which makes creative use of Twitter by encouraging students of Italian to engage in collaborative learning outside of the traditional classroom environment. **Escobar and Krauß** discuss the benefits of online blended learning approaches delivered via the Rosetta Stone® Advantage platform, and provide concrete evidence of a positive impact on the learners' cognitive and organisational skills. **Deacon, Parkin, and Schneider** discuss their experience designing and implementing a new 'Professional French' module in which they wanted to ensure that students not only use and learn French, but also practise and develop digital literacy and competencies. Throughout the module, students will develop a digital portfolio which includes a blog and other digital media, such as videos and voice recordings, that they will be able to share with prospective employers.

## 4.    Conclusion

The contributions in this collection showcase a series of inventive projects and initiatives accompanied by evidence-based, practical guidance which we hope

will enthuse and support classroom practitioners in the higher education languages sector as they seek to integrate employability more firmly into the curriculum. These papers also complement the Corradini, Borthwick, and Gallagher-Brett (2016) volume on *Languages for employability: a handbook*, and are particularly timely in the light of the changing policy environment and the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework. The modern languages community undoubtedly faces challenges ahead as the UK appears to be adopting a more inward-looking focus and we are therefore greatly encouraged by the dynamic and outward-facing nature of the teaching practice described so vividly here.

To conclude, we would like to express our gratitude to all the contributors for their excellent work and their help in reviewing the manuscripts thoroughly, as well as all the presenters and delegates who attended InnoConf16 (http://innoconf2016.weebly.com/), enriching the field of Modern Language Teaching thanks to their tremendous contributions. We would also like to thank the University of York and the Department of Language and Linguistic Science for organising and hosting the event, and Sanako (Marie O'Sullivan and David Binns) for their sponsorship.

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