

KRUSE – Linguistics – Knowledge, Representation and Use

A report on the first four years

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Preliminary note

This brief report has been made at the request of Professor Maria Antónia Coutinho (7 September 2017) on the basis of the four annual reports on the doctoral programme between 2013 and 2017.

It should be mentioned as far as any conflict of interest may arise that the author of this report gave one three-hour seminar in the framework of the doctorate but has no other connection with this programme.

1. General appreciation

1.1 Objectives of the doctoral programme

Although graduate schools have been adopted in many European universities, it is still uncommon to find fully thought-out and coherent programmes for even as broad an area as linguistics. Indeed, the scope of the sub-fields included in this programme is so large that it would be more accurate to speak of language sciences rather than simply linguistics, though institutional constraints may dictate such designations.

The idea to offer a broad range of focuses from the most theoretical to the most practical is also a highly praiseworthy initiative. In linguistics, as in most modern sciences, specialization has become the norm, to the extent that research in even closely-related subbranches too often goes unnoticed. Building a doctoral programme on a common basis, where a representative selection of theoretical and practical specializations are presented, is thus an excellent start.

The aims of the course and its components are clearly set out and cogently argued, including, it is assumed, in the literature announcing the doctoral programme.

1.2 Course features

The doctoral course combines a variety of activities in which the students are involved, namely seminars, a summer school and a graduate conference, as well as reading groups, a very comprehensive programme. The seminars, all aimed at the highest academic level, show progression as the course proceeded. The summer schools have been particularly rich, and it is to be hoped that they were not restricted to the very select PhD student body. It was in this context that many of the internationally known academics on the course were able to participate. The graduate school should have made it possible for the PhD students to present their research to a wider audience, but it is understandable that with small student numbers it is not always feasible to put on. The reading groups appear to be a very useful feature of the course, and one that other postgraduate course directors would do well to consider. There is a place for discussion of concrete research in a less formal setting than a seminar, and one in which the initiative can be

taken by the students. In addition, PhD students are encouraged to take part in international conferences and have participated in poster sessions, given papers and published articles in reputable journals.

1.3 Faculty

The claim that the doctoral course has secured the ‘collaboration of top scholars from some of the best institutions in the world’ is by no means overstated. As far as France is concerned, the leading specialists in lexicology (Jean-François Sablayolles), lexicography (Jean Pruvost), terminology (Christophe Roche, Isabelle Oliveira, Isabel Desmet) have been coopted. Similarly internationally known experts have been invited such as Xavier Blanco for lexicology, Amparo Alcina for translation studies, Jean-Paul Bronckart for discourse analysis, Charles Bazerman for knowledge extraction from texts, as well as many others. These visiting academics built on the work done by the local team of highly competent and internationally known faculty

1.4 International reach

The ambition to achieve a PhD course with international reach has also been largely attained in the few short years that the doctoral course has been in operation. Not only is the teaching staff and the recruitment of students international in nature, the graduate students are involved in formative activities which take them well beyond the borders of Portugal, for example to Paris 3 for lexical statistics (Salem), Aarhus for dictionary-making, Chambéry for ontology

1.5 Recruitment and grant allocation

On the European horizon, there are very few grants made for linguistics at the doctoral level, so it is particularly important that these be attributed as fairly as possible. This appears to be the case, as the programme was widely publicised and the recruitment process fully transparent.

1.6 Reactivity

The four annual reports show that those in charge have been at pains to identify problems, analyse them and if possible to find solutions. One such initial problem was the imbalance in graduate student applications : far more students applied in psycholinguistics than in lexicology/terminology and none at all in the theoretical course. The causes were identified, and by the third year the intake was approaching a reasonable balance.

1.7 Academic excellence

It is not possible to judge the academic excellence of this post-graduate course, although the author has by chance had the opportunity to hear an excellent presentation in Chambéry in 2014, but an idea of the level required to take this course can be gained by the remarks in the reports to the effect that international students in linguistics were simply not sufficiently qualified in their field to embark on the doctoral course. This speaks volumes for the high standard of linguistics at undergraduate and graduate levels in Portuguese universities, and augurs well for the post-graduate level.

2. Appreciation of the lexicology/terminology course

The post-graduate course in general is characterized by its voluntarily broad scope and this is mirrored in the lexicology/lexicography/terminology specialization. Studies of the lexis and principles of dictionary making are two related but very different fields, and both are given appropriate prominence in the course. Transdisciplinary collaboration is also a feature of this specialization, in particular in two dynamic areas, i.e. those of term bases and more generally of ontology, both paving the way for work in knowledge management.

3. Conclusion

From the evidence of the four annual reports, it appears that the linguistics doctoral programme is a dynamic, open structure, which has evolved rapidly over its so far short existence and has produced budding researchers who have already begun to make their mark in their various sub-disciplines. The idea of encompassing a wide range of linguistic topics, from the most theoretical to the most practically applied, has proved to be an ambitious but a realistic one.

It is to be hoped that the programme is further developed along the lines which have been so far so successful.

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