I would like to welcome all our readers to the new academic year, especially our new students who have started their first year of language study with us.

Our congratulations go to Dr. Michelle Royer from French Studies for her promotion to Associate Professor and Dr. Seiko Yasumoto of Japanese Studies for her promotion to Senior Lecturer.

I should also like to welcome, on behalf of the School, Dr. Michael Abrahams-Sprod and Dr. Gili Kugler in HBJ Studies; Dr. Ada Bieber and Dr. Catherine Moir in Germanic Studies; Ms. Beatriz Carbajal in Spanish & Latin American Studies.

I am very pleased to inform you that the development of the accelerated mode for the Diploma of Languages, the largest e-Learning project of the School has been concluded. In January 2016, we began to offer the accelerated mode for Chinese, French, Japanese, Korean and Spanish. Congratulations and many thanks to our colleagues who have been involved in the project.

2016 will be a year of new beginnings with the University launching its new Strategic Plan for the next five years. The School will continue to maintain the wide and varied language offerings and to strengthen our research culture. With our nation’s growing linguistic and cultural diversity, it is the mission of our School to equip our young generation with cultural and linguistic competency and enable them to become successful and responsible citizen of the country and of our interconnected world.
The School of Languages and Cultures offers the widest range of language studies in Australia covering Europe, the Middle East, Asia and the Americas.

The University of Sydney offers majors in
- Arabic Language and Cultures
- Chinese Studies
- French Studies
- Germanic Studies
- Greek (Ancient)
- Modern Greek Studies
- Hebrew (Classical)
- Hebrew (Modern)
- Indonesian Studies
- Italian Studies
- Japanese Studies
- Korean Studies
- Latin
- Sanskrit
- Spanish

Whether you are just starting as a University student or looking to expand your professional career, we can help you discover the joys of learning a language.
The Diploma of Language Studies (Accelerated Mode) — a project for developing an intensive pathway for language learning — started in 2014. This initiative was to address the language learning needs of students who were enrolled in a degree course with no units free for language studies, as well as the needs of postgraduate students and professionals who wished to enhance their capability through acquiring communication skills in a new language. More specifically, the new pathway was tailored to cater for students in the professionally oriented degree courses and fields where the ability to communicate in a language at a pragmatic level would enhance their capacity to work in that country or region.

In December 2015 the project completed its development stage. By then, the School of Languages and Cultures (SLC) had developed 40 units of study in the online or blended learning mode with over 100 educational videos and countless online quizzes and pedagogical activities. The full diploma program was now available for five languages — Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Chinese and French — and individual units for Indonesian.

Looking back, we can marvel at the incredible pace of the development — a project of this magnitude completed within 20 months — thanks to the heroic efforts by our academics, educational designers, leadership team and numerous individuals from around the University who generously contributed their expertise and enthusiasm. The project was also a fine example of collaboration between the SLC, the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Sydney eLearning, ICT Video Production team as well as an exemplar of leadership provided by the Dean, Head of School, Diploma Director and other senior stakeholders.

Along the way we tested the limits of Sydney Student as a system and significantly enriched the cooperation with our Marketing and Recruitment Team. Each person involved in this project deserves profound gratitude for the end result that offered to our students an innovative way of language learning with quality and flexibility never experienced before on such a large scale.

There are many things to celebrate after the completion of the developmental stage. But, if I can select one as the single most important achievement — a quality by which I measure the success of the project — I think it is the creation of a model and a
platform for reforming all curricula in the SLC. By utilizing the available technology we created a type of unit of study that extends the learning process outside the classroom, units with flip learning mode where knowledge is not simply delivered from teacher to student but is created collaboratively within the group.

Clearly, with this approach we managed to attract students’ attention and our enrolments are testament to that. One of the units, Essentials of Language Learning, had 11 enrolments in 2015. At the moment of writing these lines we have 60 enrolments. Another unit — Understanding Southeast Asia — generated 125 enrolments in its first offering. Many other Diploma units have similar success stories.

And now, equipped with the experience, tools and confidence in the quality of the product, the School is reviewing regular semester units, as well as Summer/Winter School units, with a view of incorporating technology and blended learning in all our curricula. We are currently working on creating such units in all languages that have intensive pathways, as well as in Arabic and German.

Popular blended learning units

Understanding Southeast Asia
ASNS2665
Intensive Feb, 2016 | Credit Points: 6

This Unit of Study introduces Southeast Asia, the complex and dynamic region located between China and India. It emphasises the importance of geographical, political, economic, social and cultural context to our understanding of complex real-world problems. Having gained insight into these aspects of contemporary Southeast Asia, students learn to apply an interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of challenges faced by the region such as economic and social inequality, environmental management, food security and urbanisation.

Essentials of Language Learning
ICLS2111
Semester 1, 2016 | Credit Points: 6

This online unit for language learners is only available to Diploma of Language Studies students. Students explore issues of translatability of moving between languages at a range of levels from words to discourse. This unit of study equips students to use language learning as a window to cultural concepts, and to develop communicative competence in their target language.
Learning languages at high speed

Thanks to the Accelerated Mode in the Diploma of Language Studies, students can learn a language in less than 14 months or take some subjects intensively to finish their major more quickly. James, Victoria, Nok and Adam share their experiences of studying languages intensively.

James Evans

Studying Chinese
Bachelor of Arts majoring in History and Government and International Relations
Currently 2nd year Law Juris Doctor at University of Technology, Sydney

Why do you enjoy about studying a language?

It’s completely different to my law degree and gives me a break from dry law content. The most enjoyable part for me is noticing how Chinese characters have gone from being completely incomprehensible to being part of a rich language that I’m being to make sense of without needing to reference English or the Pinyin pronunciation system.

What advice would you give to students who are considering studying a language?

Do it! Language learning is incredibly rewarding but the time commitment and importance of keeping up with the content can’t be overemphasised. However, like most things that demand a lot of effort, you are definitely rewarded for it!

How did you find the accelerated mode of studying and blended learning?

Very demanding but ultimately rewarding. I tried language learning in my first degree but didn’t enjoy the semester-long language units. The intensive mode has been completely different, and the small classes and more individual focus in a condensed period of time has really helped me learn better.

Do you have any plans to travel to a Chinese speaking country?

I’ve travelled to Hong Kong before but would like to visit mainland China after I finish my diploma to experience further in-country language learning and to practice reading, writing, and speaking with native Mandarin speakers.

Do you have any other comments about studying Chinese at the University of Sydney?

There are so many options available that it’s really easy to try it out and see if you like it. Whether you want to include it as part of your degree or take on the diploma and study mostly during regular semester breaks, if you’re at all interested in China (and you should be!) I’d really recommend learning the language at USyd.

Victoria Rene Gapps

Studying Korean
Bachelor of Arts (Honours) and Bachelor of Science majoring in Asian Studies and History and Philosophy of Science

Why did you choose to study Korean?

During my first year at university I became interested in Korean popular music (K-pop) and so I became interested in studying Korean but didn’t have the units to do so. Later on, my Honours supervisor advised
“Studying Korean at the University of Sydney has to have been one of the best decisions I’ve made. The teachers and resources are amazing, and it neatly fits around your other studies. Sydney is the only place I know of that gives you the chance to learn six language units in 14 months through its Accelerated mode, so there’s no reason to postpone it if you’ve ever wanted to study Korean.”

- Victoria Rene Gapps

me about the Diploma of Language Studies that was beginning the following year, and once I found out about the Accelerated format the timing was perfect. So I decided to take 14 months to pursue my interest in learning Korean.

What advice would you give to students who are considering studying a language?

Firstly, you have to remember that making mistakes is completely natural. It can be very frustrating and discouraging to see how many mistakes you’ll make when learning another language. You just have to keep practising, and gradually you’ll begin to improve. Also, websites like Quizlet are your best friend. Because you can use them to access your vocabulary on your phone, it’s possible to study whenever you have free time so you should take advantage of that. Go through your vocabulary when you’re waiting for the bus or standing in line. Even just a few minutes a day will do wonders for your memory.

Finally, I recommend that you immerse yourself in the culture as much as possible. Whatever your interests, try and find resources in your target language. You won’t understand them at first but you’ll be surprised how many things you do understand, which can really boost your confidence.

What do you intend to do after your studies?

I enjoyed my Diploma of Language Studies so much that I’ve decided that I want to be able to teach Korean to other people. So I’ve enrolled in a Masters of Teaching (Secondary) to become a high-school language teacher.

What was it like studying intensively for the Diploma of Languages?

Personally, I preferred learning Korean in Accelerated mode, but I think both modes have their advantages and disadvantages. Being able to complete so many language units in such a short span of time made the Accelerated mode very convenient and meant that you noticeably improved after every class. The intensive format also means that there is only a short interval between when you start and finish a unit so the information is still fresh for your exams. But as a result, you really have to stay on top of your workload and you can’t afford to miss any classes. Also, because the classes were very small, we were able to receive a lot of individual attention and feedback from our teachers, which is really helpful when learning a foreign language. Although the workload in Accelerated mode seems very daunting, you just have to take it one day at a time and be sure to revise past content in your own time.

What do you enjoy about studying Japanese?

Realising how far I have come with my Japanese studies when I am able to communicate with local people when I visit Japan.

Do you know any other languages?

English and Thai.

What advice would you give to students who are considering studying a language?

As long as you are interested enough in their culture and language, you will be motivated to study hard and do well!

What do you intend to do after your studies?

I plan to start my own business that may require me to speak Japanese. If that doesn’t go well, I will try to go to Japan on a working holiday visa and experience life there for as long as I can. I have been to Japan before and would like to go again at the end of this year!

How did you find the intensive mode of studying and blended learning?

I really enjoyed doing the accelerated mode. Students had the opportunity to
practice speaking and reading in this intensive class much more than doing the same subject during the semester. We were also given the time to study at our own pace using online resources at home.

Aaron Waters

Studying French
Bachelor of Arts majoring in Art History and French Studies

How did you come to study the intensive French subjects?
I was going to enrol in French level 1 in semester 1, and when I saw the January intensive was available I thought it would be a good chance for me to get ahead in my progression. In class I heard about the second intensive session and did that. Now it means that going into semester I can go straight into level 3.

What do you like about studying French?
It allows me to interact with a different culture. There’s a lot of people in France who don’t speak English and there’s a different crowd who do speak English. I found that if you can speak a language fluently enough to be able to talk to someone with someone who can’t speak English you get to see a whole new perspective on things that you would otherwise not see. You can talk to someone who you might not otherwise be able to talk to so it opens up their culture. People talk to you differently – even if they talk to you in English they will speak to you differently about their lives when they speak in French. They speak as they would to a friend or neighbour, as opposed to how they would speak to a tourist.

What did you think about the intensive mode and blended learning?
I haven’t learnt French at University in another method as yet, I’ve only done French in high school and then a short section when studying in France. I was doing an intermediate level of French at university in France but wanted to do a beginners course to ensure that my grammar was flawless. From those experiences, where you have maybe one hour per week in class with a teacher I found I wasn’t as engaged as I was with the intensive – where we were doing four hours a day, four days a week. Because [classes] happen more often it’s staying in my mind a bit more, with French every day for such big blocks it is really in your brain. Even when I leave the classroom it’s still on my mind. On the weekend I think back to the classes. In a perfect world I would like to have the French intensive classes all year long. Intensive requires much more work, but is much more engaging. It does require a bit more dedication.

I have enjoyed doing the language course with Clara [Dr. Clara Sitbon] because you’re not just learning words and vocab and grammar, you’re learning culture too. You realise how much language is not just speaking a certain way, but the concepts behind it. It’s interesting to see how the culture is affected through the language. I’ve just done level 1 and half of level 2 so I’m excited to see where it goes. Clara is a really good teacher, I’ve had a few different teachers and out of all of them she’s the best at explaining things in really understandable terms. Her method is really, really good. The balance between online and in-class activities is really good as well.

What would you tell students who are thinking about doing a subject in intensive mode?
Make sure that you do your homework. Be prepared to work hard. I have a little bit of French already, but I’ve seen other students who I did level 1 with in the last few weeks and now they are doing level two, and a couple of students have come so far from where they started. I think it is a testament to how much you put in is how much you get out.

“I started doing Japanese in accelerated mode just over half a year ago and I have learnt so much. The teachers for this course are great and I would recommend anyone to do it”

- Nok Punpraw

“I know that proficiency-wise, I will have learnt a year’s worth of French in six weeks and I can now express myself in ways I couldn’t before. So for me, that’s one of the rewards of doing the intensive.”

- Aaron Waters
Researching the International Labour Movement in Asia

By Professor Michele Ford, Department of Indonesian Studies and Director of Sydney Southeast Asia Centre.

My fascination with the international labour movement and its influence in Asia began in Indonesia, where I studied at Gadjah Mada University on an Australian Vice Chancellors’ Committee scholarship in the mid-1990s. There I saw first-hand how labour activists chafing against the constraints of authoritarianism were prepared to risk everything to effect change. Several years later, I wrote a PhD thesis on how the Indonesian labour movement had evolved during the Suharto period (1967–98) and in the years of what became known as reformasi, following the collapse of the regime. It was in the course of researching this topic that I first began to think about the role played by what are now called ‘global unions’ in post-authoritarian contexts like Indonesia’s.

The Indonesian Labour Movement

The Indonesian labour movement has remained a strong focus of my work. In fact, I am currently in the middle of writing a book with Professor Teri Caraway from the University of Minnesota on the re-emergence of political labour. This book is the culmination of an exciting few years of research, interviewing politicians, unionists and ordinary workers in five industrial cities about unions’ attempts to become more involved in electoral politics as a way of getting better outcomes for their members. It’s been a tumultuous time, during which unions have sought to leverage their power as a voting bloc to influence the platforms of candidates running for executive positions in local government and even presidential hopefuls, and themselves run for office. Not all these attempts have succeeded, but there is no doubt that organized labour is now firmly on the political map. We’re very much looking forward to sharing our analysis of how this situation has come about with both academic audiences and practitioners.

In theoretical terms, though, I have become increasingly obsessed in recent years with the broader question of how the different layers of the labour movement mesh or, in some cases, don’t. This question first arose — as do virtually all my academic obsessions — from my observation of developments in Indonesia. Under Suharto, trade unions had been so completely domesticated as to no longer constitute a labour movement.

During reformasi, they experienced a reversal so dramatic that they are now considered to be the most vibrant trade union movement in Southeast Asia. Much of the preparatory work for this transformation involved underground organisers like the ones I met in Yogyakarta when I was a student. Many of these organizers were associated with the student movement, or with one of the many human rights-focused non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that had emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as the regime yielded to pressure from the international community following the fall of the Berlin Wall and partially relaxed its controls on civil society. Several of these NGOs had a particular interest in labour, and were committed to helping grassroots worker activists prepare for a time when they were free once more to organise their own unions. These NGOs and alternative trade unions, in turn, were supported by aid agencies in Western Europe seeking to promote democracy or, in some cases, by the international arms of the trade union movements in the United States and elsewhere.

The transformation itself was incredibly rapid. Within months of the reinstatement of workers’ freedom of association, dozens of national unions had been established and had registered. Some of these unions were in fact little more than a ‘name plate’ (papan nama) on some sleepy suburban street. Others, though, quickly developed into serious organisations, incorporating either reformist elements that had broken away from the Suharto-era union or groups of worker activists that had had contact with student activists or labour NGOs. In
several key cases, an important element in the capacity of these new unions to assert themselves so quickly was the ‘solidarity support’ they received from trade unions around the world, provided directly or through the global unions.

**Temporary Labour Migration**

My growing understanding of the importance of this kind of solidarity support — and my interest in how it operates — has led me on a journey through the labyrinth that is the international labour movement. The first stop on that journey, topic-wise, was the question of temporary migrant labour.

Temporary labour migration is a burning issue in Asia, where almost all major countries are countries of either origin or destination for migrant workers. For decades, local unions in both groups either had little interest in this group of workers — in fact, many were overtly hostile to them. As a consequence, it was NGOs, not unions, who tried to protect them from the worst forms of exploitation as they travelled to the destination country or while employed there. Understandably, these NGOs focused on migrant workers’ identity as migrants rather than as workers, advocating for changes to government labour migration programs and supporting those in need.

Over time, however, these NGOs realised that they needed to involve the unions, which have special status as the bodies representing workers in each country’s industrial relations system, but also internationally within the International Labour Organisation (ILO), which is a body comprised of representatives of trade unions, employers and governments from all over the world. The importance of involving the unions became particularly clear in lobbying for the ILO’s Domestic Worker Convention, which was high on the agenda of many Asian migrant labour NGOs. It was for this reason that key NGO activists at the regional level decided to try to convince local unions that they should become more involved with migrant workers.

As it happens, these developments were taking place at the same time that the European Union was expanding. At first glance, this may appear to have little to do with the situation in far-off Asia, especially as domestic workers were the least of the Europeans’ concerns. In fact, however, it made a very important contribution to developments there. The reason for this was that
the expansion of the European Union also meant the expansion of the number of countries whose citizens had the right to work in Western Europe. Eastern Europeans flooded the labour markets of the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, Austria, Scandinavia, and even Spain and Italy, fundamentally changing the face of the workforce. And of course trade unions in these countries had to adapt to this new reality.

Temporary labour migration suddenly became a big issue for Western European labour movements, who carry a great deal of sway within the global unions. Trade unions from Scandinavia, the Netherlands and Germany are especially influential, because of mechanisms that allow them to apply to their government’s foreign aid programs for funding to support trade union projects. In some cases, the international arms of the trade union movements of these countries – known as Solidarity Support Organisations – work directly with trade unions or NGOs in recipient countries. In many others, however, they work with the Global Union Federations to deliver this trade union aid. Not surprisingly, as they became increasingly aware of the issue, they started to look to support projects that focused on temporary labour migration abroad.

My research focuses on the confluence of these two influences on local trade union movements in the seven main Asian destination countries for migrant labour – namely Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. It’s been a big challenge to try to get my head around the particularities of each of the cases, but also immensely rewarding. I have just finished drafting a book on the project, which tries to capture the big regional picture without losing these nuances. After around a decade thinking about this issue, I am relieved to finally have the book done.

Trade Union Aid … and Myanmar

The next element in this intellectual journey has taken me westward to compare the impact of the Global Union Federations in Indonesia with their impact in India. My partner in crime on this project is Dr Michael Gillan, an academic at the University of Western Australia who, like me, combines an area studies background with a disciplinary interest in labour movements and industrial relations. Our research has taken us not only to Indonesia and India, but to Geneva, London and Scandinavia, as we trace the diffusion of ideas, funding and strategy across the globe. As the project has evolved, we have become more and more interested in the mechanics of the Global Union Federations, and indeed the Solidarity Support Organisations, in their international work.

This project has coincided with the award of an Australian
Research Council Future Fellowship, which has allowed me to look more closely at these mechanisms in Southeast Asia. The fellowship project focuses on trade union aid to Indonesia, Malaysia and Timor-Leste, which all have very different relationships with the international labour movement. This has been the first time I have worked in Timor-Leste, which has been very exciting. It has also allowed me to deepen my understanding of Malaysia, where my work had previously focused primarily on labour migration. I still have a lot to do on both these projects over the next year or so, but it’s work I’m very much looking forward to.

The final part of the puzzle – for now, at least – is Myanmar, where Michael and I started doing some work with Htwe-Htwe Thein, an Australian International Business academic of Burmese heritage, in 2013. Myanmar is particularly interesting to me because, like Indonesia and Timor-Leste, it is a Southeast Asian post-authoritarian society. Many of the things we’ve observed in Myanmar track the experience of Indonesia after the fall of Suharto in 1998. It also has the potential to be a really useful fourth case for my Future Fellowship because all the same international organisations are now there as were in Indonesia a decade or so earlier. We are hoping to develop our preliminary research on industrial relations in Myanmar into a major project over the next few years.

Doing my Research

With so many balls in the air, people often ask me how I manage to keep everything afloat while also running the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre (SSEAC), a university-wide strategic initiative that brings together over 270 academics with an interest in Southeast Asia. Sometimes I say that I’m not really sure. But the real answer is that I have fantastic collaborators at the University of Sydney and elsewhere, and a great team of people working with me in SSEAC. I have also been lucky, as most of my major research projects have attracted funding from the Australian Research Council, which has given me the financial resources and the time to do so much research.

Another other thing that has really helped is the supportive atmosphere in the School of Languages and Cultures, where colleagues and successive Heads of School have encouraged me in my work. I have worked at several different universities, but University of Sydney has been by far the most supportive environment I have experienced in my academic career.

Most of all, though, I love being able to talk to the people who are actually making changes in the lives of ordinary workers, then put the pieces of the puzzle together and share their stories with the world.
A Q&A on Blended Learning

Dr. Clara Sitbon wrote her thesis on blended learning and has developed blended learning units of study for the Diploma of Language studies accelerated mode. In this interview she discusses how blended learning works with languages.

What is bended learning? How is it similar or different to traditional face-to-face teaching?

Blended learning has often been reduced to face-to-face teaching, supplemented by online activities. French scholars have summarized blended learning by the following formula: 1 + 1 = 1. In this case, it refers to the articulation of face-to-face and online delivery into a coherent course.

It usually follows the “flipped classroom” model, where everything the students can do on their own is left for the online mode (before the class), reinvested in the classroom, and perfected online after the class. This way of learning allows more class time to be dedicated to interaction – peer interaction, as well as student-teacher interactions. This proves to be particularly useful, especially in a context where class time is being reduced more and more.

What are some of the advantages of using blended learning for the students and teachers?

In a broader sense, blended learning presents several advantages. Firstly, it allows more flexibility in terms of time and space. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, blended learning presents great pedagogical advantages. Indeed, it allows students to learn at their own pace. They are therefore able to customise their learning experience to make it more effective. More importantly, blended learning allows students to take their language learning outside the classroom and apply it to their everyday life.

In 2010, the U. S. department of Education released a report on online learning. The analysis shows that students from a blended learning course obtained better results than students enrolled in the same face-to-face class.

I have experienced the same results with the first level of the Accelerated Diploma of French, where students obtained, on average, better results than in the standard first level of beginners French.

Blended learning combines the best of both modes and also focuses on a highly active pedagogy, which has proven to be extremely successful in language learning.

Do you think academics need special training to be able to teach a blended learning course?

I don’t think that special training is necessary to be able to develop and teach a blended learning course. The basic functions of blackboard (journals, discussion boards, voiceboards, tests, etc.) are enough.

But we can also use other interactive tools to compliment the online part
Is there anything about blended learning makes it particularly useful for teaching languages?

As previously mentioned, interaction is the key to language learning. Blended learning allows grammar, which also another cornerstone of language learning, to be approached online – the student is therefore able to go through the grammar at his or her own pace. It leaves more time in the classroom for interaction. Interaction also allows students to showcase their creativity.

Do you think that it will be used more in future?

Blended learning shifts the polarisation of teaching and learning. It shifts from a teacher-centred approach, to a student-centred approach. It does not mean that the teacher’s role is lessened, far from it. The teacher is not the sole holder of the knowledge, and when it comes to language learning, it allows a more tailored learning experience for each student.

We are fully embedded in a digital age. Students spend a lot of time online, and we need to adapt to this shift. Students are fully depending on their digital devices now, and we need to use this to maximize the student’s learning experience.

This is why I think that blended learning will inevitably become more and more prominent, as we will keep moving to a digitalisation of education. We need to adapt to changing times, and we need to make sure that the reduction of resources does not impact on the student’s learning experience.

Could you briefly describe what it took to develop the French subjects that you did for the Diploma of Language Studies?

The hardest thing in the development of the Accelerated Diploma of Languages was unquestionably time management. I had very limited time to adapt existing units into an accelerated and blended mode. The pedagogical scenario needed to be very carefully thought through to suit these two major shifts.

As I was teaching whilst developing the Accelerated Diploma, I was able to pitch ideas to my students and use their feedback and suggestions, which were invaluable.

It became evident that all the grammar would have to be done online, which allowed me much more class time to do interactive and innovative activities. I used a lot of authentic resources that students would be familiar with (social media, tripadvisor, restaurant review websites, etc.) As I progressed into harder levels, I was able to expand the range of tools used. At the end of level 4, for example, students will be completely immersed into the French web space.

It was a steep learning curve in term of pedagogical techniques, as well as technological cools. I learned to use a lot of new presentation tools to ensure variety within the course content.

How did Diploma students responded to the blended learning involved in the intensive mode that you taught?

Blended learning is not for everyone. Nor is the intensive mode.

That said, most of the students had a very positive experience. It took a few days for them to get used to the format of the class. But once they developed their routine, the course went very smoothly, I had lots of positive feedback and they obtained great results.
Books and Cuffs: Cairo International Book Fair

by Ahlam Mustafa, PhD Candidate from the Department of Arabic Language and Cultures.

Walking towards the gates of Cairo’s book fair you might find yourself wondering if you are in the right place. The sight of iron bars, long lines of waiting crowds, guards, and inspections seem more suitable for a checkpoint at a military facility than a domain for dialogue and intellectual interactions. You then enter to what is considered a sanctuary for a fraction of Egypt’s population.

Days before the opening of the book fair, lists of book recommendations, reading suggestions, and publishing houses’ advertisements flooded social media. Articles with titles like: “Your Guide to Cairo’s Book Fair” or “How to Choose the Right Book” were widely circulated.

Every year, hundreds of publishing houses participate in what is generally recognized to be the most important book fair in the Arab world. Major works are released, there are seminars, public talks, lectures and live performances. A special section for children activities is also included in the program. This year’s list of speakers and guests was packed with government supporters, while kids’ performances tediously reflected their love for their leaders and their sense of pride and glory. It is a scene that mirrors the current political and intellectual atmosphere in Egypt. In a country where a young founder of a post-revolution publishing house was captured upon his arrival to participate in Cairo’s book fair, I struggle when trying to pretend that I am talking about a normal, ordinary cultural event.

Ismail Al-Qamari, as he likes to be called, was 17 when he held his first book fair in prison in 2009, where he was being held on political charges. Al-Qamari was released after the revolution. He then followed his dream and founded the “Al-Qamari” Publishing house. His company was the first ever to be closed and banned during the 2014 Cairo book fair. He travelled abroad, relaunched his company from a distance, and thought coming to Cairo as a victor would be a good idea. Little did he know that the country is no longer a place for victors. A few days ago, a group of young men were waiting for public transport in one of Egypt’s smaller provinces. A police officer approached them and asked about their destination. When they responded, “We are going to the...”
book fair” the boys were escorted to the police station for an “investigation”.

Al-Qammari’s project is not the only one of its kind, after the 2011 revolution the number of new publishing houses founded by the youth spiked. Young men and women took the publishing business into their own hands and decided to defy the bigger, more dominant companies, those who controlled the book markets and manipulated the book publishing industry. “Madarat”, “Dawwen”, “Tanweer”, and “Al-Rewaq” are just few names in the long list of publishers; most of them are personally funded and rely on limited budgets. Yet their influence on the publishing industry in Egypt is profound. This movement allowed a great number of writers to publish their works at lower costs, and opened the doors to new talents, whose works were ranked amongst the most read books. Their production ranged from literature, to culture, political sciences and Islamic philosophy, targeting both original Arabic texts and translated works.

As much as these changes were welcomed by the majority of the audiences, they were also criticized for not having a clear criteria when it came to publishing policies. Publishing everything and anything was sometimes considered an insult to the “craft” and a perversion of the public taste. Discussion on who decides what should and should not be published took centre stage and the ultimate question of how we define art rose to the surface. This could be viewed as a positive practice, a constructive dialogue between different stakeholders in the industry of cultural production. However, it reveals a different image when parties attack each other using their own system of beliefs as a frame of reference. We can clearly see how what was supposed to be a productive process turned into destructive behavior when we looking at circulating screenshots, or pictures of book pages with an insulting caption mocking the author and his work, discrediting the publisher for printing such a thing, and debasing those who would consider reading it. The sense of sarcasm and lighthearted humor that made the Egyptians famous during the 2011 revolution has turned into a double-edged sword.

I think the discussion leads us back to whether people view literature, and art in general, as a reflection of its time and people’s taste, or as something that should be regulated and subject to “quality control” in order to “preserve” the sophisticated and elite nature of literature.

It is interesting to see how people are divided based on their attitude towards books. Cults are formed around book collections, and reading groups create their own sense of belonging. If you walk around Cairo’s Book Fair, you notice a certain amount of categorization, you have the heavy readers who struggle with huge volumes, you have the wanderers who walk around gazing at books as though they are having a walk in a garden, and you have people who come to eat and hang out with friends.

I am brought back to reality after a short state of daydreaming and staring at people by the loud voices of
book vendors shouting, “a book for one pound”, “buy one and get one for free”. As an academic you tend to despise the fact that your work someday would be advertised in the same manner, but I did not. I looked at humble men and women, school kids, and young boys and girls hovering around the piles of books searching with hunger and pure concern, that they might not find that book they want in this corner, because it means they will have to go and buy a more expensive copy, one most of them cannot afford. Those who long for knowledge cannot find their way to it easily most of the time, and those who try to empower themselves are not always safe. Because they disturb the system, they speak in the face of inequality and shake the ground under the corrupt.

As I write this article, I read the news of the murder of an Italian graduate student who came to Egypt for academic and research reasons. Giulio Regeni, the 28-year-old was found dead in a suburb outside Cairo after disappearing on the 25th of January 2016, the 5th anniversary of the Egyptian revolution. His body showed signs of torture and inflicted violence. Regeni was conducting research on the Egyptian labor unions, and wrote for the Italian newspaper *Il Manifesto* under a pseudonym for safety reasons. Days after the incident, an article was published on the results of an investigation conducted by the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE), in which the report highlights the political nature of Egypt’s banning policy against a number of foreign academics based on their anti-government stances.

The tragic loss of Regeni’s life is one in a long list that keeps growing as time passes in Egypt. In a context where human rights and freedom of speech are compromised every day, Cairo’s book fair seems more like a camouflage, a mask hiding the true face of the state, than a reflection of Cairo’s vibrant intellectual space. I find myself sitting in front of this screen and thinking, how would writing about a book fair mean anything in a situation like this. I take a deep breath, and I am reminded by Bernard Shaw’s words: “Let those who may complain that it was all on paper remember that only on paper has humanity yet achieved glory, beauty, truth, knowledge, virtue, and abiding love”.

![Image](https://example.com/image.jpg)
Meet our new staff

Dr. Ada Bieber
DAAD Lecturer
Department of Germanic Studies

Ada’s main research areas are German and comparative studies on literature and film, with a focus on children’s and youth literature. This includes literature on the Holocaust and exile, urban literature, East German children’s and youth literature, island literature and downriver narratives.

Before joining the University of Sydney, she taught at the Europa Universität Flensburg, Universität Kassel, and Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, Germany.

“I always did read as a child, and teenager, and young adult. I guess, while adding literature for adults to my reading, I never really stopped reading literature for the youth, so my field of research has always been kind of there, I only changed my perspective on it.”

- Ada Bieber

Dr. Gili Kugler
Lecturer
Department of Hebrew, Biblical and Jewish Studies

Gili is interested in researching the development of traditions and beliefs in the bible, tracking the way they are reconfigured and reshaped in different texts. Her dissertation analyses the manifestations of the idea of God’s threats to destroy the people of Israel and its evolving meaning in a range of biblical texts.

Gili has a broad and diverse teaching experience. She had taught biblical studies in several academic institutions in Israel: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, University of Haifa, Tel Aviv University and two colleges for education. In addition she taught pedagogic courses in these institutions, as well as quite a few years of Jewish studies in Jerusalem’s Keshet High School.

“An interest in the concept of free choice within religious thought led me to biblical texts that raise the subject through stories and prophecies describing Israel’s fragile destiny as God’s nation.”

- Gili Kugler

Ms. Beatriz Carbajal
Lecturer
Department of Spanish and Latin American Studies

Beatriz will be teaching levels 1, 3 and 5 of the Spanish language courses. Previously, she has taught and coordinated Spanish courses at both Senior school and University levels in Spain, France and Australia since 2009. She has also worked cooperatively with the Royal Spanish Academy and Cervantes Institute in the development of Linguistic projects.

In the upcoming months, she will present her doctoral research on the understanding and appreciation of humour in cartoons by non-native speakers at the University of Salamanca, where she completed a Master on Teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language (2011) as well as a combined BA in Spanish and English Studies (2009).

“Academia has provided me with the opportunity to balance introspective research with communicative teaching.”

- Beatriz Carbajal
Select Publications
from the academics at the School of Languages and Cultures

This hard cover volume will be turned into an ebook in the next months. Among international experts, six members of our school have contributed to this volume:

Andrea Bandhauer “‘I Cannot Live Without Performing’: Romy Schneider On- and Off – Screen Embodiment of the Tragic”
Ifdal Elsaket “The Star of the East: Umm Kulthum and Egyptian Cinema”
Vrasidas Karalis Traumatised Masculinity and Male Stardom in Greek Cinema”
Mats Karlsson “Setsuko Hara: Japan’s Eternal Virgin and Reluctant Star of the Silver Screen”
Michelle Royer “Star Embodiment and the Lived Experience of Ageing in Cinema: The Case of Amour”
Anne Walsh “Spanish Stars Distant Dreams : The Role of Voice in Shaping Perception”
Deflecting the attention from Hollywood, Stars in World Cinema fills an important gap in the study of film by bringing together Star Studies and World Cinema. A team of international scholars here bring their expertise and in-depth knowledge of world cultures and cinema to the study of stars and stardom from six continents. Chapters look at the role of acting, music, singing, painting and martial arts in the making of stars from Australia’s indigenous population, Austria, China, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, India, Iran, Japan, North and South Korea, Nigeria, the Philippines, the former Soviet Union, Spain, North and South America. Since the very beginnings of cinema, actors and stars have been central to its history and have been one of the medium’s defining characteristics. They have also been fundamental to the marketing of cinema and have played a major part in the reception of films in many cultures. Stars in World Cinema examines stardom and the circulation of stars across borders, analysing how local star systems or non-systems construct stardom around the world. Contributors put into practice their local knowledge of history, language and cultural systems, to consider issues of hybridity, boundary crossing, the mobility of stardom, and embodied spectatorship, in order to further the understanding of stars in light the of recent interest in reception theory. This book throws light on unexpected connections between stars and star systems from different parts of the world, cutting across chronology, geographies and film history.

Codex Rustici with essays by Kathleen Olive and Nerida Newbiggin, affiliates in the Department of Italian Studies.

This beautiful two-volume edition of Marco di Bartolomeo Rustici’s Codex is “monumental”. It is 45 cm high, weighs 15 kg and retails for 2200 euros. Kathleen and Nerida wrote one essay each as well as two joint essays, the bibliography and index and the critical edition of the text (which was 350,000 word – 1,100 pages of typescript). It was presented to the Pope in Florence on 10 November 2015.

Recent articles


Books and articles


What’s on at the SLC

Events

Our school runs a number of events throughout the year, including conferences, lectures and seminars offered by each language department. Here are just some of the events in the coming months, for a full list see our website.

- sydney.edu.au/arts/slc

Arab Diasporas: Migration, Citizenship, and Transnational Identities

From 21 to 22 March 2016

The Department of Arabic Language and Cultures invites you to an international workshop (free and open to the public). Presentations will focus on the history, politics, sociology and cultural production of the Arab diaspora community in Australia, the USA, Canada and Europe. Our keynote address will be presented in a Sydney Ideas lecture by Professor Akram Khater (Director of the Moise Khayrallah Center for Lebanese Diaspora Studies at North Carolina State University, USA) who will speak on “Beyond the ‘Clash of Civilizations’: Arab Diasporas and Transnational Identities” (March 21, 6-7:30 pm).

- sydney.edu.au/arts/arabic

Aristotle 2400 Years on: the legacy and relevance of a Greek philosopher

5 April 2016

Professor Vrasidas Karalis, the Sir Nicholas Laurantus Professor of Modern Greek will be giving this lecture as part of a collaboration between the Greek Festival, Department of Modern Greek and Byzantine Studies and Sydney Ideas. The lecture offers a brief presentation of Aristotle’s life, work and thought, focusing on his political and ethical ideas. It will attempt an evaluation of his continuing significance in the context of contemporary cultural pluralism and philosophical diversity.

- whatson.sydney.edu.au/events/published/sydney-ideas-professor-vrasidas-karalis

Photography. Ontology. Symposium

2 June, 2016

The French department is co-organizing the Photography. Ontology. Symposium. This symposium engages in critical debate with international scholars and specialists on the photographic medium. It will explore the relationship between photography’s ontology, the camera as a human perceptual apparatus and the unconscious.

The international guest speakers are:

- Shawn Michelle Smith, Professor, School of the Art Institute of Chicago
- Andres Zervigon, Professor Rutgers University
- Robin Kelsey, Shirley Carter Burden Professor of Photography, Harvard University and Chair of Department of History of Art and Architecture.

- sydney.edu.au/arts/french

Languages at Sydney: Go Global

On 26 February SLC ran the inaugural Languages at Sydney: Go Global event. Over 250 high school students and teachers joined us to hear what the University of Sydney can offer students who are passionate about learning languages.

Our guests heard Vice-Chancellor Dr Michael Spence speak of his own experiences studying languages and attended tutorials in languages of their choice, including Chinese, French, German, Hebrew, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese and Spanish. Whether they were watching German films or working through French tongue twisters, the students had a blast.

The response from students, teachers and everyone involved was so positive that this event will be run again next year. Keep an eye on our website for details.
For more information

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