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## Abstract

In the United States the ratio of modern foreign language enrollments to total course enrollments in higher education today is half of what it was in the sixties. The Modern Language Association (MLA) reported in 2009 that since 1965 it declined from 16.5 to 8.6 for every 100 enrollments. Between 1965 and 1987 alone, institutions requiring foreign languages dropped by a third from 88.9 to 58.1 percent. Despite this country's rich linguistic diversity, the United States suffers from a deficit of college graduates who can hold rudimentary conversations in a foreign tongue. "A quiz," quipped Nicholas D. Kristof in *The New York Times* in 2010, "If a person who speaks three languages is trilingual, and one who speaks four languages is quadrilingual, what is someone called who speaks no foreign languages at all? Answer: an American."

This journalistic project deals with the paradox of foreign language study in the United States as it relates to America's indifference toward foreign language education. To this end, I trace the public perception of language instruction beginning in early America, when the classical study of Latin was required of all students, and follow its subsequent evolution (or devolution, depending on whom you ask). As American cultural historian Jacques Barzun puts it, "It is a noteworthy feature of 20th century culture that for the first time in over a thousand years its educated class is not expected to be at least bilingual."

Today, enormous threats to language education loom on multiple fronts. Foreign languages are seldom the most respected departments in the academy, and therefore frequently assume low-standing in the institutional hierarchy. Administrators often target these departments as easy victims in times of budget cuts, as seen recently at Alfred University, Bethel College, Drake University, Louisiana State, Fort Lewis College, Washington State, and the University of Maine, to name a few. In one example that left language educators aghast, The University at Albany, State University of New York in 2010 gave their Russian, Italian, Classics, and French programs the axe, despite their institution's mission statement to put "The World Within Reach."

Other contentious issues abound, including the elimination of language requirements, the increase in non-tenure-track staff, and the two-tier curricular divide between the "language faculty" and the "literature faculty." What is being done to bridge this divide? What is the purpose of the foreign language requirement? What relationship exists between a liberal arts curriculum and foreign languages? These are among the fundamental questions I have asked scholars, professors, students, administrators, and deans from dozens of institutions across the country in my undertaking to unravel the contradictions, the complexities, and the stakes of the current downtrend in American foreign language education.

**TONGUE-TIED IN AMERICA:**

The Decline of Foreign Language Education in an Age of Globalization

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May 2013

Submitted to the Department of English of Mount Holyoke College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelors of Arts with Honors

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## Introduction

*“Journalism can never be silent...It must speak, and speak immediately, while the echoes of wonder, the claims of triumph and the signs of horror are still in the air.”*

-Henry Anatole Grunwald (1922-2005)

### *Motivation, Influences, and Writing Process*

My inspiration to pursue a work of long-form journalism came during my spring semester of junior year, when I took Magazine Writing Sequence I (English 301) with Professor Catherine S. Manegold. We began the term with four short assignments, each one page, on topics of our own choosing. We followed the style of the *New Yorker*'s “Talk of the Town” section, trying out various voices with the aim of creating lively and well-written prose. The humor, depth, and substance in the long-form content we read in *The New Yorker* greatly influenced my thesis work. The magazine's stories had staying-power. Powerful and informative, humorous and whimsical, they often left the reader both with a load of new information and a new way to look at the world. As magazine publisher Henry Luce once said, “I became a journalist to come as close as possible to the heart of the world.”

My stylistic inspiration for *Tongue-Tied in America* was not limited to *The New Yorker*. Although there are many articles that greatly influenced my writing – including “The Mark of a Masterpiece” (2010) by literary journalist and author David Grann, “The Great Oasis” (2011) by *New Yorker* staff writer Burkhard Bilger, and “Crunch” (2011) by American journalist John Seabrook – I am indebted to Professor Manegold for introducing me to legendary journalists, such as David Foster Wallace and John McPhee, as they opened my eyes to the creation of good prose. Professor Manegold's assigned

texts – William’s Zinnser’s guidebook, *On Writing Well* (2006), in particular – taught me the principles, methods, and forms of nonfiction writing. Independent research brought me to the *Longreads* database, where I read dozens of long-form (12,000-17,000 words) nonfiction works from numerous publications, such as *The Washington Post*, *Rolling Stone*, and *The New York Times*. Published in *The Atlantic*, American author Taylor Branch’s article, “The Shame of College Sports” (2011) served as a model to my own thesis. Although it told a story of amateur athletics rather than foreign language, the focus still centered on issues in post-secondary education.

Theodore Roosevelt once said, “Far and away the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.” Journalism and nonfiction writing is a hard task and one worth doing. Magazine Sequence I and II taught me that writing is revision; good writing takes rewriting. I spent many hours in that “distilling process necessary to find the story among mere information,” as journalist Scott Stossel recently put it. After much trial and error, with invaluable feedback from Professor Manegold in our productive and collaborative writer-editor relationship, we successfully found “the story,” pinpointed appropriate narrative strategies, and determined an effective structure.

Structure plays a huge role in factual writing. Tracy Kidder and Richard Todd write in *Good Prose* (2013):

The fundamental elements of a story's structure are proportion and order. Managing proportion is the art of making some things big and other things little: of creating foreground and background; of making readers feel the relative importance of characters, events, ideas, of deciding where the accents go. Often it means upsetting normal expectations by finding a superficial trivial detail or moment that, on closer examination, resonates with meaning.

With structure, we settled on chronology. We decided that with such a complex subject – the 400-year-long history of American foreign language education – the way to build a compelling narrative with minimal repetition would be through the chronological approach. The first half of my work is a historical chronicle, and the last half deals with recent happenings.

The quotes in *Tongue-Tied in America* have been selected from approximately seventy-five pages of interview transcriptions, chosen for the eye-opening, original, or humorous qualities they bring to the story.

In writing and researching about such a controversial topic, I faced some hostility from faculty and deans. Fortunately, my advisor helped me navigate through the ethics of journalism. And as American author Garrison Keillor once said, “Bad things don’t happen to writers; it’s all material.” From a writer’s standpoint, the resistance I encountered only enforced the need to tell this story.

From the onset, certain professors requested to remain off the record. In one case, an interviewee expressed she was “increasingly nervous” about her agreement to share her story in my thesis. This person requested she would feel “much more comfortable” to read “her part” before I submitted the final piece. “I cannot afford to be in a position,” she said, “where anything about what I have said can be used against me as a means of eliminating me from my job.”

A journalist can deal with these situations by allowing the interviewee to read the material beforehand; however David Carr warns against this in his *New York Times* article, “The Puppetry of Quotation Approval” (2012). He points out that “quotation-approval as a condition of access” is an increasing concern, especially in political

journalism. In my case, I faced university politics, which led me to omit all information that could be used to identify the character, such as her name, department, and home institution. Her anonymity may add value to my work, as it shows that professors are too afraid even to go public with their concerns. Journalism is a medium through which to tell these otherwise untold stories.

### *Pursuing “The Story”*

Nonfiction writer Jonathan Kozol once wrote, “Pick battles big enough to matter, small enough to win.” Eight months ago, this journalistic endeavor began as one centered around Mount Holyoke College’s foreign language requirement, but it soon grew to encompass much larger issues: decline in enrollments, decline in the numbers of faculty, and decline, of course, in funding. I believed some straightforward, engaging and effective journalism could help reverse the downtrend in foreign language education at Mount Holyoke. “I still believe that if your aim is to change the world,” British playwright Tom Stoppard once said, “journalism is a more immediate short-term weapon.” My intended readers of the Mount Holyoke community, however, soon became part of a much larger audience.

With language teaching in the colleges in the Pioneer Valley and beyond in threat of decline, the timeliness and relevance of these language closures added great value to my work (e.g. the list of language department closures grew each month over the course of my project.) As some scholars say, language education from grade school through college is “under siege.” This project opened my eyes to a crisis that seemed steadily escalating, even ironically as American interests were becoming more “global.” This was

an urgent issue. Therefore, my goal in writing this thesis became one of submitting my work to *The Atlantic* or similar publications, including online nonfiction publishing platforms, such as *Byliner* and *The Atavist*.

On a personal level, as a monolingual child, born into an American, Anglophone family, I had a tin ear for language. My first exposure to second language instruction did not come until eighth grade in my public school, and it was not until Mount Holyoke that my peers and professors showed me the value and the importance of foreign languages. In my work and studies in Spain and South America as a sophomore and junior, I came to notice that Americans wanted to live and study abroad. However, many Americans I met while abroad often struggled with speaking the native tongue. My thesis explores the origin of this phenomenon. The mere size and scope of the issues make consensus hard to come by; however in some small way, I hope that my work helps to make available more opportunities for young children to learn foreign languages in the United States – opportunities that I did not have so readily available growing up.

### *Research Process*

“But with nonfiction, the task is very straightforward,” author Laura Hillenbrand once said. “Do the research, tell the story.” Fact-checking and research is elemental to nonfiction writing. With my initial focus on Mount Holyoke, I began conducting archival research, primarily reading course-catalogues that date back to 1837, as well as letters, statements, and flyers from our language departments. Additionally, I unearthed gems such as a 1937 senior thesis by French major Roslyn Kerney, which chronicled the history of Mount Holyoke’s French Department. Later in my research, I found similar

documents (dissertations) from doctoral students at other universities who had assessed the plight of foreign languages at their own institutions.

There was no single book I could find in my research that overviewed America's foreign language history by way of factual storytelling; however, two rather outdated nonfiction books – *The Tongue-Tied American* (1980) by politician Paul Simon and *The English-Only Question* (1990) by linguist Dennis Baron – came close. These served as models for my narrative. “Foreign language study has been on a roller coaster,” Simon wrote, “but unfortunately the general trend is more down than up.” I consider my thesis, *Tongue-Tied in America*, to be a twenty-first-century addition to this field.

Grounded largely in history, my research spans hundreds of sources from multiple disciplines – from neuroscience and international economics to American history and popular culture. Government databases I consulted included the U.S. Department of Education, for information on the Center for Applied Linguistics and multiple language acts brought to Congress; the U.S. Department of State, for research on the Fulbright Program and recently adopted Mandarin Chinese initiatives; the U.S. Department of Defense, to find material on the Language Flagship Program and the National Security Education Program; and the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs' reports under the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, which overview our nation's foreign language crisis in the federal government. Nonprofits and think tanks, such as *Council on Foreign Relations*, also provided statistical data on the subject.

I consulted multiple publications, newsletters and journals from scholarly associations, including the *Modern Language Journal*, the American Council on the

Teaching of Foreign Languages' (ACTFL) *Foreign Language Annals* (FLA), and the *ADFL Bulletin* (American Department on the Teaching of Foreign Languages). Reports and surveys by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the Modern Language Association (MLA) proved invaluable for additional nationwide statistical evidence on language enrollments, requirements, and length of study.

I drew from many mainstream publications: *The New York Times* (from 1958 to 2013), *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Forbes*, *USA Today*, *The Economist*, *The Guardian*, and many local town and college newspapers, often the only media through which department and program closings are publicized.

Over sixty interviews with students, faculty, administrators, deans, and scholars brought me to many cafés, libraries, and offices. One memorable interview included helping the director of the Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School (PVCICS) in Hadley supervise thirty-some children during recess duty.

My research brought me to three symposiums: "Rethinking the Language Center in the Age of Globalization," organized by the Consortium for Language Teaching and Learning and Center for Language Study at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut from November 9-10, 2012; "Advancing Language Education Beyond the Classroom," arranged by the Penn Language Center at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia on December 8, 2012 (I "remoted in" with Daryl Weber, director of Mount Holyoke's Language Resource Center); and "Avenues of Access," the Modern Language Association's 2013 Annual Convention in Boston, from January 5-8<sup>th</sup>. Finally, over the course of my research, I exchanged emails with leading scholars in the field of foreign language advocacy, including former MLA President Russell Berman, New York

University Spanish professor Mary Louise Pratt, and German linguist Claire Kramsch. They served as guide-people and sounding-boards to verify my reasoning and offer their own viewpoints on my work. I am grateful to all these persons for their generous assistance.

## Chapter 1: The Closings

*“If English was good enough for Jesus Christ, it's good enough for me.”*  
- Texas Governor Miriam “Ma” Ferguson (1875-1961)

“A quiz,” quipped Nicholas D. Kristof in *The New York Times* in 2010, “If a person who speaks three languages is trilingual, and one who speaks four languages is quadrilingual, what is someone called who speaks no foreign languages at all? Answer: an American.” Despite this country’s rich linguistic diversity, about eighty percent of Americans are born into English-speaking households. Only 18.5 percent of K-12 students in this country were enrolled in a language other than English in 2007-2008, according to the American Council for the Teaching on Foreign Languages. The fraction of elementary schools offering foreign languages continues to drop: only one-third of them offered a foreign language in 1997, and a mere one-quarter did in 2008. Fewer foreign language classes in elementary schools translate to fewer in high school, and students entering college are less prepared to embark on learning a new language.

Only fifty percent of higher education institutions required foreign language study for a baccalaureate degree in 2009, down from nearly ninety percent in 1965. Over those years, the ratio of total modern languages to total course enrollments halved, declining from 16.5 to 8.6 for every 100 enrollments. And while it is true that modern language enrollments are higher than ever before, reaching in 2009 a record 1,639,326, which is nearly three times more than the meager 608,748 enrollments in 1960, that statistic is offset by the fact that more students than ever are now enrolled in college. The United States is one of the only developed countries in the world in which you can go through grade school through college and even get your Ph.D. without taking a foreign language.

“The U.S. is a country of immigrants and foreign-language speakers,” a German professor told *The New York Times* last year, “but not a country of foreign language learners.”

Language departments are vanishing. In the Northeast, the German major at Alfred University was shown the door, and the University of Maine suspended majors in German and Latin. Down South, Louisiana State, Nicholls State, and Northwestern State ended their French majors, as did Southern University (along with stamping out Spanish, the second most commonly spoken language in the U.S.). In the Midwest it’s the same story. Bethel College in Indiana cut German, Drake University eliminated French, German, and Italian, and only Spanish survived at the University of Northern Iowa. Further west, further cuts. Fort Lewis College in Colorado discontinued French, Japanese and German. In the Golden State, the Italian and Japanese programs at San Mateo Community College and French at Foothill College got the axe.

\* \* \*

Last fall, one language professor at a liberal arts college agreed to meet for an interview only under the condition that her name, department, and university be kept confidential. She feared that, as she was on a renewable contract, her honesty would be used against her. She sat in the office chair she’d had for thirty years, behind the wooden desk she’d corrected papers on since 1982, at the liberal arts college she’d been teaching at longer than she’d known her husband or her twenty-one year-old daughter. Nothing – not the study abroad postcards she’d pinned neatly to her office bulletin board, not the photographs of her former pupils she’d positioned by her door, not the fluorescent color-coded grammar handouts she’d strewn across her table, nor the homemade thank-you

cards from students she'd arranged to stand like little people on her desk – none of the comforting and humble decor kept her voice from quavering as she blotted away tears and said, “I hope they won't get rid of me.”

“There is an idea that language is an inferior academic pursuit,” she explained, crying, “that it is not ‘intellectual.’” Because she taught language and not literature, she sees even her younger colleagues enjoying fuller salaries and longer contracts. She spends laborious hours correcting papers for her introductory courses, nearly topping forty students per semester. It is not unusual to see her on a Friday or Sunday evening, leaving the building at midnight with tired eyes, and her rolling bag trailing behind her. “I have no voting rights,” she whispered. “I have no respect.”

Enormous threats to language education loom on multiple fronts. Foreign languages are seldom the most respected departments in the academy, and therefore frequently assume low-standing in the institutional hierarchy. Many consider foreign languages to be the academy's white elephants. Administrators often target these departments as easy victims in times of budget cuts. In one example that left language educators aghast, The University at Albany, State University of New York in 2010 gave their Russian, Italian, Classics, and French programs the boot, despite their institution's mission statement that promises: “The World Within Reach.”

“It is because of the changing times, the budgetary crisis, and new fields coming in,” Stanley Rabinowitz told me, “that we're all being scrutinized and we're all competing for diminishing resources. To me, it's a tragedy.” Rabinowitz is a professor of Russian Literature at Amherst College, one of the best endowed liberal arts colleges in the nation. His infectious smile and boisterous laugh have been loved and recognized on

the Amherst campus since the seventies. Although Amherst has largely remained a safe haven, effectively shielded from such severe cutbacks by one of the largest endowments of any liberal arts institution in the nation, today language professors fear more than ever before for their continued existence. “We’re all facing it, agonizing over it. It’s unsettling and demoralizing to see what’s happening,” he said, leaning forward in his chair to brush specks of eraser dust around his desk. His brow furrowed, and his worried expression morphed unexpectedly into a grin. He burst out, “You’re depressing the hell out of me!”

\* \* \*

Upending our language programs seemed inconsequential in the twentieth century. Back then, there was no fear that America’s economy would take a nosedive, no worry that China or Brazil would become global Superpowers, no doubt that English would continue to blabber into the next century, donning the pompous name tag: “LINGUA FRANCA.” Today, however, the English-speaking share of global GDP – on the descent since 1975 – is continuing to fall. With non-Anglophone nations soon to take the economic forefront (the Chinese economy is predicted to surpass the United States’ in size soon after 2030), the countries in the Western world – all except the United States – have bitten the apple. Despite America’s global interests, we suffer from a deficit of college graduates who can hold rudimentary conversations in a foreign tongue.

Therefore, we are transitioning now from the American Century to a new century of American Indifference. Indifference by the American public to the wealth of cognitive evidence that supports the favorable effects of bilingualism and multilingualism; indifference to the upbringing of another generation of monolingual Americans; indifference to the devaluation of foreign language study across the nation. “The question

is not one of national resources,” wrote senator Paul Simon (D-IL) in his book, *The Tongue-Tied American* (1980). “The question is one of national will.”

## Chapter 2: America's Linguistic Birth

*"Has a nation anything more precious than the language of its fathers?"*  
- Johann Gottfried Herder (1722-1803)

Imagine the United States identifying itself in relation to foreign language education on Facebook. They might be friends. More likely, the American government, using its profile in English, would select "Married" or "In a Relationship," but if you showed this status to foreign language educators, they would scoff. Language teachers in the United States would have unfriended America long ago, after having their dire warnings and Wall posts repeatedly ignored. They would demand a more representative title of "Separated" or "Divorced." In a spunky mood, they may even choose "Widowed." But scroll down their timelines to the 1600s, you'd find this tangled relationship began when Western European colonizers sailed to the Americas five hundred years ago.

Settlers came from a world where for thousands of years educated people had been consuming classical literature. Elite institutions, such as Oxford, Cambridge, and the *Universidad de Salamanca*, required students to study the classical languages of Latin (which came to be the *lingua franca* after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire), Greek, and often Hebrew. Because of this extensive literary tradition, multilingualism was commonplace among educated people. Mathematician Nicolaus Copernicus (1474-1543) knew Latin, German, Polish, Greek, and Italian. Philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) could speak German, Latin, Greek, French, Italian, English, and Hebrew. Those particularly well versed in foreign idioms could speak dozens of foreign tongues, such as Italian cardinal and linguist Giuseppe Mezzofanti (1774-1849), who was alleged to have known seventy-two languages across eleven different language families;

however “know” is a relative term, and scholars, such as Michael Erard in his book, *Babel No More* (2012), would dispute how well the Cardinal may have feigned fluency. From polylinguals to hyperpolyglots, knowledge of multiple languages was the mark of an educated mind, as French novelist and poet Victor Hugo (1802-1885) wrote, “The man who does not know other languages, unless he is a man of genius, necessarily has deficiencies in his ideas.”

Settlers sought to convert New-World natives with “their ultimate linguistic triumph, the Bible,” according to linguist Dennis Baron in his book, *The English-Only Question* (1990). “They simply ignored or devalued” native idioms, imposing their “civilized” languages of English, Spanish, French, German, Portuguese or Dutch to “enrich the ignorant natives.” Early-American language education involved a holy textbook, cultural superiority, and a strictly European elitist tradition of studying classical languages, which lived on as education systems in early America imported their curricula from Europe and taught Latin in all grade schools (in fact, the study of minority languages would not surface until the twentieth century, long after many native idioms, such as the Iroquoian languages, became extinct). Harvard University, founded as a Calvinist institution in 1636, required incoming students to take admissions exams on their knowledge of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew before they could enroll. If this requirement existed today, the Crimson’s campus would be packed with Europeans. Students were the target of educational discrimination if they could *not* speak many languages.

Benjamin Franklin knew English, Italian and French, but his fondness was for German, a language he owed his lightning rod invention to having read the German texts of physicist Otto von Guericke’s early studies of electricity. He published America’s first

German newspapers, its first German books, and in 1749 founded an Academy in Philadelphia where he made sure his pupils learned *Deutsch*.

As an undergraduate at William and Mary in 1760, Franklin's fellow Founding Father Thomas Jefferson tackled his language studies every day armed with a grammar book and feathered quill – Rosetta Stone hadn't yet monopolized the market. He had learned Latin, Greek, and French in grade school, went on to acquire Italian and Spanish, and after his death, Arabic, Gaelic, and Welsh dictionaries surfaced in his office, suggesting he'd known eight or nine idioms. In his middle-age, he would look back on his education and write: "I am of the opinion that, till the age of 16, we are best employed on languages: Latin, Greek, French, Spanish." Notably, Jefferson never learned German language, presumably because when the Declaration of Independence was printed three days after its formation in *Deutsch*, the vomit of consonants – *Unabhängigkeitserklärung* – scared him off.

Two decades after the Declaration of Independence was published, Franklin went on to found Franklin College (which later became Franklin and Marshall College) in 1787, a bilingual English-German institution that catered to his home state of Pennsylvania, where German-speakers already constituted one-third of the population. He must have hoped that *Deutsch* would prevail as America's second-most-loved Germanic language. He died late enough to see the Constitution published in German in 1788, and just early enough to miss English's rise and its subsequent obliteration of his beloved foreign tongue.

Rebellion came from within. At his very own Franklin College in the 1790s, an English professor wrote that language skills were "at times an *ornamental part* of a

liberal education.” In fact the professor felt so strongly about the study of English that he wrote “proficiency in languages is an educational frill.” This was an early indication of the increasingly hostile environment within the academy against foreign language study, which would only escalate in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Baron contended this was “already the typical American attitude,” for the dominance of English had been already begun to render foreign tongues disposable.

Universities across the country began to shift toward English-superiority. An 1847 course catalog from the all-female seminary Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts encouraged young women to “pursue the study of languages and other *ornamental branches* in the early part of their stay at the Seminary.” In her 1937 senior thesis, Mount Holyoke French major Roslyn Kerney wrote that in the late 1800s French and even Latin were considered “a very bad economy of money, of intellectual strength, of facilities for the growth of character and for the enlargement of the soul” to pursue after the “high studies” of mathematics, science, and English. Foreign languages were “regarded as too frivolous ... for serious-minded young ladies to trifle with.” Harvard dropped their age-old Latin course requirement in 1883, while institutions in Europe held onto their Latin requirements. In *An Autobiography or the Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1948), Mahatma Karamchand Gandhi reflects on his decision to enroll at the University of College London as a law student in 1888, despite the intimidating language requirement:

A friend suggested that... I should pass the London Matriculation... But the syllabus frightened me. Latin and a modern language were compulsory! How was I to manage Latin? But the friend entered a strong plea for it: ‘Latin is very valuable to lawyers. Knowledge of Latin is very useful in understanding law-books. And

one paper in Roman Law is entirely in Latin. Besides a knowledge of Latin means greater command over the English language.' I went home and I decided to learn Latin, no matter how difficult it might be.

And learn Latin he did, adding to his repertoire of the languages he already knew: Gujarati, English, and Sanskrit. Later in life, he would later learn Hindi and Urdu to communicate with the people of his country; Tamil and Teluga to speak with illiterate soldiers fighting for human rights in South Africa. (He also picked up Arabic, Persian, and French along the way.) For Gandhi, language was a window for cross-cultural communication, an ideology that J. William Fulbright adopted after World War II.

The Founding Fathers never crowned English as the official language, nor do they mention language in the Constitution or Declaration of Independence, but over the years English became the *implied* or the *de facto* official language of the United States. English became the beacon of America, and it was exactly these cultural loyalties to the English language that drove the linguistic movement of the nineteenth century. As Prussian philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt once wrote, "Absolutely nothing is so important for a nation's culture as its language."

## Chapter 3: The Americanization Movement

*“It is a noteworthy feature of 20<sup>th</sup> century culture, that for the first time in over a thousand years its educated class is not expected to be at least bilingual.”*

- American cultural historian Jacques Barzun (1907-2012)

In the nineteenth century, American governance transitioned from presidential polyglots to language-loathing leaders, as immigration changed the linguistic landscape of the United States. The Chinese poured into America in 1854 (13,000 arrived to construct the Transcontinental Railway, compared to a record of just 42 in years prior) and between the years 1880 and 1890 there were 5.2 million immigrants, many Eastern and Southern Europeans, who arrived. Foreign-born nonanglophones constituted a whopping 15 percent of the population, their enlarged presence turning attitudes against them and their languages in profoundly negative ways. The Chinese were banned from entering the country in 1882. The linguistic backlash in the coming decades became known as the “Americanization Movement.”

This was an English-only linguistic crusade of the early twentieth-century that aimed to nationalize America by wiping out everything that wasn't English. It was like Prohibition, except that instead of banning alcohol, which killed brain cells, it prohibited something that grew them (as neuroscientists would later discover). Nearly all schools abandoned bilingual instruction in a zealous attempt to convert everyone to English. “Few attempts were made to teach English as a second language in the schools,” wrote Dennis Baron. A monolingual America meant a unified country, as Republican Senator William S. Kenyon of Iowa would later say of a language study conducted in 1930, that

“ignorance of English correlated with higher rates of factory and miner accidents, increased worker turnover, lower wages, poor productivity, and industrial unrest.”

Non-English speaking foreigners thus faced discrimination not only for their low social, economic, and racial standing, but also for their linguistic status. Some more than others; for the last century Germans had been the largest body of immigrants, as well as among the best educated and most prosperous. Education systems sought to extinguish heritage languages, just as they had smothered – and were continuing to stamp out – indigenous tongues. In a celebration of patriotism, Baron wrote that Hispanic school children in the Southwest were punished by writing, “I must not speak Spanish in school,” repeatedly until they filled several pieces of paper. They were given “Spanish detention,” paddling, and even expulsion. Senator Kenyon of Iowa would also say that requiring English was a “step toward getting a nation of 100 million people to act and think without a foreign accent,” or in other words, to speak the language of your flag or suffer the consequences.

In schools, foreign language instruction waned. Forty professors of literature and modern languages joined forces in 1883 to organize the Modern Language Association of America (MLA), at a time when “Latin and Ancient Greek almost totally dominated the humanities curriculum at both the secondary school and college levels.” In 1890, a meager 16 percent of American high school students studied modern foreign languages, according to author S. Frederick Starr. “Of this group,” he writes, “fully two thirds were studying German, with most of the remainder studying French. Virtually all the other modern foreign languages were neglected in the schools.” Theodore Roosevelt (who inherently disliked foreign languages to begin with, admitting in a letter that he found

reading Latin and Greek to be a “dreary labor”) made knowledge of English a requirement for American citizenship in 1906 by signing the Naturalization Act, which targeted foreigners for not being able to understand America’s founding documents, although many of them, ironically, had been translated. “We have room for but one language here, and that is the English language,” Roosevelt wrote in 1907, “for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans and not as dwellers in a polyglot boarding house.”

This decade witnessed a rise in multilingual cities and in urban poverty. Between 1901 and 1910, nearly 9 million immigrants arrived, provoking the Immigration Commission of 1911 to jump to some misleading and overtly racist conclusions about how language fit in with education policy. The report found between 60 and 70 percent of immigrant children – Polish Hebrews and South Italians, in particular – from impoverished cities such as Baltimore, Buffalo, and Chicago, to be “retarded,” as defined by their being behind in their grade school studies. (The term was first used to signify mental disability in 1895 by psychologist G. E. Shuttleworth, and later adopted in 1926 by a psychologist named Florence Goodenough, who said that “the use of a foreign language in the home was a leading cause of mental retardation.”) Education theorists of the day believed that “bilingualism led to confusion and academic failure,” explains Baron, and that immigrants had “supposed language handicaps.” To no one’s surprise, the Immigration Commission found English-speaking British pupils to have the lowest levels of “retardation.”

This study must be unpacked for a number of reasons. In line with assimilation sentiments, American schools repressed speakers of other languages. English as a Second

Language (ESL) instruction did not exist and would not become an established field until the 1960s, which resulted in non-English speaking students not getting the attention they needed. Foreigners were either placed in the lowest grades or put in the remedial classes. “When a person studies a subject through a language which he knows only imperfectly, he is likely to do more poorly than natives of that language,” the MLA reported. “His performance has rather direct correlation to his possibly dropping out of school later.”

Only a select few public schools provided bilingual instruction, “in an effort to woo students from the private schools,” as Baron points out, but this was the exception. Inner-city schools couldn’t give lower-class students the same foreign language opportunities that white upper-class suburban and private schools could afford. Furthermore, foreigners who learned English in school did so at the expense of their native tongues – studies have shown that children and young adults need to learn language in a social, academic, and abstract sense in order to keep it alive.

Many schools, however, witnessed a boom in the study of modern languages leading up to 1915. On the eve of the U.S. entry into the First World War, about a quarter of high schoolers were studying German, almost nine percent were studying French, and three percent were studying Spanish. According to John H. Fisher in “Language and Loyalty” (1970), about 36 percent of public high school students were studying a modern language, almost equal to the percentage studying Latin (37 percent), which had decreased by 13 percent since 1900. Furthermore, Fisher notes that “by 1915 approximately 90 percent of American colleges had introduced an entrance requirement calling for proficiency in at least one modern foreign language.” This was the year that

Middlebury Language School was founded – languages were still in demand among the higher socioeconomic population.

The First World War made attitudes toward foreigners go from unfriendly to hostile. One German academic wrote in 1917 that America was “inhospitable to all foreign languages.” Between 1900 and the 1930s, the number of students learning German in elementary schools dropped approximately 90 percent, from more than 600,000 down to 70,000. This massive blow would have made *Deutsch*-enthusiast Ben Franklin turn in his grave. And in high schools, the number plunged 96 percent between 1922 and 1915, according to Heinz Kloss in his book, *The American Bilingual Tradition* (1970), which was a drop from 324,000 to fewer than 14,000 (from 24 percent of the high school population to 0.6 percent) in only eight years. “After World War I,” Baron explained, “sentiment against foreign languages was so strong that some states banned all foreign-language instruction at the elementary level.” These lawmakers had as their common target “the harmful effects of non-American ideas inculcated through the teaching of foreign languages.” The government forcibly assimilated German Americans, making English a medium to spread democracy and preserve public peace.

When the real Prohibition began in 1920, the Prohibition on language study was at full-force. As people brewed bathtub gin and moonshine, foreign-language supporters were protesting the postwar suppression of language instruction. In 1922, German phonetician Sara T. Barrows found bilingualism to be a “distinct advantage” in one’s education, a soon-to-be documented reality that Baron noted “contradicted much of the language psychology of her day.” Frank V. Thompson, superintendent of the Boston public schools, said in 1920 that “Laws prohibiting the use of a foreign language . . . not

only violate all the canons of modern pedagogy but are also in a certain sense undemocratic, un-America.” Some librarians “supported the stocking of libraries with non-English materials” and “encouraged foreign-language literacy,” according to Baron, despite fears that English-first supporters would drive a “backlash” against them. Connecticut and Vermont refused to pass anti-foreign-language laws. These language advocates, however, were in the minority.

In the '20s Nebraska prohibited foreign-language education before the ninth grade. “Violators were subject to fines ranging from twenty-five to one hundred dollars,” wrote Baron, “and up to thirty days in jail.” A teacher at a Lutheran-run Parochial School, Robert T. Meyer, committed the cardinal sin – for half an hour on May 25, 1920, he taught German to ten-year-old Raymond Papart – and was fined twenty-five dollars for his misconduct. Two years later, the Nebraska Supreme Court affirmed Meyer’s conviction (*Meyer v. Nebraska*) for “the direct and intentional teaching of the German language” and agreed that “the teaching of a foreign language was harmful to the health of [a] young child.” Offering some gleam of hope, the U.S. Supreme Court later reversed the decision; one of the justices declared that language was “an essential part of a liberal education,” asserted “early childhood was the best time to learn a foreign or classical language,” and declared that the state had “no right to prevent parents from bestowing upon their children a full measure of education in addition to the state required branches.”

Foreign language education thus became divided by class distinctions. Minority-language speakers from the poor and working classes were thought to have linguistic handicaps that would cause them to fail in school and afterwards in adult life. They were “encouraged to abandon their native tongues and become monolingual in English to

demonstrate their patriotism [and] their willingness to assimilate,” as Baron writes, which was of little concern because “members of such a group [would] never become diplomats or international trade representatives.” Opportunities in learning the *belles lettres* of another culture were not to be “wasted” on this population. Contrastingly, in the following decade there surfaced a need for Americans who were well-versed in foreign cultures and language skills, both essential elements for conducting diplomatic relations. Those encouraged to “learn a foreign language in order to strengthen their country’s position in the international arena” were “the monolingual middle class,” Baron wrote, “the academically and socially successful, whose second language skills need beefing up.” American ignored the linguistic needs of the lower-class immigrants, but began to provide educated monolingual Americans with foreign language instruction.

Two Nobel Peace Prize winners (a Columbia University president and former Secretary of State) and one professor of political science acted on this need to “beef-up” the middle-class. In 1919, this impressive team founded the Institute for International Education (IIE) to provide students, faculty, and teachers with international exchanges in order to foster and achieve lasting peace between the United States and other nations. Right away, they set about exposing Americans to foreign cultures and becoming competent foreign language speakers. The Institute partnered with several European governments, such as that of Czechoslovakia, in the twenties to foster peace through exchanges and languages. Most notable were the Institute’s incredibly forward-looking programs: in 1934 they sponsored a summer institute in Soviet Civilization at Moscow University for American Students (pre-Cold War); in 1935 they created a framework for Latin America-U.S. student and faculty exchanges (pre-rise of Brazil); and in 1936 they

provided U.S.-China student exchanges for Americans in Asia (pre-China's economic domination). Language exchange as it related to peace-making and diplomatic relations would define the next decades of American history.

## Chapter 4: Strategic Languages

*“Educational exchange can turn nations into people, contributing as no other form of communication can to the humanizing of international relations.”*

- J. William Fulbright (1905-1995)

While the American public was decrying foreign language education during the First World War, the United States Army had tapped into a pool of foreign language-competent Americans for strategic purposes on the battlefield’s linguistic front. Hypocritically, the Army called upon a population they had previously maligned before for being “un-American” – Native Americans – to serve as code talkers. Choctaw and Comanche speakers could speed up military communications simply by speaking in their native tongue, thus eliminating the need to encode and decode messages over the phone and radio and outpacing tortoise-slow machines (20 seconds compared to 30 minutes). In Comanche Code, “tank” became “wah-kah-ray,” or “turtle,” and Adolf Hitler became “posah-tai-vo,” or “crazy white man.”

During the Americanization period, Comanche speakers were instructed to abandon their native tongue, explained William C. Meadows in his book, *The Comanche Code-Talkers of World War II* (2002), as “it was thought that such languages were detrimental to the academic and economic advancement of individuals and would have no place in the future.” One Comanche told the author of his days attending an English-only Indian boarding school: “They wash my mouth out with that old yellow soap and they tell me to stop talking that dirty language.” Meadows interviewed dozens of Comanche code-talkers for his book. Another code-talker had the following to say about his education in the United States:

...we were forbidden at that time to talk Comanche. That was strictly a no-no, and if we did talk Comanche, we got strictly punished... paddled or forced to wax floors.... Like I say, they was always trying to make little white boys out of us. But still, when Hitler started kicking around, they was looking for Indians, and they come back to us and asked us to use our language for that special unit...

“Perhaps the most ironic facet of the history of the Comanche Code Talkers,” Meadows wrote, “is that the United States military forces were actively seeking Native Americans to practice what they had been instructed not to do and punished for, for many years – speaking their native languages.” America, which had previously stymied Native American language-speakers, suddenly couldn’t get enough of them. White Americans couldn’t do the job – one estimate indicates that at the outbreak of World War II, fewer than 30 non-Navajos could understand the language – so by the Second World War, the Marines recruited hundreds of Navajos for their valuable linguistic contribution. The language’s complex grammar, multiple dialects, and tonal qualities made it a nearly indecipherable language, and therefore one ideal for the encoding of messages. The Japanese never broke the code. “Were it not for the Navajos,” said Major Howard Connor after the War, “the Marines would never have taken Iwo Jima.”

During World War II, foreign language study became known in terms of its militaristic and diplomatic utility. The Defense Language Institute opened on the eve of WWII as a secret school for the United States Army; Japanese language classes were held in an abandoned airplane hangar in Crissy Field. German enrollments followed U.S. foreign policy: they had dropped during the first World War and virtually vanished from public schools in the 1930s, but reached their highest during WWII. Strategic languages became critical to national interests, and this need was reflected in university curricula.

Mount Holyoke College published a document in 1942 calling upon their language majors to be placed as interpreters, news-summarizers, radio listeners, WAVES (“Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service”), secretaries in war posts, social workers for “canteen-work and food and clothing-distribution,” and workers in the diplomatic service, because “even the humblest assistant needs her language.”

Americans witnessed a pressing need for language instruction to prepare WWII American servicemen for operations in Europe and the Far East. A historical report by the MLA noted:

Formal American education was almost totally unequipped to meet the challenge, not only because of the relatively insignificant position of language programs within the colleges and universities, but because these programs were concerned primarily with grammar and reading comprehension and paid little attention to listening comprehension, speaking, and writing.

Language education was stuck in the past traditions of classical language study as a “mind-broadening exercise in translation,” and fell short of the “language skills needed by the occupying forces” overseas. In *The Tongue-Tied American*, Simon reflected on his education in the ’40s, saying, “we learned nothing about other cultures as we memorized words and learned to conjugate verbs.” The distinction between the military foreign language training and the elitist world of academic foreign literature study became blurred. The government foreign language program would begin to seep into the academic world, and this would begin to exert an enormous influence over foreign language instruction in the decades that followed.

The same year the U.S. dropped atomic bombs on Japan in 1945, Senator J. William Fulbright (D-AR) proposed that proceeds from the sale of surplus war property

be directed to finance education exchange. Signed into law by Harry S. Truman in 1946, the bill became the now internationally celebrated Fulbright Program sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, which sought “to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchange” by exposing students and educators to foreign cultures and language training, very similar to the mission of the Institute for International Education. Graduates from top institutions with Fulbright scholarships would go on to work as United States diplomats, politicians, interpreters, linguists, code makers, or government officials, answering the geopolitical need for “liberally trained citizens” who could “adapt readily to other languages and cultures,” as Sundermann wrote. Fulbright recognized that language played a key role in facilitating global engagement and forging international connections.

Following Fulbright’s lead, more attention to foreign language-competency cropped up. “The nation emerged from the Second World War with a heightened sense of internationalism that resulted in sophisticated concern for increasing the foreign language proficiency of the population,” wrote Fisher in 1979. All segments of language study, including local elementary schools, high schools, and federal language programs, were called upon for improvement. Government concerns lead to the “establishment of area studies centers and the substantial financial support” for strategic language endeavors. The United States Department of Defense opened the Defense Language Institute in 1947 for federal language training in Washington, D.C.. Meanwhile, in 1949, Latin continued its tailspin; its enrollments measured at a meager 7 percent in high schools as strategic languages phased out the classical. The Institute for International Education began

cooperating with the U.S. Department of State to counter threats of Axis propaganda in Latin America, and in the 1940s organized large-scale, government-sponsored exchanges to the continent. Well into the Cold War, in 1957 the Institute's president traveled to Moscow and established a "Department for East-West Exchanges," to further develop exchanges between Russians and Americans.

Meanwhile, American universities witnessed great vitality in the 1950s. In 1949, a meager 852 scholars attended in the MLA Annual Convention at Stanford. By 1960, 4,693 participants arrived at the conference in Philadelphia. Jacqueline Kennedy studied abroad in 1950 in Paris and graduated from George Washington University in 1951 with a degree in French Literature. In the 1950s, when the full impact of our international involvement became apparent, it became almost a patriotic duty to learn a foreign language. The government became increasingly concerned about international developments and our competition in Europe and the Far East. In 1952, the Modern Language Association set out to develop its first Foreign Language Program, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, "to discover current needs and to recommend appropriate changes in foreign language teaching." The program was picked up in 1957 by the Office of Education, who began drafting legislative proposals for federal aid to education.

Under Dwight D. Eisenhower's presidency, the surprise launch of Sputnik set the stage for the passage of the Title VI and the National Defense Education Act of 1958. Title VI, or the "Language Development Program," authorized institutes for language teachers, federal aid to college and university language centers, and fellowships to thousands of students in language and area studies. It made available large sums of contract money for the "development of instructional materials in some 150 languages."

The National Defense Education Act, meanwhile, provided assistance for foreign language studies aimed at producing civilians fluent in strategic languages, such as Russian, in attempts to “insure trained expertise of sufficient quality and quantity to meet U.S. national security needs.” By passing these acts, the United States had finally demonstrated a “national interest” in the study of non-Western languages and cultures, which had previously been dismal – Hindi, for example, “was being studied by only twenty-three students in the United States in 1958,” according to *Changing Perspectives on International Education* (2001). “Interpreters are no substitute,” said John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State to President Eisenhower. “It is not possible to understand what is in the minds of other people without understanding their language, and without understanding their language it is impossible to be sure that they understand what is on our minds.”

“The American people generally are deficient in foreign languages,” said President Eisenhower in special message to Congress on January 27, 1958. “It is important to our national security that such deficiencies be promptly overcome.” These deficiencies were critiqued by many scholars, most notably Eugene Burdick and William Lederer in their 1958 novel, *The Ugly American*, which criticized the cultural ignorance of United States’ diplomats. One entertaining character named Joseph (Joe) F. Bing was a “very fat, warm, jolly man.” He worked as a U.S. representative overseas and later became U.S. Ambassador to the fictitious country Sarkhan (a loose representation of Vietnam). At a dinner party for prospective Foreign Service officers, a young student asked Bing about representing the U.S. overseas:

“What about learning to speak a foreign language?” a small wiry girl asked. “I understand you have to learn the language of a country before you go there.”

“Now, just a minute,” Joe said, his voice full of good humor, “someone gave you the wrong dope. Uncle Sammy is not crazy. How many people do you think we could round up in this country who can speak Cambodian or Japanese or even German? Well, not very many. I don't parlez vous very well myself, but I've always made out pretty well in foreign countries. Fact is, we don't expect you to know the native language. Translators are a dime a dozen overseas. And besides, it's better to make the Asians learn English. Helps them, too. Most of the foreigners you'll do business with speak perfect English.”

The American public identified with the story, which became a best-seller and was adapted into the 1963 film starring Marlon Brando. This says a lot, because *The Ugly American* candidly attacked the U.S. government. Lederer and Burdick ended the fictitious novel with a chapter titled, “A Factual Epilogue,” in which they call out America for having American ambassadors to “France, Italy, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, and Turkey... Japan, Korea, Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, and elsewhere” of the time who could not speak the native tongue of these countries, and had to “speak and be spoken to through interpreters.” This indeed was factual – James Reston reported in *the New York Times* on March 18, 1958 that “fifty percent of the entire Foreign Service officer corps do not have a speaking knowledge of any foreign language.” In other words, our American diplomats were Joe Bings.

“We have more than a million servicemen overseas,” Lederer and Burdick wrote. “Only a handful can speak the language of the country in which they are stationed.” They concerned themselves with the issue of espionage, considering that servants, chauffeurs, telephone operators, messengers, and interpreters in American embassies were locally hired. They also worried about the “handicap” of relying on translators, who were

“almost always non-Americans,” to interpret the press, radio talk, and personal conversations. “Our on-the-spot information is both second hand and subject to minor censorship and editing without our knowledge,” they wrote.

According to the American Department for the Teachers of Foreign Languages, there was a “surge of interest in foreign languages of the late 50's and early 60's,” due in part to, as Stanford linguist Elizabeth Bernhardt explains, the “sudden focus” on language and its practical applications for government, which “provided rich soil for notions of language use, of language as a tool, and of language for special purposes.” This attention spawned the “proficiency movement,” or the conversation about what students could actually do with their language skills. Foreign language teaching moved, in the late 1950s and 1960s, from traditional grammar-translation teaching to the “audiolingual approach,” which gave language learning “relevance by expanding the scope of study to emphasize speaking and listening, in addition to reading, writing, and grammar,” as Sundermann wrote. Leaders in the emerging linguistics field had developed this method in armed forces language schools. Bernhardt writes in a 1997 historical article:

Given this array of forces emanating from the public at large, the language curriculum, refocusing on practicality and useful language functions, began on a trajectory that would take it farther and farther away from the other part of the curriculum that was still in place—the literary curriculum. We see today a public curriculum that emphasizes everyday use—teaching about halogen lamps and computers and about whether there are salad bars in Germany, yogurt stands in France, and talk shows in Spain—a curriculum rooted in immediacy and popular culture that enables learners to get off the plane and do something.

To mediate this divide between linguistics and literature, The Center for Applied Linguistics was founded in 1959 in Washington, D.C. to serve as a liaison between the

academic world of linguistics and the practical world of language education and language-related concerns. The coming together of these two worlds called into question the “professionalization” of language teachers, due to the influx of teachers in the late 1950s to early 1960s. (Enrollments had dropped from 36 percent in 1915 down to 20 percent in 1959, but just two years after the Defense Education Act in 1960, they had risen back up to 23 percent.) This prompted the MLA in 1966 to finance the establishment of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), “a national membership organization for teachers of any language, at any level of education, concerned about the professional and pedagogical aspects of language teaching.” This was the first indication of the “language” and “literature” divide that would burden language departments for decades to come.

## Chapter 5: Discovery, Decline, and Defense

*“Never make fun of someone who speaks broken English. It means they know another language.”*

- H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

In the sixties, neuroscientists began studying multilingual subjects and unearthing the benefits attributed to learning languages. Experiments in psychology, neurology, and the cognitive sciences helped us better understand the wonders of bi-, tri- and polylingual minds. They found that childhood is the ideal time to begin foreign language study. Over the years, experimenters developed eye-tracking and mouse-tracking devices, mental puzzles, and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to further test language recognition and response time in subjects learning new words, sometimes as young as 7-months old. In 1960, Eric Lenneberg became one of the first neurologists to publish on the benefits attributed to learning foreign languages before puberty. Later brain studies confirmed that children, in addition their natural curiosity to learn new languages, have a greater capacity to develop near-native pronunciation and intonation than do adults; language learners thus reach higher levels of proficiency when they begin acquiring the language in elementary school. Volumes of journals began dedicating their pages to the subject of “the bilingual advantage.” As early as 1961, the *Modern Language Journal* published on language-learning’s cognitive benefits as it supports academic achievement, increased reading abilities, and linguistic awareness. The *Psychological Monographs*, *Foreign Language Annals* and *International Journal of Psychology* soon followed. Scientists began to see that students who understood the mechanics of a foreign language gained more insight into their native tongue. Put simply by Berman: “Students who have studied

a second language use their first language better.” Preexisting beliefs that bilingualism was bad were shattered.

Attitudes began to change for heritage language speakers, and for the first time in American history steps were taken towards supporting bilingual education. The National Defense Education Act was expanded in 1964, providing funding for more language programs, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act contributed a total of \$30 million in 1967 to help meet the linguistic needs of non-English speakers. In 1965, Senator Ralph Yarborough (D-TX) introduced the nation’s first Bilingual Education Act, which made federal funds – approximately \$7.5 million by 1969 – available to support the development of bilingual programs. (Yarborough had an affinity for saving threatened populations; in 1973 he co-wrote Endangered Species Act, saving animals as he tried to preserve foreign-tongues). There were over 300 programs requested, worth \$41 million across 41 states, but only seventy-six were approved – a testament to the great demand for bilingual education, especially for Hispanic children, that was becoming more widespread in American schools.

In the 1960s, the Modern Language Association (MLA) began tracking foreign language requirements, both for entrance and graduation, at a time when most colleges and universities in the United States required language study every semester. Almost 90 percent of four-year institutions in 1965 required foreign language courses for graduation. Yet the rise of English as an international language, along with the war protests of the late sixties and seventies, served as a counterforce and began to chip away at that tradition. Undergraduates rebelled against university requirements, which were seen as infringing on student choice and freedom, and fewer colleges considered foreign

language an elemental part of a liberal arts education. Between 1965 and 1982 alone, institutions requiring foreign languages dropped by 55 percent (from 88.9 to 47.4 percent). Entrance requirements halved from 33.6 to a meager 14.1 percent. This number is potentially skewed: many institutions did not dispose of but greatly reduced their requirement length, perhaps down to a mere one-semester requisite. (If a student is learning Arabic in that time, she may not even be able to learn the alphabet.)

The erosion of language requirements, traditionally considered basic to a liberal arts education, was an ironic response to this “campus unrest.” In the midst of American protests half-way across the world, a middle-aged South African man was fighting a different war – the apartheid – and his imprisonment in the ’70s influenced him to learn the oppressor’s tongue: Afrikaans. Nelson Mandela would later explain in his memoir that he did so in order to help instigate peaceful relations in his country, and we all have heard his now famous lines: “If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language, that goes to his heart.” Mandela had learned English in school, and his first language was Xhosa (a language that, today, along with Zulu, is being cut from South African schools in favor of English).

Meanwhile in the United States, vanishing requirements resulted in declining numbers in higher education. The ratio of modern foreign language enrollments to total course enrollments in 1980 was less than half of what it was in 1965, declining from 16.5 to 7.3 for every 100 enrollments. Degrees awarded in foreign languages suffered a wrenching contraction as well, plummeting 55 percent in the same time. Fewer students were coming into college with language experience, and more were graduating without it.

The defense rallied. In New York City on December 28, 1968, the Modern Language Association Annual Convention attracted a record 11,750 participants – a number it would never meet again. A special meeting of language scholars convened to discuss the “threat to the foreign language requirement in American colleges.” The panel identified “the need for cogent and convincing arguments for foreign language study,” and thus formed themselves into the Association for the Department of Foreign Languages (ADFL), an organization in partnership with the MLA, which was dedicated to addressing the beleaguered situation of foreign languages. This small forum of department chairs served to counter the decline of language programs on their home campuses (by 2000 this modest group would grow to 30,000 members).

Two years later, as enrollments continued to spiral downward, linguist John H. Fisher, executive secretary of the Modern Language Association, offered a pro-language argument in an address at Middlebury College, calling language “the most psychologically complex activity in the educational spectrum” and the “chalice in which we carry our identities.” He said language learning provided an “exceptional opportunity for cultural analysis and the development of cultural sensitivity” in that students could “objectively appraise their own culture” once they had apprehended it “from without.” Stanford linguist Elizabeth Bernhardt agreed with this theory in an article some years later, saying that language study posed “a powerful challenge to the entire liberal arts enterprise.” She contended that students learn adaptability when passing from “a known and risk-free” zone to an “unknown and contingent, of periodically beginning anew, of becoming childlike to gain new powers of understanding.” Studying a second language exposed the roots of our culture and demonstrated our dependence on language. But

universities hadn't developed assessments to prove the validity of these statements – they were theories without evidence, a task foreign language scholars would later pick up. Nevertheless, between 1970 and 1972, higher education language registrations continued their descent, decreasing by 9 percent – a loss of more than 100,000 students.

In 1974, just after the United States ended involvement of American ground troops in Vietnam, the Modern Language Association put forth a statement of action: “the study of foreign languages in America is once again in jeopardy.” A determined Modern Language Association steering committee undertook the task of developing a countrywide “master plan.” All constituencies involved – individuals, institutions, and professional associations – would participate in a national awareness campaign for language study “to unify and develop initiatives to revitalize the nation’s language efforts.” Their language policy document, titled “National Foreign Language Program for the 1970s,” called for an American public more fully informed about the value of language study, and more encouraged to attain proficiency in at least one second language. “Time is indeed ripe for a new multilevel, multifaceted national program,” they wrote.

Similar to Fisher’s Middlebury address, the Task Force capitalized on the need to teach American students foreign language *and* culture. The NDEA had some success – enrollments in the less commonly taught languages increased generally more than fourfold between 1960 and 1972, those of Chinese more than fivefold, according to the MLA – but it produced a slew of teachers who focused solely on basic language and communication approaches, mainly concerning grammar and reading skills (i.e. teaching the dative case), which the Task Force contested lacked an essential, philosophical

awareness. “Most of us have only limited appreciation of the vast wealth of world culture,” they wrote. “We may, however, come to cultivate appreciation through the study of a foreign language.” Exposure to foreign language and culture helped students become “rational, responsive, and responsible individuals” that could “communicate successfully in a complex society.”

Also around this time, scholars were asking: “What went wrong with foreign language teaching in high school?” With less than 25 percent of our nation's secondary school population in foreign language study in 1974 and only 18 percent in grades 7-12, teachers searched “for answers to dwindling enrollments and lack of federal, state, and local funds for support of foreign language programs,” wrote Joseph M. Vocolo, Director of Foreign Languages on the Board of Education in Buffalo, New York. If students no longer needed foreign languages to get into college, they weren't going to take them in secondary school. “High school enrollments in this field are sliding downward and many say, like a snowball gathering momentum,” Vocolo wrote, “worse is yet to come.” He was right. By inadequately preparing incoming graduates, high schools doomed college language programs, and when colleges dropped their requirements, fewer high schoolers felt the need to study language prior to college.

“Students going to college are deficient in language skills,” Vermont Royster, *Wall Street Journal* columnist, wrote in 1978. “This is indeed appalling, and it's long past time we raised some hell about it,” he added. But little hell *was* raised. Many students were graduating high school with a mere one or two years of language study (only to forget what they had learned). Considering it took an average of five to seven years to reach full proficiency in a new language, most high school students only got part-way

there. High school was too little, too late. Students experienced failure and frustration as they ended their foreign language study, convinced that the subject was too difficult, unimportant, boring, and a waste of time. “The most common experience for American students of modern foreign languages is to endure the most difficult and least rewarding phase of a program,” he wrote, “without gaining access to the natural rewards that make such study tolerable.” This led to young people entering college with negative, bitter feelings toward language study.

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Elementary schools, too, lacked support for foreign languages. In *The Tongue-Tied American*, Simon illustrated the dreadful state of American foreign language education by comparing the United States’ education to that of the people in a region called the Spanish Sahara. He once spent a night there, where he visited a “primitive school (only for boys) in a battered tent in which there were no textbooks, only a small blackboard and chalk—and these students, whose native tongue is Arabic, were learning Spanish.”

“How ironic,” he thought, “that if they were in a grade school in the United States, they would have desks and books and pencils and electric lights and school lunches and many things these boys do not even dream of—yet these young people in this primitive setting are acquiring foreign language skills that most U.S. elementary school students are not taught.”

Our nation needed a major overhaul, but it would need to come from more parties than just the federal government. The cost of teaching modern foreign languages in public elementary and secondary education was covered by local and state tax levies, and

therefore subject to the whims of local and state authorities. With the progress of language teaching dependent on thousands of local decisions, linguist S. Frederick Starr wrote in 1979 that proposals needed to be not only toward Washington, but also toward state capitals, city halls, local school boards, and curriculum committees. “Let there be no misunderstanding,” he wrote, “the battle for foreign language study will be won or lost at the local and state levels and not in Washington.” Initiatives at the national level wouldn’t have the slightest chance of success unless there was strong and active support at the local and state levels. “Yet it is precisely at these lower levels that support for the study of foreign languages is thinnest.”

There was a need for well-articulated rationale at the grade school level to convince legislators, school boards, administrators, and parents of the validity and objectives of second language study, or else America would prolong its monolingualism (or would continue to be a nation of “second language illiterates,” as some language scholars say) and lag behind other nations’ second language studies. Little was done; the opposition was too monumental. During Jimmy Carter’s presidency in 1979, the President’s Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies declared: “Americans’ incompetence in foreign languages is nothing short of scandalous.”

## Chapter 6: English First

*“We should erect a sign at each port of entry into the United States: WELCOME TO THE UNITED STATES: WE CANNOT SPEAK YOUR LANGUAGE.”*

- Paul Simon, *The Tongue-Tied American* (1980)

Virginia: 1981. Kentucky, Indiana, and Tennessee: 1984. California: 1986.

Arkansas, Mississippi, North Carolina, North Dakota, and South Carolina: 1987. Florida and Colorado in 1988. These were the states (and their corresponding years) that made English their official language, making the eighties a decade of English-only frenzy. Millions of Americans received in their mailboxes in the year 1987 a document titled “ENGLISH FIRST,” a letter put forth by twenty-seven well-to-do legislators to solicit signatures for “a Petition calling for a constitutional Amendment to make English the official language of the United States.” British linguist Geoffrey Pullum recorded the document’s text in his essay, “Here come the linguistic fascists” (1987):

Tragically, many immigrants these days refuse to learn English! .... They never become productive members of American society. They remain stuck in a linguistic and economic ghetto .... Incredibly, there is a radical movement in this country that .... actually wants to give foreign languages the same status as English – the so-called “bilingual” movement .... The National Education Association, the nation’s largest teachers union, sees bilingual education as a means to force schools to hire more teachers and swell the union ranks. Even the textbook publishers, who have visions of doubling their business, have gotten into the act....

There is no need to go into the blatant contradictions, false assertions, and utter outrageousness of this document (if you wish to do so, read Pullum’s essay, as he lashes out against everything from undocumented claims to punctuation errors), but Pullum notes that it represented a “wave of linguistic chauvinism” with “ugly political

undertones,” attempting to make bilingualism a “danger” to society. Since Roosevelt’s days of America’s polyglot boarding-house, the racial and socioeconomic status of language was still ingrained in conservative political mentality; the rise of English gained a global foothold in international society, pushing out foreign tongues. “The world is just cuckoo bananas about English,” he wrote, “[but the] plain fact is that making English the official language of the United States of America is about as urgently called for as making hotdogs the official food at baseball games.”

All jokes aside, the English-Only movement distracted attention from college foreign language programs. Imagine trying to “sell” the value of second language study at a time when English took precedence in the humanities, and when incoming students, deficient in second language skills, set out to learn a new language while simultaneously confronting “the struggle to carve out an intellectual voice in their *native* idiom,” as noted linguist David P. Sudermann in 1992. Foreign languages had been rendered “remedial,” with a “low-intellectual content.” Many perceived introductory-level language courses to consist of simplistic and mechanical regurgitations of preterite and imperfect tenses, regular and irregular verbs, grammar charts, and fill-in-the-blanks worksheets. English, a more “intellectual” discipline, had taken precedence.

To this, foreign language scholars would say that the complexity of language study added value to other academic disciplines. In many college departments, such as history, anthropology, and government, scholars encouraged their students to study primary texts. An aspiring historian who conducted her undergraduate research on Leo Tolstoy’s life history read his personal letters in Russian. A government major had to understand Italian to analyze documents for her dissertation on Benito Mussolini. On top

of this, scholars argue that students *should* be reading these texts in the primary language, anyway, as those who advanced to complete humanities Ph.D. dissertations must study at least one other foreign language. English translations abounded and served great purpose in spreading literature; however, translations are not without their drawbacks. “Learning a second language,” Sundermann wrote, “supports habits of precision and systematic mastery that could under favorable circumstances offer a valuable counterpoint to the often superficial ‘exposure’ given in other liberal subjects.” Learning a foreign tongue would color a student’s cross-disciplinary experience.

Critics would agree, but strike back in saying that students can never become proficient after one or two years of study. “If a modest degree of foreign language competence were actually to become a serious goal of general education, the time spent on that task in beginning courses would need to increase at least fourfold,” Sudermann pointed out. First-year college students may learn how to order a simple meal, request shelter or lodgings, ask and give simple directions, make purchases, and tell time, but their vocabulary remains elementary; errors in pronunciation and grammar still abound. At the college-level, Sudermann notes that the hours allotted to foreign language study in a college curricula are often only “a trifling rate of three to five hours a week.” Foreign languages produced students with “low-level multiskill proficiency” that would have to compete with other humanities disciplines that required “substantially less time and effort for greater intellectual return.” Even students who majored in Spanish or French may not have reached proficiency. Sudermann contended:

In the company of the liberal arts, introductory foreign language study has often seemed an unequal partner. While the beginning courses in subjects like philosophy, psychology, and literature hold out the

opportunity for important intellectual discovery, the early semesters of proficiency-based language study seem aimed at lesser accomplishments, like ordering from menus, buying train tickets, and reading traffic signs—what the profession calls ‘meeting basic survival needs.’

Sundermann saw solutions to these problems through introducing massive overhauls to college foreign language education: adopting immersion strategies, integrating foreign languages across the curriculum, and making the junior year study abroad more popular. And a major issue was time. “Research tells us that for the most part we cannot speed up the second language acquisition process,” he wrote. “In other words, one does need to crawl before walking, and there is no way around it.” He proposed introducing a “BASL – bachelor of arts with second language competency – rather than the customary BA,” which would include a special five-year degree. Professional and graduate schools would favor applicants with these degrees, he imagined, and “the cost of a fifth year of college could be underwritten by nationally funded foreign language scholarships. “At first blush, the foreign language year sounds unabashedly utopian,” he admitted. But in his eyes, the Fulbright program had been offering these opportunities for decades, and it was time colleges did as well.

Senator William Fulbright would have loved to have all students study abroad. He reflected in 1986, fourteen years after Johnson stepped down from office: “I’m sure that President Johnson would never have pursued the war in Vietnam if he’d ever had a Fulbright to Japan, or say Bangkok, or had any feeling for what these people are like and why they acted the way they did.” Politician Paul Simon imagined how wonderful it would be if even one-quarter of armed forces personnel and diplomats visiting abroad

could speak another language with minimal fluency. “Instead of offending people,” he wrote in *The Tongue-Tied American* (1980), “we would learn from them.”

For those who couldn’t study abroad or win a Fulbright, language centers began cropping up in universities across the United States. In the mid-1980s, the Consortium For Language Teaching And Learning – whose member institutions were Brown, Columbia, Cornell, the University of Chicago, and Yale – responded to the challenges of enhancing foreign language programs by meeting the needs of the less commonly taught languages, addressing the imperatives of new technologies, and generating external support for foreign language projects. The Consortium was supported by charitable foundations such as the National Endowment for the Humanities. For the government to support such pro-foreign language projects would have been outrageous in this decade of pro-English. Our country was suffering the consequences.

John H. Fisher in 1988 attributed America’s decline in trade balance and success abroad to the decline in the centrality of foreign language education in the states. “The battle is not over,” he wrote. “The rest of the world is learning English at a clip that makes our teaching of foreign languages seem apathetic, if not supine.” In 1990, the Department of Education finally recognized the growing national need for language centers to equip graduates with expertise and competence in foreign languages by establishing the first federally-funded Language Resource Centers. These centers soon became beacons of hope and innovation for foreign language advocates. As one scholar wrote, they were “clearinghouses of information on language teaching.” Among the initiatives they adopted were to disseminate research on teaching and learning methods, develop research-based language materials to reflect effective teaching strategies, teach

less commonly taught languages, operate intensive summer language institutes and provide professional development. Using digital equipment and state-of-the-art technology, these centers potentially offered hope for language departments in the decades to come.

The nineties were a rollercoaster for foreign languages, with its build-up of potential energy and subsequent free fall. At the Soviet Union's peak in 1990, the number of students taking Russian rose to a record-high 44,626; after the USSR's demise in 1995, that number was slashed in half to a record-low 24,729. The United States Department of Defense initiated the National Security Education Program (NSEP) in 1991, a post-Cold War investment designed to build a broader and more qualified pool of citizens with foreign language skills critical to national security. Just six years later, however, a *New York Times* reporter would write of languages in the academy saying that "program elimination is rather obvious." Elizabeth Bernhardt, Professor of Comparative Literature at Stanford, wrote in 1997 article for the MLA, "In a fundamental sense, foreign language and literature teaching in the United States is broken, and it must be fixed."

The 1990s also saw Congress pass the Native American Languages Act that sought to "preserve, protect, and promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans to use, practice, and develop Native American languages." After four hundred years of marginalization, this was certainly an accomplishment, but with almost all Native languages extinct since the settlers sailed to this continent in 1600s, the document endowing them linguistic rights had come just a few centuries too late.

## Chapter 7: A New Century

*“Parents should conduct their arguments in quiet, respectful tones, but in a foreign language. You’d be surprised what an inducement that is to the education of children.”*

-Judith S. Marin (journalist)

Born on January 6, 1991, in the below freezing city of Edmonton, Alberta, Eirene Wang became the first child to loving parents Jing Lin and Wuyi Wang, a professor of education and a pharmaceutical businessman. The couple met while obtaining their degrees at Guangxi University in China, and together they immigrated to North America in the mid-1980s. Eirene’s mother, Jing, named her first-born after the Greek word for “Peace” (*Eιρήνη*), having conceived during the Gulf War, and hoping Eirene would work towards building peace in the future. She added the “E” to her forename so that she’d always remember her birthplace. The couple clearly loved every nuance of language.

At one year old, Eirene and her parents moved to Montréal – her mother secured a teaching position at McGill University – where Eirene learned to walk, talk, and read in a French-Chinese-English world. She spoke French at school, English in daycare, and Chinese at home and in Sunday School. (Jing saw to it that Eirene kept her heritage language alive. “You can negotiate on anything,” she had told her daughter, multiple times, “but learning Chinese is unconditional.”) Her trilingual childhood alone wouldn’t have set her apart from her peers in Canada’s Cultural Capital, where the majority of people can order their dinners in at least two languages, English *et français*. However, a biological advantage did make her unique. Languages ran in her blood on her father’s side.

In the 1950s, during the reign of the Chinese Communist Party, Eirene's grandfather, Chun Ling Wang, became a Russian-Chinese interpreter, his Russian language education wholly subsidized by Mao Zedong's government in response to the Soviet Union's rise in power. At the same time, her grandmother, Rui Ling Zeng, earned a Master's degree in Russian in 1950, something unheard of for a woman in China at the time. "It was very rare," Jing told me. In addition, Jing swears that her husband can memorize an entire foreign language dictionary in just one read through.

As an educator, Eirene's mother employed specific learning tactics to build her daughter's memory at a young age, pointing to the English words and Mandarin characters in the picture books she read aloud. The tactic worked. Young Eirene in a bookstore was like any other child in a toy store. "Eirene took books as her friends," Jing told me. "Before she went to bed, she would lay all her books on the floor, and cover them each with a napkin, like it was their comforter, and then say, 'Now you need to sleep!'" Fluent in English by the third grade (Disney movies and the first Harry Potter novel accelerated her acquisition), she decided to teach herself the Russian alphabet, having seen her grandparents exchange love notes in the language.

During the 1990s, the United States welcomed 9 million immigrants, making the nineties the highest decade of immigration in American history. Eirene and her family came at the tail end of that wave, moving to Silver Spring, Maryland in the months before the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Eirene soon enrolled in Frances Scott Key Middle School, where she began learning her fourth language: *español*.

From her first day in Spanish class, Eirene stood out from her peers. "It was like relearning a new language," she remembered. She would transfer vocabulary and verb

conjugations from the French *je, tu, il/elle, nous, vous,* and *ils/elles* to the Spanish *yo, tú, él/ella, nosotros, vosotros* and *ellos/ellas*. Her monolingual peers resented her for advancing so quickly. “It bred some hostility,” she admitted. When her teacher held Spanish vocabulary contests, her classmates would vie to have Eirene on their team. “That was the only time they liked me,” she remembered, smiling.

Neuroscientists had been studying foreign language acquisition for four decades, and had found that bi- and multilingual pupils outperformed their monolingual peers in learning novel language vocabulary and grammar, and even scored higher on the SATs (the verbal section, in particular). Foreign language study supported academic achievement, and with significant investments, had the potential to improve our national literacy rates. This is not to say, however, that Eirene’s high test scores were a direct result of her trilingual childhood. In fact, she worked extremely hard at it. For most people, “language immersion” means living in another country, such as Venezuela, for an extended period of time. For Eirene, it meant physically surrounding herself with Spanish words. Jing recalls that her daughter would spread index cards with Spanish vocabulary words and grammar rules on every surface of their house. In addition, by this time her professors, her family, and her pupils could all see that Eirene was no ordinary student – she was a language savant.

Eirene came to the United States in the same year that George W. Bush enacted a new educational agenda called the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Passed by Congress in 2001, signed into law January 2002, and scorned by educators for years later, it gave schools monetary incentives based on students’ performance on standardized math and reading tests. (Considering that language learning increased test scores, No

Child Left Behind may have served better as “No Child Without Language.” Instead, it assumed wise-crack nicknames, such as “No Child Left Untested” and the “Act to Help Children Read Gooder.”) The sole focus on Math and English Language Arts disadvantaged foreign language programs and ruled them out as a core area of study. The only gesture at foreign language support was the Foreign Language Assistance Program (FLAP), receiving a sliver of the funding from No Child Left Behind. It was the first and only federally-funded initiative that exclusively targeted foreign language instruction in state and local elementary and secondary schools; unfortunately, it didn’t reach enough of them.

When September 11<sup>th</sup> occurred, the United States took a nose dive into linguistic turmoil. Only six out of approximately two million students in the United States graduated with Bachelor’s degrees in Arabic in the 2001-2002 academic year. Ill-equipped and underprepared, the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) scrambled to find counterterrorism and counterintelligence experts competent in Arabic. The need for Arabic linguists in the Federal Bureau of Investigation ballooned 261 percent after the attacks, causing the government to face one of its largest deficits of language-qualified personnel in American history. Building the nation’s language capacity became a critical issue. New strategic language programs began their own foreign language of acronyms and nicknames: the NSLI (National Security Language Initiative), the STARTALK Program (a play on the phrase, “Start Talking!”), and the CLS (the Critical Language Scholarship Program), which offered intensive overseas study in the critical-need foreign languages of Arabic, Bangla/Bengali, Hindi, Punjabi, Turkish, and Urdu. Meanwhile,

Chinese became increasingly popular as China steadily ascended to become a global superpower.

In the small town of Amherst, Massachusetts, Kathleen Wang (no relation to Eirene – “Wang” is the third most common last name in China), a mother of two young boys, joined the Amherst Public Schools’ World Language and Dual Language Committees in the 2004-2005 academic year, in attempt to have Mandarin Chinese instruction introduced into the curriculum. Born in China, Kathleen had immigrated to the United States and graduated with a Bachelor’s Degree in Mathematics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1984 and received her masters from Stanford in 1990. After decades of working in the private sector, she left the corporate world to settle down with her family in Hampshire County.

Kathleen worked tirelessly to persuade the Amherst Council School board to adopt Chinese immersion instruction. Under No Child Left Behind, schools like Amherst had higher priorities: reading and mathematics. Administrators resisted the Chinese proposal with their concerns over staffing, scheduling, budget, and operations issues. This is what Kathleen calls a “profound misconception” – that teaching language immersion is expensive. “It’s no more expensive than teaching English,” she explained. Immersion instruction can be accomplished without separate classes for children or specialist instructors, making it cheap and administratively convenient. She voiced these facts to the board, but they were unswayed by her reasoning and rejected the idea time and time again. “It just didn’t happen,” she told me. (Ironically, the Senate and House had both unanimously voted on resolutions to “promote and expand” language study in the year 2005, which they deemed as “Year of the Languages.”)

With her efforts to bring about bilingual instruction fruitless, this mother had nowhere left to turn except to retire from the school board and start on her own educational endeavor. Over the next two years, Kathleen visited immersion schools across the country, researched the most successful programs, and applied for grants in the hope of starting her own school with Chinese instruction. The opposition was tough: less than a decade earlier in 1997, Massachusetts voters supported Mitt Romney's Pro-English campaign to eliminate bilingual education programs in the Commonwealth State. In 2007, Republican Candidate Newt Gingrich said plainly, "We should replace bilingual education with immersion in English."

Fortunately, China's simultaneous global expansion was in Kathleen's favor. The Department of Education reported that in 2006 only about 24,000 of approximately 54 million students – or 0.04 percent of the grade school population – in the United States were studying Chinese, both in elementary *and* secondary schools. But this number was on the rise. Between 2004 and 2007, according to the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages, K-12 enrollments in Mandarin tripled. The American public was coming to recognize Mandarin as something other than the mandarin orange.

As a couple would begin their life together with a starter home, Kathleen and her husband, Richard Alcorn, began with a starter school. They rented a modest space in South Amherst for their nonprofit charter school, with tuition partly subsidized by the government, and admitted forty-four students that first year in 2007. Admissions were by lottery. Demand was there – the school had a waiting list even before it opened – and parents wanted to enroll their children. Within twelve months, Kathleen received \$1.5 million from the Foreign Language Assistance Program (FLAP) to expand her program,

so she upgraded her facility to an old children's health center in Hadley, Massachusetts, gutting and revamping it in the process. The Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School (PVCICS) – a true pioneer – became the first Chinese immersion school (grades K-9) of its kind in New England.

Before long, Kathleen's school began outperforming its counterparts across the state. Depending on their grade level, students split their day between learning in English classroom and learning in Chinese classrooms, where everything – down to the labels on the desks and chairs – was in Mandarin. This kind of immersion brought students closer to the language and culture in such a way that only a study abroad experience could compete. The Pioneer Chinese School offered interactive learning and intense language training that enabled students to reach full proficiency before graduation. To the students' delight, they also ordered pizza (the pizza boxes bigger than most of the children) for lunch every Friday.

Meanwhile, schools across the nation were closing their foreign language programs. High schools offering at least *one* language remained stable from 1997 to 2008 (mainly Spanish), but this did not account for other languages that were cut. A 2008 survey conducted by the Center for Applied Linguistics found that among five thousand schools, No Child Left Behind “had drawn resources from foreign languages.”

Back in Silver Spring, Eirene entered eleventh grade in 2007 at Springbrook High School, which despite the national decline, was one of the few programs in the nation that maintained its strong language program (with its close proximity to Washington, D.C., Springbrook marketed itself as a global school, promising to produce “lifelong learners who are culturally inquisitive.”) The menu of languages included Spanish, French,

Arabic, Latin, Italian, and German. By this time, Eirene had scored a 780 out of 800 – 99<sup>th</sup> percentile – on the Chinese SATs, and received perfect fives on her AP Spanish Language, AP Spanish Literature, and AP French Literature exams. Eirene had taken the French exam just in time – due to the low number of tests administered, in 2008 the College Board discontinued its AP tests in Italian, Latin literature, and French literature. And just as Eirene entered her final year at Springbrook High, America veered toward economic collapse.

## Chapter 8: The Great (Linguistic) Recession

*“In the end, the humanities can only be defended by stressing how indispensable they are; and this means insisting on their vital role in the whole business of academic learning, rather than protesting that, like some poor relation, they don't cost much to be housed.”*

-Terry Eagleton (English literary theorist and critic)

Similar to how university protests in the seventies prompted the elimination of language requirements, university financial crises (shrinking endowments) that followed the 2008 economic collapse triggered unprecedented closures of language departments. In the wake of the global economic meltdown, Meredith College in North Carolina, California State University at Fullerton, and University of Maine at Orono cut their French majors. The University of Arkansas and Washington University slashed budgets for their language programs. Emory University suspended its Spanish graduate program and cut its French department. Southeastern Louisiana University dismissed French, despite the 1,300 students who signed an online petition to keep the department alive. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill moved all of its Spanish 101 courses online. SUNY-Albany (State University of New York at Albany), dropped the guillotine on its Russian, Italian, Classics, and French departments, leaving only Spanish *viviendo*.

Clamant SUNY-Albany students protested across campus. The sweeping set of cuts made national headline news. The severity of the case became representative of the hundreds of language department deaths across the country, and the much larger decline of the humanities in general. Just weeks later, education columnist Stanley Fish of *The New York Times* published an article titled, “The Crisis of the Humanities Officially Arrives.”

One biochemistry professor at Brandeis University, Gregory Petsko, wrote a scathing letter to SUNY-Albany's president, criticizing not only the department closures, but also the institution's lack of distribution requirements – many SUNY-Albany students glided through their undergraduate years without taking a single language credit. At the time, this was nothing new. Many colleges, such as Brown and Amherst, did not have language requirements. At those universities where strict requirements were upheld, such as Columbia and the University of Chicago, admissions officers often had to hear complaints from prospective students about not wanting to undergo that same mediocre language training they had in high school. Rather than argue against these points, Petsko's letter paid homage to higher education as it was centuries and even decades earlier, when elite institutions mandated the study of the humanities, such as language, history, and philosophy. He suggested that the SUNY-Albany president read Fyodor Dostoyevsky's parable of the Grand Inquisitor in his novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, to illustrate the consequences that are faced when students are allowed too much academic freedom. "I'm sure your Russian faculty would love to talk with you about it," he wrote sarcastically, "if only you had a Russian department, which now, of course, you don't."

SUNY-Albany's president stood by his decision, saying that his administration made their budget cuts based on low student enrollments. Indeed, one major ramification of the Great Recession was that more and more undergraduates began electing non-humanistic courses of study. Concentrations that promised high-paying jobs right out of college (e.g. economics, computer science, and chemical engineering) became particularly appealing, especially considering that tuition costs ballooned at three times the rate of inflation between 1982 and 2007. The total cost for out-of-state residents was

approximately \$30,990 at SUNY-Albany. When Eirene enrolled at Amherst in 2009, her institution charged nearly \$60,000 annually. Sixteen percent of Eirene's peers were economics majors – a great number of whom signed contracts with Goldman Sachs and J.P. Morgan in their senior years – and Eirene did not go untouched by this curriculum-to-career mentality. In her first semester, she pursued a Pre-Med major. “Coming from a Chinese-American family,” she told me, “there was definitely pressure to study things like economics, mathematics, finances, or the sciences.”

Back at SUNY-Albany, Victoria Sheehan, a French major, told *CNN* of her worries after the department closings. “I'm hoping that when I apply for jobs,” she said, “they'll be able to look past the fact that my university cut my program.” The slashing of programs, albeit grave, wasn't the real tragedy – it was the hypocrisy. Just two years prior, SUNY-Albany had enacted a new branding initiative, adopting the academic mission: “The World Within Reach.” The day the university announced these closures, its institutional statement became a fraudulent marketing tactic; a deceptive branding initiative to trick students into buying a falsely global education. (For example, international business applications have risen steadily over the past decade; students want an education that will prepare them to enter the international economy). SUNY-Albany's decision did not put the world within reach; it pushed the world out of reach.

SUNY-Albany was not alone in this misconduct. Tennessee State, where students acquire skills for a “diverse culture and world,” terminated its foreign language degree. South Carolina State, where students learn to “live productively in a dynamic, global society,” scrapped its French degree. Anglo State University, where students become “responsible citizens,” did away with French and German. Rice University, where

students contribute “to the betterment of our world,” said *adieu* to French graduate study. Louisiana State University, where students get “world-class knowledge,” shut down instruction in Portuguese, Swahili, Russian, and Japanese, and pulled the plug on Latin and German. Washington State, where students learn “global engagement,” killed its German major. And the University of Nevada in Reno, where students are prepared “to compete in a global environment,” said *auf Wiedersehen* to German.

Paradoxically, as universities pushed for a more “global” outlook, they made foreign language programs irrelevant to their academic missions. When I spoke about this issue to Ombretta Frau, an Associate Professor of Italian at Mount Holyoke College (where administrators are currently considering eliminating the foreign language requirement), her Italian accent turned unmistakably serious, as she brushed back her long, black hair and said in a low voice. “It pains me to see these things on the table. I think that if you market yourself as a global school – international, multicultural, and global – students need to be learning about a language and culture that is not their own.” She paused, and then flailed her arms suddenly into the air. “I could put that on a shirt and wear it around!”

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“Things cannot get worse,” Nancy Rhodes, director of the Center of Applied Linguistics, said in 2010. “We are at the bottom of the barrel now.” No matter what language you speak – Croatian (*Nevolja nikad ne dolazi sama*), Russian (*Бедa не приходит одна*), or Swedish (*En olycka kommer sällan ensam*) – the phrase holds a similar meaning in every tongue: when it rains, it pours. The Title VI Program, which funded fifteen National Language Resource Centers (NLRCs) in 2010 supported by

grants under Title VI of the Higher Education Act, witnessed a massive reduction in federal funding during the year of the SUNY-Albany cuts, dropping down 65 percent from \$190 million to \$66 million. To put this in perspective, the government shelled out six times more than that (estimated at \$440.4 million) in 2009 on unnecessary printing costs.

Simultaneously, Uncle Sam axed the budget of the entire Foreign Language Assistance Program (FLAP), withdrawing millions that funded fifty-five language programs in primary and secondary schools nationwide. Marty Abbott, executive director of the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages, worked relentlessly in the months prior to the decision – soliciting and sending letters to Congress in support of the program – to no avail. She told *U.S. News* in 2010, “The rug has been pulled out from underneath these districts.” The Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School was one of those programs. At the time, it served about three hundred students in grades K-9. Although promising from its start in 2001, its elimination failed Kathleen and her students. “This was not the first time FLAP was going to be axed,” Kathleen remembered, “the only difference was that this time it actually occurred.” FLAP became nothing more than a flop.

The following year, a bipartisan contingency lead by Representative Rush D. Holt, Jr. (D-NJ) introduced to Congress the “Foreign Language Education Partnership Program Act,” which sought to fix our country’s language problem at its roots by providing incentive payments (\$50 million) to public K-12 schools for foreign language instruction and, additionally, giving language grants to higher education institutions:

Because of poor foreign language education, American companies today lose international contracts, our scientists miss important opportunities for collaboration, and clues critical to our national security go untranslated. We need to dramatically improve how our children learn languages by establishing a foundation at the earliest ages and building on it through high school, college, and beyond.

The bill was wholly rejected; however, it's interesting to note that Holt was not a humanist, but rather a trained scientist. He received his B.A. in Physics from Carleton College in 1970, his Ph.D. from New York University in 1981, and became head of the Nuclear and Scientific Division of the Office of Strategic Forces at the United States Department of State after that. No doubt influenced by the brilliant multilingual physicists before him – Sir Isaac Newton (English, Latin, Arabic), Albert Einstein (English, German), and Edwin Hubble (English, Spanish) – he recognized the importance of foreign language study even for aspiring scientists. The same couldn't be said about SUNY's president, who perhaps was not aware of the long tradition of multilingual scientists before him when, after saving a mere \$12 million from the draconian language cuts, he allocated \$435 million in state funding that year for a new university nanoelectrics institute.

## Chapter 9: Recent Years

*“Life doesn’t come with subtitles.”*  
 -Middlebury Language School’s slogan (2013)

American college students’ indifference towards competency in foreign tongues has not gone unnoticed by popular culture. In fact, poking fun at students’ waning interest in learning “unpopular” languages was exactly what comedian Mindy Kaling did this January in an episode of her show, *The Mindy Project*. She plays an OBGYN who meets a handsome, thirty-something New York University Latin Professor (B.J. Novak) at a cocktail party in Manhattan, and pursues small talk with the academic:

“So you teach Latin, huh?” Mindy asks him. “Is that a popular class?”

“Not as popular as it was like two or three thousand years ago,” Jamie replies. “Back then even the dumb kids spoke Latin. It was a great time to be a Latin teacher.”

“I guess it is hard to sell kids on learning a dead language,” she says.

“Oh we don’t like to use the term ‘dead,’” he corrects. “We try to go with ‘pointless’ or ‘waste of time.’ ‘Useless.’”

Mindy then makes a marketing suggestion: she tells Jamie to have the NYU Latin Department petition Hollywood to make another Indiana Jones movie. “Those movies make Latin look so cool!” she says. “He’s in a cave; he’s reading a Latin inscription by torch...” Mindy acts out the scene before their conversation is swiftly interrupted and changes the topic. Nevertheless, her brief story effectively illustrates the lengths to which language departments must go in order to recruit their principal clientele: undergraduates. Apart from the far-fetched reasoning behind a Hollywood resurrection film, the idea

behind Mindy's suggestion is on point. Maybe we need a marketing strategy. Pope Benedict used to Tweet in Latin and eight other languages. Teresa Heinz, John Kerry's wife speaks five languages. Brooke Shields majored in French Literature at Princeton University. Kate Beckingsale studied French and Russian Literature at Oxford University. J.K. Rowling received her Bachelors Degree in French and Classics in 1986 after studying abroad in Paris for one year, and then began work as a bilingual (English/French) secretary for Amnesty International in London before teaching English in Porto, Portugal. Later, she became a multi-millionaire.

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Eirene used to eat up Harry Potter novels as a child. Today, at twenty-two, she has more sophisticated tastes. She likes Junot Díaz for English, Wu Yuan-tai for Chinese, Joann Sfar and Don Quixote for French and Spanish, and Anton Chekhov for Russian. Russian is her current preferred tongue. She says "current" because it changes constantly. Russian today, Swahili tomorrow. To her language professors, she is their most prized student, and probably will remain so, at least for as long as their departments remain standing.

She sits in the café of Frost Library at Amherst College, her shoulders slightly slouched, and she occasionally pushed aside her relaxed black bangs as she talks, the way she does in language class when copying the vocabulary words written on the chalkboard. On the table in front of her, her hand rests on a soft-covered book – *Swahili: A Complete Course for Beginners* – which looks well-worn, and well-loved.

Eirene seems to be the archetypal Amherst undergraduate – competitive and sharp – but she is only one of the few polyglots on campus. In knowing six languages, or rather,

in being fluent in at least one foreign language, she is a minority. Amherst College hasn't required a foreign language since 1973. Eirene explains to me that she never did pursue her Pre-Med major – instead she chose an interdisciplinary major in Black Studies, pursuing a newfound passion for West African language and culture. To satisfy her fix for languages, she enrolled in Swahili and Russian. As a rising senior, in the summer of 2012, she attended an intensive language institute in Saint-Petersburg. Six years earlier she surrounded herself with vocabulary notecards to mimic immersion; now she had the real experience of immersing herself in Russian language and culture.

One day during her stay, she decided on a whim to skip her Wednesday phonetics class and visit the Winter Palace, the official residence of the Russian monarchs between 1732 to 1917. She was standing in line to enter the Hermitage Museum when she started to eavesdrop on conversations from the tourists around her: the Americans vacationers behind her, the Chinese sightseers in front of her, and just ahead of them, a group of Russian day-trippers. Although they took no notice of her, Eirene began to listen in on their dialogue in the three different languages. “People didn't realize that I understood what they were talking about,” she remembers. “I could follow them in the museum and be kind of sneaky.”

As she toured the palace, she overheard French-speaking travelers discussing prehistoric art and Spaniards deliberating over Western European sculptures. “It was like watching butterflies,” she recalls. (Another one of her favorite writers, Vladimir Nabokov, collected butterflies. He once said of his book translations: “In the case of languages my wife and I know or can read – English, Russian, French, and to a certain extent German and Italian – the system is a strict checking of every sentence. In the case

of Japanese or Turkish versions, I try not to imagine the disasters that probably bespatter every page.”) In just hours, Eirene had received viewpoints on the Russian palace from five different cultures, in five different languages. Her language skills broadened her social understanding and had opened new perspectives of ways to see the world. Eirene fit well with a famous Czech proverb that says, “You live a new life for every new language you speak. If you know only one language, you live only once” (*Kolik jazyků znáš, tolikrát jsi člověkem*).

Her knowledge of foreign languages was doing much more than simply enhancing her cultural experiences. While Eirene was in Russia that summer, the field of multilingual studies was exploding. Researchers discovered that being multilingual actually increased the efficacy of your brain. New findings correlated bilingualism not only with increased cognitive development and abilities, but also attentional control, intelligence, metalinguistic skills, memory skills, verbal abilities, spatial abilities, problem solving, efficiency in automatically processing sound, and even creativity. Language butterflies like Eirene were found to be more at ease in planning, processing information, performing and switching between tasks, and handling conflict management. One Swedish study explained that the better you learn a language, the more your hippocampus and areas of the cerebral cortex grow, correlating with higher gray matter volume in your left inferior parietal cortex. Translated from neuroscience talk, this meant that learning languages kept your brain in shape; it took your mind to the gym.

Researchers at the University of Chicago published their results of an intriguing study, which suggested that “people who routinely make decisions in a foreign language might be less biased in their savings, investment and retirement decisions.” In essence,

foreign language acted as a “distance mechanism” for multilinguals who thought through their decisions in a non-native tongue, eliminating their bias and resulting in better decision-making. Numerous publications picked up on this study, such as *Bloomberg* (“To avoid stupid mistakes, think in French”) and *Forbes* (“Why Your Next CEO Shouldn’t Be American”). Accordingly, when *The Economist* surveyed 572 executives around the globe on the importance of foreign language proficiency in their companies’ hiring processes, almost one-half of all companies said that prospective candidates needed “to be fluent in a foreign language.” Moreover, a further 13 percent said that multilingual ability “was a key selection criterion.” In other words, foreign-born job seekers had a leg up on their American competitors simply by speaking another tongue.

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On Friday, November 9, 2012, representatives from Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Harvard, Princeton, UPenn, and a handful of other institutions, gathered at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, to discuss the future of foreign language education in an age of globalization. It was a special meeting called together by The Consortium For Language Teaching And Learning (founded in 1982 during the “English First” decade) to discuss the innovative and experimentative potential for language teaching and new technology in the twenty-first century. The dozens of scholars in attendance included professors of German, Modern Greek, French, Swahili, Korean, and Turkish, among others.

Claire Kramsch, a Professor Emeritus of German at the University of California, Berkeley, was the keynote speaker. She had fleshy cheeks, a broad smile, and hooded eyes magnified beneath round spectacles, all surrounded by soft white hair. In the field of

applied linguistics, her books – *The Multilingual Subject, Language and Culture*, and *Redefining the Boundaries of Language Study* – were considered milestones. She addressed the crowd in English, though she could have done so in seven foreign tongues: German, French, Latin, Greek, Russian, Spanish, and Italian. “Foreign languages have a crucial role to play in the discussion about the globalization of education,” she declared. “We must challenge dominant ideologies,” she said, with her pointer finger raised into the air. “We, foreign language teachers, that’s what we’re up against!”

The symposium was a mixture of hope and uncertainty. Some programs were very strong. The University of Wisconsin-Madison, for example, offered 41 different languages – enough to keep even a hyperpolyglot busy for two (maybe three) years – however, their lifeline depended on federal funding from the Title VI program, which underwent drastic cuts in 2010. “We don’t know if Title VI is going to be around,” said Dianna Murphy, associate director of Wisconsin-Madison’s language center. “The big question that we’re asking here is what happens if Title VI goes away on our campus?” (The impact of the sequester on the Title VI and Fulbright-Hays Programs is predicted to reduce FY 2013 funds by approximately 5 percent.) New technology may be able to offer a hopeful alternative to eliminating entire departments. Columbia, Yale, and Cornell were developing framework to use HD videoconferencing technology – “a synchronous, interactive and learner-centered environment” that closely emulated a regular language classroom, and was “qualitatively comparable to a face-to-face alternative” – to collaboratively offer a number of less commonly taught languages.

Despite all of this promising news, no real ground has been covered yet. While the Ivy Leagues may be developing these interactive programs, hundreds of higher

education institutions lack these resources. And if they had the resources, they wouldn't likely invest in saving weakening language programs. ("Languages have never brought a penny into the university," one professor told me.) Additionally, language professors do not receive recognition from their departments for these technological endeavors – the most respected research area is literature scholarship. (Comparing annual incomes, the salary gap between foreign literature professors and language adjuncts is one of the largest in the academy. Foreign language instructors make barely half of what professors make, according to a 2012 National Faculty Salary Survey by the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources, which is already a relatively low figure: \$43,688 compared to \$87,104.)

On another level, while videoconferencing, e-mentoring, and blended-learning may offer alternatives to department closures, introducing new technologies potentially threatens professors' jobs. The intent of Columbia, Yale, and Cornell's system is a hybrid approach of using both in-class and digital instruction to facilitate language learning. But who is to say that administrators will not take advantage of this software, and eliminate professors completely? Certain institutions have already taken steps in this direction, offering language software courses for college credit. Earlier in 2012, James Madison University replaced their introductory Spanish professors with the contents of Rosetta Stone's canary yellow box.

Language scholars agree that it is a good thing students are studying languages outside of the academy. Duolingo, Mango Languages, and iTunesU are among other platforms that students can use to teach themselves languages. "Online language learning sites are not subverting the standards," linguist Michael Erard told *The New York Times*

last year, “but they’re operating in parallel.” Still, this was the elephant in the room at the Yale language symposium – the globalization of education meaning the decline of the language professoriate. Even scholars didn’t know what to expect of the future. After having delivered her speech, polylingual language advocate Claire Kramersch approached me among the crowd of language professors, and as she removed her round spectacles, I could see that her blue teardrop earrings sparkled almost as brilliantly as her eyes.

“What do you teach?” she inquired.

When I responded that I was a writer and student at Mount Holyoke, this piqued her interest.

“What is the structure of your narrative?”

I admitted I didn’t yet know.

“Well, who are the villains? Who are the heroes?”

“The heroes are people like you,” I offered. Accepting the compliment with a smile, Kramersch sipped her coffee and put forth a final question: “And does it have a happy ending?”

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Two months after the Yale language symposium, the Modern Language Association (MLA) hosted its annual convention in Boston from January 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013. Over 8,000 educators arrived, many came looking for jobs, and had their interviews scheduled in hotel rooms (an odd set-up, but one to accommodate the vast number of jobseekers). Those who taught foreign language and literature arrived with the extra baggage of worry and anxiety. Due to language department closures and the subsequent shrinking of available positions in the foreign language and literature professoriate, the

number of unemployed Ph.Ds. had swelled significantly. For those who had jobs, their positions were teetering on the cusp of extinction.

One Spanish professor who presented to a hotel ballroom full of participants hesitantly referenced her PowerPoint projected on the large screen. The graphs showed drastic decreases in language requirements, enrollments, and funding at her institution. “These statistics are from Cuyahoga Community College,” she said, pausing before she added, “though I may not be teaching there after this presentation.”

Nervous laughs trickled from the crowd. The presenter did not have a tenured professorship; rather, she was an adjunct language professor with a renewable contract. Temporary labor – graduate students, teaching assistants, and visiting professors – has increased exponentially in the past two decades. (The percentage of tenured faculty members reduced from 75 to a mere 25 percent across all departments.) Tenure is hard to come by even for upper-level foreign literature professors. According to a report this January by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), a faculty rights organization, the influx of “low-status” educators is allowing administrators to make “unilateral budgetary decisions” and faculty dismissals more often than ever before.

The director of the language center at Emory University, where the administration eliminated Russian and suspended the Spanish graduate program (while expanding their Chinese and Arabic language curriculum) last fall, told me that “the language professors were blindsided” by the decision. He said there were serious flaws in faculty governance that needed to be fixed. “Deans come and go with different priorities,” he explained. “As a tenured faculty member, I do have the leverage and standing to reach out to both sides, however some language professors might not feel empowered enough on campus to step

up and push for certain issues.” Although foreign language educators were teaching students how to communicate with the world, paradoxically, the hierarchies within their institutions were silencing them.

This “decisive shift in power” away from the educators, as described by the AAUP, was allowing institutions to shift priorities elsewhere (e.g. athletics), even if those programs did not support their educational missions, as was the case with SUNY-Albany. “Program closures are matters of *curriculum*,” reported the AAUP, “central to the *educational missions* ... over which the faculty should always have primary responsibility.” Unfortunately, educators are seeing even less control, whether that means losing department funding, having their programs eliminated, or being replaced by Rosetta Stone. Nor do language faculty have control over elementary and secondary language education policy, which directly affects their students’ desire to study languages. That is, with declining foreign languages programs in grade schools and high schools, incoming undergraduates arrive both unprepared for and indifferent to the study of language in college. According to the Asia Society, a global non-profit that focuses on international education (established by John D. Rockefeller III in 1956), only half of all American high schoolers today take even one year of foreign language.

This was the topic of the most heated session at the MLA convention. The sheer volume of people who squeezed into the conference room forced everyone to peel off their suit coats and sweaters; however the topic at hand was too pressing and too consequential for them to leave. The Common Core State Standards Initiative is one of the biggest national overhauls in American education since the No Child Left Behind Act. The Common Core curriculum will be implemented in fifty states in the coming

years. The standards pave the way for excellence in Mathematics and English Language Arts, and secondarily, History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects. They prepare students “to succeed in our global economy and society,” according to their mission statement, by providing “a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn.” Regrettably, students are not expected to learn a second language.

To many professors, this was news. Some looked confused; some shook their heads. Others cried. The Common Core will soon become a Common Nightmare among language teachers. Language educators agree that students should at least have access to language programs. “We have engineering camps,” Michael Erard, author of *Babel No More* (2012), recently told me. “Why don’t we have programs for students with language gifts?” Distinguished linguist Mary Louise Pratt agreed, and proclaimed that all students with exceptional aptitudes for learning foreign languages should receive the opportunity to develop it, “just as we do with math whizzes.”

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In the midst of the tumult and questions, the innovation and the crises, politicians and diplomats who believe in foreign language education have started to push harder than ever before for its existence. A 2012 Council on Foreign Relations report, chaired by Condoleezza Rice (who speaks Russian, French, German, and Spanish), asserts there should be a national policy to promote second language competence as a cultural asset – not a social liability. It makes a compelling case for high-quality foreign language programs available starting in the earliest grades; to develop bilingual curriculums, immersion programs, and robust second language programs; and to call on governors to expand the Common Core curriculum to include foreign languages.

Furthermore, the United States State Department and intelligence agencies are facing critical language shortfalls (e.g. Chinese, Dari, Korean, Russian, and Turkish) because of the dismal state of America's second language competency. Rice and her constituencies argue that this jeopardizes Americans' ability to "participate meaningfully in business, diplomatic, and military situations." The task force affirms:

The United States is not producing enough foreign-language speakers to staff important posts in the U.S. Foreign Service, the intelligence community, and American companies...This leaves the United States crippled in its ability to communicate effectively with others in diplomatic, military, intelligence, and business contexts.

In other words, America's failure to teach strategic languages is severely limiting our cross-cultural competence, our capacity for global awareness, and our ability to assess situations and respond appropriately in an interconnected world. ("Not only do American children know little about their own country," the task force points out, "they also cannot understand or communicate with their global peers." Astonishingly, in 2012 the number of American undergraduates that study abroad was an anemic 1.4 percent.) In the European Union, for example, kids become bilingual before they lose their baby teeth. Second language instruction begins between kindergarten and fifth grade and nearly three fourths of all countries require nine years of language study before college. Many of these students study third or fourth languages. Even England has recently pushed to make modern foreign languages a compulsory subject in their National Curriculum. When will this change come in the United States? The foreign language teaching community has tried to make this happen – we had seen it before with the MLA's "Language Development Program" in 1954 and "National Foreign Language

Program” in 1974 – but neither their efforts – nor their anguish – had much effect on funding or policy. Today, however, the most recently developed initiative called the “National Language Learning Standards” may not follow in the footsteps of its predecessors.

Although the sole content areas of the Common Core Standards are English Language Arts and Mathematics, the implementation of any new national curriculum opens windows of possibility. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages has seen this opportunity and is running with it. Language scholars have been toiling away, in partnership with hundreds of educators, administrators and policymakers, to align the National Language Learning Standards with the Common Core Standards. To that end, they have collected dozens of concrete examples on how this relationship could successfully be achieved. The Common Core preaches the teaching of “21<sup>st</sup> century skills.” What better way to prepare young people for a global world than to integrate foreign language as a core subject into their curriculum? The bar is high, but so are the potential rewards if they succeed. Adding a “World Languages” content area alongside English Language Arts and Mathematics could reverse the 18.5 percent of students currently enrolled in a language to 81.5 percent or more. Using the Common Core as a vehicle to enact a major language policy improvement in grade schools and high schools today would help increase the chances that our language programs are still alive tomorrow.

The demand for foreign language education cannot be overlooked; immersion language programs are flourishing. On March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2013, the Massachusetts Board of Education approved the Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School for

expansion. Since opening the school in 2007, Kathleen's goal had been to develop a "fully articulated" K-12 program for students to develop high proficiency in Chinese. After six years of arguing with school boards, defending her program to the state, and keeping her program afloat despite the government's sinking funding, her dream had finally become a reality. In the 2013-2014 school year, Kathleen will double her enrollments from 300 to nearly 600 students, making the Charter School the first K-12 Mandarin immersion school of its kind in the country.

Kathleen is optimistic that additional federal funding will become available as the government becomes increasingly interested in promoting Chinese language instruction. Her curriculum already follows the Common Core Standards, but her students are getting double the benefits by learning the standards both in English and in Mandarin. To Americans, Kathleen's school seems like a remarkable accomplishment. Indeed, in the context of the United States it is an exceptional program. To the rest of the developed world, however, it's just another school. Three hundred million people last year in China either knew or were studying English, a compulsory subject for all *primary* school students, whereas only about 60,000 K-12 students in the United States were studying Mandarin – that's five thousand Chinese English language learners for every one American language learner. When language opportunities become available to all elementary and secondary students in this country, America will finally be on the same footing as the rest of the world. Foreign language education in the United States has never seen a Golden Age, and perhaps it never will. But as a nation on the brink of a major education overhaul, in the midst of an increasingly global world, the time could not be more ripe to establish a robust national program between foreign languages and the

American education system. Too late is better than never; unless we wish to carry on into the twenty-first century as a nation that is irrevocably and indifferently, tongue-tied.