

THE U.S. FOREIGN LANGUAGE DEFICIT, LANGUAGE ENTERPRISE, AND LANGUAGES FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

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Abstract: *At present, there is a gap between the need for foreign language skills and their availability in the U.S. marketplace, resulting in a monolingual American in a multilingual global workplace. The Language Enterprise, a partnership of government, academia, and the private sector, can collaborate to effectively address the U.S. foreign language deficit and to close the gap between the availability of foreign languages skills and the need for them in the U.S. workplace. High profile partnerships, such as the "Many Languages One World" (MLOW) Essay Contest and Global Youth Forum, and advocacy initiatives such as the American Association of Teachers of French (AATF) Commission on Advocacy, the National Organization of Business Language Educators (NOBLE), the Joint National Committee for Languages and the National Committee on Languages and International Studies (JNCL-NCLIS) will be described. This article will also examine career opportunities as language specialists and other careers enhanced by foreign language skills, as well as the importance of creating a sustainable framework for motivation in order to empower U.S. students studying foreign languages to achieve the level of foreign language proficiency needed in the workplace. In order to bring about the needed paradigm shift, a sustainable framework for successful foreign language learning would also require pre-professional and career-oriented programs in foreign languages included under the umbrella of Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) and Business Language Studies (BLS). The recommendations of the Modern Language Association report, "Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World," with its proposed transformation of the traditional 2-tier system into an "integrative approach with multiple pathways to the major, clearly demonstrate the importance of programs in Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) and Business Language Studies (BLS). Conclusions and future needs also include the significance and importance of high-profile partnerships such as "Many Languages One World," (MLOW), the establishment and enforcement of foreign language requirements, the importance of heritage language speakers, and the necessity for a unified strategic advocacy campaign bringing together all sectors of the Language Enterprise.*

Keywords: foreign language deficit; language enterprise; advocacy; many languages one world; language services; languages for specific purposes; business language studies

1. The U.S. Foreign Language Deficit

Americans are among the least likely in the world to speak another language, and this lack of foreign language skills among Americans has a negative impact on our

economic and national security. Despite a long-term public conversation on the need for foreign languages, little progress has been made. In addition, career opportunities exist for those with foreign language skills in education, government, and business.

According to a Gallup poll (McComb, 2001), with only one in four Americans reporting the ability to hold a conversation in another language, compared to 56% in Europe, according to *Europeans and Their Languages*, from Eurobarometer (2005). In addition, relatively few Americans study foreign languages, according to the *Foreign Language Enrollments in K–12 Public Schools: Are Students Prepared for a Global Society?* from the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), 18.5% of students at the K-12 elementary and secondary level and according to *Enrollments in Languages Other Than English in United States Institutions of Higher Education, Fall 2009*, from the Modern Language Association (MLA), 8.6% of students at the college and university level are enrolled in a foreign language or in a language other than English respectively. On the other hand, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (OOH) and the *Ferguson's Career Guidance Center* database, career opportunities exist in the language services industry, in education, in government, in international business, and in other careers, for Americans with foreign language skills. A 2012 US Senate Hearing, *A National Security Crisis: Foreign Language Capabilities in the Federal Government*, confirmed that many positions requiring foreign language skills in the Federal Government remain unfilled because of a lack of qualified candidates. In the 2009 Language Flagship report, *What Business Wants: Language Needs in the 21st Century*, the "opportunity cost" of the lack of foreign language skills within U.S. companies in developing new business opportunities and keeping them in a competitive global marketplace is examined (4). The 2012 Association for Training & Development (ASTD) report, *Bridging the Skills Gap: Help Wanted, Skills Lacking: Why the Mismatch in Today's Economy?* includes a study on the importance of foreign language skills in the healthcare workplace (19).

The gap between the need for foreign language skills and the number of Americans who possess foreign language skills has been demonstrated to be the challenge, but the challenge is two-fold. The first challenge is to raise awareness of the professional and career opportunities available to those with foreign language skills among Americans generally, and American students in particular. A second challenge is to create the social and learning environment necessary to create and support motivation so that American students will stay the course to develop the proficiency, and even fluency, needed in the workplace. This second challenge is both social and educational, requiring support for continued interest and motivation and the development of pre-professional and career-oriented foreign language programs within the areas of Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) and Business Language Studies (BLS).

In order to effectively address the U.S. foreign language deficit, a strategic social marketing campaign and a language enterprise partnership are needed.

2. The Role and Importance of the Language Enterprise in the U.S. and Beyond

The Language Enterprise is a partnership of education, business, and government. Foreign language skills are a competitive advantage, and should be treated as such. In his 2013 presentation, *The Language Enterprise in the US: The View from Washington*, Bill Rivers, the Executive Director of the Joint National Committee for Languages and the National Committee on Languages and International Studies (JNCL-NCLIS), defined the Language Enterprise, writing that "the 'Language Enterprise' encompasses everyone who enables communication among different cultures and languages." He went on to place the number of people engaged in the language enterprise at "300,000 in the educational sector, 200,000 in the private, more in government," and its economic importance at "\$25b each year in the US economy".

The following are 2 examples of successful Language Enterprise collaborations.

2.1 The "Many Languages One World" Essay Contest and Global Youth Forum -- The Language Enterprise in Action at the United Nations and in the United States

The "Many Languages One World" (MLOW) Essay Contest & Global Youth Forum is a wonderful example of the global Language Enterprise in action. Sponsored by the United Nations Academic Impact (UNAI) and ELS Educational Services, and hosted by Adelphi University, it represents the Language Enterprise partnership of government, private enterprise, and academia.

Launched in October 2013, with the goal of promoting multilingualism and the study of the official languages of the UN, this event invited college and university students from all over the world to submit essays on the theme of multilingualism and global citizenship in one of the official languages of the UN -- but not in the writer's native language or the language of his/her schooling. Over 1,400 students from 128 countries entered the contest, 300 universities and 4,000 people participated, and 60 winners (10 for each of the official languages of the UN) were selected to be brought to New York to present at the UN General Assembly in June 2014.

This author was honored to have been invited to participate as the French language facilitator in the selection of the winners and in their preparation of their presentations, and to have accompanied them to the UN..

The collaboration of private enterprise (ELS), government (the UNAI), and academe (the university and faculty sponsors of the students, and the host university -- Adelphi) in this event was significant.

2.2 The British Academy and the "Case for Language Learning" -- The Language Enterprise in Action in the United Kingdom

A noteworthy example of the Language Enterprise partnership at work in the UK has been "the Case for language learning" series in the *Guardian* and the annual Language Festival.

In 2011, the British Academy launched a 4-year program, which according to its website was intended "to deepen awareness and demonstrate the importance of languages in the humanities and social sciences".

This program has included a partnership with the *Guardian* as co-sponsor of the "case for language learning" article series, the Language Festival in 2013 and 2014, the London Language Show in 2013 and 2014, and additional partnerships. A series of publications, beginning with the Position Statement, *Language Matters*

More And More, in 2011, is scheduled to conclude with the publication of *Born Global: Rethinking language policy for 21st Century Britain*, in 2015

The important factor is that -- in the UK -- the Language Enterprise partnership has led to concerted action at the highest levels.

3. Advocacy for Foreign Languages and the Language Enterprise

Advocacy for foreign languages takes place on several levels -- the Language Enterprise, or the partnership of business, government, and academia; professional lobbying at the national level; professional associations; and concerned citizens at the local, state, and national level.

3.1 The American Association of Teachers of French (AATF)

The American Association of Teachers of French (AATF) is an example of foreign language advocacy in action. The AATF is noteworthy for its Commission on Advocacy, Commission for the Promotion of French, Commission on Cultural Competence, and Commission on French for Business and Economic Purposes, etc.

This author is honored to have been selected as a the Chair of the AATF Commission on Advocacy.

3.2 The Joint National Committee for Languages and the National Council for Languages and International Studies (JNCL-NCLIS)

JNCL-NCLIS is the national lobbying body for foreign languages in the nation's capital, comprised of professional organizations of language educators and of language services companies. Berlitz, whose ELS Language Services was one of the sponsors of "Many Languages One World," is one of the newest members of JNCL-NCLIS, as announced in the October 2014 JNCL-NCLIS Newsletter. A recent review of its website found 94 member organizations, 6 of whom are members of JNCL only.

3.3 The National Organization of Business Language Educators (NOBLE)

An organization dedicated to the development of foreign language skills for the global marketplace, NOBLE has existed since 2009. The organization offers resources and information online and through regularly scheduled webinars. This author is honored to have been invited to present the opening webinar of the 2014-2015 academic year in October 2014, and the presentation was entitled *How Foreign Languages Can Give You the Professional Edge*.

3.4 The American Translators Association (ATA)

According to its website, "ATA is a professional association founded to advance the translation and interpreting professions and foster the professional development of individual translators and interpreters." In support of this mission, ATA also sponsors a school outreach program intended to promote awareness of the career opportunities available to students at all levels. ATA is also a member of JNCL-NCLIS.

3.5 The Centers for International Business Education and Research (CIBERs)

There are over 30 CIBER programs on U.S. campuses which provide education to

on-campus students and impart best practices to other institutions. The CIBERs were created by Congress in 1988 to foster intercultural competence and global competitiveness.

3.6 The Language Flagship

The Language Flagship is a program at over 20 institutions of higher education to foster language skills in the ten languages determined to be critical to national security and to develop corresponding intercultural skills. The Language Flagship has also most recently expanded to include K-12 initiatives and programs such as STARTALK and The National Security Language Initiative for Youth (NSLI-Y), sponsored by the Department of State.

3.7 Foreign Language Immersion Programs in Louisiana, Utah and Delaware

Louisiana's French Immersion schools, Utah's Dual Language Immersion program, and the Delaware World Language Immersion programs are among the best examples of the growth of foreign language immersion programs in the U.S. and of foreign language advocacy at the state level.

3.8 The American Language Enterprise Advocacy (ALEA)

The American Language Enterprise Advocacy (ALEA), an alliance of the Globalization and Localization Association (GALA) and the National Council for Languages and International Studies (NCLIS), is an advocacy initiative launched in 2013.

4. Foreign Languages and Foreign Language Advocacy in the United States

The current public conversation of foreign languages in the U.S. began with the 1979 Presidential Commission had issued its report, *Strength through Wisdom*, and in 1980, Senator Paul Simon published *The Tongue-Tied American*, opening the current conversation on foreign languages. The events of 9/11 brought the lack of U.S. foreign language skills to the forefront of the public conversation. Many reports and initiatives on the importance of foreign language skills followed.

The *Languages for All: The Anglophone Challenge* initiative culminated in a conference in September 2013 and has served to launch a 5-year plan to promote and advocate for foreign languages in the United States.

5. Foreign Language Advocacy beyond U.S. Borders

The European Union has embraced multilingualism as a core value and has promoted plurilingualism -- mother tongue plus two -- and the adoption of *The Common European Framework of Reference for Foreign Languages* (CEFR). Since 2001, the European Day of Languages, an initiative of the Council of Europe, has been observed on September 26th.

The United Kingdom has advocated strongly for languages. The current campaign for foreign language learning, a collaboration of the British Academy and the *Guardian* has included the publication of several major reports. Educational reform has included the expansion of foreign language to the elementary grades, a reform of the A-level exams, a re-examination of the GCSE requirements and curriculum, and a new entry-level for the undergraduate foreign language major.

6. Career Opportunities in Foreign Languages -- The Importance of Foreign Language Skills for the Individual

Individuals learn languages for different reasons, but cultural affinity and career opportunities are among the most important. Opportunities in the workplace for those with foreign language skills include careers as language specialists, which include foreign language education and language services, and careers that are enhanced by foreign language skills, which include international business, social services, etc.

In the 2002, "The Returns to Speaking a Foreign Language," Saiz calculated that earnings are 2% more for those who speak a foreign language, and that foreign language benefit is different for each of the languages studied, with German, at 3.8%, the highest of the languages studied. According to the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (OOH), opportunities for careers in foreign languages are predicted to increase "much faster than average" and to have median earnings of over \$10,000. above the median wage for all workers, which indicates opportunities for employment and for above average earnings.

As has been demonstrated by the above, there are numerous career opportunities and career paths for U.S. students with the necessary foreign language skills in this sector, but many students are unaware of the opportunities that exist, especially those that exist in the private sector.

In addition to median wage and growth of employment, the sheer size of the language sector is an indicator of the number of opportunities. According to Rivers, in his 2013 presentation, *The Language Enterprise in the U.S.: The View from Washington*, the number of people engaged in the language enterprise at "300,000 in the educational sector, 200,000 in the private, more in government," and its economic importance at "\$25b each year in the US economy".

6.1 Careers as Language Specialists

U.S. students tend to be unaware of the range of career opportunities, but the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* finds that the median pay for interpreters and translators is well above the national average and that opportunities are projected to increase at a faster-than-average rate over the next 10 years. Careers in education also provide higher than average earnings, with the rate of growth for elementary school teachers projected to increase at the national average, while opportunities for high school teachers are projected to grow at a slower than average rate.

Selected data from the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* includes the following.

6.1.1 Median Pay

- Interpreters and Translators -- \$45,430.
- High School Teachers -- \$55,050.
- Kindergarten and Elementary School Teachers -- \$53,090.

6.1.2 Projected Rate of Growth 2012-2022

- Interpreters and Translators -- 46% (much faster than average)
- High School Teachers -- 6% (slower than average)
- Kindergarten and Elementary School Teachers -- 12% (as fast as average)

6.1.3 Other Factors

Factors to keep in mind include the overall size of the language services industry, which is over \$35 billion globally, and 15 billion in the U.S. alone, as well as the number of U.S. companies in the top 10 (5), and the number of U.S. companies in the top 100 (30), according to Commonsenseadvisory's *The Top 100 Language Service Providers: 2013* . It is also important to note that opportunities and compensation for foreign language educators vary from state to state, as foreign language programs and graduation requirements vary.

This objective data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics clearly demonstrates that there are opportunities in the U.S. in both language services and foreign language education, offering pay above the national median salary. However, the growth of opportunities in the language services sector, in which employment is projected to increase by 46%, much faster than average, is significantly greater and is, paradoxically, the area less familiar to U.S. students.

6.2 Careers Enhanced by Foreign Languages

Careers enhanced by foreign languages fall into three broad categories: those which benefit from cultural intelligence (CQ); careers in international business; and other careers.

6.2.1 Careers in International Business -- "What's Your Language Strategy?"

According to Neeley and Kaplen, in their September 2014 *Harvard Business Review* article, "What's Your Language Strategy?" "language pervades every aspect of organizational life. It touches everything. Yet remarkably, leaders of global organizations, whose employees speak a multitude of languages, often pay too little attention to it in their approach to talent management" (72).

It is also interesting to note that, although many Americans and other English-speakers believe that English is the global *lingua franca*, many important global economies do not necessarily possess the level of English language skills that many Americans may suppose. According to English First's 2014 *English Proficiency Index* website, Russia, China, Brazil, and Mexico are rated "low proficiency" and Saudi Arabia is rated "very low proficiency," re-confirming the need for foreign language skills among English-speakers, including Americans.

Foreign language is a marketable skill, especially in international business, and the question of foreign languages concerns both business education and companies themselves. A quick review of their websites by this author revealed that even the most highly-ranked Schools of Business Administration in the U.S., (Harvard, Stanford, UPenn/Wharton, ranked at #1, and Chicago/Booth, and MIT/Sloan rounding out the top 5), do not generally require a foreign language for their MBA students, although they have developed and support a wide range of global experiences for their students. However, instruction is generally conducted in English.

6.2.2 Other Careers

Many careers within government, including local, state, and federal government, the military, law enforcement, judicial system, and the State Department offer careers opportunities that either require or prefer foreign language skills, or pay an extra stipend for foreign language skills.

7. Bridging the Foreign Language Skills Gap -- Motivation and Languages for Specific Purposes

The challenge is to empower U.S. students to develop their foreign languages skills to the level required in order to be an asset in the workplace. While it is one thing to inform students of the opportunities available to those who possess foreign language skills, it is quite another to raise the level of foreign language skills among a significant number of U.S. students. An overall strategic framework to support both motivation and learning is essential, with the campaign to motivate prospective students to begin and to continue foreign language learning complemented by foreign language programs to support a range of professional and career objectives. However, even if a campaign is successful, the challenge remains to maintain motivation in students to continue the prolonged study of one or more foreign languages necessary to reach the advanced levels of proficiency and fluency needed in the workplace.

Intrinsic motivation is of critical importance in foreign language learning and the most effective predictor of student foreign language learning outcome. According to Swift, in *Foreign Language Competence And International Business: A Cultural Approach*, cultural affinity is the most powerful motivator, and this is most difficult challenge in the U.S., where geography and history have made it less likely for young people to desire to learn foreign language skills. This is where adequately funded and supported extra- and co-curricular programming at all levels can make all the difference, giving students the opportunity to use their language skills in enjoyable settings on a regular basis and to make their new language skills a positive part of their daily life, rather than having to study for years before a high-stakes or one-time-only study abroad or travel abroad experience.

When motivation is supported by a sustainable framework of community and co-curricular programming, and learning is supported by relevant and pragmatic foreign language programs including Business Language Studies (BLS) and other pre-professional and career-oriented programs in Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP), a paradigm shift in U.S. foreign language skills becomes a realizable goal.

8. Future Directions

Future directions include advocacy initiatives by the Language Enterprise, bringing together education, business, and government in support of foreign languages, the establishment and enforcement of foreign language requirements in higher education, effective outreach to heritage language speakers and development of programs designed to empower them to maximize the career potential of the combination of their heritage language and their English language skills, and continued energetic advocacy by all stakeholder groups.

8.1 The Significance and Importance of "Many Languages One World" (MLOW) -- The Language Enterprise Advocacy Partnership in Action

The "Many Languages One World" Essay Contest and Global Youth Forum is a stunning example of a high-profile inspirational event showcasing the importance of foreign languages, made possible by the public-private-academic partnership described by William Rivers as the "language enterprise."

8.2 Higher Education -- Foreign Language Requirements and Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP)

As recommended by the 2007 Modern Language Association (MLA) report, *Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World*, the transformation of college and university programs beyond the traditional 2-tier model to include areas other than literature is essential to the effecting the paradigm shift needed to effectively address the U.S. foreign language deficit and to overcome the foreign languages skills gap (2,3). This "integrative approach with multiple paths to the major" would include interdisciplinary and pre-professional programs in Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) and Business Language Studies (BLS) (4,5).

It is interesting to note that, although many institutions embrace global/international education, the author's doctoral research found that undergraduate programs in international/global studies did not require a foreign language beyond the intermediate level and that foreign language proficiency and fluency were not program goals.

8.2.1 The Role and Importance of Heritage Language Speakers

Heritage language speakers possess language skills that may be under-utilized, both in their own personal careers and for the benefit of society. Programs specifically addressing the needs of heritage language speakers must be developed and expanded for heritage language speakers, as their linguistic journey to the language skills workplace may be different from that of non-native speakers. Programs like the *Puerta al Futuro*, *Latino Promise*, *MiraeRo*, and *Cheng Gong* programs offered a Fairleigh Dickinson University offer recent immigrants and other heritage language speakers of Spanish, Korean, and Chinese respectively, an opportunity to build on their bilingual skills and to acquire the U.S. educational credentials and English-language fluency needed for positions requiring foreign language or bilingual skills.

8.2.2 The Importance of Advocacy

Professional associations like the ACTFL, AATSP, AATF, and others, the Modern Language Association (MLA), and the national advocacy group JNCL-NCLIS form the basis of the national advocacy movement emanating from the profession. However, regional groups such as CODOFIL, Action cadienne, and Francophonies des Ameriques play a complementary and significant role.

The expansion of JNCL-NCLIS membership to include corporate members is among the most interesting examples of public- private sector foreign language collaboration, with Berlitz and LanguageLine Solutions among its newest corporate members.

9. Conclusions

Americans are among the least likely in the world to speak another language, and the lack of foreign language skills impacts our economic and national security, our individual careers, and our ability to understand and enjoy all that the world has to offer.

Foreign language skills offer a "competitive advantage," as defined by Michael

Porter in his trilogy, to those nations and corporations that can effectively deploy needed foreign language and cultural skills. They are also a competitive advantage, or "resume differentiator," as described by Risner, in *Are We Prepared for the Jobs of the Future?* for the individual in the globalized workplace.

The U.S. foreign language deficit has caused a shortage of critically needed foreign language skills at a time when globalization has made them more necessary than ever. For decades, foreign language educators and others have chronicled the decline of foreign language education among English-speaking Americans and the subsequent failure of foreign language enrollment to rebound proportionately in response to the needs of the globalized world

Effective advocacy by all segments of the Language Enterprise, a collaborative partnership of education, business, and government is essential in bringing about the needed paradigm shift in both motivation to learn another language and the education and training to maximize the career advantage that business proficiency, or even fluency, can bring. The "Many Languages One World" (MLOW) Essay Contest and Global Youth Forum and the British "Case for language learning" are high-profile examples of the impact of the Language Enterprise partnership.

Career and professional opportunities exist for those with foreign language skills in business, government, and education, as language specialists or in careers enhanced by foreign language skills. However, to bridge the gap between the foreign language skills that are needed by business, government, and our multicultural society, and the current level of interest in foreign languages among U.S. students, the advocacy campaign to motivate students to study foreign languages must take place within a learning environment which supports professional- and career-oriented foreign language learning. Programs in Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) and Business Language Studies (BLS) are the most effective pathway to effectively addressing the U.S. foreign language deficit and in bridging the foreign language skills gap.

The 2013 *Languages for All?* initiative website sums it up best with,

"in recent years, much of the discussion regarding foreign language education has centered on its perceived benefits: a more robust economy, stronger national security, improved cognitive ability, and advantages in college admissions and the job market, just to name a few. Recent surveys show that 85 percent of American adults now believe that it is important for youth to learn a second language, yet 79 percent of Americans are still monolingual. It's time to shift the discussion from 'Why should we learn a second language?' to 'Why aren't we learning languages?'"

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