I. What is SD? What is ESD?
II. Drivers for including SD in the language/TS classroom
III. Existing Research on including SD in the classroom
IV. Proposed study (motivation, questions, method, analysis)
V. Discussion and Conclusion
1. What is Sustainable Development?

“Development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987)
What is ESD?

_Education for Sustainable Development is the process of equipping students with the knowledge and understanding, skills and attributes needed to work in a way that safeguards environmental, social and economic wellbeing, both in the present and for future generations._ (QAA/HEA, 2014)
2. Drivers for including SD in the classroom

  - **Vision**: “Within the next 10 years, the higher education sector in this country will be recognised as a major contributor to society's efforts to achieve sustainability - through the skills and knowledge that its graduates learn and put into practice, its research and exchange of knowledge through business, community and public policy engagement, and through its own strategies and operations.” (2012)

- **HEA** Report (Drayson et al., 2013): “Students Attitudes Towards and Skills for Sustainable Development”
  - Over 8 in every 10 students ...
    - Want to learn more about SD
    - Believe that SD should be incorporated into their courses and promoted by universities
    - Are willing to accept reduced starting salaries for a job in a company with a positive performance on sustainability
Drivers for including SD in the classroom

Recommendations of the Report:

- Academics should embed SD across the curriculum and subject-specific disciplines
- Academic should develop sustainability skills in students in order to produce graduates who can contribute to a green economy

QAA/HEA 2014 Guidance document

- Key role of HE institutions in the development of sustainability literate graduates

Aston University’s 2020 Strategy

- Produce graduates that are “literate in social responsibility and sustainability”
Environment and sustainability

Here at Aston we are strongly committed to becoming a more sustainable University.

We're very proud that this commitment was recognised in the 2012 People&Planet Green League, where we came 11th out of over 140 universities.

We have also achieved the Platinum EcoCampus award for our Environmental Management System.

What's new?

Go Green Week Success
Review of Go Green Week 2013 Go Green Week 2013, now in its 4th year at Aston,...

Go Green Champions 2013
I'm sure you've all been waiting with bated breath for the launch of the 2013...

Festive Fairtrade events!
Our Fairtrade Steering Group have pulled out all the stops to organise some...
3. Existing research on including SD in the classroom

  - Successful impact on students’ awareness of SD through embedding SD content in the classroom

- Languages and Area Studies: Mixed results
  - Phipps (2005): sustainability requires languages
  - Canning (2005):
    ‘Failure to address sustainability in our languages and area studies curricula can only increase the likelihood that solutions to environmental problems are seen as the answers to wholly technical questions which are conceptually divorced from a concern for (sometimes) fragile cultures.’

But... danger of ESD being seen as something that is ‘bolted on’ to the curriculum
4. Proposed study: rationale/motivation

- Language students should care about the cultures and environments they encounter and study while at university.

- Language students should be able to understand and compare environmental discourses effectively and Translation Studies students (=intercultural mediators) even more so!

- But what are our students’ attitudes re. SD and ESD?
Research Questions

✓ To what extent are SD issues already covered in our language modules and degree programmes?

✓ Do students perceive SD as solely or primarily environmental issues, or do they understand the balance between society, economy and environment?

✓ Do students understand the need for ESD and its importance for graduate employability?

✓ How can students be encouraged to understand a range of cultural perspectives on problems relating to SD?
Methods and Aims

☑ Survey students as regards their attitudes towards SD and its role in language studies
   ➢ Google survey (questions inspired by Atkinson et al. (2009) ESD survey)
   ➢ Participation: voluntary and anonymous
   ➢ 3 sections: (1) awareness and personal relevance of SD, (2) role of university and course in teaching SD, and (3) professional relevance of SD

☑ Research Aims
   ➢ To assess whether language students believed it appropriate to learn about SD at university;
   ➢ To compare first year and final year students’ views on SD;
   ➢ To evaluate the impact of developing the language curriculum to include sustainability learning.
Participants and Procedures

✓ Two case studies (2013 and 2014)
  ➢ Study 1: Final Year undergraduate’s views
  ➢ Study 2: First Year undergraduates’ views (action research)

✓ Study 1
  ✓ Two cohorts of Final Year students (17 females, 8 males)
  ✓ BA degree in Modern Languages (French, Spanish, German)
  ✓ Surveyed in second semester of 2012/3 and 2013/4
  ✓ Age: 21-24 years, 1 mature student (33y)
  ✓ Origin: 19 British; 4 European non-British, 1 African, 1 American
  ✓ No deliberate strategy to introduce SD materials into their curriculum
Participants and Procedures

✓ Study 2

- One cohort of First Year students
- BA degree in Modern Languages (French, Spanish, German)
- Surveyed Twice: November 2013 and April 2014 (before and after AR intervention)
- **Q1**
  - 16 females, 6 males
  - Age: 18-20y
  - Origin: 21 British, 1 European non-British
- **Q2**
  - 17 females, 6 males
  - Age: 18-21y
  - Origin: 21 British, 2 European non-British

- Action Research Project
SD Action Research Project

✓ Q1
  ➢ Students surveyed at the end of « Introduction to Latin America » lecture (TP1)
  ➢ No deliberate strategy to introduce SD materials into their curriculum

✓ Q2
  ➢ April 2014: SD content embedded in lecture on Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer
  ➢ Interactive discussions on SD
  ➢ Short 10 minute presentations on SD and its impact on the future
  ➢ Lecture on planned topic
  ➢ Ask students to decide whether his architectural creations can be considered sustainable
  ➢ 3 weeks after lecture, students surveyed again
FY students – surprising results

✓ 16% had never heard of it / could not provide a definition of SD
✓ Qualitative data showed a limited understanding of SD
  ➢ “developing things for the future”, “may be language development”
  ➢ Only 4 made reference to the 3 pillars of SD
  ➢ Contrast with QAA/HEA guidance (2014) which states the “high level of SD issues awareness”

✓ Role of University: yes... but...
  ➢ How can SD be relevant for language studies?
    “I’m not entirely sure”, “I don’t really understand how it fits in”, etc.
  ➢ No understanding of links between language teaching and SD
  ➢ Lack of awareness of the impact and role of their discipline on the well-being of future generations
First Year students

Understanding of SD
✓ Pre intervention
  ➢ Qualitative data showed a limited understanding of SD
  ➢ Vague definitions, mainly on the environment
  ➢ 36% left blank
  ➢ Here again, contrast with QAA/HEA 2014 guidance

➢ Post intervention
  ➢ Definitions improved: ‘Maintaining or improving the daily lives of others and also for the future. This includes environmental aspects, social aspects and economic aspects’, ‘SD is the maintenance and protection of the environment but also the protection of social advances such as human rights protection. It is the consciousness for the wellbeing of future generations.’
  ➢ 3 pillars in most definitions, “future” in 70% of the responses
First Year students

Role of University

✓ Pre intervention
  ➢ Lack of awareness of the impact and role of their discipline on the well-being of future generations
  ➢ No understanding of links between language teaching and SD: ‘Learning a language is an international study and therefore it is important to understand Sustainable Development’

✓ Post intervention
  ➢ 32% increase about integration of SD in degree courses
  ➢ 21% increase about integration of SD in language modules
  ➢ Link between language teaching and SD: ‘We learn about the culture and development of other countries so it’s important to understand how we can protect their wellbeing as well as our own’, ‘Learning how the world works and how we can work together using language skills’
5. Discussion and Conclusion

- Aston language students not as SD aware as stated by QAA/HEA guidance (2014)
- Need of active embedding of SD in the language class to make students sustainability literate and change their attitudes towards SD issues
- Intervention should happen at an early stage
  - Prepare students for their Year Abroad
  - Avoid SD overload at FY stage
  - Progressive integration is recommended
- Some have recommended assessment driven interventions (Gordon 2006)
  - Not necessary to make an impact (Case Study 2)
  - ‘Maybe we can read about SD, but it should not be included in the assessment part’
“I hope that I am not wrong in believing that language students believe in the intrinsic value of the peoples whose languages they seek to acquire and whose cultures they seek to learn about.” (Canning 2005)

“We run the risk of creating unaware and selfish professionals in the future... simply because nobody ever made them think about it when they were studying at university... we should build these ‘little cells’ of awareness in our translation students.” (Sainz 1994)

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION
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Phipps, A. 2005. “Education for Sustainable Development: Languages and Sustainability” LLAS.

