



Languages and Work

Language skills constitute an advantage in the job market. They are required for a range of highly skilled jobs, for language-specific positions, but also increase the potential for less-qualified workers to find employment. In the EU, 20% of employees use a foreign language at work, rising to 25% among 26-35 year olds. As societies become increasingly multicultural, international and connected, the need for foreign language skills among workers is critical for growth. Language and intercultural skills play an important role in trade, tourism and employment. They are key to international cooperation and opportunities in the current global age. English is used in many companies as a lingua franca and a command of English is often perceived as a basic skill that all employees should have. Increasingly, however, this is not enough and workers will need to speak at least two additional languages (probably including English). Many migrants and speakers of a minority language already possess these skills.

Challenges

- *Is English enough?* Knowledge of English is a distinct advantage. It is the first language in many cities and countries and serves as a *lingua franca* in many others. English is often regarded as the language of the business world and is a prerequisite for many jobs. However, reliance on English restrains both employers and (potential) employees. An even greater competitive advantage exists if you command two foreign languages or a less widely spoken language. In Cyprus, for example, private sector companies arrange for their employees to take Russian lessons, as Russian is now seen as a must in retail and banking. It is not uncommon for employers and employees to add a language that dominates their particular field, for example German in engineering or Mandarin in trade. Economic activity is enhanced through multilingualism, yet stakeholders often are not aware of the potential of other languages. Any additional language is a tool that can be deployed in the job market and for economic advantage.
- *How to re-position languages as an advantageous and attainable skill?* Many employees have foreign language skills, but this resource is often not used strategically to the benefit of the employer. Jobseekers can also increase their employability by highlighting their language skills, but tools for

certifying language skills are not always transparent enough. Further and higher education institutions, which play a key role in careers advice, may not (yet) have the capacity to advise students on how to apply or develop their language skills. Policymakers in government may not be aware of the importance of language skills for the economy. This toolkit therefore provides tips and ideas for each of these stakeholder groups on how to highlight and utilise language skills for the economy.

What are the advantages of multilingualism for the economy?

- *Communication:* greater trust can be built with colleagues, suppliers and producers when a target language is used; foreign customers and clients can be addressed in the most appropriate and natural way.
- *Contacts:* greater language capabilities can lead to a greater choice of customers and clients for collaboration; multilingual staff often possess networks in other countries and regions. A foreign language is not only spoken in one specific country or region, for instance Turkish is not only spoken in Turkey, but in Cyprus, Albania, Greece, Azerbaijan, throughout the Balkan states and in other European countries with large Turkish populations.

Learning new languages

- *Knowledge*: a knowledge-based economy requires up-to-date technical and commercial information from a range of areas; additional language skills can source more and better information when carrying out market research, for example.
- *Employability*: speakers of other languages can benefit from opportunities offered by international connections; multilingual staff are also an asset to all employers - as well as the language skills themselves (and thus the potential role of multilingual staff as a contact partner, translator or mediator), speakers of other languages often possess intercultural skills which can be beneficial for a company:
 - Knowledge of particularities, habits and customs of a specific cultural group;
 - People who speak more than one language can see things in different ways. Staff with languages are often more flexible, more tolerant and more able to sort out disagreements;
 - A little goes a long way – one does not have to be fluent to gain a great competitive advantage.

Broken links, corrections and updates can be reported and viewed at www.urbanlanguages.eu/toolkits/errata

Ideas for the multilingual jobseeker



Have you thought about the ways your language skills increase your employability?



Be aware that you have a competitive advantage through your language skills in the job market. Don't underestimate your language skills (especially your home language). Search for job announcements that require language competences.



You could highlight your language skills in your application. Point out your language skills as strengths in the cover letter and job interview. Match them to the job announcement.



Kerr Recruitment in the UK specialises in all positions requiring language skills:
www.kerr-recruitment.co.uk



Have you considered a qualification in the language of an emerging economy or in a less widely spoken language?



Do not underestimate your own heritage language skills!



The best paid translators' jobs are for specialised translators working in less widely spoken languages.



Think about studying Mandarin or Arabic, the languages used in the world's fastest growing markets.



Have you considered taking language courses that address the needs of companies in your city?



You will help your employment prospects if you develop your language skills according to the demands of companies (business language, article writing, intercultural competences, knowledge of economic and political systems of specific countries).



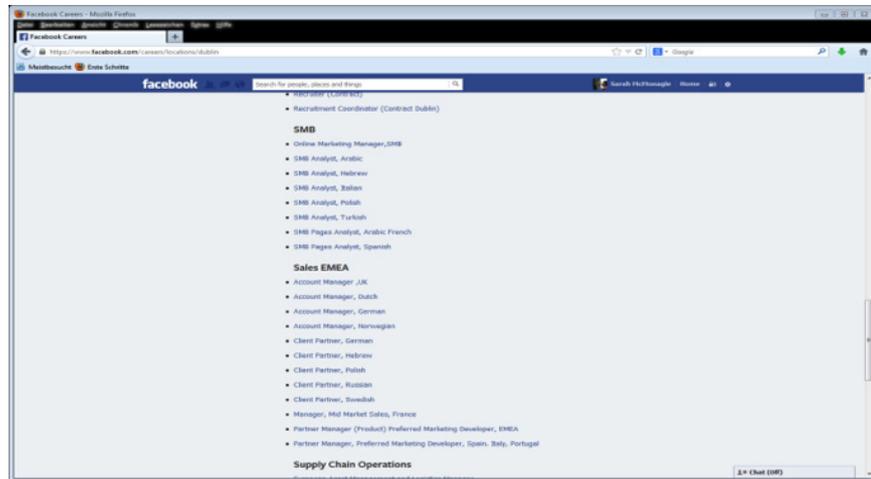
To develop your skills in translation or mediation, you should take specialist courses.



There are many places you can find out the language needs of a company: its website and social media, its publications, reports in the press and even contacting them directly.



This is an example from the Facebook recruitment page in Dublin, which lists vacancies and required language skills:



Remember, you don't need to have native-like fluency in a language in order to recognise it as a skill – businesses need people who are culturally sensitive and who can get along with a wide range of people!



Are your language skills certified?



Obtain a certification or qualification in your language, which you can add to your applications. This does not only apply to foreign languages, but also to migrant and minority languages



Where can you certify your language skills?

You should look at local colleges or cultural institutes such as the Institut Français/ Alliance Française (French), Goethe Institut (German), Società Dante Alighieri (Italian), Hellenic Institute (Greek), Instituto Camões (Portuguese), Instituto Cervantes (Spanish). A full list is available [here](#)¹.



Several universities have developed ways of certifying language knowledge to allow students to participate in ERASMUS exchanges. Remember, you may also be able to get your qualification elsewhere if it is not available in your city or country. Online courses may be available to help you progress.

¹ <http://www.eunic-online.eu?q=eunic-members>



The University of Ljubljana is an example of a university offering qualifications in language skills to [facilitate Erasmus+ exchanges²](#).



The Goethe Institut's distance learning course includes a participation certificate and can help students prepare for an exam, [all on the internet³](#).



Why not get some work experience abroad?



Extend your job research to other countries in which your additional languages are spoken. You then have an immediate advantage by using your own language skills! You can also apply for a short-term stay in a company abroad.



[EURAXESS⁴](#) is the European platform for open positions and job market requirements and conditions in European countries.



Internships can be financed by the [ERASMUS+ programme⁵](#) of the EU.



[Working abroad not only improves language skills but also intercultural and social skills which are other valuable competences in the job market. Research shows that experience in other countries makes you more flexible, creative and a complex thinker⁶](#).



Are you aware of the job fields that require your language skills?



Certain fields require specific language skills. Research companies or fields that could benefit from your language skills. Don't forget that language skills might be relevant in any job that deals with customers or partners abroad.

2 https://Erasmus.uni-lj.si/Language_Certificate_CEFR_scale.pdf

3 <http://www.goethe.de/lrn/prj/fer/kur/onl/enindex.htm>

4 <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/>

5 http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/index_en.htm

6 <http://time.com/79937/how-studying-or-working-abroad-makes-you-smarter/>



Here is a list of professional areas and their required languages within Germany. In other regions, other languages might be needed!

Logistics, foreign trade: English, any language depending on which country company is trading with

Hotel, catering industry: English;

Healthcare, caring for the elderly: Turkish, Russian, Polish, Arabic, Dari, Farsi;

Crafts: Turkish, Russian, Polish;

Support services: Wide range of languages;

Child care: English, Spanish, Turkish, Russian, Polish, Chinese;

City administration (public services, police, fire brigades, penal system): English, Turkish, Russian, Polish.



The [fashion industry](#)⁷ is another sector in which language competences are “in vogue”.



Here you can see some examples of the career paths of UK language graduates:
<http://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/oct/16/language-graduates-jobs>
<http://www.thirdyearabroad.com/language-launchpad/>



There are language-specific job websites. For instance, [TopLanguages](#) are one of Europe’s biggest recruitment companies specialising in language jobs.

They have websites for most European countries.

Ideas for employees



Have you thought about how you can make your employer aware of your language skills?



You could be placed in positions where your language skills are strategically used for the company. You could mediate for other colleagues in need. Your language skills are an extra qualification that can make you essential to the company.

7 <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/jan/17/languages-career-fashion-industry>

8 <http://www.toplanguagejobs.co.uk>



Have you thought about taking qualification courses to improve your language or mediation skills?



You could either take language courses that improve the specific vocabulary of your job environment, or courses on the basics of language mediation. Mediation in this context does not mean word to word translation but “translation” of a concept, an idea or content of one language into another.



Would it be possible to do an internship or short-term stay in a branch of your company in another country?



Language skills are best developed in the country where the target language is spoken. Companies might enable a short-term stay in one of their international branches or with one of their partners or suppliers. There you could also develop your job-specific language.



Internships can sometimes be financed by the ERASMUS+ programme of the EU. Contact your national agency for details (see full list of national agencies at <http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/national-agencies.htm>)

Ideas for Further and Higher Education



Do you advise students on how they might apply or develop their language skills for employment?



Universities can organise job placements through the **IAESTE⁹** (International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience) programme. Placements for 1-2 months are funded by the European Commission and have a key language component, for example German at BMW in Germany.



Do you liaise with industry to find out workplace needs?



The university at Limassol employs an expert to liaise with industry. This person focusses on the importance of languages.



When advising students on CV and job search skills, do you have an expert on language needs in the economy?



Are language requirements sufficiently highlighted at careers fairs?



Today, many graduates have to migrate. Young Spaniards go to South America, while many Irish go to Canada and Australia on account of the “same” language. Advisors should emphasise that jobseekers can re-position themselves with another language.



Does your institution offer extended training in languages to all students, in particular in relation to communication skills and vocational development?



Do you address language in your own corporate planning process?

Ideas for employers



Are you aware of the language skills that your employees possess? Language may be a criterion for selection, but do you track current employees who speak another language?



Consider carrying out an audit of the language skills in your company. Keep in mind that any additional language is a key skill, so encourage employees to think about their home languages, as well as languages learned in education or while abroad. Is your human resources department aware of the skills in the company and how they might be used? How might trainers in your company work with multilingual employees?



Do you make your employees aware of the potential of their language skills?



Develop your own ways of making your multilingual workforce aware that their language skills are valuable for your company. Are there projects they could contribute to? Partners or clients whom they could communicate with? New areas for development that could exploit your staff's languages?



Have you considered using the language skills of your employees more strategically?



Carry out a language audit to find out the language skills of your employees.



This [questionnaire](#)¹⁰ based on the Common European Framework of reference for Languages (CEFR) can be used to assess language competences of employees. Employees report a) their spoken languages and b) the level of those spoken languages.



Keep a list of the language competences of your employees, in which one can quickly find a translator/mediator when needed (keep data protection and good ethics in mind!).



Think about ways to improve translation, mediation and intercultural skills in your company.

¹⁰ <http://www.kombi-hamburg.de/kombi.html?seite=17&lang=en>



Assist your multilingual employees in the challenging tasks of general translation/ mediation by offering a course on the basics of translation, localisation and mediation.

Develop the specific vocabulary of your workforce by using targeted language courses.



<http://languedutravail.org/> is a website built by Quebec's main unions that provides advice and dictionaries to help businesses translate technical terms in different industry sectors into French.



Some companies organise seminars on cultural awareness, habits and differences. This type of knowledge can help to build greater trust with clients and associates and avoid misunderstandings. Cross-cultural awareness is an investment in global economic activity.



Encourage job exchange (internships, job-shadowing) of your employees in foreign countries, e.g. in your network of suppliers, clients or in other companies.

Encourage apprentices to carry out internships abroad.



Internships can be financed by the ERASMUS+ programme of the EU. Contact your national agency for details. See full list of national agencies at http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/tools/national-agencies/index_en.htm



Point out the multilingual features or languages spoken by your employees as a special characteristic of your company.



In Toronto, many private businesses target the multilingual public. For example Rainbow Caterpillar prides itself on being the first multilingual children's bookstore in Toronto.



In Vancouver, a number of firms are built to serve multilingualism and point this out as their competitive advantage. For example, TigerTel provides outsourced call centre and contact management services in multiple languages, including French, Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese and Portuguese. The Richards Buell Sutton LLP law firm and its 40 lawyers offer services in eleven languages. Bilingual Family offers advice and support to professionals working with multilingual families and to families considering raising their children in two or more languages. Gentle Health Care is a private company providing a whole range of health and comfort services in English, French, Persian, Tagalog, Punjabi, Hindi, Cantonese and Mandarin. Founded in 2009, Captus Advertising has grown to become one of Western Canada's premier multicultural advertising agencies. This agency has launched many campaigns targeting individual cultural groups, sometimes exclusively in the group's mother tongue.



Have you considered approaching schools to inform pupils about your company's language needs?



If your business requires specific language needs, you might think about using local schools as a long-term recruiting possibility, by cooperating with them and organising interactive information days and providing internship possibilities.



In England, the [Routes Into Languages](https://www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk)¹¹ programme intervenes in schools to promote language learning, including a focus on languages at work.



Have you considered approaching universities to let them know of your language needs?



Universities may facilitate communication between students and businesses. The university at Limassol, for example, keeps lists of companies with major occupation and languages that are needed. Universities also host careers fairs and advise employees and workers of the future!



Have you thought of ways of addressing clients in their own language(s)?



Making multiple languages visible can increase attraction towards certain products and companies. Providing information or just simply advertising products in several languages will attract more clients. A website is a great place to start. Social media supports many languages and has immense potential in terms of customer reach.



Consider translating your website into different languages. Remember, these versions don't have to be as extensive as your main website – but they make your business much more open to international clients. They also ensure your company has an international profile. You could also provide a list of staff on your website who can deal with queries in different languages.



Examples of businesses communicating multilingually include simple ideas such as paper carrier bags in Osijek, materials published by banks in Altona and advertisements in several languages in Limassol.

Ideas for policymakers



Have you considered creating a welcoming atmosphere for different cultures and languages?



Foster a welcoming culture for multicultural and plurilingual employees. The emphasis should not only be on the languages, but also on the cultural competences of multilingual employees.



The German federal government runs the travelling exhibition [“Yes, we’re open”](#). This exhibition promotes the openness of the German government to an international workforce.



Have you thought of ways in which you can advise jobseekers with language skills to apply for jobs that will make use of them?



Careers advisors (in public employment agencies or in chambers of commerce, crafts etc.) should identify jobseekers with languages and offer them advice on how to work in jobs/sectors where their skills are especially useful.



Make transparent how jobs that require language competences can be found. Advertise job fairs that focus on languages.



In Toronto, at least five recruitment agencies specialise in targeting multilingual candidates, namely Bilingual Source, Bilingual Target, Anne Whitten Bilingual Recruitment, Diamond Global, and Nevian Counselling and Placement Services, and a multilingual career fair attracting hundreds of organisations worldwide is organised each year.



You might raise awareness of the importance of language skills for the economy through the education system.

There is a very clear overlap between the economy and education – language skills from one ought to feed the other. Early investment in language education, bilingual programmes and language development is crucial. Ongoing evaluation of language education programmes is necessary to meet economic needs.

Careers information and advice should start early in schools and should include a consideration of the language skills of students.



In the educational system the importance of language skills (for all languages) for the economy should be pointed out. This could raise student's motivation for learning languages and exchanges abroad.



Schools could diversify the range of languages they offer to reflect the importance of global market and trade, as well as languages that are important for local industry.



Improve job-related foreign language learning in vocational schools. Implement courses in business languages in vocational schools.



Funding is available for young people to spend time abroad (for work and study) through Erasmus+. If young people are made aware of this possibility when they are still at school, they will be more likely to take advantage of the opportunity.



Do employees in your own departments and agencies possess language skills that can facilitate economic development?



You could carry out an audit of language and intercultural competence in your own departments and agencies to find out what skills already exist (and might be used strategically) and where there are gaps.



Have you thought about supporting research to find out more about the language demands of companies?



Studies can be carried out on the demand of languages for specific sectors and on the significance of intercultural competences in the job market. This can be very helpful in deciding priorities for a plan.



Have you thought about encouraging citizens to gain a qualification in their language skills?



Make it clear to citizens where they can gain certification in their language skills. You could do this by listing opportunities on a city website, in local libraries or colleges, cultural and community centres, or through publications and mailings.



“Utrecht International” is a joint publication by the Utrecht Economic Board and the Chamber of Commerce that describes the situation in the economic sphere in the city from the perspective of internationalisation and globalisation. The final chapter includes a “to do list”. Among the 28 recommendations, some are specifically directed towards multi- and plurilingualism, such as the suggestion to offer English courses to bus drivers, taxi drivers and other ‘ambassadors’ of the city.

Conclusion

There is a wide range of opportunities for languages to be used for the benefit of the economy on different levels. Often this potential is already there but not known to the employer and not used strategically. A first step to make more use of language competences could be to find out, with a simple questionnaire, which languages the employees in a company already speak. By doing this, employers can benefit their business and also show that they value those language competences as a resource for the company.

Whatever you do, we wish you every success in increasing your multilingual capabilities, and please do get in touch with us to share your experiences and tips of using more than one language in the work place!

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