Welcome to the study of
Asian and Middle Eastern Languages
(AMES)
Today’s session

• What linguistic areas we cover in AMES?
• Why studying an AMES subject?
• Challenges involved in language learning: the example of Japanese.
• Not only a language!
• Building transferrable skills.
• All together: an impressive degree.
What languages do we offer?

East Asian
- Japanese
- Chinese
- *Korean

Middle Eastern
- Arabic
- Persian
- Hebrew

They can be combined with MML languages
Why an East Asian or Middle Eastern language at university?
Why study a non-Western language and culture?

- The importance
- The impressive degree → the challenge
The challenge
The challenge 1
Learn a new script
Japanese script

*Kanji* 漢字 = logographic characters (ca. 2000 + 50000)

*Hiragana* ひらがな = phonetic syllabary (50 signs)

*Katakana* カタカナ = phonetic syllabary (50 signs)
What is involved?

*Hiragana and katakana*

- New shape
- Stroke order
- Types of lines
- General balance of the sign
Hiragana
‘a’ sound
あ
What is involved?

Kanji

- New shape
- Stroke order
- Types of lines
- General balance of the character
- Meaning
- Multiple readings
- Possible combinations with other kanji
Kanji
Kanji
Compounds

人間  ningen  ‘human being’
友人  yūjin  ‘friend’

…and many others!
Teaching style at Cambridge

- Hiragana and katakana to be mastered by students before they come to Cambridge.

   → Issues

- Around 650 kanji in the first year.
The challenge 2
Learn new sounds
Japanese sounds:  
the syllabic system

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The challenge 3
Grammar and syntax
I AM A TEACHER

Watashi wa sensei desu

Watashi = noun to indicate the first person ‘I’
wa = particle marking the topic
sensei = here you can put other professions...... for example you can say gakusei (学生) = student
desu = is (or 'am', 'are', etc: pronounced ‘des’) >> copula
I READ A BOOK
Watashi wa hon wo yomu

ENG: SVO
JP: SOV
↓
Subject + particle + object + particle + verb
I AM A TEACHER

Watashi wa sensei desu
私は先生です

I AM A TEACHER

Watashi wa sensei da
私は先生だ

Conjugation based on level of politeness
= ‘Linguistic register’
Inflection (yomu→yomi) +
agglutination (masu)
= ‘Linguistic register’
What is gained in term of ‘transferrable skills’?

- Ability to think outside the box
- Problem solving
- Hard work
- Time management
The language component

From scratch to advanced language

One can...

- Read all sorts of materials classical, modern and contemporary
- Translate a variety of texts
- Write in well-educated language
- Speak as a quasi-native speaker

Sakari Mesimäki
Japanese Speech Contest 2015 – Finals
From scratch or not from scratch?

**PROS in having done already some study**
- Understanding of the linguistic features of the chosen language.
- Understanding of the challenges involved in the study of the language.
- Some ‘time’ to get ahead of the game once at university (but how much ‘time’?).

**CONS in having done already some study**
- Illusion that they might know already a great deal of the language and less commitment at university.
- Presence of ‘bad habits’ and need to correct them.
Not only a ‘language’
How our Tripos is organized
First year
Intensive language training
Introduction to the history and/or culture of the region

Second year
Intensive language training
+
Selection of other cultural papers (see list given before)

Third year
Year Abroad

Fourth year
Papers that allow you to ‘use’ the advanced language
+
Selection of other cultural and linguistic papers
+
Dissertation

Acquisition of skills/knowledge → → → Application of skills/knowledge → → → Production of knowledge
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<th>What cultural areas do we offer?</th>
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The Tales of Ise; 12th century manuscript scroll

The Tales of Ise; 18th century printed picturebook

The Tales of Ise; 21st century manga
What is gained in term of ‘transferrable skills’?

• Inter-cultural awareness
• Adaptability
• Flexibility
• Intellectual independence
• Critical thinking
• Writing skills
• Research skills
An impressive degree
Read about the ‘success stories’ of our graduates

What languages do we offer?

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Questions are welcome!