

Why is foreign language requirement important at CSUS?

By Kazue

My position of the issue of foreign language requirement is to maintain current requirement. Since I researched the history of foreign language education before, I thought that I share my perspectives on this issue with you (Masuyama, 2000). My points from #1 to #4 focus on why the foreign language requirement is important to the CSUS, while #5 and #6 examine the issue of foreign language learning from more broader perspectives.

1. Foreign Language Promotes the Value of Humankind

Foreign language learning promotes the values of humankind, providing opportunities for students to gain knowledge and skills of languages and cultures of people beyond political, economic, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. Especially at this time of global terrorism and violence, which has often been caused by ignorance, foreign language skills are powerful communication tools to understand differences. People in various regions of the world are no longer strangers to those who have invested their time and effort in learning foreign languages. Thus, foreign language learning clearly serves the mission of university- “to preserve, communicate, and advance knowledge; cultivate wisdom; encourage creativity; promote the value of humankind; and improve the quality of life for its graduates and the people of the region.”

2. The Foreign Language Requirement Sends the Right Message to K-12 Educators & Students

The foreign language requirement shows K-12 educators and students that CSUS faculty and administration understand that foreign language learning is important. There are vast numbers of research that cite the importance of foreign language learning at the earlier stage (K-12). They include:

- a. Global awareness: Lambert, 1967; Gardner and Lambert, 1972; Torney-Purta, 1986)
- b. Academic and cognitive benefits: Cooper, 1987; Olsen and Brown, 1992; Pearl and Lambert, 1962; Landy, 1974; Hakuta, 1984.
- c. Increase the likelihood of success in learning foreign languages: Lenneberg, 1967; Met, 1991; McLaughlin, 1978; Krashen, Scarcella, and Long, 1982.
- d. Positive personality change: Stitsworth, 1999.
(Please see a complete text in the below – Appendix I)

As a university teacher, I strongly feel that students start learning a foreign language early. In this way, they embark upon, not an introductory level, but intermediate

or advanced levels of foreign language learning when they come to the university. As a result, the students become fluent enough to function in a foreign language when they graduate from the university. At the K-12 level, foreign language education is considered as one of essential subject, and became the seventh and final subject area to receive federal funding for the development of national standards for students (The National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996).

The reduction of foreign language requirement from CSUS will send an inappropriate message to the community, in which CSUS has a duty to serve. Instead of thinking of reducing the requirement, we should promote foreign language learning at the K-12 level, by supporting the firm policy on the foreign language requirement. As a result of such a positive circulation, we can increase a number of people who have a higher level of foreign language and cultural proficiency in California.

3. The Foreign Language Department – A Department of Future with Vision

In 2002, I joined this department after having served four major universities including SUNY Buffalo and UC Davis. As a new faculty member, I found this department very special. The followings are the lists of my reasons:

- (a) The CSUS is one of the two campuses that have a foreign language requirement for their graduation. This itself makes this university as a special campus among the CSU system. Because of this consistent and supportive policy, the Department of Foreign Languages has been able to develop a cohesive curriculum, which has resulted in a higher level of accountability in foreign language teaching and learning. There is a detailed recorded department history by Professor Mark Riley, titled “History of the Department of Foreign Languages, CSU Sacramento, 1948 – 2002.” It depicts a rich department history vividly, and explains how the CSUS administration under President Gerth initiated the foreign language requirement under the slogan of “globalization” of education in 1992. I found the existence of such a complete record as rare.
- (b) The Department has offers a variety of courses: Spanish, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Chinese, Russian, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Arabic, and others. I learned that local ethnic communities have supported the offering of foreign languages such as Punjabi and Italian. In collaboration with communities, the department has a great potential to expand the kinds of foreign language offerings in future.
- (c) The Department is serving the community and will continue to provide more service to the community. CSUS, located in the capital of California, provides learning opportunities to a number of decision-makers, public officers, and educators. Foreign language learning helps people increase their flexibility, perception, patience, and empathy toward different people and cultures. Because of foreign language requirements, I believe that foreign language learning has benefited many CSUS graduates who now work as government workers and public servants, who have frequent contact with delegations from foreign

countries, as well as school teachers who deal with children from various backgrounds. If we reduce or eliminate this requirement, will these people enroll in foreign language classes? I am doubtful. In California, we cannot afford monolingualism and mono-culturalism especially for those who plan to be public workers.

- (d) The Department is serving our students' short-term and long term goals. Spanish 7 (3rd semester) is designed to help many heritage language learners, who have not acquired formal heritage language reading and writing skills. California, being a multi-lingual state, has an obligation to establish a system that helps them to excel in learning of both their heritage language and English. Without a foreign language requirement, a class like Spanish 7 may be viewed as less attractive to these students. By allowing the reduction of the foreign language requirement, we are NOT servicing these students. Mastering their heritage language to the proficient level will give them not only academic and practice skills, but also a strong sense of confidence and identity. Isn't it a mission of this university?
- (e) The Department has been developing a number of on-line courses that internationally known such as on-line French and Spanish and web-enhanced Japanese, French, and Spanish courses. In these classes, students are learning computing, research, and analytical skills as well as foreign language proficiency.
- (f) The faculty members at the department published not only textbooks and workbooks, but also traditional scholarly books (See Riley, pp. 20 – 21).

4. The Real World Demands Foreign Language Skills!

Ilon and Paulino (1996) analyzed competitive market forces within the global economy and multinational firms. They reported that the demand for internationally trained employees would be about 1.65 million by 2005 or an average annual increase of 75,000. They listed a series of real needs and demands for personnel with international training in the business community and ranked each occupation by level of demand for international training. An increasing number of businesses have faced the demand to hire personnel with a global perspective and international skills. Multinationals are moving from a homogeneous management style of command-and-control to one based on flexible, dynamic, and knowledge-based management (The Economist, June 1995). The growth pattern of multi-national corporations is creating a demand for international tools of management such as foreign language ability.

Despite of these realities, the US public feels that there is no urgent need to be overly concerned about having to go through the rigors of learning foreign languages. Presently, English is used as the lingua franca in business, trade, politics, academics, science, media, arts, and tourism. Crystal (1987) claims that there are over 1400 million users of official English, of whom only 350 million are mother-tongue speakers. Because the world has revolved around the United States after WWII, people in the US tend to

perceive that it is the responsibility of other countries to learn English and the American way of doing business. For the US corporations, it is easier, more efficient, and economical to hire educated foreign-born employees because the international staff are likely to have first-hand familiarity with foreign practices, and a network of local contacts to draw upon in conducting business in foreign settings. Since English is the most powerful, and practical foreign language today, the majority of people in the US have little instrumental motivation to study a foreign language compared to people in other countries where English is not the official language.

The questions is: “Can American afford continuing hiring foreign nationals, by reducing career opportunities of American citizens?” I believe that California has a great advantage in that it has a large number of heritage language learners. Although many of these people may be considered as semi-bilingual, they can excel in their careers and lives by having additional training to improve their language skills. The university is the place to help them refine and solidify their heritage language skills.

5. Should We Stand Against “Mono-lingual” America?

The United States is a nation with a diverse ethnic and linguistic heritage. Ironically, however, the public and the educational communities at all levels have not given much priority to foreign language learning. Recent research on secondary-level foreign language enrollment in the US revealed that 6 million students, at only 33 percent of students in American public secondary schools, took a foreign language course in grades 7-12, and only 5 percent of students in grades K-6 were enrolled in non-exploratory foreign language courses in 1994 (Draper and Hicks, 1996, pp. 1-2). Bergentoft’s research (1994) shows that European countries offered foreign languages from the elementary school level, and second and third foreign languages were frequently offered at the secondary school level (See Appendix II). They showed that a majority of European students was able to gain proficiency in at least one foreign language, often two, and occasionally three. English speaking European countries such as England and Scotland have recorded much higher enrollment in foreign languages than the US: England had 73 percent and Scotland had 80 percent of students studying foreign languages. The US students had the lowest and shortest experience in foreign language learning among all the countries surveyed in this study. Do these figures indicate that we are ready to compete these people in global market? Can we communicate people who do not speak English?

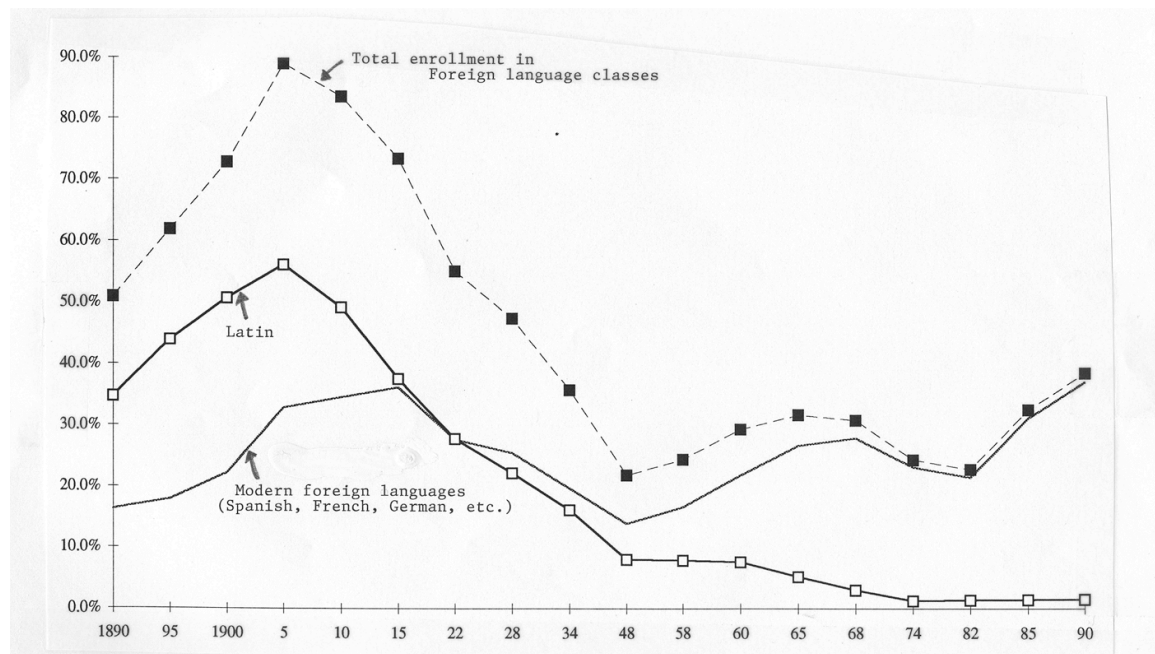
Simon (1980) called the US "the land of monolinguals" (p. 1) and pointed out that the process of Americanization of immigrants has accounted for the deep-seated phenomenon of monolingualism and monoculturalism. In the US, patriotism has been defined, and determined in large measure by the degree of mastery of the English language, and the vigor with which the person is opposed any language other than English. Simon (1980) stated: “To speak another language has been a matter of shame, not of pride... So we have this unusual, deep-seated phenomenon: a historical cultural barrier to the learning of another language in a land of great ethnic diversity”(p. 12). The concept of Americanization has led the public to believe in the supreme position of the English language and their culture over any other foreign languages and cultures. As

Gardner (1979) explained, in monolingual settings such as Britain and the United States, the prevailing beliefs are likely to be that bilingualism is unnecessary and that assimilation of minority cultures and languages is desirable. As a result, the minority language groups are not motivated to learn their heritage language in order to identify themselves with the culture of the second foreign language group.

Can America continue to hold up this trend? Should we stand against “Mono-lingual” America?

6. History of Foreign Language Education: Do we want to go back to “Dark Ages” that stressed Mono-lingualism was superior to Bilingualism and Multilingualism?

The last point that I want to make is whether foreign language learning is necessary or not has been in debate since the beginning of the twentieth century. One needs to know that the history of foreign language education in the US has been a roller coast ride with ups and downs, and has been heavily influenced by the politics and economy at that time. Draper (1991) surveyed foreign language enrollment in public secondary schools between 1890 and 1990. Appendix III shows the breakdown of enrollment in foreign languages at the high school and university levels in 1977, 1980, 1986, 1990, and 1995.



As you can see, the total foreign language enrollment began to decline after 1905 and underwent a long and steady decline during the first half of the century, bottoming out around the end of World War II, when fewer than 15% of high school students were engaged in modern foreign language study. The decline in the enrollment was due to the impact of recent wars that were used by educational policy makers as an excuse to exclude “foreign” elements from the school curriculum. It was also caused by the expansion of secondary education to include the greatest amount of American young

people since the 1930s, which led educators to question the appropriateness of requiring all students to follow an identical curriculum. As a consequence, schools came to make certain subjects elective, especially foreign languages. Believing that they were strengthening the nation, the educational authorities began to emphasize English, mathematics, and science (Cummings et al., 1997). At the same time, during the two major World Wars, the Department of Defense came to realize that foreign language skills were essential to the war effort, and language training took on a new importance at the government level (Thompson et al., 1990).

Between 1948 and 1965, interest in foreign languages surged. The 1950s was characterized as the era of Sputnik, and it was perceived as a new beginning of foreign language education (Hancock, C. and Scebold, C. 2000). After the launching of Sputnik in 1957, the US government passed a bill (the National Defense Education Act) and put a priority on efforts to support educational programs in foreign languages (including Russian) as well as math and science in order to narrow the perceived educational gap with the Soviet Union. This event boosted the foreign language field in the 1960s. Moreover, the initiation of the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) rejuvenated foreign language instruction in US schools. The study of foreign languages and cultures shifted from “mental exercise” activities to a more practical and utilitarian purpose, and the teaching methods were shifted from grammar translation to oral language. With the support of the Federal government, from 1957 to 1961, the number of secondary schools with language laboratories increased from 100 to 2500, and by 1967, it had increased to over 8,000 (Galloway, 1983).

However, the total number of students enrolled in foreign language programs declined once more after 1965 and throughout the 1970s, dipping to just over 20 percent of the high school population by the early 1980s. In a 1970s' Gallop Poll Survey, parents consistently expressed the opinion that foreign language courses represented the weakest part of the school curriculum and should be the first to go in any curtailment effort. Parents, students, school administrators, and legislators responsible for appropriating educational funds, and educators not directly involved in the teaching of foreign languages, all were increasingly engaged in asking a persistent and disturbing question: Why should so much effort be spent on the teaching and learning of foreign languages when the results appear to be so meager? Many language educators had a strong concern about the general slowdown of federal support for research and the trend of reducing foreign language requirements at both the undergraduate and graduate levels by an increasing number of universities (The Britannica Review of Foreign Language Education, Vol. I, 1970).

The view towards foreign language education began to change when economic pressures and an increasing trade deficit brought attention back to foreign language education as a key issue for America. The 1979 Presidential Commission Report on Foreign Languages and International Studies indicated that many American business leaders cited America's lack of ability to communicate effectively in foreign languages and the lack of understanding of foreign cultural patterns as a big hindrance to American international trade. Significant efforts were made to reorient thinking about the objectives of language study, including attempts to reach a consensus on how foreign language instruction goals might be measured, and to increase overall awareness of the importance of foreign language learning.

In the 1980s, foreign language professionals felt motivated to establish a common yardstick, and the term proficiency became a keyword. In this proficiency movement, the foreign language educators attempted to reach consensus in the description and measurement of language abilities rather than agreement on teaching methodology. The shift from methodology to measurement was a milestone and a significant change in direction for the teaching profession. The standards-based education movement in the 1990s stimulated important infrastructure improvement in core subject learning at the K-12 levels. In this movement, the academic standards were created to improve students' achievement and set a specific vision of what the students actually needed to know and be able to do. The development of standards has galvanized the field of foreign language education. The degree of involvement and consensus among educators at all levels has been unprecedented. This standards-based educational reform movement has begun to shift foreign language education towards the mainstream arena. The globalization of the world economy and educational reform has helped to strengthen the foreign language field. Since the 1980s, interest in foreign languages began to rise, and students enrolled in less-commonly taught languages such as Japanese, Arabic, Russian, and Chinese. Do we want to go back to the Dark Ages that stressed that Mono-lingualism was superior to Bilingualism and Multilingualism? Would that be the right thing to do?

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX I: Benefits of Foreign and Japanese Language Learning at an Earlier Stage

An appealing rationale to offer a foreign language in a multicultural society like the US is that foreign language learning promotes positive views towards different cultures and global awareness. Lambert (1967) stated that younger children are more receptive to learning about and accepting other peoples and cultures. The older children become, the less likely they are to accept differences between themselves and others and identify in a positive way with those of a different culture. Gardner and Lambert (1972) indicated that integrative motivation, which is the desire to identify and integrate with a target group, is positively related to foreign language learning. Torney-Purta (1986) concluded that foreign language fluency and the number of years a foreign language had been studied were significant predictors of openness to global concerns and problems among secondary school students. He stated, "there may be previously unappreciated advantages to students' taking foreign language even if they are unable to achieve fluency, since it appears to increase empathy for global problems" (p. 22).

In addition to global awareness, foreign language education will offer academic and cognitive benefits. Cooper (1987) found that students who had taken four or five years of a foreign language, compared with students who had taken four or five years of any other subjects, scored higher in word derivation and other skills on the verbal section of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and in other standardized tests, especially in the verbal areas. Although those students with strong verbal aptitudes tend to choose foreign language learning, the findings of this research indicate some distinct academic benefits. Olsen and Brown (1992) analyzed the data on over 17,000 students who applied for admission to Northeast Missouri State University between 1981-86, and found that students who had completed a foreign language course in high schools tended to have higher scores on the ACT exams in English and mathematics regardless of their foreign language ability level (National Standards in foreign language education project, 1996, p.12).

Pearl and Lambert (1962) stated "a youngster who has wide experiences in two cultures has advantages which a monolingual child does not enjoy. Intellectually, his experience with two language systems seems to have left him with a mental flexibility, superiority in concept formation, and a more diversified set of mental abilities... In contrast, the monolingual appears to have a more unitary structure of intelligence which he must use for all types of intellectual tasks." Hakuta (1984) pointed out that bilingual children demonstrate greater metalinguistic awareness and mental flexibility than do monolingual children. Landy (1974) found that sixth-grade students who had taken a

foreign language since the first grade scored higher on a measure of divergent thinking (which includes fluency, flexibility, and originality of thought) than did a comparable group of students who had not. Stitsworth (1999) examined the personality changes of American teenagers who participated in a one-month homestay exchange program in Japan. The California Psychological Inventory was administered to 154 exchange participants and 112 in the control group. The results show that the overseas exchange group increased their flexibility and independence and became less conventional as compared to the control group. Overseas travelers who had studied a foreign language for one or two semesters experienced no significant changes, but travelers who had studied a language for three or four semesters changed significantly. Such findings support the positive benefits of foreign language learning for an extended period.

Moreover, earlier exposure to a foreign language and culture makes foreign language learners better language learners. The influence of learners' age upon their second and/or foreign language study has been hotly debated over the last couple, but Krashen, Scarcella, and Long (1982) concluded that while adults may outpace children, and older children outpace younger children in the early development of control of the syntax and the morphological system of the language, younger children are superior language learners to adults in the long-term development of language proficiency. They stated "older children may be better than younger in the rate of language development, but the younger ones are better in the ultimate level of attainment" given a comparable number of years of study (Krashen, Scarcella, and Long, 1982, p.161). An earlier start is the key to produce individuals with a high level of proficiency in language and culture.

APPENDIX II: Percentage of each foreign language studied by students in primary and secondary schools in European countries, US, and Japan.

		English	French	German	Spanish	Italian	Russian	Others	Total	Total P + S
		(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Norway	Primary	99	0	0	0	0	0	0	99	204.9
	Secondary	66	9	30	0.8	0	0.1	0	105.9	
Finland	Primary	91	1	3	0	0	0.3	9	104.3	343.7
	Secondary	97	10	33	0.3	0.1	2	97	239.4	
Sweden	Primary	99	0	0	0	0	0	0	99	262
	Secondary	100	16	47	0	0	0	0	163	
England	Primary	0	1	0	0	0.5	0	0	1.5	75
	Secondary	0	52	17	4	0	0.5	0	73.5	
Scotland	Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	80.1
	Secondary	0	57	19	3	0.9	0.2	0	80.1	
Netherlands	Primary	100	0	0	0	0	0	2	102	267
	Secondary	88	33	44	0	0	0	0	165	
Germany	Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	136
	Secondary	95	26	0	1	0	0	14	136	
France	Primary	78	0	17	4	0.6	0.1	0	99.7	248.2

	Secondary	94	0	25	26	3	0.5	0	148.5	
Spain	Primary	77	22	0.2	0	0.1	0	0.1	99.4	200.2
	Secondary	82	18	0.2	0	0.5	0	0.1	100.8	
Italy	Primary	4	1	0.4	0	0	0	0	5.4	109.4
	Secondary	60	35	7	2	0	0	0	104	
Japan	Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	102
	Secondary	100	0.7	0.3	0.2	0	0	0.8	102	
US	Primary	0	1	0	2.6	0	0	1	4.6	32.5
	Secondary	0	7.5	1.9	18	0.3	0.1	0.1	27.9	

Note: Data on Europe and Japan. Bergentoft, Rune. 1994. Foreign language instruction: A comparative perspective. In *The annals of the American academy of political and social science*, ed. Richard Lambert, v. 533: 8-34. Data on the U.S. Draper, Jamie. 1991. Foreign language enrollments in Public secondary schools, fall 1989 & 1990. American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages: Yonkers, N.Y. ERIC , ED 340 214, 8.

APPENDIX III: Enrollment in foreign languages at the K-12 and university levels.

Table 1. Number of students who enrolled in foreign language classes at public high school level (Grade: 9-12) in the US in 1978, 1982, 1985, 1990, and 1994.

	1978	1982	1985	1990	1994
Spanish	1, 631, 375	1, 562, 789	2, 334, 404	2, 611, 367	3, 219, 775
French	855, 998	857, 984	1, 133, 725	1, 089, 355	1, 105, 857
German	330, 637	266, 901	312, 162	295, 398	325, 964
Italian	45, 518	44, 114	47, 289	40, 402	43, 838
Japanese	-	6, 246	8, 557	25, 123	42, 290
Russian	8, 789	5, 702	6, 405	16, 491	16, 426

Note: Enrollment data from American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL).

Table 2. Number of students who enrolled in foreign language classes at college (including two year colleges) in 1977, 1980, 1986, 1990, and 1995.

	1977	1980	1986	1990	1995
Spanish	376, 637	379, 379	411, 293	533, 944	606, 283
French	246, 115	248, 361	275, 328	272, 472	205, 351
German	135, 371	126, 910	121, 022	133, 348	96, 263
Italian	38, 327	34, 791	40, 945	49, 726	43, 260
Russian	27, 784	23, 987	33, 961	44, 626	24, 729
Japanese	10, 721	11, 506	23, 454	45, 717	44, 723
Chinese	9, 809	11, 366	16, 891	19, 490	26, 471

Note: Enrollment data from Modern Language Association of America (MLA)