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Seventeen Values of Foreign Language Study

Alan C. Frantz

THE virtues and values of foreign language (FL) study have been extolled in the United States over the years by advocates beginning perhaps with Thomas Jefferson and in many reports, such as “The Yale Report of 1828,” which defended Latin and Greek in the classical curriculum. In 1893 the Committee of Ten (commissioned by the NEA and led by Charles W. Eliot) issued a report recommending the study of Latin, Greek, German, and French. Harvard University’s 1945 *General Education in a Free Society* recommended language study but specified no language (Harvard Committee). Current defenders of FL study include persons from both ends of the political spectrum, from Lynne Cheney to Paul Simon, and members of the popular press, such as Sylvia Porter.

The Seventeen Values

What values have people assigned to FL study over the years? How do current FL professionals in higher education view those values? For a study on the role of FL in general education, I developed a questionnaire that included a list in no particular order of fifteen values culled from the recent books and articles published in the United States on FL education (see app. and selected bibliography). Obviously, there is unavoidable overlap among categories.

The study of a foreign language is valuable because it

- (a) offers a sense of a relevant past, both cultural and linguistic
- (b) liberalizes one’s experience (helps expand one’s view of the world)
- (c) balances content and skills (rather than content versus skills)
- (d) contributes to the creation of a student’s personality
- (e) encourages critical reflection on the relation of language and culture, language and thought; fosters an understanding of the interrelation of language and human nature
- (f) contributes to cultural awareness or literacy (such as knowledge of original texts)
- (g) contributes to achievement of national goals, such as economic development or national security
- (h) expands one’s opportunities for meaningful leisure activities (such as travel, reading, or viewing foreign language films)
- (i) develops the intellect (includes learning how to learn)

- (j) improves one’s knowledge of the native language (through comparison and contrast with the foreign language)
- (k) exposes the learner to modes of thought outside the native language
- (l) builds practical skills (for purposes such as travel or commerce or as a tool for other disciplines)
- (m) preserves (or fosters) a country’s image as a cultured nation
- (n) teaches and encourages respect for other peoples
- (o) enables the transfer of training (such as learning of a second foreign language)

In the spring of 1994, I asked chairs of college-level FL departments three questions related to the list: whether there were any areas of value in FL study that they believed were not listed (not including subcategories of listed values); which six values they considered most important, ranked in order (including any values they added in response to the previous question); and how much study time they thought necessary for a typical student at their institution to have a reasonable chance to attain those six values. The results of the survey are shown in table 1.

In table 1 the values are listed in descending order of importance as determined by the statistical mean of their rankings (the rankings are from 1 to 7, with 1 being the highest rating and 7 indicating that the respondent did not choose the value). The rankings largely reflect the foreign language literature: six of the top eight choices were among the most commonly cited values in the literature. The two exceptions were “(k) exposes the learner to modes of thought outside the native language” and “(n) teaches and encourages respect for other peoples.” These values were each mentioned only once in the literature, the former by Maria Alter and the latter by Frank Ryder. The positive response to these choices could be attributed to the growing importance of multiculturalism. (See app. for the sources in the literature of the fifteen listed values.)

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The amount of time considered necessary to attain the values that foreign language study offers averages just over two years. Of 300 respondents, 181 (60%) answered 2 years, 56 (19%) answered 1 year, 45 (15%) answered 3 years, and 19 (6%) answered 4 years. It is interesting to compare these results with the actual amount of study that the faculty members reported was required at their institutions. The average required time was 1.3 years—about 60% less than the amount deemed necessary for students to benefit from the values.

The fifteen categories of values found in the literature were nearly sufficient for the respondents. Of the 52 who named additional values, 4 suggested two values that are not subcategories of the listed values. The additions show that just as language is a changing phenomenon, so is human thought about language and about its functions and purposes. The two ideas not found in the literature are that the study of a foreign language can be a point for integration of many areas of study and that it permits access to information unavailable in English. These values are significant additions to the literature on FL study, and indeed they have both recently been identified by the National Standards in Foreign Language Education project. The group lists similar values in its report, "The Five C's of Foreign Language Education": "Standard 3.1: Students reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through the foreign language. Standard 3.2: Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its cultures" (3). Had the two additional values been included on the questionnaire, they

might have received substantial support. It is noteworthy that these two values are among the only ones listed that are offered exclusively by foreign language study.

Methodology and Demographics

I used a cross-sectional design to collect data from a random sample of foreign language departments in public and private institutions of higher education across the United States. I sampled public and private institutions in four categories (research or doctoral, comprehensive, liberal arts, and two-year institutions). The categories were based on the Carnegie classification system and were merged into four categories to produce a population large enough for meaningful statistical comparisons. The sample was drawn from the listing of departments in the September 1993 (Directory) issue of *PMLA* ("Department Administrators") and is detailed in table 2. Of 557 departments surveyed, 316 (56.7%) responded. The sample numbers of departments appear in table 2.

Of the 316 respondents, 248 (79%) were chairs of departments. The remaining respondents were department members whose chairs had given them the questionnaire. A few respondents were professors who administered larger entities, such as divisions, that included FL. The chairs had served in office for one to twenty-nine years; 132 (55%) had served one to five years. Only 117 (37%) served on a general education committee. There were 187 male respondents (57%). Respondents with doctorates numbered 251 (79%); the rest held master's degrees.

Table 1
Frequency of Choice of Values for Studying a Foreign Language (Percentage), with Mean Rankings and Standard Deviation

Variables (in Order of Mean Importance Ranking)	Chosen First	Chosen Second	Total	Mean	SD
(b) Liberalizing	31.8 (100)	15.5 (49)	78.1 (247)	3.45	2.35
(e) Reflection	13.7 (43)	11.6 (37)	61.3 (194)	4.23	2.33
(i) Development of intellect	10.3 (33)	8.2 (26)	59.3 (188)	4.76	2.21
(n) Respect for other peoples	6.5 (21)	12.5 (40)	62.8 (199)	4.98	2.03
(f) Cultural literacy	5.5 (17)	10.3 (33)	52.5 (166)	5.15	2.03
(l) Practical skills	12.4 (39)	5.2 (16)	49.0 (155)	5.24	2.18
(j) Native language knowledge	2.8 (9)	8.2 (26)	55.7 (176)	5.27	1.88
(k) Modes of thought	2.8 (9)	11.3 (36)	47.4 (150)	5.46	1.98
(a) Sense of relevant past	4.0 (13)	5.2 (16)	29.9 (95)	5.86	1.91
(c) Content and skills	3.0 (10)	2.9 (9)	18.4 (58)	6.47	1.39
(h) Leisure activity	0 (0)	2.9 (9)	17.6 (56)	6.59	1.08
(g) National goals	1.1 (3)	1.1 (3)	17.9 (57)	6.60	1.07
(d) Personality	1.3 (4)	1.3 (4)	11.6 (37)	6.63	1.13
(o) Transfer of training	0.6 (2)	2.3 (7)	10.9 (34)	6.76	.91
(m) Cultured nation	1.6 (5)	0.3 (1)	6.4 (20)	6.85	.70
Other	0.6 (2)	1.3 (4)	6.4 (20)	—	—

Note: Numbers in parentheses are base figures for percentages (weighted $N = 311$).

Table 2
Number of Foreign Language Departments and Institutions Sampled

Institutional Type	Departments			Institutions	
	Total Population	Number Sampled (% of Total)	Number Responding (% of Sample)	Number Sampled	Number Responding
Doctoral public	342	75 (21.9)	46 (61.0)	49	39
Doctoral private	209	75 (35.9)	42 (56.0)	40	29
Total	551	150 (27.2)	88 (58.6)	89	68
Comprehensive public	345	75 (21.7)	48 (64.0)	67	46
Comprehensive private	270	75 (27.8)	36 (48.0)	72	35
Total	615	150 (24.4)	84 (56.0)	139	81
Liberal arts public	34	34 (100)	31 (91.0)	34	31
Liberal arts private	666	75 (11.3)	40 (53.0)	74	40
Total	700	109 (15.6)	71 (65.1)	108	71
Two-year public	753	75 (10.0)	35 (47.0)	75	35
Two-year private	73	73 (100)	38 (52.0)	70	38
Total	826	148 (18.1)	73 (48.7)	145	73
Total	2,692	557 (20.7)	316 (56.7)	481	293

The respondents included 149 full professors (47%), 95 associate professors (30%), 31 assistant professors (10%), and 19 instructors (6%). In 21 departments (7%), mostly at liberal arts or two-year colleges, no academic ranking was utilized. The primary non-English language that 179 (57%) of the respondents taught was a Foreign Service Institute (FSI) group 1 language (Spanish, French, etc.); 43 (14%) taught a group 2 language (German, Modern Greek, etc.); 45 (14%) taught a group 3 language (Latin, classical Greek, Russian, etc.); 7 (2%) taught a group 4 language (Arabic, Japanese, etc.); and 40 (13%) listed no language. The respondents in the last group were administrators in departments or divisions that housed foreign languages among other disciplines. (See the first chapter of Omaggio for more information on the FSI groupings of languages.)

Larger institutions of higher education were represented more often than smaller ones because some housed more than one surveyed department. Of the 557 departments in the sample, 76 were from 43 institutions and of the 316 responses, 49 came from departments housed in 23 institutions. The sample included 481 institutions, of which 293 were represented among the respondents.

The foreign language professionals who responded to the survey believe that FL study offers the learner many values, at least eight of which are widely acknowledged among respondents: liberalizing one's experience; reflecting on the relation among language, thought, and culture; developing the intellect; encouraging respect for other peoples; gaining cultural literacy and awareness; acquiring language skills for practical use; improving the native language; and exposing the learner to modes of thought outside the native language. Respondents thought that

when possible, students should study a language at least two years; less than two years is insufficient for the student to gain the values FL study offers, although it is considered preferable to no study at all.

One may wonder how the viewpoints expressed by FL professionals in this study fit in with the current emphasis on communicative competency as expressed by National Standards in Foreign Language Education and others. Does FL study in higher education need to emphasize communicative competency more and literature less? Or is studying literature still the best way to learn about a foreign culture and encourage intellectual growth? Analysis of this study shows that FL professors continue to value most the liberal education aspects of FL study. However, they do not ignore practical aspects or view the communicative and literary values of FL study as mutually exclusive. Of the fifteen values listed, acquiring language skills for practical use was ranked sixth overall. Thus respondents do not appear to divide FL study into two camps of literature and communicative competency, but seem to agree with David Maxwell that "the 'literature vs. competency debate' is based on a false and unproductive dichotomy." Maxwell suggests that the FL profession discuss questions about our effectiveness in meeting the general education goals of language education, about the national need for bilingual and bicultural competence, and about the "most effective means to achieve genuine competency in the higher education context" (2). Communicative competency and literature are the two feet on which FL study stands. Culture through literature and communicative competency are both necessary for a person to have solid footing in the language of another culture. Without a knowledge of cultural values and traditions, often gleaned

through literature, little significant communication occurs. Without communicative competence, there is little understanding of the literature and culture.

Appendix

The following is the list of sources for each of the fifteen values for the study of foreign languages mentioned in the questionnaire devised for this project:

- (a) offers a sense of a relevant past, both cultural and linguistic: Parker, "Case"
- (b) liberalizes one's experience (helps expand one's view of the world): United States, *Report*; Parker, *Language*; Grittner, *Teaching*; Deeken; Alter; Rivers, *Speaking*; Brod; Jarvis, "Value"; Mayhew, Ford, and Hubbard
- (c) balances content and skills (rather than content versus skills): Kramsch, "Beyond"
- (d) contributes to the creation of a student's personality: Deeken; Alter; Edgerton; Rivers, *Speaking*; Patrikis, "Reports"
- (e) encourages critical reflection on the relation of language and culture, language and thought; fosters an understanding of the interrelation of language and human nature: Parker, "Values"; Deeken; Alter; Edgerton; Moravcsik and Juilland; Ryder; Kramsch, "Missing Link"; Valdman and Pons; Redfield; Sadock; Cheney; Henry; Ward; Fradkin;
- (f) contributes to cultural awareness or literacy (such as knowledge of original texts): Harris; Harvard Committee; Parker, "Values" and "Case"; Conant; Deeken; Alter; Edgerton; Galinsky; Burnett (quoting Carolyn Dunham); Brod; Adelman; Rosenthal; Sachs; Bennett; Gumperz; Valdman and Pons; Cheney; Mayhew, Ford, and Hubbard; Swaffar; Henry; Mueller, Goutal, Hérot, and Chessid; Sudermann; Kramsch and Nolden
- (g) contributes to achievement of national goals, such as economic development or national security: Alter; United States, *Nation*; Amer. Assn. of Colls.; Hoegl
- (h) expands one's opportunities for meaningful leisure activities (such as travel, reading, or viewing foreign language films): Alter; Jarvis, "Value"
- (i) develops the intellect (includes learning how to learn): United States, *Report*; Hagboldt (quoting the Committee of Twelve); Harvard Committee; Parker, "Case"; Titone (quoting Harold Palmer); Brower; Deeken; Alter; Cook; Hancock; Masciantonio; Brod; Jarvis, "Value"; Ryder; Adelman; Burnett (quoting George Levine); Frink; Gumperz; Fradkin
- (j) improves one's knowledge of the native language (through comparison and contrast with the foreign language): Hofstadter and Smith; Parker, "Values"; Deeken; Alter; Rivers, *Speaking*; Shattuck; Read; Adelman; Hilt; Sachs; Cheney; Olsen and Brown; Sudermann
- (k) exposes the learner to modes of thought outside the native language: Alter
- (l) builds practical skills (for purposes such as travel or commerce or as a tool for other disciplines): Parker, "Values"; Deeken; Grittner, *Teaching*; Alter; Brod; Hollander; Jarvis, "Value"; Frink; Rosenthal; Bennett; Patrikis, "Consortium" and "Reports"
- (m) preserves (or fosters) a country's image as a cultured nation: Deeken

- (n) teaches and encourages respect for other peoples: Ryder
- (o) enables the transfer of training (such as learning of a second foreign language): Harvard Committee; Conant; Titone; Williams; Grittner, *Teaching*; Edgerton

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Studying of foreign language. Language proficiency system. Language is a unique phenomenon, if only because it is the only scientific phenomenon that describes itself. In addition, its nature is very complex, which gives rise to many scientific approaches, various theories and ways of describing the essence of language. Modern linguistics recognizes language as a complex sign system. Systems approach. A systematic approach as a methodological requirement entered linguistics thanks to the works of F. de Saussure. Under the system usually understand the unity of homogeneous interconnected elements. When studying a foreign language, the following levels of language knowledge are distinguished: initial (A1); elementary (A2) Foreign Languages and Designers - Free download as PDF File (.pdf), Text File (.txt) or read online for free. foreign languages and designers. three reasons to study foreign languages; Alan C. Frantz in his essay Seventeen Values of Foreign Language Study, ADFL Bulletin 28:1 (Fall 1996): 44-49. Design students who take a large number of studio courses and most do therefore may have very little time in their schedules for classes that are specifically intended to develop cultural awareness or to directly address language and communication. Fortunately, however through the relatively painless step of instituting a foreign language requirement for all design students educators and accrediting agencies such as NASAD can ensure that student Learning a foreign language improves not only your ability to solve problems and to think more logically, it also makes you experiment with new words and phrases. Leveling up your second language skills forces you to reach for alternate words when you can't quite remember the original one you wanted to use. Just swipe left or right to see more examples of the word you're studying. The program even keeps track of what you're learning and tells you exactly when it's time for review, giving you a 100% personalized experience. Start using the FluentU website on your computer or tablet or, better yet, download the FluentU app from the iTunes store or Google Play store.