

Language and International Employment Opportunities in the Public and Private Sectors¹

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This paper is focused on the placement of current and future IFLE grads in government and private sector jobs. There is mounting evidence that the training/expertise of today's BA and MA graduates of IFLE programs can lead to productive careers in both the public and private sectors. While the evidence for jobs in the public sector is rich and relatively longstanding, the situation in the private sector, while just as compelling, is of a much more recent nature. There are three reasons for optimism here: First, the pipeline for language skills especially at the higher, professional levels has reach a level of effectiveness unprecedented in the history of second language acquisition in the U.S. Second, language jobs are now viewed as critical in the public sector, and there is little reason to expect that to change, budget cuts notwithstanding. Second, employment opportunities in the private sector are exploding, and the expansion trend shows no sign of moderating. (See below.)

Language Skills: the Pipeline in 2014

Turning first to levels of preparation of graduates of US higher educational institutions, it is very important to note that where federal investments in training have been made (e.g., through USED Title VI and Fulbright-Hays, as well as STARTALK, NSLI-y, CLS, Title VIII, and the Flagship Programs), BA graduates with speaking, reading, and listening at the professional level (ILR S-3, R-3, L-3 and higher) have become the new norm for those who have participated in a year-long capstone overseas program in any one of 10 major critical languages, with or without a traditional major in that field.² For those who have completed a summer or semester overseas in conjunction with a strong stateside program (with or without a language major), the typical expected outcome is now a 1+ or 2 across language modalities.

The proficiency levels of the present generation of undergraduates in the critical languages are a far cry from those reported by various researchers for US higher education in the past century, beginning with John Carroll's oft-quoted study of measured proficiency outcomes of modern foreign language graduates of 1962 through comparable studies by the present authors in the 1990's.³

Targeted federal investments in stateside and overseas immersion study, teacher training, and learning resource development over the past decade, as well as re-doubled efforts in K-12 and higher education focusing on proficiency development in the classroom, higher standards of accountability, and access to well designed overseas immersion study has confirmed that US undergraduate programs can indeed produce speakers of the major

¹ The authors acknowledge contributions by the participants in the "Languages for All? The Anglophone Challenge" effort, including the White Paper and the International Forum held at the University of Maryland on Sept 30, 2013.

² Link to USED Forum Lecture Data Presentation by Dan Davidson, July 2013. Forthcoming in Georgetown University Press volume, edited by A. Newel Brown et al, 2014.

³ John Carroll (1962), Brecht, Davidson, Ginsburg (1995), Davidson (2010).

world languages who are professionally bilingual and fully capable of engaging counterparts around the world in the pursuit of business, social enterprise, academic research, or in government service. Volumes of graduating seniors with these qualifications are not yet large, still measured in the hundreds, rather than the thousands, but the numbers of Level 3 speakers/readers/listeners in Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Korean, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, Swahili and Urdu are increasing with each passing year, thanks to the modest federal investments that have been made by Title VI/Fulbright-Hays, and the complimentary support of this effort by the U. S. Department of State (ECA) and the U.S. Department of Defense (DLNSEO).

International & Foreign Language Education; Language, Regional Expertise, Culture

Normally, IFLE education is focused quite specifically on language competence, with the notion of “international expertise” being broad and somewhat amorphous, including global issues (like security, environment, cyber) area studies (including history, politics, geography), culture behavioral, performance), and civilization, however defined. Remarkably, in the summer of 2011, Secretary of Defense Panetta sent out a letter to all DoD components underlining the need for what he termed “Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture (LREC)” capabilities across the department. This was the culmination of a process that had been underway in the department to settle the debate about the need for linguistic ability vice cultural knowledge and skills for effective job performance. It was now to be understood that the capacity required by the DoD into the future comprised language proficiency, knowledge of a region or area or country, and a sophisticated understanding of the differences between U.S. and target cultures. This combination of knowledge, skills and abilities was projected onto a five-digit scale for “regional proficiency” (RP) in the DoD, in this way resembling the government’s ILR language proficiency scale. However, given the difficulty of developing a RP test akin to the DLPT that could accurately and reliably determine the level of expertise in this very broad range of area and cultural skills, the RP scale incorporated an amalgamation of knowledge, experience, skills and abilities as reflected in language proficiency, areal and regional education, and living/working/learning experience in the region. In a word, the professional capability required by the DoD was to involve a broad range of knowledge and skills, only one of which was language proficiency.⁴

This recent specification of global capabilities carries with it the challenge of conveying these quite complicated demand signals to the education and training elements in academe and government. In this regard, the three components of RP have very different supply systems, so to speak, which we will discuss below.

The Public Sector

The question of federal employment opportunities in the international sphere that require language competence involves several data sets:

- the type of jobs and the agencies and offices where they are offered;
- the number of current and projected openings and their location

⁴Of course, it has to be said here that language proficiency is key to being able to turn the “declarative” knowledge one acquires in textbooks and classrooms into the “procedural” knowledge that enables the characteristic expert reaction of immediate and intuitive responses in real world situations.

- the skills and abilities required (language ability, area & global knowledge, cultural expertise)

The type of jobs and the agencies and offices where they are offered

The first question had enjoyed anecdotal answers for decades, particularly in the past half century as U.S. security and economic interests necessitated interactions with virtually every country on the globe. Until recently, this data set was out of date and thus had to be inferred from other data. For example, the most comprehensive study was done in the summer of 1997, when

the National Foreign Language Center asked Ted Crump to update his 1985 survey of translation and interpretation in the federal government entitled *Translations in the federal Government 1985*, which Mr. Crump had published himself. In the Introduction to his new study (*Translating and Interpreting in the Federal Government*. American Translators Association. 2001), Crump explains:

The NFLC sought hard data on the FL needs and capacities throughout the federal government, to what extent these needs are met by in-house capacities or outsourced procurement, main trends over time and the impact of national language study priorities federal legislation and foreign developments on the overall posture.

In this study, Crump found data for over 80 agencies, speculating that a fully comprehensive study “...would probably encompass more than 100 agencies and entities....” This was the first real effort at a comprehensive census of language jobs in the federal government.⁵ Since that time there had been no effort to update this study. However, for all intents and purposes this situation has been rectified with the 2013 publication of *Making Global Impact: Guide to International Jobs in Government, Sept 5, 2013*, a joint publication of the Robertson Foundation, GOVLOOP and APSIA.⁶ The table of contents of this study provides a vivid illustration of the usefulness of this resource:

Where Are the International Jobs in Government?
 Traditional Federal Agencies
 State Department: Foreign Service Officer
 State Department: Foreign Service Specialist
 State Department: Regular Civilian Opportunities
 U.S. Agency for International Development
 Peace Corps
 Department of Defense
 Intelligence Community
 Non-Traditional Federal Agencies
 Advice for Finding Federal Jobs
 International Opportunities on USAJOBS

The number of current and projected openings and their location

⁵ The basic premise of the founding of the NFLC was to focus on “language use,” not only the tradition preoccupation with language acquisition. Thus, Crump’s study was one of a series focused on jobs: Carol Fixman’s study XXX; D. E. Ingram’s *Foreign Language Employment Opportunities with International Agencies in the United States*. Center for Applied Linguistics and Languages, Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia, National Foreign Language Center, Washington, D.C.).

⁶ <http://www.cfr.org/united-states/languages-jobs-initiative/p28396>

Data set # 2 on the number and location of current employment opportunities in the international sphere now exists as part of the *us.jobs* website, where all federal employment opportunities are listed and where a keyword search can give the requested international jobs current openings.⁷ However, there appears to be a significant underreporting of employment opportunities on this website, as Carreira (p. 68) reports, due to the fact that a key word search for “language” leaves out some 37,000 positions requiring language outside of “language professionals” like translators, interpreters, linguists, teachers and language analysts. To the extent that this is true, the effectiveness of this site for finding positions requiring language abilities is greatly diminished.

Part of the problem here is the challenge of specifying LREC capability needs for the range of international positions across the federal workforce, where LREC is a critical but subsidiary capability in addition to technical skills like war fighting, diplomacy, development, disease control.

Required skills and abilities (language ability, area & global knowledge, cultural expertise)

This difficulty bridges over into the third data set, which presents significant challenge to job seekers as well as to employment providers in the federal government. The difficulty arises on two levels: First, specification of language capabilities needs has been a constant challenge to offices, agencies and departments of the federal government, as well as to organizations in the private and NGO sectors. Secondly, without such specification, these organizations cannot send timely and accurate demand signals to in-house training units as well as to the education system of the country. This situation has resulted in significant deficits in mission readiness in the federal government, as documented by a series of Congressional hearings, OMB studies, national reports, and shared/common institutional sources of language services (National Virtual Translation Center, National Language Service Corps).⁸

This being said, language demand signals across the government are addressed specifically to the government language training system, comprising the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, the Foreign Service Institute, the Intelligence Language Institute, and the National Cryptologic School. With regard to culture, the picture is more complicated, as culture is taught together with language in these schoolhouses. Recently, in an effort to make more explicit the notion of “general” and “specific” culture (and in part to separate it from language), various federal efforts for cultural research and training have been established.

By comparison, the training target for “regional expertise” in the federal government is reasonably straightforward. With the exception of the Naval Postgraduate School and, to a lesser degree, the National Defense University, all education in this domain depends on higher education institutions in the United States, mostly those with designated National Resource Centers supported by Title VI of the Higher Education Act. This is the conclusion

⁷ www.usajobs.opm.gov

⁸ A list of these hearings and reports can be found in Appendix A.

of a 2012 Center for Advanced Study of Language report on the status and locus of area studies programs in the United States:

Note the following specification from the Directive on Defense Language Program (DoDD 5160.41E, 2010):

Regional Expertise. Graduate-level education or 40 semester hours of study focusing on, but not limited to, the political, cultural, sociological, economic, and geographic factors of a foreign country or specific global region through an accredited educational institution or equivalent regional expertise gained through documented previous experience as determined by the USD(P&R) or the Secretary of the Military Department concerned.

The scale provided in the same document specifies “civilian education” in the following manner:

RE Level 3: Professional: Master’s degree from an accredited university in a relevant discipline with a regional focus or Enlisted Career Language Professional (E7 or above) with L3/R3/S3 language skills and has a regionally focused career training certification

RE Level 4: Senior Professional: Master’s degree from an accredited university in a relevant discipline with a regional focus (could include an immersion education experience of a least a year in a foreign university/staff college

RE Level 5: Expert: Masters or PhD from either a foreign university or an accredited US university in a relevant discipline with a regional or global focus

The Private Sector

Job seekers in the private sector face different challenges, as finding jobs is reliant on public search engines, like Monster.com.

The type of jobs and the industries where they are offered

While providers of language services are focused on translation, interpretation, and instruction, the consumer side that includes FedEx, Google, Deloitte, Microsoft etc. requires a very broad range of LREC abilities, including public service, on-line global monitoring, accounting, programming, etc. These positions require language proficiencies at Intermediate/1 up to Distinguished/4 in varying modes of usage (Interactive, Presentational, Interpretive). When it comes to Regional Expertise and Culture, the demand signals are, for all intents and purposes, essentially non-existent, although DoD’s schema might be useful here.

In spite of this plethora of employment opportunities, there is no accessible, comprehensive and effective resource for job seekers. The massive jobs data base search engines like Monster, while popular, demand a great investment of time and energy on the part of job seekers, who must search by key words like “language,” “international,” “global,” “culture,” etc. in addition to the professional or technical skills they are marketing. Employers, on the

other hand, are forced to spend a great deal of time on resume analysis and interviews, most of which will do little to ensure a good fit of employee and employer.⁹

The number of current and projected openings and their location

In an article to be published by Georgetown University press in *Professional Language Skills: Unprecedented Demand and Supply*ⁱ, Richard D. Brecht, William P. Rivers, John P. Robinson, and Dan E. Davidson articulate the state of the job market accordingly:

What has changed dramatically in the last decade or so is the fact that the language industry, and the major sectors of the US economy that it serves, face a major talent gap. The language industry continues to grow at 8%-10% per year, some 3-4 times faster than the overall U.S. economy, and is worth at least \$15b per year (Kelly & Stewart 2011). Industry experts and observers expect this growth to continue, if not accelerate, due to the explosion in content, particularly from social media and the use thereof by major industry clients.

The LREC skills and abilities required

The range of desired skills in industry depends on whether the potential employer is a provider or a consumer of language services. The Language services industry requires mostly highly proficient employees in order to provide services like translation, interpretation, and language instruction. This is particularly relevant, given the fact that industry provides many of the required language services for the public sector. However, there is a significant difference between the public and private sectors in this regard: the private sector cannot set up a provider system of education and training institutions the way the government does (e. g. DLIFLC, ILI, NCS, FSI, NDU, NPS). In this case, the education system itself must serve as the provider system, which in the US context is a real challenge, given the paucity of graduates with any LREC skills, not to mention high level ones.

Accordingly, there is an intense need for skilled professionals to meet this burgeoning demand for multilingual, multimodal, multidirectional communications. Among the language professionals in demand are translators and interpreters, who must possess professional levels of skills in at least two languages and must also be adept at using the modern technology that these professions now require. Skilled professionals are equally needed and scarce in the supporting business disciplines of the industry, to include IT, project and program management, customer relations, and business operations. These personnel all require high degrees of linguistic and cultural skills as well as other critical technical and business skills.

On the consumer side, the situation is different, as a full range of language skills is needed, from health services, food provision, software engineering, accountancy, nursing, environment, etc.¹⁰ Again, the specific language proficiencies and skills depend on the position, e.g. programmers working to provide on-line support for multiple languages need, probably, only an Intermediate Plus/1+ proficiency.

As above, the regional and cultural skills required in all of these industries is as undeniable as it is amorphous, with very little effort expended to define and identify them and to send

⁹ Full disclosure, the authors are involved in a new business to greatly improve the fit of global professionals to global positions: GPS

¹⁰ Until recently, government jobs were aimed at high level proficiency for purposes of intelligence, diplomacy, and law enforcement. Recently, the DoD's focus on the expanding focus on general purpose forces has changed that.

clear and comprehensive demand signals to the education sector. However, in this regard, the GALA has launched a survey of its members to determine the “gap in global talent” that language providers are experiencing.

Conclusion

While the future looks bright for graduates of IFLE programs, they still face significant challenges, among which are:

- demand signals for IFLE/LREC from government & industry
 - specification of Regional Expertise & Culture
 - effective infrastructure to match language supply & demand
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