

Abstract

The Language Centre library has a collection of online external resources on its website for the languages it also has in the physical library. The external weblinks were presented alphabetically by language. The website was moved to a more professional platform, Oxford Mosaic. The web architecture was already made and it led to some rethinking of the online classification as it moved from alphabetical to partly alphabetical and geographical. Some other language classifications are being discussed as well as a study of other language centres and libraries with substantial foreign languages collections.

[Oxford University Language Centre library](#), like many language centres, possesses an [online library](#) as well as a physical one. While online resources created by our Language Tutors, or resources using licences are on a VLE (Virtual Learning Environment), the website also offers a collection of external links for learning languages and some cultural websites. These links are mostly external and free to use, for example grammar exercises quizzes, or resource gateways, mostly from universities all around the world or, simply, links to museums and galleries.

This is an example with an extract of our [Italian page](#):

Grammar

- [Centro Studi Italiani eClass](#) Grammar fact sheets and exercises
- [Dig-Itale Eduware](#) exercises from J.A. Campana at the University of Toronto
- [Impariamo l'italiano](#) check your grammar and learn Italian sayings

Vocabulary

- [Smart Phrase](#) [Smart Phrase Online Phrasebook](#) Useful vocabulary and phrase finders in Italian.

Italian language resources

Culture

General

- [Biblioteca digitale IntraText Online](#) digital archive of Italian literary, theatrical and religious works
- [City of Florence](#) Official web site of the Municipality of Florence
- [Global Arte](#) Dedicated to history of art, from its origins to now
- [Italian Cultural Institute](#)
- [Letteratura.it](#)
- [Literature page from Zanichelli](#) excellent documentation on many Italian authors, there is [also this page available](#) and [tests available too](#)
- [Italian woman writers](#) from the University of Chicago
- [Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali](#) It offers news and information about exhibitions, events, archives, libraries and museums
- [National Museum of Science and Technology "Leonardo da Vinci"](#)
- [Nuovo rinascimento](#)
- [Photosearch](#) a collection of pictures
- [Sette lezioni online](#) History and literature of Southern Italy
- [Storia dell'Arte](#) personal site, created by a Liceo artistico teacher
- [The Italian Renaissance](#) Bibliography of academic sources on the Renaissance
- [Torino film festival](#)
- [Tourism in Tuscany](#)

Magazines

- [ArtOnline](#) Contains an updated section on art news, and a list of the main exhibitions. There are sections about old and contemporary artists

The Language Centre is happy to have increased the numbers of languages on offer. After ten year, it has gone from 80 to 200 languages and thanks to the great professional help of the Bodleian Libraries (in particular Bernadette O'Reilly, Bibliographic Standards Librarian and Chris Hargreaves, System Support Librarian), the collection is now catalogued and partly borrowable.

In truth, not all 200 languages on offer will have a lot of resources, and for some endangered or indigenous languages, we only have 1 or 2 items. This is why, perhaps, an online presence for all languages in the library is important. Indeed, we will not have much for Inuktitut as physical object (so far one DVD in the library) but we will offer several links online.

Inuktitut

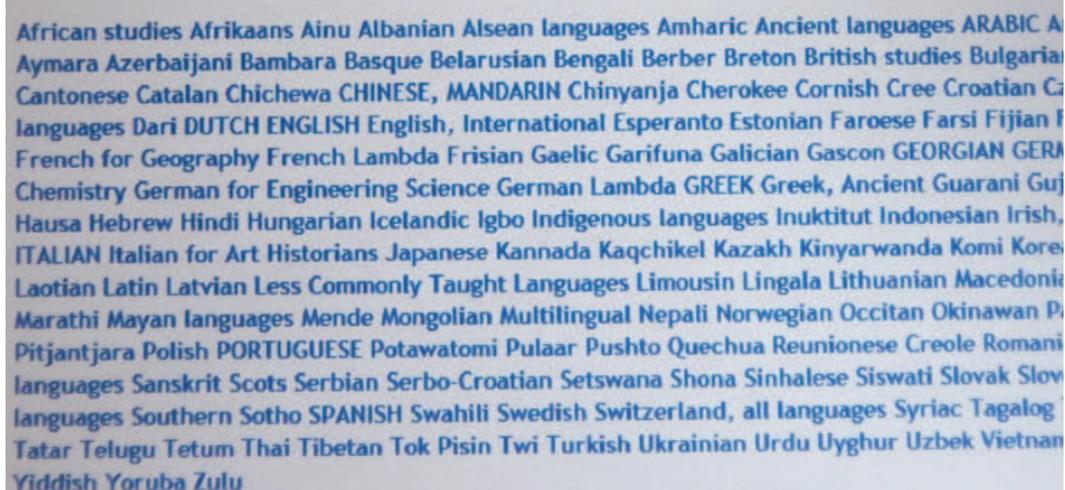
Library shelfmark: INU (only one film available)

- [Omniglot page](#)
- [Tussalanga.ca](#) learning (from English or French)
- [Livingdictionary](#)
- [CBC North](#) some radio programmes available
- [NAC Nunavut Artic College](#)

Likewise, many of the African languages books we have in the library date from missionary times. Yet, they can be the only printed sources available. Languages have changed a great deal since the publication of those books, and having online resources helps redress the balance, especially in terms of contemporary vocabulary and pronunciation.

In the summer of 2017, we were invited to participate in the creation of a new website, in partnership with [Oxford Mosaic](#), an Oxford University web making platform. Indeed, our previous website had had its days. And beyond the look, some facilities had gone from bad to worse such as the search box. One had to use google in order to find anything related to our languages' pages.

However, the languages' pages, had been classified in a very simple (if messy looking) way:



African studies Afrikaans Ainu Albanian Alsean languages Amharic Ancient languages ARABIC Aymara Azerbaijani Bambara Basque Belarusian Bengali Berber Breton British studies Bulgarian Cantonese Catalan Chichewa CHINESE, MANDARIN Chinyanja Cherokee Cornish Cree Croatian C languages Dari DUTCH ENGLISH English, International Esperanto Estonian Faroese Farsi Fijian French for Geography French Lambda Frisian Gaelic Garifuna Galician Gascon GEORGIAN GERMA Chemistry German for Engineering Science German Lambda GREEK Greek, Ancient Guarani Guj Hausa Hebrew Hindi Hungarian Icelandic Igbo Indigenous languages Inuktitut Indonesian Irish, ITALIAN Italian for Art Historians Japanese Kannada Kaqchikel Kazakh Kinyarwanda Komi Kore Laotian Latin Latvian Less Commonly Taught Languages Limousin Lingala Lithuanian Macedon Marathi Mayan languages Mende Mongolian Multilingual Nepali Norwegian Occitan Okinawan P Pitjantjara Polish PORTUGUESE Potawatomi Pulaar Pushto Quechua Reunionese Creole Romani languages Sanskrit Scots Serbian Serbo-Croatian Setswana Shona Sinhalese Siswati Slovak Slov languages Southern Sotho SPANISH Swahili Swedish Switzerland, all languages Syriac Tagalog Tatar Telugu Tetum Thai Tibetan Tok Pisin Twi Turkish Ukrainian Urdu Uyghur Uzbek Vietna Yiddish Yoruba Zulu

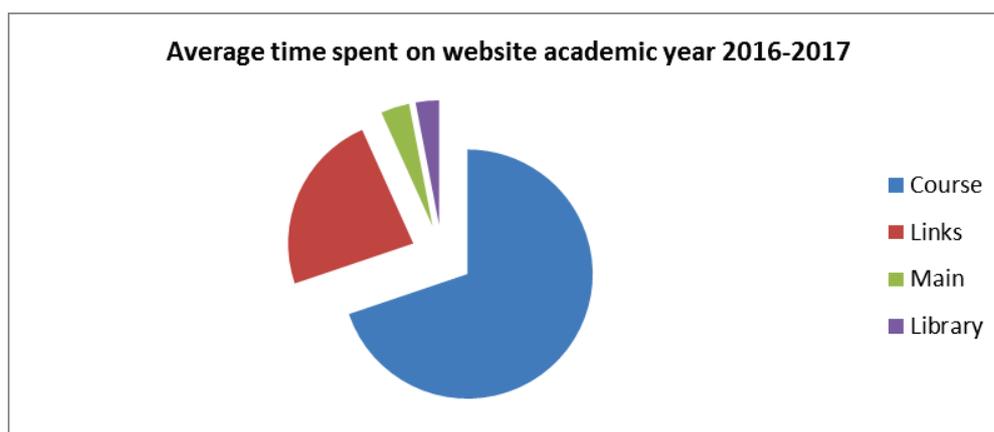
The Oxford University language centre website, details of the languages' page, 2010

The page was alphabetical by language, reflecting the library collection's classification, an in-house system, based on ISO codes, similar to the one used in [Cambridge University Language Centre](#) and in other substantial language centres such as [Glasgow University Language Resource Library](#). The classification on the website was alphabetical by the name of the language in English: GE for German for example, not Deutsch. You would click on the language which was hyperlinked, and you were taken directly to the language.

My role, in the making of the new website was to be a content editor only. I thought, at the time that the language learning links had had their days and that I ought to remove them altogether. I backed my decision on usage statistics data:

```
/links/japanese.html  
/links/urdu.html  
/courses/italian-closed.html  
/tests/tst_reqs_italian.html  
/links/irish_gaelic.html  
/links/portuguese.html  
/courses/english-pre-ses2.html  
/links/chinese.html  
/reg/i2.php?sm3=1
```

I transferred this data into an excel document, selected the first 100 and classified each page in the following categories: main information, courses, library, language links. And I was pleased to see that the language links pages were still being consulted. Though the views for the academic year 2016-2017 (October to June) were only 8% of the first 100 links for all categories, the average time spent was 23%.



Data from Google analytics on the first 100 pages of the website academic year 2016-2017

So the language links would stay. And in the middle of summer I was being offered, like a key to a new home, my pages already classified: but partly alphabetical, and partly geographical.

Online Classifications

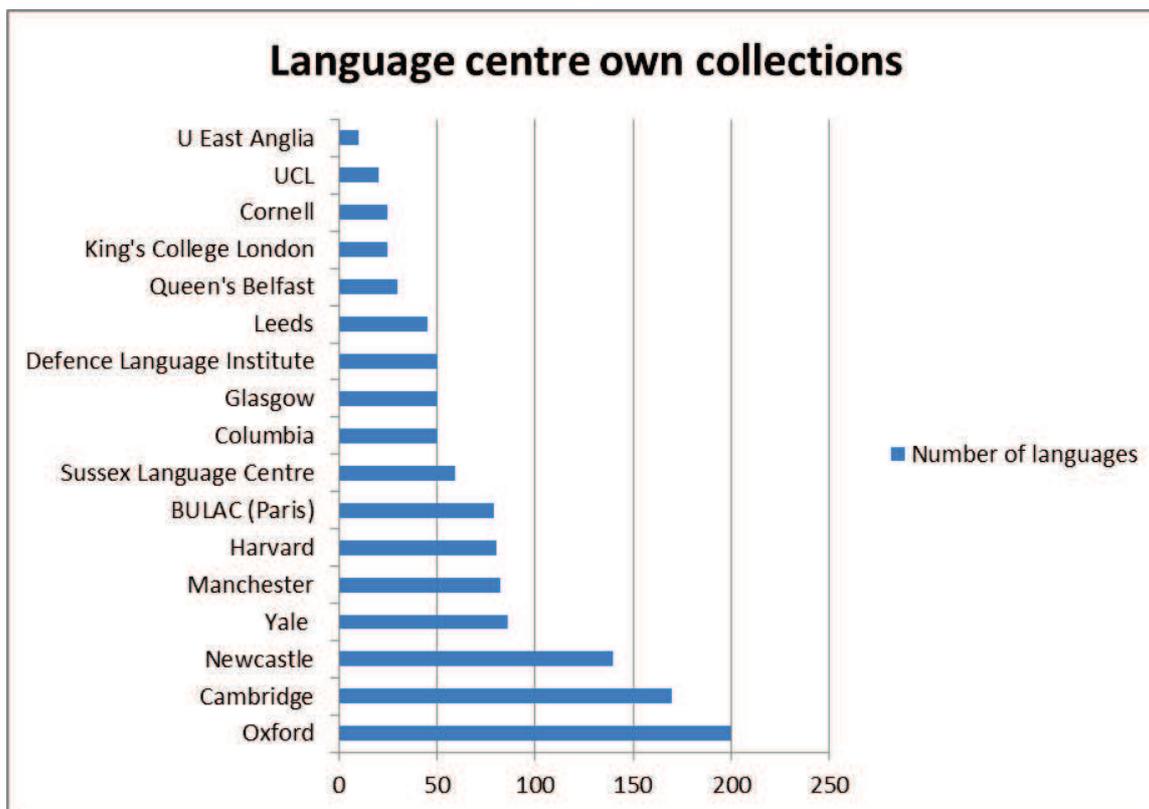
Languages can be classified in many ways. [Omniplot](#), a referential website when it comes to all things connected to language learning, presents several classifications.

A classification by [language families](#) could have been also possible, it would make sense to group the Turkic languages together in the website. Having said that, some families are enormous, for example the Indo-European family (455 languages or so), some families are small, even tiny, for example the Eskimo-Aleut family (11 languages). You also have the problems of many orphans... the language isolates, languages not linguistically connected with any others, Ainu and Basque for example. Like Simon Ager, the creator of Omniplot, you could create a group for all isolates, and another group for all creoles.

Another classification could be to [classify languages by writing systems](#). Then again, some groups (the Arabic script with Cyrillic with 115 language, the Latin script 711 languages) will be enormous while others just one unique system to write one language (Lao script for example). Le Monde Diplomatique shows us an interesting world map for writing systems [in this article](#)

Other Language Centres

Having a look on the world wide web at other substantial language learning libraries I could see if other classifications were being used. I searched through members of [AULC \(Association of University Language Centres\)](#) as well as a few centres abroad.



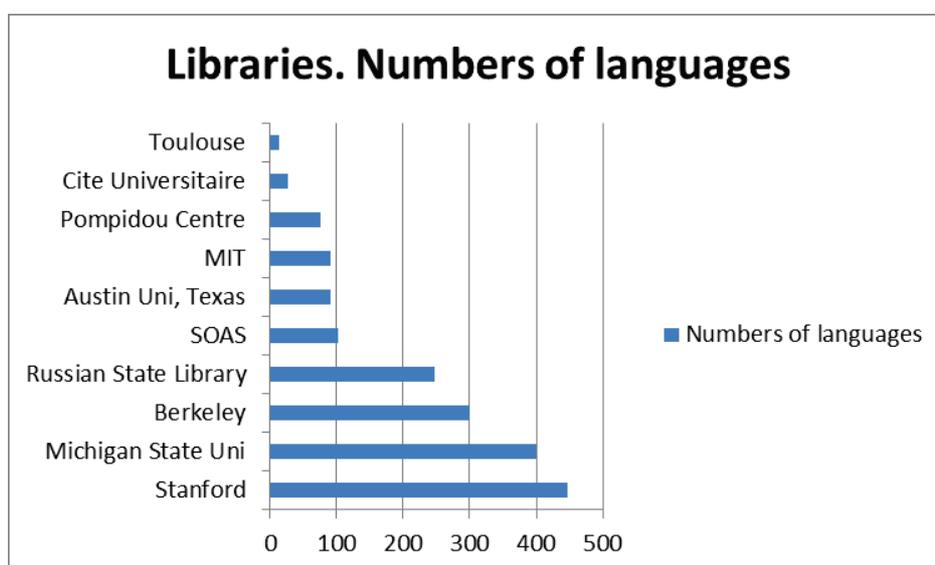
Data collected in 2017 (emails sent to several language centres). This is not, however, a ranking of language centre by language numbers but just a selection of language centres.

It was quite a surprise then to see that many links to external sites had gone from websites. Out of the 15 language centres shown above, 9 did not display any links anymore, 2 had one multilingual page only, and only 4 still had language learning links classified for 3 of them alphabetically. The fourth one geographically ([BULAC](#)).

Is the disappearance of external links pages because of the rise of VLEs? The online resources links chosen by language tutors will be specific to their students and not to all students and the general public. Or perhaps some centres wish only to show their own work, in particular open courseware ([Cambridge University Language Centre's open courseware](#) for example).

Libraries with Substantial Foreign Language Collections

I then had a look at libraries with substantial language collections, though there is fuzziness in my finding. The materials are not necessarily for language learning, i.e. some libraries might simply have books in other languages not aimed at language learners.



Data collected in 2017 (emails sent to several libraries and catalogues' checks).
This is not, however, an accurate view of the collections.

Same situation again: out of the 10 libraries in the graph, 8 of them did not appear to have language links. The two others were exceptions: [SOAS](#) with a geographical classification, then offering a selection of language links (similar to BULAC mentioned above) and [Austin University](#) with an alphabetical classification and quite fantastic open source collections.

Rethinking the Classification

So I had to rethink the classification of languages from alphabetical to partly alphabetical and geographical. The already made pages were:

- All the languages we teach at the centre in alphabetical order (Arabic, Chinese, Dutch, French, Georgian, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish)
- With the addition, in the same alphabetical classification, of other languages that had been considered important by the webmaster: they were languages that had, in the previous website, whole individual webpages (contrary to Less Commonly Taught Languages that were presented in one long html page)

Arabic	Bulgarian	Chinese (Mandarin)
Czech	Dutch	French
Gaelic	Georgian	German
Greek	Hebrew	Hindi
Hungarian	Irish Gaelic	Italian
Japanese	Norwegian	Polish
Portuguese	Russian	Spanish
Thai	Turkish	Urdu
Welsh		

Then I was offered the following:

Other African Languages	Other American Languages	Other Asian Languages
Other Australasian and Pacific Languages	Other European Languages	Other Middle Eastern Languages
Ancient Languages		
Ancient Greek	Latin	Other Ancient Languages
General Resources		
Indigenous and Endangered Languages	Multilingual Resources	

Part of the new Language Centre website, November 2017

This is when the intellectual puzzles started. There were a few issues worth raising in order to offer the best classification possible:

- Is it the history of the language that matters? Is it where the language comes from, or is it where the language is spoken today? Do you place Pashto in "Other Middle Eastern Languages" as it belongs to the Easter Iranian family, or do you place it in "Other Asian Languages" as it is spoken in Afghanistan and Pakistan?

- And speaking about actual geography, what are, exactly, Europe and Asia? There is quite a substantial amount of languages in between, such as in the [Caucasus region](#). Do I place Azerbaijani in Europe? I decided finally to place this language in “Other Middle Eastern” languages.
- Another geographical puzzle is to place languages that are not in the proposed classification boxes, such as island languages like Malagasi, from Madagascar, that I finally decided to place in... Africa, its closest continent.
- Where to place Esperanto, a constructed language? Europe, where it was created as its author, Zamenhof, is Polish? But surely, being a constructed language, it ought to have its own place. I had once a query from our Facebook page, about Enochian, the language of Angels and an email enquiring about one of Tolkien’s languages. Would we also place middle-earth languages in Europe then, as its author was living in Oxford? Clearly this would not make any sense. I could forget it altogether, yet given the queries I received, I felt I had to create a page.
- What about languages spoken by people who were displaced? [It is estimated by wikipedia](#) that the population transferred in the Soviet Union amounted to 6 millions. Amongst many others... would you place Crimean Tatar in Europe or in Asia?
- What about creoles and pidgins? Where to classify them? In the country where they are spoken now? In the country where they partly come from? For example put all English, French, Portuguese based creoles in the English, French and Portuguese pages? So Cajun (based on French) could be in Other American Languages, or in the French page?
- And the sensitive issues (cultural, historical)... Should I place the Armenian language in the “Other Middle Eastern” languages page? Or perhaps create a new “Eurasia” classification? I finally decided to place this language in “Other European Languages” My decision was partly taken after looking at the history of Armenia, the first country in the world to adopt Christianity.
- Due to several queries and some usage statistics regarding the British Sign Language, and the fact that we are starting to have substantial collections in the library, I thought it would be great to create separate pages for all the sign languages we have.

So I asked for the creation of the following three subsections:

Constructed Languages

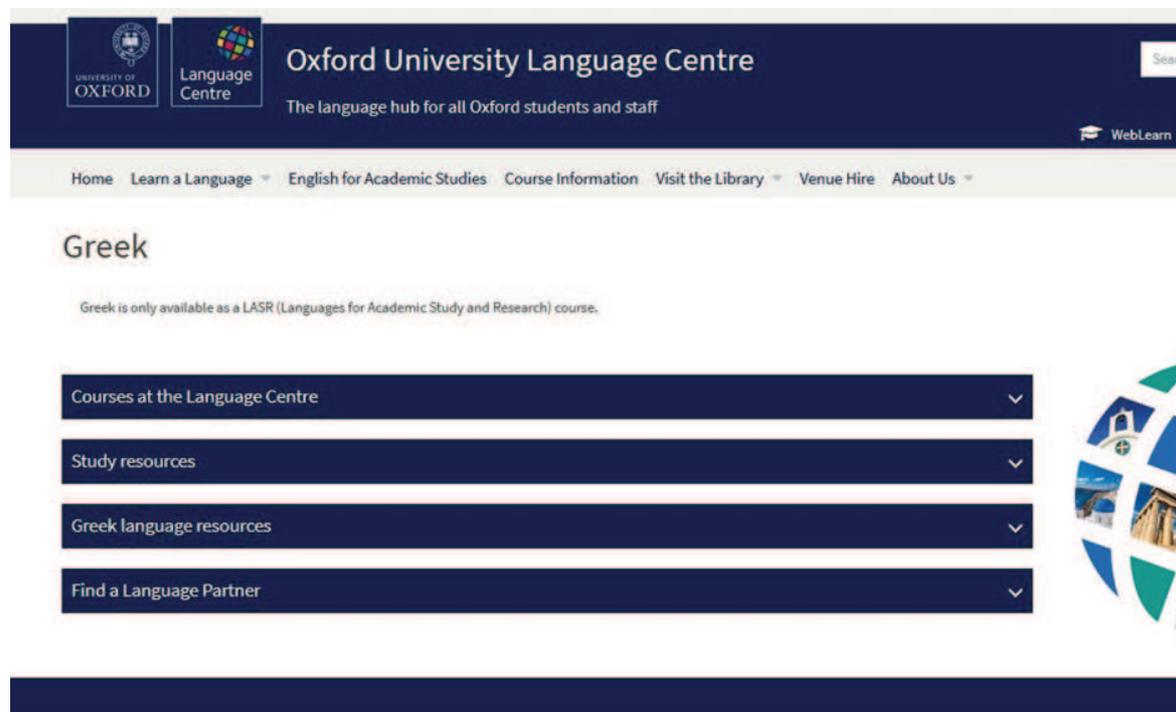
Creoles & Pidgins

Sign Languages

Latest Statistics on Web Usage

The latest statistics from our website are quite different, given its structure and cannot be compared with the previous statistics. It is not possible so far to get statistics within a page. All languages taught at the Centre will have, on the same page, the language external links.

This is our Greek page for example:



Partial screenshot of the Language Centre Greek page, November 2017

So there is some fuzziness in data as both courses and links are in the same webpage. I have added a "course or link" parameter. Annual statistics should help define a clearer image and proper comparison could be done from the second year running of the new website.

Conclusion

It will be the web user, of course, who will have the last word. So far there has been no criticism about languages perceived as misclassified. Should this happen, I would engage with readers and improve the situation, by either, reclassifying the language in question, reclassifying all non-taught languages or, in the case of getting statistics getting lower and lower, progressively remove all language learning links from our website, or move a selection of them to our VLE.

Many thanks to Dr Jane Sherwood, Director of the Language Centre, and Bernadette O'Reilly, Bibliographic Standards Librarian, Bodleian Libraries, for their help and comments.