

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Maximising language instruction in Australia

Dr Mark Antoniou of the MARCS Institute has received funding through the Australian Research Council's Discovery Early Career Researcher Award to investigate and improve methods of teaching a second language to individuals of a variety of backgrounds. Supporting this project is Professor Patrick Wong, of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, who will help provide international participants.

'The ability to use language permeates all aspects of life, and being able to learn more than one language provides international opportunities for schooling, employment and business', Dr Antoniou explains. 'Yet while some people struggle with a second language, others flourish. What I am aiming to do with this research is to identify the unique combination of factors that predict successful language learning. I am also going to investigate whether learning two languages makes it easier to acquire others. If both the internal and external factors that produce the best learning outcomes in this area can be understood, linguistic programs around the country can be tailored to maximise an individual's learning success.'

To identify the factors underlying language learning, the research team will expose participants – UWS students, recruits from the Australian population, and students from The Chinese University of Hong Kong – to one of five artificial languages, and test whether the artificial language can be more easily learned when it is phonetically similar to the participant's native language. The participants will be a mixture of people who only speak Australian English, and people from non-English speaking backgrounds. It is predicted that having a similar language background to that of the artificial language will boost learning; for example, participants from a Mandarin Chinese language background should find it easier to grasp the



Mandarin-like artificial language. The team will also investigate how having a specific language dominance, and having multiple speakers teaching the new languages affect learning outcomes.

The findings from this research will help streamline English-language classes for Australians from diverse backgrounds, as well as providing better foreign language courses for English-speaking Australian children. Such innovation could save millions of dollars, for example, the Australian Government is currently investing \$377.4 million in the Building Australia's Future Workforce Initiative, which includes language development classes for workers.

Project Title: Cracking the code of successful language learning

Funding has been set at: \$364,536

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July 2015