

**Question for written answer E-005294/2018/rev.1  
to the Commission**

Rule 130

**Dominique Martin (ENF)**

Subject: Brussels grants EUR 2 million to a researcher based in Australia for a study on an Aboriginal language that is spoken by only 2 500 people

More and more companies based in France are looking to work with people who can speak English. Poor English language skills can therefore make it more difficult for people to find employment, especially for those aged over 40. France has the second lowest average level of English proficiency in Europe, with only Italy faring slightly worse<sup>1</sup>. Some 74% of French students would like to improve their English<sup>2</sup>.

Despite this, however, Brussels decided to grant EUR 2 million to an Australian-born researcher to study unknown languages<sup>3</sup> (Murrinh-Patha<sup>4</sup>, Siwu<sup>5</sup>, Lao<sup>6</sup>, Kri<sup>7</sup>, Cha'palaa<sup>8</sup>, Duna<sup>9</sup>, and Argentine Sign Language). A key finding from this research was that when an Argentinian person responds to a question with a blank expression<sup>10</sup>, the person asking the question repeats what they have just said because they understand that the other person did not understand<sup>11</sup>. The research was even awarded an Ig Nobel Prize in 2015<sup>12</sup>.

What were the results of this investment for unemployed people in Europe?

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<sup>1</sup> <http://focuscampus.blog.lemonde.fr/2017/11/09/maitrise-de-langlais-la-france-stagne-a-un-niveau-mediocre/>  
<sup>2</sup>

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=2ahUKEwiX2J6TmlJeAhVHZ1AKHRgsC3YQFjAAegQICRAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fec.europa.eu%2Fcommfrontoffice%2Fpublicopinion%2Findex.cfm%2FResultDoc%2Fdownload%2FDocumentKy%2F82898&usg=AOvVaw2mpNj33ySIQsrE1QaO13Hd>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mpi.nl/institute/research-departments-groups/sociality-and-language-use>

<sup>4</sup> Aboriginal language spoken by 2 500 people.

<sup>5</sup> Language spoken in Eastern Ghana.

<sup>6</sup> Language spoken in Laos.

<sup>7</sup> Language spoken in Laos.

<sup>8</sup> Language spoken by 10 000 people in Northern Ecuador.

<sup>9</sup> Language spoken in Papua New Guinea.

<sup>10</sup> Freeze look.

<sup>11</sup> Manrique, E., & Enfield, N. J. (2015). Suspending the next turn as a form of repair initiation: Evidence from Argentine Sign Language. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6: 1326. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01326>.

<sup>12</sup> <http://nickenfield.org/huh/> Ig Nobel Prizes