



# Routes into languages

Professor Debra Kelly  
Languages and International Events



# Routes into Languages Research Report (HEFCE-funded)

- Develop key language initiatives to facilitate UK HE/FE sector's contribution to making Britain a "generous host" and "cultural inspiration" for 2012 and for other international cultural and sporting events in London and across UK;
- Widen participation and interest in languages both for personal development and public participation;
- Contribute to wider national multilingual policy for public and private sectors;
- Contribute to body of experience and history that constitute the heritage of the modern Olympics and the place of languages and culture within it;
- Deliver knowledge transfer between HE language departments and civic and business communities



# Languages and International Events, Past, Present and Future

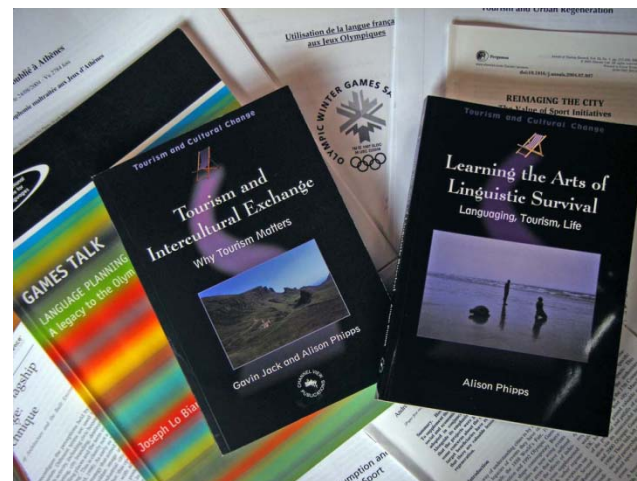
How 'language services' were/could be delivered to a range of audiences and in a variety of forms at international sporting events (e.g. Winter and Summer Olympics and Commonwealth Games)

The place of language training and intercultural communication within sporting contexts and ways in which linguists and intercultural specialists can work with sports bodies to develop international cooperation, communication and understanding



# Lessons to be Learnt

Research based on official reports, literature, interviews and specially-commissioned reports (including Barcelona 1992; Atlanta 1996; Sydney 2000; Manchester 2002; Athens 2004; Melbourne 2006, Turin 2006; Beijing 2008; Vancouver 2010, London 2012)



# Underlying Principles

Deployment of linguistic and intercultural skills within context of sporting events enables individuals and wider communities to become more aware of nature and value of language skills

Planning, delivery and legacy of high-profile sporting events may (if successfully executed) act as a motor of economic and civic regeneration and personal and community development, allowing citizens to play a productive role in complex globalised contemporary societies



# The Olympic Context

“The modern Olympic Games are increasingly about much more than sporting excellence and are deeply embedded in a multitude of economic, political and cultural transactions. The Games are invested in multiple ways with meanings of profound national symbolic significance. Grasping the significance of the symbolic as well implementing the practicalities are essential for success”

(Kelly: 2008)



# Games and the City

“Language Services have become an essential part of the international peace-making role of the Games in that they facilitate an ease of, and accommodation in, cross-cultural communication during all aspects of the Games” (Lo Bianco: 2000)

“The Games are a catalyst for re-imagining and re-imagining, re-constructing and re-presenting host cities (...)

London 2012 presents the UK with the opportunity to shed its monolingual image and to project its vibrant multiculturalism and its openness to internationalism” (Kelly: 2008)



# Scope of Language Services

Official languages of the Olympic Games: French, English and the language of the host city

Plus 'Working languages': Arabic, German, Russian and Spanish

Chinese (?) following Beijing 2008 and China as a major economic power in 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Main Groups affected in varying degrees by need for effective linguistic communication:

Athletes and their management teams; Officials and Dignitaries (e.g. delegates from IFs and the IOC); Spectators; Journalists

Extended groups include: transport services; emergency services; hospitality and retail industry; tourism industry (including heritage, museum and gallery sector); domestic communities and international visitors





# Scope of Language Services (cont.)

Atlanta 1996 Language Services Department (Translating, Interpreting, Operations); Language Service Communication Centre for central coordination (model followed at Sydney; Australian research into evaluation of multilingual communication was positive); training programme developed by a Language Service training coordinator in conjunction with an outside consultant; creation of sport-specific French and English glossaries (further developed at Sydney); translation of contents of 'Info '96' system including biographies, news, historical results, schedules, general info about the Games; daily chefs' meetings; weather reports; 32 issues of the Olympic Village newspaper; 24 hour language switchboard (31 languages) in the Olympic Village

Use of 'language agents' in e.g. Doping Control, Medical Services, Opening and Closing Ceremonies; Press Operations; Protocol, Security.

[Focus on Olympic Family only; Professional Interpreters for high-level work; Language Agents received no formal language/intercultural training]

"I think that the whole languages aspect was a very peripheral part of the organisation and the event (...)When it was here, it was here; and when it was gone, it was gone" (Atlanta Language Agent Interviewee)



# Scope of Language Services (cont.)

Sydney 2000 (see Lo Bianco *Games Talk*, 2000 and 2007)

Official Report notes that during Games-time, the languages services programme was of particular benefit to athletes and was located in SOCOG's Sport Division because of its role in sport competition

Chief Interpreter appointed in 1998; 88 interpreters contracted (38 simultaneous interpreters mostly recruited from overseas with extensive Olympic and international experience; 50 consecutive interpreters providing professional services in English, French, Spanish, Russian, German, Arabic, Mandarin, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Italian and Greek)

Simultaneous interpreting at Main Press Centre, Olympic Village and Olympic Family Hotels; services also provided at Olympic Stadium, International Aquatic Centre, Sydney Entertainment Centre, Exhibition Halls and Convention Centre; all other competition venues had consecutive interpreting

2,300 interpreting assignments from 28<sup>th</sup> August to 1<sup>st</sup> October 2000; services across 25 competition and 2 non-competition venues using 898 Specialist Language Volunteers (Official Report)

Details of translation services are not mentioned in the Official Report at all, but it was on a vast scale both pre-Games (e.g. technical booklets of the 28 Olympic Sports; Chefs' dossiers; Athlete's Handbook) and during Games-time (including flash quotes, info sheets, results, biographies and historical records, scripted announcements, press releases, media updates, minutes of all IOC and IF meetings,



# Improving Performance of Language Services Past

“Research shows that effective communication fails when there is a mismatch between the linguistic and cultural expectations of the target group, and the way in which the provider has ‘packaged’ information” (MGIVE: 2007)

“The transient nature of mega-events can lead to equally transient training and other opportunities. This is incompatible with the notion of bequeathing a legacy to the Games, to the host city and nation, to international visitors” (Kelly: 2008)

“Well, why do we need to have anything besides Italian and English anyway?” (Organiser on Turin Winter Olympics 2006)

- Disproportionate reliance on private commercial sector has led (inevitably) to inadequate long-term legacy and exclusion of sectors of the population (apparent both in official reports and in academic research);
- Where language provision does offer interesting models, only major, economically powerful languages are properly represented;
- No objective evaluation of language services;
- Lack of long-term commitment/inconsistent language provision and training from one city/event to the next/loss of ‘memory’ from one Games to the next



# Going for Gold in Language Services Future?

**Sydney Language Planning Consortium:** provided a bridge between provision of language services within the strict requirements of the Olympic Family and the wider community need for communication support

“The Australian government and the Organising Committee understood and supported languages, and that hasn't been the case in Turin, Salt Lake or Atlanta where language services were seen as an obligation rather than a priority” (Experienced Olympic Games Language Services Professional Interviewee)

## Vancouver Winter Olympics 2010

The National Action Plan “Une Grande Occasion” (February 2007): particular social and cultural model but much to inspire; language strategy as a means of taking ownership of the Games, and of making the public feel part of their envisaged success story and their legacy, not only for the Francophone community of British Columbia but for Canadians generally; planning on national level; education and young people; sport, leisure and physical activities, art and culture, business and tourism; ‘event-themed’ rather than ‘event-led’; inclusiveness

“Everyone is very organised, very ahead of the Games (...) there is an official languages component that has been pulled out and recognised (...) a new component, which puts some focus on spectators and general guests at the Games, because we [at VANOC] don't do that (...) I feel really good about these Games, because I've never seen a Committee this organised, this far out” (Interviewee as above)



# Going for Gold in Language Services Future? (cont.)

London 2012 Are we ready to talk to the world?

LOCOG: number of language-specific roles is “relatively limited”; provisional requirements to be based on practice at previous Games and to be confirmed following the appointment of Languages Services Manager: 300 ‘critical role’ dignitary assistants with experience at very senior level; 1,000 people with fluency in key ‘official’ languages (not yet chosen) to act as facilitators and interpreters in a range of roles; around 60 contracted interpreters to work with Languages Services

‘City Volunteers’ Programme: currently being scoped; 12, 000 volunteers

Higher and Further Education Sector/PODIUM: expertise, capacity, enthusiasm

CILT The National Centre for Languages: initiatives such as the LAFTAS ([www.languageswork.org.uk/laftas](http://www.languageswork.org.uk/laftas))

London Regional Language Network: ‘Welcoming the World’ training programme and resources

“The main ‘new’ skills that will be required of those working at or around the 2012 Games will be: Games knowledge, cultural awareness, disability awareness and language skills” *Impact Research Skills for the Business Network* (June 2007)



# References

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- Debra Kelly (2008) *Language and International Events Past, Present and Future. Are we ready to talk to the world in 2012?*
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Abridged published version of Routes Research Report *Languages and International Events. Are we ready to talk to the world in 2012?* available at this conference

For full report, see:

[www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/international](http://www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/international)

