

American University Students: The Necessity of Foreign Languages

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Abstract

This paper reports on a study of 481 American university students' current and desired foreign language ability as well as their opinions about the necessity of foreign language fluency in the United States. The study found that although almost half of the American university students did not speak a foreign language, an overwhelming majority would like to be able to speak one or more foreign languages. Employment considerations, personal growth (for example, traveling, learning more about one's heritage), and economic and social opportunities (for example, greater chances for communication) were given as motivating factors for learning another language. The study also found that students were almost equally divided about the necessity of foreign language fluency for both the American public and American university graduates.

Introduction

“Although it is not uncommon to hear people speak languages other than English in the U.S.” (Jones, 2013, para.2), in other countries, Americans are often stereotyped as English-focused and American-centered, and national opinion polls in the United States support these stereotypes. For example, a survey by Gallup, a polling corporation respected for its scientific and trustworthy research, found that a majority of Americans believe immigrants must learn English (Jones, 2013). Furthermore, the results of Gallup polls in 2001 and 2013 demonstrate the continuing perception that although knowledge of a second language is valuable, it is not essential (Jones, 2013 ; McComb, 2001). For example, as a percent of the population polled, the

number of people who said they knew a non-English language¹ well enough to have a conversation increased between 2001 and 2013, but two-thirds of the Americans did not have this skill (Jones, 2013). The 2013 Gallup poll concluded, “The public generally does not think it is essential that Americans learn to speak a second language. Rather, it is probably viewed as more of a desirable skill than an essential one” (Jones, 2013, Implications, para. 1). United States Secretary of Education Arne Duncan lamented this when observing, “For too long, Americans have relied on other countries to speak our language” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, para. 11), and while campaigning in 2008, President Obama said it was embarrassing that he did not speak a foreign language and acknowledged the need for more Americans to speak other languages (Gavrilovic, 2008).

Student Attitudes

University students’ attitudes toward foreign languages change over time. A professor of Chinese at George Washington University observed, “Languages follow fads” in terms of which languages are popular (Neely, 2011, Languages Follow Fads, para. 1) and whether foreign language study is desirable. For example, studies in the early 1970s demonstrated American students’ desire to abolish foreign language requirements, but by the early 1990s, a study of college freshmen found “overwhelming and enthusiastic support for foreign language study in general, and foreign language requirements in particular” (as cited in Price and Gascoigne, 2006, p. 385). In the early 2000s, both the general public and university students supported foreign language studies and international education (Price and Gascoigne, 2006), and Price and Gascoigne (2006) found similar trends seven years ago. A weakness of the latter study was that it utilized essays from the university’s English placement test. On the test, entering freshmen who chose the foreign language essay topic were asked to provide pros and cons of foreign language education. Although informative, the study was “a descriptive exploration” in which students may have provided answers which they thought would earn them high marks rather than expressing their real feelings (Price and Gascoigne, 2006, p. 390).

Methodology

Research Objective

The Modern Language Association (2013) has been collecting data about tertiary student enrollment in foreign language courses for over 50 years, but there are fewer studies of students' opinions, particularly those of students who do not enroll in a foreign language course. Since attitudes and trends do change and it has been seven years since Price and Gascoigne's study (2006), the current study investigated American university students' current foreign language ability, their desire to study a second language, and the students' perceptions of the necessity of second language abilities. Specifically, the researcher sought to answer the following questions :

1. What languages other than English do American university students speak? What other languages would they like to be able to speak, although they do not speak them now?
2. Do the university students believe the general American public must have the ability to speak a foreign language? Do they think this skill is necessary for university graduates?

Although originally intended to report shifts in university students' opinions about the perceived necessity (or lack thereof) of foreign language abilities, comparisons with the general public vis-à-vis the most recent Gallup poll are also useful. Furthermore, this exploratory study was designed to provide a foundation for comparative studies at other universities inside and outside of the United States.²

Selection of University

Studies that focus on high-ranking U.S. tertiary institutions provide an incomplete picture of American post-secondary students. For this reason, a decision was made to find a university that might better represent what "average" American university

students believe. This does not infer, however, that the results can be generalized to the entire American tertiary population.

To select the university for the current study, data from the Freshman Survey conducted by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) at the Higher Education Research Institute in the University of California—Los Angeles (UCLA) was analyzed. The survey population includes higher education institutions (for example, colleges and universities) but excludes vocational or semiprofessional institutions (Pryor, Hurtado, DeAngelo, Blake, and Tran, 2010). The university selected for the current study participated in the CIRP Freshman Survey, thereby facilitating contrasts with weighted national norms.

As Table 1 demonstrates, one important difference between the university discussed in this paper (Bridgewater State University, Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, 2010) and the weighted national norms from all higher education institutions (Pryor, Hurtado, DeAngelo, Blake, and Tran, 2010) is the economic background of the students. The students in the current study more often came from homes with less economic resources than the national average. Because schools whose students are of lower socioeconomic status are less likely to offer foreign language classes (Rhodes and Pufahl, 2009, pp. 1–2; U.S. Department of Education, 2010), this must be considered when examining the data. However, a comparison of the national averages and the students in the current study suggests the university students were fairly typical in terms of their views on cross-cultural interaction (Table 1). For instance, when asked to assess the ability to see the world from someone else's perspective and the ability to work cooperatively with diverse people, the ratio of students who assessed themselves as "above average" or in the "top 10%" was similar to the national averages.

	University in current study	CIRP All Institutions
Father's (Mother's) highest level of formal education		
High school graduate or less	41 (32)	29.6 (25.5)
Graduate degree	10 (12)	23.2 (19.2)
Responded "Very Good Chance" that they will		
Get a job to help pay for college expenses	65	48.4
Work full-time while attending college	14	6.9
Responded "Essential" or "Very important" to the life objective		
Helping to promote racial understanding	37	33.8
Improving my understanding of other countries/cultures	44	49.1
Assessed themselves as "Above Average" or "Highest 10%" in		
Ability to see the world from someone else's perspective	65	66.5
Tolerance of others with different beliefs	71	72.2
Ability to work cooperatively with diverse people	77	77.7

Table 1 : Freshman Survey results. (Percent response.)

Sources : Bridgewater State University, Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (2010) ; Pryor, Hurtado, DeAngelo, Blake, and Tran (2010)

Data Collection

A questionnaire exploring attitudes toward foreign language education, English as an International Language, and intercultural communication was administered during a one-week period. Administration occurred primarily in political science classes and courses fulfilling students' general education requirements. International students were excluded from the study. Participation was voluntary ; students were allowed to opt out of answering the questionnaire, resulting in a response rate of 97.8 percent. Interviews with 29 students supplemented the data by providing explanations and more detailed responses.

Participants

Of the 481 students who completed the questionnaire, 36.4 percent were male, 63.4 percent were female, and 0.2 percent did not respond. Students were fairly evenly divided in current status at the university (freshmen 28.9 percent, sophomore 28.1 percent, junior 24.3 percent, senior 17.9 percent, dual status/no response 0.8

percent). Students ranged in age from “18 or younger” (16.8 percent) to “31 or older” (3.3 percent), with the largest number of students indicating they were 19–20 years old (43.5 percent). Approximately two–thirds of the students said they had been abroad.

Students were from a wide variety of majors, with no major having a majority of the students. Only one percent of the students was majoring in “foreign languages and literature ;” this is an important consideration since the following discussions focus on attitudes toward foreign languages.

Nearly 90 percent of the students indicated the language they spoke at home while growing up was English. The U.S. Census Bureau (2012) found that approximately 20 percent of American households use a language other than English at home, but 91.5 percent of the CIRP Freshman Survey respondents said English was their native language (Pryor, Hurtado, DeAngelo, Blake, and Tran, 2010). Considering the fact that the Census Bureau statistics include families with children who do not attend tertiary education, the results suggest the students in the current study were forthcoming with their language background.

Results and Discussion

Current Foreign Language Ability

Students were asked what foreign languages they spoke. As Table 2 demonstrates, the most frequent response was Spanish ; this is not surprising since Spanish is the most commonly taught language other than English in the United States (Rhodes and Pufahl, 2009). When university students in the current study were asked about the popularity of Spanish in the United States, a bilingual male explained, “Because of the relationship to Latin America. Latinos and Hispanics are the most popular race in the U.S. so I figure Spanish (is the most popular language). And it’s the most offered in schools. That’s another reason why it’s Spanish. If they offered more

Chinese (it would be different).” A senior male noted, “Even in the general public—you get *press 2 for Spanish* all the time. We’re turning into a multi-lingual country,” and another student emphasized the necessity of knowing Spanish. “I grew up in Southern California. If you don’t know Mexican or Spanish...you have trouble doing business with a lot of Spanish-speaking people.”

Spanish	29.1
French	12.3
Japanese	1.5
German	1.0
Chinese	0.6
Russian	0.4
Korean	0.2
Other	15.6
None	49.1

Table 2 : Foreign languages spoken. (Percent response.)

Note : Multiple responses were acceptable.

When asked about their experiences in studying a foreign language, some students said they started to study Spanish in elementary school, and one student described going to a bilingual school in which all of the courses were taught in English for half of the year and Spanish for the other half of the year. Spanish, French, and Latin were frequently mentioned as being taught in primary and secondary educational settings. To a much lesser extent, students noted that German and Italian were offered in their schools, with Chinese and Japanese apparently only provided in a limited number of school districts. These students’ observations reflect national statistics, which show that German, Chinese, and Japanese were taught in 2 percent, 3 percent, and 1 percent, respectively, of the elementary schools and 14 percent, 4 percent, and 3 percent, respectively, of the secondary schools offering foreign languages (Rhodes and Pufahl, 2009, p. 3).

Although almost 30 percent of the students indicated they speak Spanish, nearly half of the students said they did not speak a foreign language. A male sophomore acknowledged this when noting, “English (speaking) people usually only know their

own language and don't care to know any other language." Considering the economic strength of the United States and the fact that English is often referred to as the world's lingua franca (see, for example, Jenkins, 2007 ; Seidlhofer, 2011) and a language for international communication (see, for example, Crystal, 2008 ; Graddol, 2006 ; McKay, 2002), this result may not be surprising. However, during the interviews, many students had negative perceptions of an over-reliance on English. For example, one student observed, "We have this whole normative culture type thing. In the UN or the international community, I never see our President giving addresses in other countries in their language, but when international leaders come to the US, they speak and answer questions in English most often." The student went on to provide a reason for the difference. "It seems that English is becoming the international language. I'm not sure if that's true or not." Another student echoed this while observing, "Well, my perception, right now, as an American, and I don't think this is necessarily too ignorant of me because I have traveled abroad and I do know how we [Americans] aren't perceived in the best light, but regardless of that, the English language is an essential language to business."

Although 49.1 percent of the students indicated they did not currently speak a foreign language, it would be imprudent to conclude that half of the students had not studied one. During the interviews, some students pointed out that they had studied another language besides English but did not feel fluent so they did not mark the language on the questionnaire. In addition, more than a few students alluded to having more fluency in the past than at the time of the interview. One student, for instance, said that he studied Spanish during secondary education and went to Spain for a two-week home stay in high school. This student assessed his ability during high school as a seven or eight on a scale from one (low) to ten (high). In spite of this, he did not select Spanish on the questionnaire because "I haven't spoken it in a while in a decent amount and my level is now probably a six." These self-imposed standards of fluency are intriguing because this was the first item on the questionnaire, and it asked, "What foreign language(s) do you speak?" without requiring fluency. Students' reluctance to assert that they speak a language even

though they have studied it provides one of many possible explanations for why almost half of the students in the current study indicated they did not speak a foreign language while 93.8 percent of all students in the CIRP Freshman Survey said they had studied a foreign language for two years during high school (Pryor, Hurtado, DeAngelo, Blake, and Tran, 2010).

There were important differences between the 2013 Gallup survey results and the university students' responses. To begin with, although two-thirds of those polled by Gallup said they did not have the ability to hold a conversation in a language other than English (Jones, 2013), fewer university students (half) said they did not speak a foreign language. This difference could, however, be the result of the difference in the language on the two surveys. Second, for both surveys Spanish and French were the first and second most often spoken languages. There were, however, differences in the popularity of other languages. For example, only 1 percent of the university students indicated they spoke German, while 12 percent of the Americans in the Gallop poll indicated they spoke it, making it the third most popular language (Jones, 2013). Reflecting the inaccessibility of Chinese language studies until post-secondary education, Chinese was spoken by 3 percent of the general population (Jones, 2013) but by less than one percent of the university students.

Desired Foreign Language Ability

On the questionnaire, students were asked what, if any, foreign language(s) they would like to be able to speak although they did not currently speak them. Students choose, on average, 1.5 languages. As Table 3 demonstrates, only 12.5 percent of the students marked "None." A statistically significant difference ($p < 0.001$, $df = 1$, $\chi^2 = 152.304$) between the number of students who did not speak a foreign language and the number of students who did not want to speak another language suggests that for these American students a current inability did not impede the desire to acquire another language. The results also suggest that, similar to the findings by

Price and Gascoigne (2006) seven years ago, there is a desire to have foreign language education.

Spanish	36.0
French	28.3
Chinese	17.5
German	14.6
Japanese	11.0
Russian	9.8
Korean	2.7
Other	26.2
None	12.5

Table 3 : Foreign languages that students would like to be able to speak. (Percent response.)

Note : Multiple responses were acceptable.

Students gave eight main reasons for choosing a language. Interviewees most often focused on travel, with one student noting, “I feel like if you’re going to go somewhere, you should speak the language.” The second most popular argument was cultural heritage. For example, one woman noted that she is an American but her heritage is Portuguese, so she would like to learn the language. Interestingly, two students indicated religious heritage was their motivation for wanting to study certain languages.

The next most popular factors were the aesthetics of the language and the economic power associated with the language. Students mentioned things such as “a beautiful language,” “a nice language,” and “sounds nice” when discussing the former. When expounding on the latter, students mentioned the status of the language and the country most often associated with that language. For example, one student observed, “Chinese [is] being used much more and being much more important in international business.” A female political science major explained that during a trip to China the previous summer, she was told that Chinese “will be the race to the top language in the world so I definitely want to learn Mandarin.”

Bourdieu (as cited in Block and Cameron, 2002) referred to foreign language

competence as “linguistic capital,” and several students’ discussions reflected the perception that language and communication abilities are economic commodities. For instance, a male management major pointed out, “Being able to speak other languages is a really big asset. My parents are bilingual, and I am, too. My parents have taught me the more languages you speak the more useful you are to other companies and since we are in a recession it’s good to make yourself as useful as possible is one thing. It takes a long time to actually get good at a language so when a company sees that, it’s like ‘oh, this person could be useful’.”

Block and Cameron (2002, p. 5) summarized the economic impact of learning a foreign language and suggested that the increased importance of employees’ linguistic capital has affected not only language learning motivation but also the “choices about which languages to learn.” A student echoed this when saying, “I just think that’s [Chinese is] the most important language to know at this point. It’s important because China is the biggest country in the world, and Chinese is the number one business language. If you want to communicate with the world, globally today, you have to know Chinese.” Similarly, a student who has studied Spanish and French said that he wanted to study Chinese because of economics and politics, concluding, “That’s the way to go.” Another student noted, “If I were a business person and I were looking to study a language and think about what language would probably be the most important right now, I’d probably take Chinese because China is just taking off.”

During the interviews, two additional incentives for learning a language were its perceived usefulness, which included not only the population of speakers around the world but also the use of the language by friends, and interest in the culture. The influence of the pop culture of *anime* and *manga* punctuated several of the discussions about the desire to learn Japanese.

The final two stimuli for wanting to learn another language were historical reasons, including an interest in history, and the belief that acquiring one language would facilitate the study of additional languages. For example, one student pointed

out, “I want to be more proficient in French and Spanish because with those you can really learn a lot of the other romance languages. It’s easier to learn them.”

When communication is a primary goal in foreign language education, questions such as “with whom” and “for what” become pertinent (Yashima, 2002, p. 54). As the interviews demonstrated, students have internalized their own answers to these questions and their motivation to learn a foreign language appears to vary by language. For example, while the economic strength of China dominated discussions about learning Chinese and the appeal of Japanese pop culture positively affected the desire to learn Japanese, the widespread use of Spanish contributed to its perceived value.

The above eight reasons for wanting to study a foreign language, given in order of popularity, differ from Price and Gascoigne (2006, p. 388), who found *cultural understanding* accounted for almost one-third of the arguments for foreign language studies. Travel, the most often given explanation in the current study, was a distant seventh place in the study seven years ago (Price and Gascoigne, 2006, p. 388). Furthermore, in 2006, the ninth most often cited reason was national security, but this was missing from the interviews in the current study. In contrast, Price and Gascoigne (2006, p. 388) did not have categories for language aesthetics, historical reasons, or the facilitation of language learning. This suggests that students’ considerations for learning a foreign language are fluid and must be regularly assessed.

Necessity of Foreign Language Fluency

On the questionnaire, the university students were asked to assess the necessity of being fluent in a foreign language. Using a five-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, don’t know, disagree, strongly disagree), students chose the response that most closely represented their opinion. As Table 4 demonstrates, the students’ opinions for the general public and for university graduates were comparable,

resulting in no statistically significant differences ($p < 0.010$, $df = 4$, $\chi^2 = 8.6295$).

	Strongly Agree	Agree	I don't know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Multiple response or No response
In the US, it is necessary for the general public to be fluent in a foreign language.	15.6	30.8	11.4	29.3	11.6	1.3
In the US, it is necessary for university graduates to be fluent in a foreign language.	15.8	28.1	16.8	29.7	8.1	1.5

Table 4 : Students' opinions about the necessity of foreign language fluency. (Percent response.)

The number of students who agreed/strongly agreed and disagreed/strongly disagreed to the statements was also similar, resulting in no statistically significant differences for opinions about fluency in the general public ($p < 0.010$, $df = 1$, $\chi^2 = 1.6100$) and for university graduates ($p < 0.010$, $df = 1$, $\chi^2 = 2.1400$). Considering the effort required to become fluent and the role of English in the world, it may not be surprising that students were almost equally divided in their opinions, and taken alone, these results suggest there is a need for educators to convince university students that it is worth the investment of time and energy to learn a foreign language. When asked to give reasons for their opinions, the results were, however, less straightforward. Four main themes emerged during the interviews.

First, although the statistics in Table 4 do not demonstrate this trend, during the interviews many students pointed to the greater expectations that are placed on university graduates. One student asserted, “University graduates are in higher education. They are not coming straight out of high school. You graduated from university, so you are not just the general public. You’re held to a higher standard. That’s why you get paid more than a high school graduate. That’s why you should know more and another language.” Similarly, a student who agreed to the general public item but strongly agreed to the university graduates item contended, “I did say strongly agree for university graduates because there’s a little bit more opportunity, like there’s study abroad options in university and not to mention grad school, and I feel you go to university to prepare for a job, and these days, it’s very

likely you'll go into jobs that are going to require something along those lines." These students' perceptions reflect the Gallup poll's finding of a positive correlation between higher education and second language ability (McComb, 2001). In the Gallup survey, 20 percent of the high school graduates were bilingual, but 33 percent of college graduates and 43 percent of those with postgraduate studies were bilingual (McComb, 2001, para. 2).

Secondly, students who supported learning an additional language cited increased opportunities. For example, one student noted, "As the world itself is becoming more globalized, it's almost become a necessity to be able to speak in another language." Another student reflected, "It helps landing jobs, especially if you're doing something that has to do with other nations. Well, everything basically has to do with others, for example, as a nurse you might have foreign patients. If you're going to do political science, things like government or running for a political position, it would also be a tremendous help if you knew another language and it just makes you look more desirable. If there are two people who are up, and you look at this person who only speaks English but this person speaks another language fluently, you might want to take them because we have this kind of clients. A lot of jobs nowadays, even receptionist jobs, you have to, they prefer you to speak a language fluently." Students also discussed additional opportunities to communicate and the ability to grow intellectually (for example, "the chance to exercise your brain").

In contrast, some students who disagreed to the questionnaire items pointed to the lack of need, with one saying, "I'm fluent in Spanish but I hardly ever use it, very rarely. Everywhere I go, everyone speaks English. I don't think it's going to help me in my regular life." Similarly, another student who disagreed noted, "Most people in the U.S. aren't looking to go out and about. They stay in the U.S. That's where they are. The U.S. is almost all English so I don't feel everyone needs to learn a foreign language unless that's what your career choice is going to be." These attitudes echo those in Price and Gascoigne (2006, p. 388), who found the main detractor to foreign language studies was the belief that it was not necessary.

The third trend during the interviews, given by both students agreeing and disagreeing about the need for fluency, was a lack of availability. One student asserted, “I agreed that graduates should be fluent in a foreign language, but is it realistic? No. It’s not realistic, but I believe yes, the U.S. should aim for that. I think with more and more globalization in this era, people are more inclined to try to learn more languages, and over time that will be the goal but as of now, they haven’t been exposed to another language.” Ironically, a student who disagreed to the two questionnaire items provided a similar observation when emphasizing, “Well, that’s not my opinion. I was thinking about it more from an educational standpoint. In my experience they cut all the foreign language classes in middle and elementary school, so I think they don’t put an emphasis on learning a foreign language...In the U.S. there’s not an emphasis.” According to the results of a national survey on foreign language teaching in American schools, these students have accurately surmised the current educational focus. Between 1997 and 2008 “the percentage of elementary and middle schools offering foreign language instruction decreased...from 31% to 25% of all elementary schools and from 75% to 58% of all middle schools” (Rhodes and Pufahl, 2008, p. 1).

The final trend during the interviews was the necessity of cultural awareness and the ability to communicate with others. Within this context, one student observed that learning a foreign language is about “not just thinking English is awesome, English is all I need.”

Twenty percent of those in the Gallup study believed it is “essential” for Americans to learn to speak a language other than English (Jones, 2013). Because the university students were asked about being fluent, rather than only learning to speak another language, it may not be surprising that less than 20 percent strongly agreed. However, the Gallup poll also found that 50 percent of the Americans thought learning a second language was “important ;” taken together, 70 percent of those polled valued foreign language studies (Jones, 2013). In contrast, in the current study there were almost equal numbers of university students who agreed and disagreed to the necessity of fluency. As a result, the relationship between

“learning to speak a second language” and “the necessity of foreign language fluency” must be explored in more detail.

A report on the demands of the current and future workforce demonstrated “a disparity between workers’ skills and the percentage of employers who indicated moderate to high demand for employees who are proficient to conduct business in Arabic, Chinese, Russian, or Spanish, with the largest disparity in Spanish” and the second largest gap in Chinese (Heitner and Miller, 2010, p. 32). While writing for the college version of the national American daily newspaper, *USA Today*, a second-year graduate student emphasized this when observing (Walker, 2012, para. 1), “When it comes to foreign languages in today’s society, being conversational is no longer enough. If you hope to use your language skills as leverage to snag a job post-graduation, become fluent.” In spite of the fact that both statistics and peers emphasize the importance of foreign language fluency, the current study suggests that the majority of American university students do not believe it is necessary. Implications for not only the future American workforce but also current and future curriculum reform abound.

Conclusions

The results of this study show that although the most spoken second language is Spanish, almost half of the American university students claimed they did not speak a foreign language. The interviews indicate, however, that this number may have been inflated because students who had studied a foreign language lacked the confidence to assert they could speak the language. In addition, students pointed to insufficient opportunities to use their second language. Both of these findings suggest it is essential for American educators and stakeholders to develop effective opportunities for students to learn and then use, maintain, and improve their foreign language skills.

The current study indicates that a majority of the American university students

had a desire to speak another language besides English. Students' explanations included travel, career opportunities, and the economic power of languages such as Chinese. The fact that the United States is continuing to develop into a multi-cultural country was also mentioned. Students also cited usefulness, deeper cultural awareness, and a better ability to communicate with others. While some of these considerations were similar to those of previous studies, there were new reasons as well as new rankings. In addition, the current study indicates the reasons for learning a foreign language vary by language. As a result, it is important to conduct periodic studies to discover subtle shifts in students' foreign language attitudes and motivation.

Overall, the American students in the current study did not emphasize the need for the general public or tertiary graduates to be fluent in a foreign language. At first glance, this would appear to agree with the Gallup findings, but further research into fluency expectations is necessary. For example, although the students did not emphasize foreign language fluency, during the interviews, the students indicated that foreign language ability increases career and social opportunities. They also asserted that there are increased expectations for university graduates compared to the general public. Some of the American university students blamed the lack of widespread foreign language fluency on a lack of need, as well as the lack of courses in primary and secondary education. In addition, some students admitted there is an over-reliance on English in the United States. Taken together, the students' explanations emphasize the need for future studies that focus on American tertiary students' perceived obstacles to fluency. Furthermore, these students' assertions are all issues that must be resolved with American national education policy and the corresponding financing.

Notes

¹ Many languages are used in the United States, including indigenous languages and those of immigrants. As a result, languages cannot be broadly classified as second or

foreign languages. To avoid confusion or misinterpretations, the United States census refers to “languages other than English spoken at home” (Ryan, 2013). However, educational curriculum, the CIRP Freshman Survey, and the academic literature often use “foreign languages” when discussing languages other than English in the United States. For the purposes of this paper, the terms “foreign language,” “second language,” and “language other than English” will be used interchangeably to refer to any language that the student does not consider to be his/her first (in other words, home) language.

² The same questionnaire is being used in countries across East and Southeast Asia. Although beyond the scope of the current paper, future papers will contrast the American tertiary students’ opinions with Asian and East Asian tertiary students’ beliefs.

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