

How can key skills "sell" linguistics to students and employers?¹

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I spend half my working life teaching linguistics, and I feel this is time well spent even though I know that very few of our students will become linguists (in any sense of the word). This is because I believe the students have the chance to develop a lot of important "life skills"² as a by-product of my teaching, so even if they can't remember the three tests for adjectives or the exact definition of *diglossia*, they may well have become better at coping with life. In short I think linguistics is a particularly good curriculum subject from this point of view, and most of this paper is an attempt to lay out my reasons for thinking this. However I shall start with some rather obvious warnings to the effect that it's quite possible to spend three years studying linguistics without learning anything worthwhile at all.

1. Some obvious reservations about life skills in linguistics

a. A linguistics BA doesn't **guarantee** any skill, whether subject specific or transferable. As we all know, there are students who fail to learn anything useful but scrape together just enough marks for a BA.

b. Successful teaching of any skill depends on **emotion** as much as cognition. Students need to be both interested and confident. A bored or anxious student may, reluctantly, learn a list of facts, but they're unlikely to learn life skills without some commitment and confidence. Again we all know this and can illustrate it from our experience of students' different reactions to our teaching.

c. Some life skills - e.g. ability to work in groups - depend heavily on teaching **methods** rather than on the subject content. Linguistics, per se, is no more likely to develop such skills than any other subject, and taking the example of group work, I know from my own experience that teaching group-work requires special teaching skills which not every linguist has simply by virtue of being a linguist.

d. I believe that any skill is more likely to develop at all if it is **conscious**, and skills are more likely to be transferable if the learner is aware of them. This is as true of life skills as it is of more familiar subject skills, such as spelling or speaking a foreign language. I know that this belief is controversial, but if it is correct it is important. It is

¹ This paper is based on a talk at the workshop on "Identifying, teaching and assessing key skills in linguistics" hosted by the UK government-sponsored Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies on 23 May 2003 at the Centre for Information on Language Teaching in London. The discussion that followed the talk was extremely productive, and I have built some of the ideas that emerged there into this version. I have attributed them to individuals where I could remember the source, but in some cases I know I have lost the link and apologise to those concerned.

² Patricia Ashby introduced the term "life skills" into the discussion of one of the other papers at the workshop. I prefer this term to the alternatives such as "key skills" and "personal transferable skills" as its meaning is more transparent and there is less temptation to try and define it.

supported by the following quotation from the website of the Centre for Developing and Evaluating Lifelong Learning at Nottingham³.

"One widely accepted pre-requisite of the transferability of a set of skills is the individual's **awareness** of them. For instance, an awareness of how a report is presented in one field can help in successfully presenting a report in another field. An awareness of the dynamics of small groups, brought about following the review of one small group experience, can help in other group sessions. Embedding the skill in an activity without explicitly recognising it can minimise its transfer. And key skills can be transferred between different activities within a course, too. The critical feature appears to be the degree to which the students (and tutor) are **conscious** of the skill, can **reflect** on it and refer to it **explicitly**."

In other words, if we think life skills are important we should **teach** them explicitly rather than leave students simply to absorb them from experience; and that means, of course, that we too must be aware of them and able to talk about them. This may be easier for linguists than for many other specialists because our whole working life is about making implicit knowledge explicit; but we also know how hard it is to make tacit linguistic knowledge and skills available for scrutiny, so we should be prepared to put the same intellectual effort into the life skills that underlie our teaching.

Bearing all these warnings in mind, here are my reasons for thinking that linguistics is good for the mind; in fact, I shall even claim that it is good for the "spirit", if we can use that vague term for the emotional and ethical bits of the human mind.

2. Some elements of linguistics teaching and related life skills

I shall distinguish three kinds of learning experience that are a normal part of any undergraduate study of linguistics:

- **application** of some given system of categories - most obviously doing phonetic, phonemic, morphological or syntactic analysis in terms of a given vocabulary of categories such as the IPA, phonemes (and allophones or whatever), morphemes (etc) or some grammatical framework;
- **understanding** of 'how language works' at various levels of generality, from some small corner (e.g. the inflectional system of English verbs) to the whole picture (e.g. how communication works or how language changes);
- **self-reflection** on 'how we work', in the light of what we learn about language - how we learn, store and use language, how our thinking may be influenced by our language, and so on (more examples below).

2.1 Application

Linguistics has a surprisingly wide variety of 'systems' which we teach students to apply. Learning to apply one of these systems is basically a sophisticated exercise in classification, comparable with the classificatory systems that underpin any of the hard sciences. As in, say, chemistry, there is usually a single right answer (or at least a

³ <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/education/cdell/>: 2: Which key skills? Defining Key Skills in a particular degree programme

small number of right answers), so it is possible for us to mark student work either right or wrong and in doing so we transmit to students our reverence for The Truth (even if we relativise it to truth-within-a-system). Here are some systems that we teach:

a. Rigorous and rich '**complete**' **analytical systems**, which give (more or less) exhaustive coverage of some area of experience. For example, the IPA gives a symbol for virtually every consonant or vowel, so a student who knows the IPA should be able to transcribe any speech sounds. Similarly, there are systems for grammatical analysis which cover almost every construction in any sentence. Indeed, the alphabetic writing system that we learned at school was an initiation to this kind of analysis. These complete systems cover 'everything' - no mean achievement for any discipline, and hard to match outside the sciences.

b. Other **rigorous classifications** of 'special' aspects of human behaviour which students apply by spotting examples in their own experience. For example, a common exercise in connection with speech production has students collecting examples of speech errors; in pragmatics they may find examples of miscommunication or metaphor; and in sociolinguistics they hunt for greetings or for gender-specific variables. Once again the classification is rigorous in the sense of not being merely a matter of taste. Borderline cases exist, of course, but they don't undermine the point - they just show the complexity of the issues.

c. **Theoretical frameworks**, by which I mean systems of general categories such as we teach in phonology (phoneme, allophone, feature, etc), morphology (morpheme, inflection, paradigm, etc) and syntax (word class, phrase, grammatical function, etc.). These are frameworks for describing the system of language, so students typically learn to apply them in 'data-problem' exercises; for example, we provide a list of words from some language and invite them to work out the underlying rules and forms.

d. **Research methods** - methods for planning projects, finding new data, analysing it and drawing conclusions. In most BA programmes in linguistics the final-year project is the culmination of the programme, in which the student starts to operate as an independent research linguist by bringing together a range of these skills and applying them to data of their own choosing. Many students, and by no means only the high-fliers, find this a time of real intellectual excitement - possibly the first such experience in their lives. If one could measure the growth of life skills, I feel sure that one would find a peak during this period.

How, then, does this range of intellectual activities relate to **specific life skills**? With all the obvious warnings about the skills being potential rather than guaranteed, here is a tentative list of skills that are likely to grow in a student who is learning to apply given systems as described above:

- **Respect for accuracy.** Students can be wrong, but the converse of this is the possibility of being totally right - a very satisfying experience for any student, but one which only comes to those who care about detail as well as about the broad picture.

- **Confidence in learning** new systems. If you can learn a complex system such as any of the competing theories of syntax, you can probably learn any other system in later life, from the house-rules of a firm to the law of property conveyancing.
- Ability to **investigate human behaviour**. Language (including speech) is a kind of human behaviour, so linguistics is the study of one part of human behaviour. If you can stand back from language and treat it as an object of study - reflect on it - then maybe you can do the same for other areas of human behaviour - a really important life skill. The reflective office manager or army commander builds teams and gets results; the reflective commuter copes with the stresses of daily life; the reflective parent builds a reflective and happy family.
- **Attention to form**. This is a specifically linguistic skill, but important in life to the extent that linguistic form matters - in short, very important. Maybe linguists have a pathological concern for form - for 'interesting' pronunciations, grammatical structures or whatever - but much of the population has an equally pathological disregard for it, at least at a conscious level. This disregard is pathological because most professional careers involve the production of written documents, and most written documents benefit from the attention to form that we associate with professional editors and proof-readers. (This is especially true in the area of IT, where we are all aware that computers are unforgiving communicators; attention to form is de rigueur on the keyboard.) Our students should be in a happy position somewhere between the two pathological extremes, able to pay attention to linguistic form when relevant, and not at other times.
- **Metalanguage** for language and **communication**. This too is subject-specific, but it's also an important life skill. Everyone needs to be able to talk about communication, just as they need to be able to talk about - say - family medicine, for the simple reason that the system can fail. As long as normal efficiency prevails we can - and probably should - leave it alone; but as soon as it goes wrong, someone needs to do something about it. Questions about who, what and how require thought and discussion, and discussion needs metalanguage - in fact, arguably we need metalanguage even to think about some such things. Communication often fails at work and at home, and in such cases a little metalanguage comes in handy - for spotting and explaining ambiguities, for example. There are even careers whose aim is to improve the communication skills of others, which necessarily presupposes some metalanguage; this is most obviously the case with teachers of language (first or second) and with speech and language therapists.
- **General communication skills**. It would be comforting to think that linguistics makes a student better at communicating, and given what I said about attention to form and the benefits of metalanguage, this is probably the case. The trouble is that we know better than most that these two skills are only a small part of a complex package, where a strength in one corner may easily be offset by a weakness in another. If studying linguistics per se made one a better communicator, then linguists should all be superb communicators; but none of us would seriously claim that this was so - we spend too much time reading opaque

articles and listening to appalling conference presentations where the silly conventions of academic life offset the supposed insights of linguistics. Still, I think it might be fair to claim that linguists are quite good at communicating and that a good degree in linguistics is something of a guarantee of good communication skills.

2.2 Understanding

Any of the grand systems that I described above rests on an intricate web of relations which hold all the individual categories together. We all spent years assimilating these interconnections and for most of us the experience was deeply and emotionally rewarding, so this is basically why we chose linguistics as a career. This fundamental understanding of the system gave 'meaning' (in many different senses) to all the details, and it is this meaning that we try to share with our students. Many students are fired with enthusiasm when they discover this new intellectual world waiting to be explored, and this is the same enthusiasm that still drives us as researchers and teachers.

Here I should like to distinguish two kinds of understanding that we can offer students:

a. Understanding of **complex analytical systems**, in which students gradually understand how this particular complex of ideas fits together and relates to the reality that it models. The same intellectual process is at work whether the system is the place-manner-voice framework for phonetic analysis or the much more elaborate architecture of a theory of syntax. In both cases we try to explain each new category or idea as we introduce it, and students have to work at building the new system of ideas into their minds. The best students integrate the new system more or less totally with their existing knowledge, giving really deep understanding, while less good students compartmentalise more and understand at a more shallow level. Similarly, the best students understand implicitly as well as explicitly whereas for weaker students the understanding isn't much more than a pattern of words - i.e. explicit but not implicit. As for lecturers, the best student evaluations go to those who explain clearly - students clearly value understanding above all else (including fun).

b. Understanding of the **basic logical relations** that are the basis for any of these complex systems. The most important set of relations involve classification, where students learn to distinguish sub-classification from sub-classification and to handle feature structures in both phonology and syntax; but they also handle part-whole hierarchies (in phrase structure, morphology and phonotactics) and various other kinds of relations (most obviously grammatical functions such as subject and object). Perhaps the most important aspect of our teaching in this area is our use of diagrams for displaying these relations - phrase-structure trees, attribute-value matrices, system networks or whatever. Each such diagramming system forces a clear decision about how to display each relationship and inevitably inculcates a deeper understanding of the relation-types. In contrast, the 'mind-maps' favoured in so much of the humanities crudely lump all relations together and discourage clear thought.

How does this understanding pay off in terms of **specific life skills**? The list of skills is surprisingly long, though it overlaps somewhat with the earlier list:

- **Hard thinking** about difficult issues. Deep understanding is difficult, and we all know how it feels to be struggling with an idea that is basically a little too difficult for us. It really makes our heads hurt, and success isn't guaranteed; but when 'the penny drops' the joy is enormous. Maybe this is the point when our brains have succeeded in building a new coherent set of connections, and it is clearly a signal of successful learning. As with some medical treatment, if it ain't hurting, it ain't working; students who coast easily through the course, absorbing everything effortlessly, may well have learned less (in terms of mind-changing) than those who struggle with every new idea. In the process, the struggling student will have developed strategies which may pay off in future learning situations - a life skill worth having.
- **Confidence** in trying to **understand** new systems. This is a corollary of the first skill - if you can cope with Chomsky's latest theory (or whatever), then you can cope with anything the world can throw at you. This is the best possible preparation for 'life-long learning', about which we hear so much. The biggest deterrent to life-long learning is fear of failure, so anything that boosts confidence is a plus. Anyone who leaves university with the confidence and determination to tackle difficult new ideas really has acquired an important life skill.
- **Respect for evidence**. This skill was in the first list as well, so it gets double input from linguistics. Not only do we respect the evidence when applying a given analytical system, but we also respect it in building the system in the first place. This is what 'understanding' means - it means appreciating why the system is as it is, why the starting assumptions plus the facts lead (more or less) inevitably to this system rather than some other. Even if we teach just a single system, ignoring all the alternatives, we would all present some evidence for it, even if only because this is how systems (i.e. theories) develop in linguistics research. Unlike many humanities subjects, linguistics is deeply empirical so any theory has to be justified in relation to the relevant facts; moreover postmodern relativism is very foreign to most of us, so we take the alternatives really seriously as matters of truth. It makes little difference from this point of view whether we teach a theory as a believer or as a sceptic; in either case students see our overriding concern for evidence - another important life skill, and one that many of us feel is in short supply in places that matter (such as government policy).
- Ability to **evaluate** explanations critically. This is an extension of the previous skill, respect for evidence. If evidence counts, then it is worth evaluating, and evaluating properly. New students sometimes think that evaluation is as easy as an argument in the bar, where "It stands to reason ..." is a knock-down argument. We professionals know differently, and many of us have learned that there's no such thing as an easy debate or a knock-down argument. Evidence does exist, but all too often it is anything but obvious and may involve a long chain of argument. A student who can construct a chain of evidence with more than two links has acquired another important life skill.

- **Respect for alternative** systems. In some areas of linguistics students find themselves surprisingly soon⁴ at the frontiers of research, and in the battles that rage there. In all areas there is some theoretical debate, so unlike some of the hard sciences there is no uncontroversial introductory course which lays absolutely solid foundations for later work. Sooner or later students become aware of the theoretical debates and, given good teaching, they learn that these debates are real - neither side can be dismissed simply as the work of fools or naves. Even if the teacher is 'committed' (whatever that may mean) to one theory, they can present the alternatives as interesting and worth consideration. The parallel with political parties and religious creeds is obvious, but life is full of competing alternatives - alternative views on how to raise children, on how to save the world, on how to be happy. Few subjects have the potential of linguistics to prepare students for making these choices sensibly.
- Ability to **build** complex systems. What students learn about the complex systems of linguistics is that they are the product of human minds - not God-given. This is certainly in sharp contrast with traditional grammar, but also with much of what they have experienced at school, so for most students it a new experience. It is a first-rate preparation for situations in later life where they may themselves be called on to develop complex systems of their own. Although few will have the chance to develop an abstract intellectual system such as a linguistic theory, many will need to think creatively about more concrete systems such as the structure of an organisation or of an IT system. Much of a degree in linguistics is relevant here - not least the diagramming conventions for showing logical relations which I mentioned above, and which have the same kind of general relevance for systems as flow-charts do for processes.
- Ability to **speculate**. A certain amount of linguistics is frankly speculative - most obviously the current debate about the origins of language, but also most causal theories (theories about what causes what). Why do languages change? Why do universals exist? Why do women speak differently from men? Why do different languages divide the world so differently? Most of these questions are really interesting and important, and debating them is real fun because it touches bits of our brain that other discussions don't reach. But unlike other issues we're uncomfortably short of any evidence, let alone conclusive evidence - just like many of the most important issues in life, in fact. The benefit of a good training in linguistics is the ability to distinguish clearly between speculation and debates based on strong evidence - between mysteries and problems, as Chomsky put it. Speculation is an important component of life for those who want to fill the gaps in their understanding of the world; so we cannot simply dismiss it as idle fantasy. But it's important to distinguish speculation clearly from the beliefs for which we believe we have good evidence. This is another life skill for which linguistics is an excellent preparation.

2.3. Self-reflection

One of the great attractions of linguistics as a degree subject is that it's ultimately the study of ourselves - self-reflection. In this respect it's closer to the humanities subjects

⁴ In my department this happens in the first term of the first year, but this is probably too soon.

than to the hard sciences, and (like the humanities) it throws light on many different aspects of our 'selves' - our whole self, including our feelings and values. It is true that linguistics is part of cognitive psychology, but it is also part of social psychology and sociology and anthropology. This is simply a factual statement about the kinds of issues that linguistics students can find themselves confronting. In the following I shall distinguish five 'selves':

- the cognitive self
- the social self
- the emotional self
- the ethical self⁵
- the aesthetic self.

If these terms aren't already self-explanatory I hope they will become clearer in the discussion. The point is, then, that a linguistics course may give a student opportunities to reflect on each of these selves (and of course, in the process, to distinguish them from each other).

a. The **cognitive** self. One of the core tenets of mainstream linguistics is that language is a 'window on the mind', meaning that we can learn something of how our minds are organised by studying the organisation of language - i.e. its general architecture. This is pure cognitive psychology - a study of how we categorise and relate within language. Unfortunately this is of relatively little immediate interest to most linguistics students because they have few prior ideas about cognitive architecture, and in any case many linguists claim that language is unique, which means that it has no relevance to anything else. What does excite students, however, is the study of word meanings, and in particular the idea of linguistic relativity. For instance, even the least engaged student succumbs to curiosity on hearing of languages that have no word for our left-right contrast but use compass points instead. In the process one hopes that they learn to reflect on their own conceptual system and to take it less for granted. Unlike postmodernism, this is a relativity that many linguists value because it relativises our folk beliefs rather than scientific truth.

b. The **social** self. Sociolinguistics is about social structures - social class, ethnicity, gender, and so on - so a course in sociolinguistics touches on these things too. Students have to reflect on their own internalised model of society and on where they themselves fit in this model. Even more importantly, sociolinguistics considers social interaction and social relations between individuals, and in my experience (as a teacher of sociolinguistics) students take easily and enthusiastically to notions such as power, solidarity and face. These elementary ideas from sociology give students, mostly for the first time, an objective framework for thinking about their social relations and about how society works.

c. The **emotional** self. Some of the topics that we discuss in linguistics are emotionally charged; for example, a tutorial on standard English and prescriptivism can be a highly charged event because of the challenge that it presents to deep-seated and highly-valued prejudices. Swear words impinge on the emotional self in a different way by raising interesting questions about our strategies for coping with

⁵ The ethical and aesthetic selves were not part of my presentation at the workshop, but on later reflection they do seem to be worth including here.

strong feelings - for example, why do we use these words, and why do we think they're naughty? The answers may be pure speculation, but the simple fact of reflecting on our emotions is an important part of education.

d. The **ethical** self. Modern linguistics raises a surprising number of ethical questions that students often enjoy engaging with. We know that languages tend to be biased, at least in their vocabulary, against underprivileged social groups, and gender bias is a favourite topic for undergraduate dissertations. Equally we know, and teach, that some communities are severely disadvantaged by their language resources, or rather by the lack of some more 'powerful' language. For example, how unfair it is that speakers of non-standard varieties of English have to learn standard English at school, whereas native speakers of standard don't have to learn non-standard varieties. More recently we have thought a lot about the ethical issues of endangered languages. It is even arguable that language shows how important co-operation and willingness to conform are - an important example of self-interest coinciding with the interest of the whole group. We can help students to understand the specific issues more deeply, to appreciate their complexity and even to change their minds in the face of evidence; and this exercise in ethics is probably more important than whatever positions they adopt on the specific issues. Reflection on the ethical self must be a healthy preparation for the many complex ethical issues of everyday life.

e. The **aesthetic** self. This kind of reflection is probably less common in linguistics courses than the other kinds, but it does have a place. Most obviously it's an ingredient of literary linguistics, where the aim is to understand what makes a text 'beautiful' - what linguistic features distinguish a well-crafted piece of writing from the commonplace? Similar questions arise in pragmatics (how does metaphor work? how does humour work?) and even in psycholinguistics (why are some sentences easier to process than others?). Maybe the only reason for ignoring the aesthetic side of language has been our collective ignorance, but at least we can ask some of the relevant questions even if we can't give many satisfying answers. And ultimately I think we would all see our research as a matter of aesthetics, in which we strive for 'beautiful' explanations for linguistic phenomena.

Once again we can ask how these exercises in self-reflection relate to practical **life skills**. I shall distinguish two kinds of skill: self-awareness and attitudes.

- **Self-awareness.** Presumably we cope with life more successfully if we are aware of how our minds work than if we simply go on 'automatic pilot', as it were. It is true that too much introspection can be debilitating, but our minds are basically too complex and contradictory to be left to their own devices. For instance, if our emotions conflict with our intellect (as they often do), then at least we should be aware of it; and the same is true in the everyday experience of dealing with conflicting emotions. More specifically, we can distinguish the following kinds of self-awareness:
 - **Self-understanding:** we should all know what makes us tick, however uncomfortable that knowledge may be; but the peculiarity of learning about ourselves through the study of language is that language is communal, so we learn to see the similarities between ourselves and other people. To take a

simple example, we can understand why we make speech errors, but at the same time we see that the problem lies in the human brain, not in our own individual brain.

- **Self-criticism:** we should all be able to recognise faults in our own minds, whether these are species-wide (as with speech errors), cultural (as with learned prejudices) or individual (as with gaps in our knowledge - spellings, words, grammatical constructions, conventions of use). Language is an excellent focus of self-criticism precisely because weaknesses can be ascribed to any of these three sources so we have to learn to discriminate in the diagnosis before deciding on remedial action.
- **Self-appreciation:** this is the counter-balance to self-criticism. We probably all enjoy pointing out to students how complex language is, and consequently how 'clever' they must be to be able to cope with it so well. More seriously, perhaps, we can help them to undo the effects of negative attitudes to their native language by getting them to study it seriously. Learning that their non-standard English (or their low-status language) has rules is a good antidote to the poison they absorbed in earlier life. Maybe if our students learned to really appreciate the richness of their knowledge of language, more of them would be motivated to share it with others as language teachers.
- **Attitudes.** The attitudes on which I should like to focus are important in life and can, at least in principle, be profoundly affected by a course in linguistics.
 - **Tolerance:** students should become more tolerant of others. They should learn to understand rather than blame when faced with communication failure, with alternative ways of speaking or with alternative classifications of the world. For someone who understands language, most such experiences are interesting rather than irritating or threatening.
 - **Openness:** as well as tolerating alternatives, students should become open to adopting them in their own behaviour - what sociolinguists call accommodation. This is one way of fixing the personal or cultural weaknesses exposed in self-criticism, and perhaps the most obvious manifestation should be in the area of language learning: our students ought to be above average in their ability to learn new languages - an important life skill indeed.
 - **Interest:** students who apply for places on our course all claim to be interested in language, but some find it hard at first to translate this general interest into an interest for the nitty-gritty details of the IPA, sentence structure and so on. However most of them eventually find some area that really turns them on - often an area that relates easily to their ethical or emotional self, as described above. Most of the population have some kind of interest in language, but few have an informed interest, which is much more of an asset in life.

3. Conclusion

How, then, can life skills "sell" linguistics to students and employers? I have no doubt **that** life skills are a really important selling-point for linguistics, as must surely have emerged from what I have said above; but we are left with the question "how?". I haven't tried to answer this question, and I can't offer a proper answer at this point either. Instead I should like to finish with a collection of comments which I hope will be relevant and helpful.

- I said that studying linguistics can be painful - if it ain't hurting, it ain't working. As Doug Arnold pointed out in discussion, this is hardly a strong selling point for potential students, but I believe it's almost certainly attractive for potential employers. My conclusion is that it may be important to present different benefits to different audiences; for example, employers can hear how intellectually challenging the course is, while potential students hear how interesting it is.
- As I pointed out in section 1, a course in linguistics does not, per se, guarantee any of these life skills. These skills are highly dependent on teaching methods, so for example attitudes are much more likely to change in a small-group tutorial discussion than in a large lecture theatre. To the extent that we have choices in matters of teaching methods, these should be informed by the goal of developing life skills rather than, say, by the goal of 'covering the syllabus'.
- Many of the benefits of studying linguistics at university should also come from the study of language at school level. Many of them have been offered as arguments for 'language awareness' work in schools, and some of the benefits should accrue from the current focus on the explicit study of language in the National Literacy Strategy, the literacy strand at KS3, and the Modern Foreign Languages curriculum.
- Speaking personally, this presentation has been the first occasion on which I have ever had to think hard about life skills in linguistics (though I thought a bit about them when writing my short *Invitation to Linguistics*, Blackwell 1984). I'm not aware of any other attempts to review all the relevant life skills systematically⁶, though (to judge by Google) many of our colleagues have found ways of linking their courses to specific skills. Maybe it is time for the profession at large to set its collective mind to the question, as it is clearly an important one at least in terms of student recruitment. If this paper contributes to that process, so much the better.

⁶ Several departmental web sites present useful lists of key skills which students are likely to develop during a linguistics degree - for example at the University of Manchester (<http://ling.man.ac.uk/Students/UGHandbook/Handbook0203.html>) and at my own department at UCL (http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/toc/set_info.htm - follow "information for current students" - "Degree programme home sites" - "Teaching aims for undergraduate programmes"). However these lists tend to adhere to the 'official' public lists of skills, ticking off the ones that relate to linguistics. As we heard in the first talk at the CILT workshop, these official lists are well known for varying rather arbitrarily. What I have tried to do is to work the other way round, starting from linguistics and finding relevant life skills.