

MULTILINGUALISM AND ITS PURPOSES– INTERDISCIPLINARY APPLICATIONS IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY

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Abstract: *Within the context of multilingualism as a tool, this article will examine the benefits and uses of languages by individuals, within organizations, and in our lives as citizens, both locally and globally. Viewed through the lens of the social, global, and economic value proposition for languages, the significance of purpose in developing sustainable language learning and multilingualism will be highlighted, along with the necessity of linking language learning and the purpose of multilingualism in curriculum, experiential learning activities, and in a variety of organizational settings. The linkage of motivation and a sense of purpose in supporting both interest in language learning and successful learning outcome is explored. In order to achieve this goal of sustainable language learning and multilingualism, the importance of an early start to language learning, of immersion programs, of appropriate pre-professional curriculum, and of flexible workplace learning will be discussed, as well as – most importantly – the role of heritage languages. Central to the discussion is the concept of accessibility, which includes both affordability and the availability of online, hybrid, and flexible learning opportunities for learners of all ages. In conclusion, the role of language advocacy is essential in ensuring that the conversation on language learning remains focused on multilingualism as a tool for personal empowerment, communication within our multilingual society, organizational success, and effective global communication even in times of crisis. It is essential to focus consistent attention to the nature and diversity of purposes among current and potential language learners.*

Keywords: purpose; motivation; values; language learning; multilingualism.

1 Introduction

A news report highlighted the absence of an interpreter during a meeting between French President Macron and US President Joe Biden because the French president speaks English (BFMTV, 2021). However, on the other hand, Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau struggled to make information available beyond English during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Air Canada CEO Michael Rousseau's lack of French language skills was also headline news (AFP Ottawa, 2020; Cecco, 2021). These are just a few examples of the impact of languages on our lives, whether in international communication or in communication within our increasingly multilingual societies, demonstrating their value in international and global communication and their role in reducing segmentation and potential

inequality in our own societies as well as in providing critically needed healthcare information to all. Despite these and many other stories in the news, many still question the value of language learning. It is this lack of a realization of the value of languages among many that results in a lack of purpose in language learning, which in turn can lead to lack of perseverance among learners when the inevitable challenges and plateaus of language learning are encountered. In order to develop sustainable language learning and use, it is essential to recognize the value of multilingualism as a tool in our lives as individuals, in our communities, and as global citizens, as well as its value in our institutions and organizations. It is also necessary to make this belief and core value, both central and explicit in language education and advocacy. In order to build a multilingual society and to empower all of us to achieve our goals, languages and language learning need to become a habit rather than a wish or resolution (Cornfield, 2020; Sarner, 2017).

The US lags behind many nations in language learning, with consequences not only in terms of global competitiveness and national security, but also in terms of understanding within an increasingly multilingual society (Devlin, 2018; American Councils, 2017). For these reasons, although purpose is a significant concept across cultures, this article will examine the role and nature of purpose in language learning outcome with a special focus on the US. This article will document and demonstrate both the importance of multilingualism in a globalized and interconnected world, and the role of purpose in developing sustainable motivation in language learning.

2. The Role of Purpose and Motivation in Language Learning

Parents, students, educational administrators, and government consider the value of languages and language learning in their decision-making. In the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic, which has disrupted so much, including education around the world, it is important to recognize the importance of purpose among learners and to foster and encourage a sense of sustainable purpose in language learning. It is easy to pinpoint specific narrow areas where languages or specific languages would be useful in achieving a specific goal. However, the concept of language for global communication is both sufficiently broad to appeal to many, yet sufficiently specific to retain the sense of purpose necessary for learning as well as for building support in government and educational administration for funding and development of new programs. Purpose has been defined as "an abiding intention to achieve a long-term goal that is both personally meaningful and makes a positive mark on the world" (Berkeley, 2021). The power of purpose is important to consider (Brower, 2021). Whether our purpose in learning and using an additional language is career advancement or further education, scientific and professional research, increased understanding of a heritage culture or that of a friend or family member, direct access to information, literature, media in another language, or the desire to communicate directly with others during travel, etc., purpose is a primary motivator and driver of sustainable effort and successful outcome. Yet the power of purpose is not often discussed explicitly. Language learning requires significant effort over a considerable time period, and sustainable and successful language learning requires a clear sense of purpose within the learner and the development

of linkages between specific language learning activities and opportunities and the achievement of the learner's personal linguistic goal(s). In language education, this sense of purpose and development of linkages need to be reinforced on a regular basis through reflection, discussion, and action on the part of the learner and the educator. Purpose is an effective motivator, and one of the most powerful motivators is the desire to create a better world through engagement in global initiatives.

This not only should be accepted and encouraged, but the inherent interdisciplinarity of language in international and intercultural understanding, and in global citizenship needs to be explored and examined through curriculum and learning activities at all levels. Languages in business and healthcare often come first to mind, but the role of multilingualism in our lives and careers is broader. Language is a global communicative tool to empower and facilitate global solutions and a better world includes, but is not limited to, business and medical settings. Therefore, they can impact the lives of students at all levels and any academic program or major. Multilingualism as a tool to improve our skills and our lives is universal, and a language(s) component has its place and can play a role in any major or program. In balancing the need for language learning as part of a general education. The need for language skills and cultural knowledge in specific areas like business and health services, it is important to consider the role of language and of multilingualism as a tool rather than as an end in itself in order to reinforce this sense of purpose necessary to drive motivation among learners and the political will in educational institutions and government to actively support language policy and funding in a crowded agenda of needs. For this very reason, needs analysis is an important first step, with global citizenship an often-overlooked area.

However, in addition to developing a framework of needs that may at times appear abstract to the non-specialist, it is important for each learner not only to know the reasons why language can be helpful, but even more important for the learner make room for one or more additional languages in daily life, to find a place for languages to live in their life (Leveen, 2021). While this may appear both self-evident and straightforward, it can be challenging due to busy schedules and multiple demands on time beyond the classroom or workplace. However, envisioning how the new language will become an integral and rewarding part of their lives can help not only to drive motivation for language learning, but also for the role language can play in their professional and personal lives. Beyond establishing the need for language and a place for language in the heart of the learner, language learning needs to be accessible and affordable for all interested students. At present, most US public school students do not have access to language programs beginning at the earliest grade levels, and even fewer have access to immersion programs (AMACAD, 2017). These programs need to be made available to all interested students, and funding needs to be increased for after-school, weekend, and summer programs. However, accessibility also means having more community-based programs, both in-person and online, for interested learners who cannot -- for a variety of reasons -- attend or travel to a traditional program. If we can build on the already-existing interest in languages in business and health services to develop language learning in other areas, such as global

citizenship, or creating a better world in our community through education, social work, etc., it is possible to rebuild a multilingual America for a global age.

The sense of purpose is deeply rooted in our core values and identity, and so too is language learning motivation. While purpose may not be discussed as frequently, types of motivation – instrumental and intrinsic – along with the challenges of sustaining motivation through the lengthy process of language learning and the inevitable plateaus have been studied and examined (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Dornyei, 2005; Mackey, 2014). If the language learning environment, materials, and curriculum explicitly and consistently address and respond to both the purpose and motivation of the learner, the meaning and importance of language(s) can be firmly established within each learner. In highly tangible terms, the role of multilingualism as a tool in the life of the individual and in society and the economic and humanitarian value of multilingualism are powerful motivators in themselves and need to be part of the ongoing conversation with language learners, partners, and other stakeholders.

3. The Role of Multilingualism as a Tool and the Value Proposition for Multilingualism and Language Learning

Multilingualism is an integral part of life, central to communication both global and local, and at least half the world population is multilingual (Grosjean, 2010). In a globalized and interconnected world, languages are more important than ever in our communities and in global citizenship. Multilingualism is an asset both personally and professionally, as well as in the actualization of our personal cultural identity, and it is also an asset in our communities and society. In addition, it is a tool -- in our personal and professional lives, in terms of building relationships and careers, but also in developing an international mindset, global identity, and global citizenship skills. Language skills and cultural knowledge are important in our lives, globally and locally, and they are especially important in business and organizations, both for-profit and nonprofit. -- In business, language skills and cultural knowledge are important in business discussions, transactions, and contracts; in sales, marketing, and retail; as well as in company and organizational operations at all levels.

While many say that English is the global language, this is only partly true. Three quarters of the world population does not speak English, much of the global internet traffic is in languages other than English, and a significant portion of global trade and global economy exists beyond the Anglosphere (British Council, 2013). Non-business organizations include international organizations like the United Nations and regional organizations like European Union, as well as more specialized international organizations like the International Red Cross and International Olympic Committee, all of which have recognized the importance of languages and language use and have adopted language policies. Nation states, regions, and organizations around the world have adopted language policies and procedures in order to improve communication and operation. In terms of humanitarian international aid, **languages play a vital role.** “For aid workers,

learning languages can save lives" (Morton, 2020; Translators without Borders, 2018, 2019).

Multilingualism has been found to be rewarding on both the personal and national levels (Hogan-Brun, 2017, 2021). Multilingualism brings value to both individuals and organizations, as well as to society business and humanitarian organizations. Multilingualism is both part of daily life and central to the operation of organizations around the world, and every organization -- from the small or medium-sized enterprise to the large multinational corporation, and from the fledgling not-for-profit to the largest NGO or international organization. Organizations are typically constantly seeking to maximize the efficiency and returns from capital -- physical, financial, and human. In terms of maximizing human capital, better communication and inter-agency skills are top priorities, and the best way to realize that goal is through better language skills. Beyond the individual or an individual organization, multilingualism provides economic benefits for society.

However, in the US, there is a gap in the demand and supply of language skills among US employees (NAE, 2017; ACTFL, 2019; Bilingualism Translates, 2018). "Multilingualism is good for the economy," and "countries that actively nurture different languages reap a range of rewards, from more successful exports to a more innovative workforce" (Hardach, 2018). Among the countries impacted by a gap in the supply and demand of language skills, Switzerland attributes 10% of its GDP (\$38.15B) to its languages, while on the other hand, the UK loses the equivalent of 3.5% of its GDP due to its lack of language skills (Bradley, 2008). In Florida, those who are bilingual in English and Spanish earn \$7,000 a year more, and in Canada, "bilingual men earn 3.6 per cent and bilingual women earn 6.6 per cent more than those who speak only English" (In Florida, 2000; Bilingualism Translates, 2010).

4. Multilingualism within the Individual and Organization – Language Policy, Language Planning, and Crisis Communications

Language skills and cultural knowledge have long been acknowledged to have personal and professional benefits, associated with rational thought, problem-solving, and creativity (ACTFL, n.d.). In addition, multilinguals enjoy the ability to communicate with other cultures in social and workplace environments, and to appreciate media, entertainment, and the arts in one or more additional languages. It is also possible for the multilingual to access information and education in other languages. In the globalized workplace, where transnational teams are the norm, the multilingual is able not only to be an active participant, but also to contribute to the diversity of perspectives and to operate with greater tolerance and tolerance of ambiguity (WEF, 2017; Vollmer, 2016).

Beyond its impact on the individual in terms of identity and global citizenship, language use may occur naturally and organically, or may need to be planned in organizational settings. At the national and regional level, language use and language policy vary widely, with virtually every nation unique in its languages and cultures. Among the many examples of nation states, Canada has observed the

50th anniversary of being officially bilingual, with debates in both official languages a newsworthy part of national political campaigns. While Quebec is unilingual, with French as its official language. Switzerland has been sustainably multilingual for centuries. The United States has no official language, while many US states do. International organizations address both the need for multilingualism and its implementation in a variety of manners. The United Nations, with over 190 members, has 6 official languages, yet uses many more in order to more effectively communicate and to achieve more widespread support for its programs and initiatives. The European Union, with its motto of unity in diversity, embraces multilingualism as a core value actualized in plurilingualism, and uses English, French, and German as working languages, with the role of English a frequent topic of discussion in the post-Brexit era. The International Olympic Committee uses French, English, and the local language as the official languages of the games. Within the context of international organizations, language policy and language use may also include another dimension -- that of crisis communication. This is especially evident within organizations like the International Red Cross, *Médecins sans Frontières*, etc. Within business entities, ranging from multinational corporations to small and medium-sized businesses, language policy and language use can be tools of communication between subsidiary and parent company, between trading partners, or between consumers with their local retailer or service provider. However, language policy and language use can also indicate the power dynamic between the parent organization and the local branch or subsidiary and between those who speak the official company language fluently and those who may not (Thomas, 2007). Within the context of language policy and language use in international organizations, it is important to consider and examine their use of languages in crisis communications.

The examples of the importance of language and languages in international and crisis communication already mentioned demonstrate the importance of communication in a timely and effective way. The COVID-19 global pandemic has highlighted the need for rapid and accurate communication of information, as well as the challenges (BFMTV, 2021; AFP Ottawa, 2020; Cecco, 2021).

5. Encouraging and Teaching Pre-Professional Language Skills

While language education is quintessentially interdisciplinary, impacting all aspects of our lives no matter what culture we live in, there are, however, specific ways to encourage pre-professional language learning. While it is possible to think immediately of multilingualism in international business and international relations, language skills and cultural knowledge are useful across the disciplines, ranging from the humanities and the arts to STEM. The challenge is how best to incorporate pre-professional language learning into the foreign language learning experience. The short answer is that foreign language learning incorporates the whole of life, including our personal interests, our professional aspirations, and our role as global citizens. A longer answer is that an interdisciplinary approach to foreign language learning as part of our lives is beneficial from the earliest age. It is possible to make interdisciplinary connections between language learning, business, global and international studies, science and technology, and the fine

and performing arts, literature, and media from the earliest ages, at a developmental level appropriate to the learner.

Beyond traditional educational institutions, workplace learning is also an excellent way for organizations to empower their employees to more effectively interact with customers, clients, and students, and to respond to their needs (Rogers, 2018). The French language offers an excellent example of this approach. The *Français des Affaires*/French for Business initiative of the CCI Paris-Ile-de-France is an example, as are workshops offered at various US institutions of higher learning for college and university faculty on French for Professional Purposes within specific areas of activity, including international relations and global health (CCI, n.d.; Cultural Services, n.d.a., n.d.b.;2021a). Job fairs, both in person and online, are a means of highlighting the importance of language skills and a specific means of connecting those with an interest in languages with prospective employers seeking those very skills (Cultural Services, 2021b).

It is also important to bear in mind that pre-professional language skills reside within a broader framework of linguistic and cultural knowledge. An early start to language learning, specifically within an immersion or dual-language immersion (DLI) setting is key to building both knowledge of authentic language and of the importance of a real need to use an additional language in building language skills. In addition, the intercultural understanding that results from living with another culture and using another language on a daily basis is invaluable in all aspects of life. Further validating the importance of early language learning and of immersion programs -- specifically dual-language immersion. Workplace and adult language learning may not be mentioned as frequently, yet they can be impactful on both the life and career of the non-traditional learner as well as on the trajectory of the organization, with both individual careers as well as the competitiveness of a business in a global marketplace or the effectiveness of and an NGO, not-for-profit, or international organization in terms of disseminating information and in garnering support for its initiatives in a multilingual world (Crack, Footitt, & Tesseur, 2018; Footitt, 2017). Generally, language learning in the workplace can be considered as language learning for current and potential expatriate employees or in terms of personal and professional development in order to better serve clients and customers (Forbes, 2017; Gurchiek, 2017)). Organizations may choose to implement corporate language training programs and to incentivize participation and achievement in a variety of ways (Oesch, 2019). According to Rosetta Stone, corporate language training opportunities strengthen business operations, stimulate employee engagement, increase productivity, drive company loyalty, attract globally-aware Millennials. Benefits to employers include improved employee confidence, performance, productivity, engagement, and loyalty (Rosetta Stone Business, 2017, 2018).

Heritage languages may also provide a pathway to multilingualism within organizations. In the US, over 70M speak a language other than English in the home. Maximizing the role of heritage languages can help in building language capacity within organizations. However, some who speak a language other than English in the home may not have the English skills needed for the workplace. In this case, English language learning can benefit both the individual and the organization, enabling the individual to maximize career potential and the

organization to maximize effectiveness. In addition, honoring heritage languages while encouraging English proficiency can increase harmony and decrease segmentation and divisions within organizations.

7. Future Needs

Future needs to build language skills and increase multilingualism in the US include similarities and differences depending on the area in which they are used. From educational institutions to businesses, to international organizations and NGOs, and to families and communities striving both to safeguard heritage languages and to empower the current and future generations to maximize their benefits, the languages are the same and yet different. While students are aware of the personal, academic, and professional advantages of multilingualism, foreign language skills, and cultural knowledge, they may not be as aware of the role of language and languages in organizations beyond the high-profile multinational corporation (MNC) and beyond the highly visible role of translation and language services in international exchanges.

Awareness of the communicative value of multilingualism, in terms of diversity of worldview and perspective, problem-solving approaches, and creativity, may be less frequently mentioned, but plays an essential role in transnational teams and global solutions. These areas need to be highlighted in a developmentally appropriate manner beginning at the earliest ages. Beyond increasing awareness, all students need to have access to foreign language learning and specifically to project-based learning and authentic real-life experiences requiring the use of other languages. In the US, not all students have access to language learning, and less advantaged students have the least access (AMACAD, 2017). The curriculum needs to be expanded to include exploration of professional language and culture in business and organizations, and as a tool for creating a better world, from the earliest grade levels. It is essential to make language learning available to all so that we can use language effectively as a tool to create a better world. In language learning and beyond, nothing is more important, making affordability and accessibility key issues today and moving forward.

8. Conclusions - Accessibility, Affordability, and Advocacy

In order to build multilingual skills, it is necessary for language education and advocacy to effectively link language skills and multilingualism to learner empowerment in terms of the self-actualization of the individual, as well as in our professional lives and in our role as global citizens. "Values are fundamental to us as people, and for organizations they provide the same cultural and moral foundation" (Rai, 2020). Multilingualism as a tool to make the world a better place, and Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) have the potential to re-frame the conversation on languages in the United States and beyond. Focusing on language as a tool to make the world a better place and on making language learning accessible and affordable for all empowers language learners to make

language part of their lives for a wide variety of personal and professional reasons, and as a tool to create relationships and to do good across cultures.

Next steps include building the "why" of languages and language learning into conversations with language learners of all ages as well as with language stakeholders in our schools, businesses, communities, and decision and policy makers in government at all levels. The "how" of developing the skills adds affordability and accessibility to the conversation, as well as the development of language learning programs within and beyond the classroom, both in-person and online, and for all ages, from the pre-schooler and the adult learner.

Current and future research practice will need to continue to expand the curriculum and course offerings in language as tool for specific disciplines and purposes in response to changing global conditions and student interests. This can be done through interdisciplinary collaborations with language either in joint programs, or with language as a fully integrated part of a course in a specific discipline or as an associated module with research, reading, writing, and study online or abroad as potential models (MLA, 2019). Multilingualism is part of the skills set of the global citizen, both globally and locally, whether in our multilingual neighborhoods and communities, in our society and government, and internationally -- for business or travel, and most importantly, for humanitarian purposes. The world faces numerous complex issues that need to be addressed multilaterally and transnationally, and the search for global solutions is greatly enhanced by increased ease in communicating directly in each other's language. The dilemma remains -- how to get there from here. In the US, relatively few students learn additional languages in schools, 20% in K-12 and 7.5% in postsecondary education, making the pipeline to the development of pre-professional language skills insufficient to meet the demand (AMACAD, 2017; MLA, 2019; NAE, 2017; ACTFL, 2019; Bilingualism Translates, 2018) in the workplace. Increased access to language learning is key to meeting this need, and increased opportunity and affordability are critical. At the present time, not all US students have the opportunity to learn an additional language, especially in elementary and middle schools, which serve students at the optimal age for language learning and afford the possibility of a sufficient period of continued study for the development of pre-professional skills at the college and university level. (AMACAD, 2017).

Affordability is part of access, with private K-12 schools more likely to offer an early start to language learning, and after-school, weekend, and summer programs often fee-based. In order to increase opportunity and equity, more public schools need to offer language learning, beginning at the earliest age, whether in traditional or immersion format, and programs beyond the classroom need to be affordable, through funding and scholarships. Another part of access and affordability is online learning -- an advantage for those who cannot travel to summer camps and study abroad for financial or family reasons, or due to a disability, etc.

Advocacy can help in starting a sustainable conversation on affordability and access which need to be at the heart of our advocacy initiatives. We owe it to ourselves, to our children, and to our world. "The necessity of foreign-language education could not be clearer right now. The future in America, and everywhere, is

multilingual. And so is the present" (Montlaur, 2019, A23). It is time to make languages, language learning, and multilingualism a habit rather than a resolution, and we can best do this by raising consciousness and awareness of the purpose for language learning in each individual learner.

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