

Interim evaluation of Corpus-based Linguistics and Language Education (CbLLE), Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Centre of Excellence: March 2009

Project Planning

The layout and explanation of what the project is about could not be more transparent, and this indicates a clarity of purpose which is a credit to all involved in this project. Reading through section by section, I detect good deal of attention to detail, as well as the setting of what are, on the whole, feasible and attainable aims and objectives.

Originality

This project takes a somewhat limited view of field linguistics and I do not see any problematisation of concepts such as 'naturally occurring' nor how one can be sure that data collected is somewhat representative of the whole of the uses of particular language. I therefore would qualify the framing of this part of the project as correct but not original.

Similarly, the corpus linguistics part seems consistent with international practice without breaking new ground.

Finally, there is linguistic informatics. I first came across this term when I was invited to attend a conference organised by TUFS in 2003. It surprised me somewhat at that time, as I saw what was going on, in more prosaic terms, as language education or even applied linguistics (or more specifically, as a part of applied linguistics).

The most original aspect of this project is, in my view, how it combines the three areas, imaginatively and ambitiously, albeit within fairly structuralist parameters. In addition, the variety of languages covered is better than most similar such projects around the world could claim.

An additional positive aspect of the study is the use of varied ways to disseminate results, from more traditional face-to-face conferences and 'hard' publications to the creative use of new technologies (e.g. making material variable via internet, use of moodle). The organisers might consider soliciting additional publications from all involved to put up on blackboard.

Scientific Quality

While I see this project producing examples of research that is of a high quality-good publication based on field linguistics corpus linguistics and linguistic informatics- I wonder about two addition outcomes of research. First, is there any scope in the project for the production of publications which might challenge, at a

theoretical level, more traditional approaches to these three areas, publications which might point to, for example, new understandings of the epistemology and ontology of the three areas? Second, is there any scope for the development of new ways of actually carrying out research? Again, I detect what is perhaps a little too much following the rest of the world and not enough innovation as regards practices (see my comments on originality above).

International Contribution

This programme appears to be working in an international way as it attempts to make contributions to ongoing and developing understandings in the three areas at an international level. There is inconsistency as regards the listing of publications for the different projects, but this is no doubt due to these projects being at different stages of development. There is also a noteworthy effort on the part of the TUFs staff to organise conferences involving partner institutions and their staff. However the question remains as to whether or not these participants, and indeed the existing staff at TUFs, have a sufficiently international profile in their different areas of expertise. I cannot judge the world class status of the people who have been invoked in this project, both from inside TUFs and from without. However, I can leave this as an issue to consider. In short, is there sufficient effort to involve in these different projects what we might call 'global players'?

The range of languages is part of this international character. And in this aspect, the programme is impressive: under Field Linguistics (Khoe languages, Swahili, Tangkhul Naga ...); Under Corpus Linguistics (Russian Thai, German Hmong, Khmer, Romansch, Latvian ...) and under Linguistic Informatics (French, Spanish, English, Turkish, Japanese ...) .However, I did wonder if the choice of these languages was strictly according to available expertise among existing staff. For example under the EU Minority Language Corpus (6.7, Corpus strand), why just Latvian and Romansch?

Finally, there is a good combination of researchers who were formed both in Japan and abroad.

Feasibility (Results)

As I indicated above, these are uneven at present. However I am impressed by the number and variety of concrete outcomes to date (e.g. under 'Exploration of Interaction between Auditory Phonetics and Phonological Structure ' there are already several interesting publications and the Russian dictionary 10000 entries, available via internet, looks positive).

If we understand results in terms of feasibility, i.e. the extent to which the programme aims can be achieved by the staff listed, within the time frames established, I see no reason why this should not be the case. Indeed, as suggested above under the heading Scientific Quality, there is scope for more ambition as regard more theoretical additions to the various projects outlined.

Scientific Results

The programme brings together researchers from a good range of geographical areas around the world and what has been produced up t now seems to be of good, if not cutting edge, quality.

Fostering young researchers

Two of the chief aims of the programme are the provision of an 'education program for training young researchers ... with broad perspectives as well as a profound understanding of linguistic and cultural diversity in the world' and 'practical training in the studies of languages and language education' with a view to producing 'researchers who are competent in technical communication in research activities within and outside Japan'. Judging by the procedures and activities outlined in this report, the programme seems likely to achieve these aims: there are good experienced researcher-less experienced researcher combinations set up and trainee researchers find space to take an active role in projects. Of course, the development of each researcher will vary, as it will be dependent on and shaped by the specificities of each individual set of experiences, mediated in turn both by personal histories and the actual activities engaged in (and people engaged with) in each case. However, what is produced in the report, under the headings 'Young Researchers at International Conferences in 2008' and 'Nurturing Researchers', looks very positive.

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