

‘Scholars-in-Training’ in History and Political Science
and their Ability to use Foreign Languages in Research

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Abstract

This exploratory study surveys graduate students in History (n=25) and Political Science (n=25) on their ability to use foreign languages in research, and compares them to a group of graduate students (n=25) from 10 other Humanities and Social Science departments who reported having the ability to use multiple languages in their research. Respondents were asked how important knowledge of languages is to their field, what foreign languages they know well enough to carry out research tasks, and what advantages the language ability gives them in their work.

The study found that:

- Nearly two-thirds of respondents in History and 44% of the respondents in Political Science asserted that languages were “crucial” or “very important” to their field or subfield.

- A third of the graduate students in History expressed frustration with departmental and university support for learning languages, while three of the graduate students in Political Science (12%) stated that they would like more support from the department and the university.

- The median student in History and Political Science had learned one language well enough to discuss, while at the level of deciphering a text, the median History student was able to handle three languages and the median student of Political Science could handle two languages—compared to the median graduate student from the group with multiple research languages, who reported having learned five languages well enough to decipher a text.

- The graduate students were exploiting related languages to increase the number of languages they could cover (History, 76%; Political Science, 44%), although to a lesser extent than the multilingual graduate students, of whom 92% knew two or more languages from a language family.

- Most respondents said that the major advantages to their foreign language knowledge were access to otherwise inaccessible primary and secondary sources, and independence from possibly inaccurate translations.

Based on respondents’ comments about departmental and university support of language learning, the study recommends more use of foreign language source materials in coursework, more courses in the home department and/or language departments devoted to developing relevant advanced language proficiency, and greater flexibility and financial support on the part of department and university to accommodate students developing language proficiency.

Introduction

The university is a segment of U.S. society that plays a double role in the matter of the ‘national foreign language capability’ (the ability of the country’s population to speak foreign languages): as users of foreign languages pursuing academic goals and objectives but also as teachers of others who use languages in a broad range of non-academic capacities. It is primarily the first role that interests me in this study. We can think of the university as an organized community of individuals or teams of investigators within established fields of inquiry, seeking to deepen understanding of what can be known and is worth investigating. Some of the underlying work necessary for conducting research—gaining access to bodies of data and knowledge, or participating in scholarly discourses—may be possible solely via a foreign language. This means that the U.S. scholar who knows no foreign languages is necessarily restricted to carrying out research in English. That many find this state of affairs acceptable is troubling and problematic precisely because much of the world we want and ought to know, I contend, is accessible solely through languages other than English.

In connection with this fact, numerous commentators have pointed out in policy papers, reports, and newspaper editorials that in broad areas the U.S. is failing to engage with the rest of the world, overlooking subject matter that may be important, and potentially hindering its own ability to compete or to protect U.S. security. To counter this state of affairs, many national professional organizations—some with a focus on language but many others with a focus on non-language areas, such as scholarship or business—have renewed their combined efforts to push for national leaders to do more to

promote the country's capacity to educate individuals to a level of advanced language proficiency. The government and business sectors have clear methods for estimating the need for languages in their respective areas, but in academia, a measurable need for foreign languages is not as apparent, since scholars in the university research community largely determine their own agenda (notwithstanding grant-awarding processes outside the university). The present study proceeds from the assumption that it may be useful to approach the emerging generation of scholars in selected departments and ask them about their perspective on the situation of language capability in the U.S. research community.

The study focuses on graduate students in two departments traditionally at the heart of the liberal arts, one in Humanities (History) and the other in Social Science (Political Science). Respondents were asked how important foreign language knowledge is to their research, and what advantages they see to having language ability or disadvantages to not having language ability. Additionally, the graduate students were asked whether, in their efforts to acquire language proficiency, their department and the university support or hinder them. The survey also asked what languages respondents know, in what combinations, and to what extent they are able to use those languages for professional purposes—in terms of whether they are able to discuss their work in another language, read a scholarly article, or decipher a text sufficiently to figure out whether an article is relevant or understand an inscription. The responses to these questions were compared to those provided in an earlier study by 25 self-identified learners of multiple

languages, drawn from other graduate programs in Humanities and Social Science at the university.¹

Since the point of interest for the research was the ‘capability’ of the graduate students as a group, the study was designed to examine *potential ability*, and not *actual use* of languages in research, and as such it relies entirely on self-reporting by respondents of the language knowledge and ability they claim to have. This aspect will be discussed further in the limitations section.

Literature Review

Overview

In this study I approach the question of the foreign language capability of graduate students in History and Political Science from a number of directions. First, I show the question as an issue of L2 learner motivation that is only peripherally treated within the literature of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) studies. Second, in order to present a context for American higher education, I provide the steps being taken by two other major sectors in society, government and business, to show their interest in improving the nation’s foreign language competence, and concrete steps on the part of government to support increased language study to high levels of proficiency. Third, I ask to what extent the national demands for more proficient users of languages are reflected and complemented by campaigns to step up and internationalize research at

¹From the outset it is important to say that, obviously, we would expect that the group designated “successful language learners of multiple languages” necessarily to know more languages than a group of students who were not chosen for their language ability. The comparison is not meant not to place anyone in a poor light, but instead intended to offer insights on what might be accomplished under more conducive conditions.

large research institutions such as the University of Minnesota. Fourth, I trace efforts to arrive at an “inventory” of the national foreign language capability in society and in higher education, using existing standards on what foreign languages U.S. researchers are encouraged to know. Finally, to explore one possible means of expanding foreign language capability—for the individual, higher education, or society—I draw upon research on multilingual individuals and their ability to acquire multiple languages in particular combinations.

Motivation of graduate students to learn foreign languages

To start, I would like to relate the topic of this study to the research on L2 learners’ motivation for learning foreign languages. The literature on L2 motivation has tended to focus on two basic types of motivation, *integrative*, or the desire to join or be part of a language community and culture (see, for example, Gardner & Lambert, 1959, 1972; Gardner, 1985; Lambert, 1980) and *instrumental*, or having some pragmatic or utilitarian purpose for acquiring foreign languages (see, for example, Dörnyei, 1990; Hudson, 2000; Wen, 1997). However, there seems to be little agreement among researchers on what factors in motivation are most influential.

While at first glance the acquisition of foreign languages for research purposes may seem to correspond only to instrumental motivation, it is possible that there are elements of integrative motivation as well, particularly if one were to consider the desire of young scholars to interact with the scholarly community, within the tradition of scholarship itself, or even a wish to understand and recreate the inner workings of a

milieu of another historical epoch (Elizabethan England) and or group of power-holders (the Kremlin).

A survey of recent research on motivation (whether instrumental or integrative) shows that almost none focuses on U.S. graduate students learning languages for research purposes. Instead, recent studies focus on students who are in situations that are probably not a good comparison. For example, much of the L2 motivation literature looks at EFL students who presumably have a different matrix of motivational factors since their L1 is not the international academic lingua franca. Non-English-speaking students would be likely to want to learn English L2 not just to access sources, but possibly also to study at an Anglophone university and live or at least spend time in an English-speaking country, participate in the dominant language culture of the scholarly community, or even to partake of the institutions of modern Western Culture, such as media, tourism, or communications and information technology. Other recent work on motivation seems to measure primarily how motivation contributes to ‘success in the language classroom’; however, for the purposes of understanding the motivation of the graduate students of this study, it would be important to locate research which differentiates the short-term goal and result of achieving success in the language classroom from the decision and persistence of a graduate student to attain proficiency for success in his/her field.

Some specialists in L2 motivation have noticed that the types of instrumental motivation studied are limited, in that the theories have targeted the foreign language classroom; in response to this Oxford and Shearrin (1994) have called for expanding the types and nature of instrumentality studied. I did not find research that took up this challenge. Although students in the present study did defend the importance or lack of

importance of foreign languages to their research, the complex interrelationships among integrative and instrumental motivation for SLA in both their academic and social lives could not be disentangled. More research relating to this question is needed.

The research on motivation has largely focused on topics relevant to instruction in language classrooms, such as how motivation can be predicted, the link of motivation and successful learning, and how teachers can activate motivation. The above discussion was intended to show that the issues of motivation most applicable for this study, i.e., how universities and departments are capitalizing on graduate students' existing motivation, and how graduate students' motivation is nurtured by departments and the university, seem to be untreated in the literature.

The next section will document the way the need for foreign languages is presented in U.S. society outside academia.

Foreign language capability for government and business purposes

In post-9/11 America, public opinion makers and politicians have begun to take more seriously warnings about Americans' aversion to learning foreign languages, and high-profile news stories have emphasized problems filling government positions requiring knowledge of languages other than English. A 2004 draft White Paper from The National Language Conference, a body of experts convened under the auspices of the Department of Defense, criticized the country's national foreign language capability and issued a "call to action", urging creation of a national strategy on foreign languages and cultural competency in government, academic, and private sectors, and more language instruction at all levels, particularly for critical languages (U.S. Department of Defense,

2004). The “call to action” embraces a broad set of global military and economic challenges:

We must act now to improve the gathering and analysis of information, advance international diplomacy, and support military operations. We must act to retain our global market leadership and succeed against increasingly sophisticated competitors whose workforces possess potent combinations of professional skills, knowledge of other cultures, and multiple language proficiencies. Our domestic well-being demands action to provide opportunities for all students to learn foreign languages important for the Nation, develop the capabilities of our heritage communities, and ensure services that are core to our quality of life (Department of Defense, 2004, p. iii).

The following year, the Department of Defense released a “roadmap” outlining a series of steps to be taken to improve its foreign language capabilities, with a similarly strong appeal to necessity not just for military purposes, but also outside of waging war.

Conflict against enemies speaking less-commonly-taught languages and thus the need for foreign language capability will not abate. Robust foreign language and foreign area expertise are critical to sustaining coalitions, pursuing regional stability, and conducting multi-national missions especially in post-conflict and other than combat, security, humanitarian, nation-building, and stability operations (Department of Defense, 2005, p. 3).

Subsequently, in April 2008, a national conference brought together representatives from academia, the federal government, and non-governmental agencies to put together a panel charged with developing a national foreign language policy platform (Wasley, 2008,

April 3). Other leaders in the foreign language community have used post-9/11 security revelations, coupled with economic concerns about increasing global competition, to issue reports highlighting the seriousness of the shortage of competent users of many languages, and making sets of recommendations on how to improve the national situation (Committee for Economic Development [CED], 2006; National Research Council [NRC], 2007).

The outcry over the security implications of the shortfalls of experts in languages has prompted the U.S. government to launch a series of initiatives to address the situation. One of the most prominent of the measures, *The National Security Language Initiative*, is designed to increase knowledge of languages with “vertical” application, from elementary school children “seed” programs focused on developing a national supply within the population-at-large, to targeted “end-product” grant opportunities for those who have intermediate or advanced skills in some language which they combine with some other professional competence. The initiative is intended to support teaching and language learning resources, and facilitate K-16 language study and exchanges in a number of languages deemed critical to the nation by a number of concerned agencies (U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of State, U.S. Department of Defense, & the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2006).

Much more focused on the “end-product” demand side of the effort, the Department of Defense released a strategic planning guide for 2006-2011 to create teams of language experts with specific assignment areas of expertise. One component of that plan envisages an unprecedented new role for society-at-large as a broad reservoir and potential supplier of language professionals who can be called up to work, like the armed

forces reserves, when necessary--“a Civilian Linguist Reserve Corps”—which consists of “volunteer civilian specialists with advanced proficiency in languages ... available to serve ... during times of need, crisis, and/or national emergency” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2005, p. 9).

The above is intended to demonstrate that in recent years entities within the Federal Government are moving more and more toward a task- and need-based approach to foreign language coverage, assembling teams of individuals who are highly competent users of language to improve overall foreign language capability.

In the next section I would like to investigate to what extent this sense of necessity on the part of government and business is taken up in American higher education.

Internationalization and research support at the university

Based on recent announcements from the administration, the University of Minnesota would seem poised to lead a campaign to produce American scholars who possess the language skills to access the bodies of data and knowledge necessary for top-quality research of global scope. In his broad campaign to transform the University of Minnesota, President Robert Bruininks (2005) announced the strategic positioning goal of making the institution “one of the top three public research universities in the world”, and charged top administrators with the task to establish a task force

[to] develop a strategy, plan and structure to most effectively leverage, stimulate and coordinate cutting edge international research, and globally informed teaching and public engagement programs with selected partners in other countries. The

task force should address strategies for building strategic international partnerships with universities and research institutions; expansion of study abroad and international scholarly exchanges, and internationalization of the curriculum (Bruininks, 2005, p.18).

A task force established by President Bruininks issued a report stating that the effort to become one of the top three public research universities in the world demands “that internationalization, diversity, and academic excellence be inextricably intertwined and central to the University’s core mission,” and that the University’s core identity and mission “must develop a *global orientation* and realize its place in a developing *global network of engagement and scholarship*” [italics are mine] (Isaacman & Okediji, 2006). Additionally, the report goes on to say, the university “must demonstrate an uncompromising commitment to *international concerns*; weave *the international* into the very fabric of its institutional objectives, processes, and core values; and recognize that international concerns are not an accessory to the University’s mission but instead are at its core,” and, subsequently, the university “must invest in the creation of an institutional framework that nurtures interdisciplinary knowledge production, and provide the resources to encourage continuing engagement in *global affairs*” [italics are mine] (Isaacman & Okediji). That report also calls specifically for expanded language instruction at the university.

Subsequent university bodies have done important work to evaluate progress towards the goals of internationalization and heightened status as a research institution; still, the overall implementation, particularly of the internationalization program, appears to have been uneven. A July 2007 internationalization progress report notes that

university officials tend toward a narrow understanding of the term, with most of the focus on attracting foreign students and on encouraging study abroad (*Bringing the world to U*, 2007). While these developments alone should be viewed as positive trends, they are clearly insufficient in terms of the overall aim of producing graduates (and new generations of researchers) who can understand the world better and who engage with it more. National trends suggest that although more students are studying abroad, it is possible and even likely that they are “engaging with the world” less than those who have studied abroad in the past, as recent trends suggest that study abroad programs are increasingly short-term, conducted in English, and not requiring any sort of language study (Obst, Bhandari, & Witherell, 2007). Although it is commendable that more students are having an experience abroad and potentially achieving part of the goal of gaining a more international perspective, it is important to note that this and the increased foreign student population, perhaps the most implemented aspects of “internationalizing the university”, are doing little or nothing to work toward expanding the national language competence reservoir or contribute to development of a broad national cadre of language professionals.

These statements suggest strongly that the University of Minnesota may view its internationalization and research agenda as largely unrelated to promoting the use of foreign languages, and not see a need for foreign languages in conducting global research of high quality.

From here I would like to look at efforts to document foreign language capability—of the nation as a whole, the U.S. research community, and graduate students.

Determining foreign language capability

Despite the above assertions of deficiency in the national foreign language capability, it appears that up until very recently there has been little attempt to establish an inventory of foreign language speakers or ability at any particular level for graduate students, higher education, or even for the country. It appears no research exists addressing this question for any part of the U.S. academic research community.

This state of things may be changing. In connection with the post-9/11 language debate, the Social Science Research Council initiated a major project under a government grant to examine a number of aspects, including language instruction, of Title VI-funded area studies centers for four regions: the Middle East, South Asia, Russia/Eurasia, and Central Asia.² The authors have not yet analyzed the data, but a preliminary report from March 2009 indicates that they have noted a strong difference between the attitude of humanists, such as historians, and social scientists regarding studying language.

We were impressed by how often, in [the] interviews, humanists stressed the germinal importance of language instruction for doctoral training, and how often social scientists spoke of language acquisition as a high cost of regionally oriented study, even a prohibitive barrier to it (Stevens & Miller-Idriss, 2009, p. 14).

As regards the population as a whole, a 2000 survey of 1,400 U.S. respondents indicated that approximately 26% spoke a foreign language and that 10% reported speaking a foreign language “very well”. The study reported the results primarily in terms of what percentage reported being able to speak a foreign language “very well” (Spanish,

² The mandate of Title VI legislation was to create language and cultural experts in particular world regions, world affairs, and international studies.

50%; French 15%; German 9%), and not in terms of breadth of language coverage or number of multilingual individuals (Robinson, Rivers, & Brecht, 2006). There is also census information on what language is spoken in U.S. homes, which can give a rough picture of the foreign language coverage for the population as a whole, in terms of native language competence. Still, it is likely that these figures are more indicative of certain immigration and assimilation resistance trends, and not a reflection of the abilities of the researchers at academic institutions.

A possible indication of the contours of the foreign language capability of graduate students may be gleaned from a 2008 survey of 764 graduate students from Brown University which shows that, when asked to list languages they felt competent enough to teach, the highest percentage reported was Spanish (70 of 764, or 9%), followed by French (37 of 764, or 5%), with all other languages trailing far behind (Brown University, 2008). However, feeling competent to teach a language is not necessarily equivalent to being able to conduct research using that language, although it is likely to mean that the individual can use the language in at least some research tasks.

We do have extensive data on foreign language enrollments from the Modern Language Association (Furman, Goldberg, & Lusin, 2007), which can serve as a rough indicator of language coverage, and the relative differences in numbers of individuals who have studied Spanish and the other most-commonly-taught languages vis-à-vis the less-commonly-taught-languages. But data on what languages are being taught can only serve as a rough indication of what languages are being acquired by graduate students. There appears to be no direct assessment of the language ability of any group of professionals in the research literature, let alone academics or graduate students.

The above discussion suggests that, while there are some broad indicators of what languages are known by the population at large and are (or could be) taught in American schools and universities, there have to my knowledge been no direct attempts to measure the foreign language proficiency of graduate students themselves.

The next section will examine whether there are standards or guidelines for universities and departments that would indicate whether a command of languages is felt to be useful for academic research in the disciplines.

Existing foreign language standards for researchers

In the post-9/11 debate conducted in the public sphere about national language competence, one of the crucial issues has been ensuring that those who are charged with carrying out tasks have a proficiency level sufficiently high to do so competently. To return to the comparison with government agencies, the Department of Defense's Strategic Planning Guide for 2006-2011 specifically sets a standard for many of its specialists at Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) level 3 ability in reading, listening, and speaking (U.S. Department of Defense, 2005).³ Along these lines, this study proceeds from the assumption that American scholars' proficiency level in world languages necessarily affects the quality and extent of research of a transnational or cross-cultural nature that is carried out in U.S. higher education. But what language

³ The ILR scale is defined primarily in terms of the ability to carry out certain tasks, with ILR 3 designating 'professional working proficiency' ("Able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, and professional topics") (Interagency Roundtable Language Skill Level Descriptions, no date, p. 3). ILR 3 is roughly equivalent to the Association for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) scale of "superior"; while ILR 2, which indicates "limited working ability", is roughly equivalent to the ACTFL scale of "advanced" (Summer Institute of Linguistics International, no date).

proficiency levels would be advisable in order to carry out particular kinds of academic research? There seem to be very few guidelines.

Academic research organizations are intended to represent the interests of researchers and departments; we might expect them to interpret their role with an eye to the national situation, relevant legislative action, and the role of research in the public sphere, and take an interest in offering some guidelines for departments. In light of the focus we just saw in government and business on improving language proficiency in order to meet society's needs to complete certain tasks, it is not unreasonable to assume that such organizations would suggest, for example, that it would be advantageous for an expert in a certain region to have some designated level of familiarity with the relevant languages of that region in order to access sources. Yet the national associations for the Humanities and Social Sciences, (such as the Council of Graduate Schools, American Council on Education, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the Social Sciences Research Council⁴), do not issue recommendations on foreign language competency for specific disciplines or sub-disciplines, either for scholars or graduate programs. I was unable to find any research that specifically identifies standards for language ability of graduate students in the disciplines, nor did the professional research associations I contacted offer any guidelines.

Some professional associations for foreign language learning, however, have called for departments to take steps to enhance graduate students' language learning in

⁴ The Social Sciences Research Council is currently conducting a broad study on universities with Title-VI area studies centers that includes the question of language (see Stevens & Miller-Idriss, 2009); still, there are no indications that this would lead to specific language proficiency recommendations from the organization itself.

general terms. The MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages, a leading body of experts, has recently addressed a number of issues related to using languages to conduct quality research. In a May 2007 report intended to spark debate on the state of language instruction in the U.S. higher education and the organization and content of the language department and its relation to other disciplines, the committee urges faculty--in the social sciences in particular—to “recognize the limits monolingualism imposes on research” and to “work with colleagues to strengthen language requirements in the design of their majors and graduate programs” (MLA, 2007, para. 21). Also, the report states that “at the graduate level, language requirements are notoriously under-enforced across the humanities and the social sciences”; the MLA committee makes recommendations to “encourage departments to enforce language requirements in doctoral programs” and to “provide courses that enable students both to acquire genuinely usable linguistic skills and to apply those skills in research.”

The above summary suggests that, in contrast to government agencies which have developed a clearly defined set of guidelines on how well professionals should be able to use foreign languages for specific tasks, U.S. higher education does not define what foreign languages are necessary, at what proficiency level, to carry out academic research in the disciplines, nor have national professional research organizations provided guidance in this matter.

In the following section, I will explore the possibility of multilingualism as a component in the national foreign language capability.

Role of multilingual individuals in the national foreign language capability

In the national debate on the national foreign language capability, there seems to be very little attention paid to the possibility of individuals learning multiple languages. From looking at the various programs and initiatives, one might conclude that the basic assumption is that the desired and only feasible end product is a nation of native speakers of English, some of whom have acquired competence in one foreign language. Such a scenario of “native speaker of English + 1 foreign language” seems remote from any likely reality (largely due to the varying abilities of individuals to learn languages), and not reflective of societies in parts of the world with higher levels of language capability. A multilingual society consisting of some (but not all) individuals who have achieved varying degrees of mastery of two or more foreign languages is probably a more realistic ideal and model.

Towards this end, individuals’ ability to use a known language to learn additional languages is an important issue, and is a growing area of research, particularly in Europe, where there are entire communities of multilingual learners; the relevant literature on acquisition of multilingualism is already quite extensive. The overall findings are that learning subsequent languages often leads to awareness as to how languages work, which in turn fosters further successful language learning. Due to their experience in language learning, multilingual learners acquire and use different strategies in adding third or more languages than monolingual students do in learning their second language (Jessner, 2008).

In particular, research shows that learners making conscious use of similarities between typologically-related European languages can learn languages faster and more efficiently (Klein, no date, www.eurocomresearch.net). A large-scale systematic effort to

exploit the acquisition of languages that are similar has been mounted by the EuroCom (European Comprehension) project, which involves training in inferencing techniques in acquiring typologically-related languages, such as in developing reading competence in the Romance, Germanic, and Slavic languages (Eurocom, no date, www.eurocomcenter.com).

This final section suggests that having some individuals learn multiple related languages, especially related European languages, might play a greater role in the effort to expand the overall language capability of U.S. scholars and of the nation as well.

The review of the literature suggests that there is little to no research on the motivation of graduate students to learn languages for research purposes, and little to no research on the foreign language capability and multilingualism in U.S. higher education. Despite good intentions on the part of top university administrators at the University of Minnesota to “internationalize” and expand support for research, they seem on the whole uninterested in considering the role of language proficiency, particularly in graduate education, in order to achieve these aims. In stark contrast, business and government are calling for more proficiency, especially in languages deemed “critical”, and government in particular is reorganizing departments and committing funds to new programs designed to increase the national foreign language capability. While some departments have implemented and maintain their own stringent requirements for graduate education, it appears that universities and professional Humanities and Social Science research associations have not seen fit to make specific recommendations on levels of foreign language proficiency for scholars. There have only been the merest beginnings of an

inventory of language coverage in the U.S. research community, and there has not been any work on the role that individuals' multilingualism might play in the effort to increase language coverage within the academy.

This paper presents an exploratory hybrid quantitative and qualitative study aimed at identifying the ability of the emerging generation of U.S. researchers in History and Political Science to make use of foreign languages in conducting research in their fields. The study asks to what extent multilingualism occurs in three groups of graduate students, scholars-in-training at a major American research university (the University of Minnesota), and in what forms. Also, it seeks to discover what languages the graduate students learn, and whether they learn combinations of related languages. The study is based on a survey of respondents from two large and prestigious departments with international and cross-cultural content yet a non-language focus, History and Political Science, and compares their self-reported ability with that of multilingual graduate students from a range of other departments in the Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Minnesota. Specifically, the research questions are:

1. How important do graduate students in History and Political Science feel that languages are to their work?
2. What advantages are there to knowing languages in carrying out research, from the point of view of graduate students in History or Political Science?
3. What languages do graduate students in History or Political Science report being able to use in research, in comparison to those reported by multilingual graduate students from a range of other departments?

4. How many languages do individual graduate students in History and Political Science report being able to use in research, in comparison to the multilingual graduate students?

5. Are there particular patterns apparent in the language combinations that the graduate students in History or Political Science report knowing, in comparison to patterns apparent in the language knowledge reported by the multilingual graduate students?

6. Do the graduate students in History or Political Science see their departments and the university as helping or hindering them in learning languages, and if so, in what ways?

Method

Participants

The main component of the study seeks to establish the extent of language knowledge for research purposes within History and Political Science, two large departments that do not have language as part of its subject of study per se. Out of 132 graduate students contacted in the History Department, 25 (19%) responded (15 men, 10 women); out of 92 graduate students contacted in the Political Science Department, 26 (28%) responded (13 men, 9 women, 3 chose not to reveal their gender), with one respondent removed randomly. The subfields represented among the graduate students of History (n=25) were: U.S. or American History, 9; Early Modern/Modern European History, 5; Medieval History, 6; African History, 2; Latin American History, 2; and Asian History, 1. Among the graduate students of Political Science (n=25), the subfields

were: Comparative Politics/International Relations, 14; U.S. Politics, 6; Political Theory/History of Political Thought, 3; other topics, 2.

In the first phase of the study, a comparison group of graduate students who had learned multiple languages was drawn from 15 departments in the Humanities and Social Sciences (including English as a Second Language and Liberal Studies). Emails were sent to approximately 518 graduate students, asking them to identify themselves if they “had learned more languages than required by their department.” There were 25 members (8 men, 16 women, and 1 who chose not to reveal gender) of this multilingual group (4.8%) from 10 different departments (see Table 1). The estimated 4.8% response rate reflects the total number of students contacted, but not the total number of students who might have qualified for the study.

Table 1.

Multilingual component of survey: departments or programs selected and number of respondents

Department or Program	No. of Respondents
Spanish/Portuguese	5
ESL	5
Comparative Literature	5
Linguistics	2
German/Scandinavian/Dutch	2
Classics	2
Art History	1
Asian Languages and Literature	1
Anthropology	1
Sociology	1
Total	25

Instrumentation

In phase one of the study, the multilingual graduate students were surveyed, and one year later the graduate students in History and Political Science were surveyed. The instrument was a survey with 4 or 7 items (depending on the phase of the study) requesting respondents to indicate language knowledge in connection with language-dependent research tasks, such as being able to discuss one's work or read a scholarly article (see Appendix A for the instrument used in the first phase and Appendix B for the instrument used in the second phase). The instrumentation was essentially the same for both, although in the second stage of the project (Appendix B), one question (#3) in the survey was changed from open to multiple choice and three questions (#1, #4, and #7) were added in order to elicit more precise answers.

In order to establish approximate skill-based standards for proficiency and capability, the questions were oriented toward basic research tasks, such as interviewing and discussing, reading, and deciphering a text, and, further, how the graduate students themselves saw their ability to carry out those tasks. In both the first and second phases, respondents were asked in which languages they could discuss or interview (see Appendix A, Question 1a; Appendix B, Question 2a), in which languages they could read a scholarly article (see Appendix A, Question 1b, Appendix B, Question 2b), and in which languages they could determine the relevance of a foreign-language text to their work (see Appendix A, Question 1c; Appendix B, Question 2c).

To ascertain the importance of languages for their field (second phase only), the study had respondents choose one of four possible answers (see Appendix B, Question 1). To allow for the possibility that respondents understood professional tasks in broader terms than I did, and to gain a better understanding of how they viewed their foreign

language needs, the survey used in both phases asked them to identify professional tasks in addition to the ones listed in the survey (see Appendix A, Question 1d; Appendix B, Question 2d).

The survey requested that respondents indicate how they had learned each language mentioned in the earlier answers (see Appendix A, Question 2; Appendix B, Question 3). In the first phase, to back up student claims of ability to discuss and read articles, the survey asked respondents to provide proficiency test scores (see Appendix A, Question 1e); however, only a few respondents had scores to report and for this reason this question was dropped in the second phase and was not included in the findings.

In both phases the survey asked respondents to give specific examples of advantages they felt they had using their foreign languages in carrying out professional tasks (see Appendix A, Question 3; Appendix B, Question 5), and, conversely, of disadvantages their colleagues had or might experience from not having sufficient foreign language ability in similar sorts of tasks (see Appendix A, Question 4; Appendix B, Question 6).

In addition to the items above, the survey for phase two contained three additional questions (plus a modification) in order to elicit more precise answers. It asked respondents to assign a value to the importance of foreign language knowledge for the respondents' research focus (see Appendix B, Question 1), and also asked explicitly about departmental or university support for language study (see Appendix B, Question 7), and whether respondents had actually used a foreign language in their research (see Appendix B, Question 4). For the question on how the respondent learned the language (see Appendix A, Question 2), it added the following specific choices: home, school,

university course, lived in country, self-study, and asked the respondent's native language (see Appendix B, Question 3).

Data collection procedures

All three groups were given the option to respond to the questions by email or in a 10-minute face-to-face interview; however, the History and Political Science students had the additional options of filling out a hard-copy or online questionnaire. Initial response rates were low, and providing respondents with a link to a quick online survey proved to be most effective.

For phase one, which focused on multilingual graduate students, respondents had the option of answering by email or meeting in person for a recorded interview. Sixteen respondents chose to fill out the survey by email, while nine participated in person-to-person taped interviews. If respondents omitted data or specifics, follow-up questions were asked during the interview, or via an additional email. The follow-ups concerned clarification on how respondents learned or used languages, their native language, or incidents of colleagues lacking language ability.

In phase two of the study, with History and Political Science graduate students, respondents were able to fill out the survey by email, over the telephone, in person on hard copy, or in an online format. Among the History graduate students, 20 responded by filling out a hard copy of the questions, three by email, and two were interviewed; among the political scientists, 11 used the online survey option, three responded by email, one by telephone, three were interviewed, and six answered on hard copy. The same survey was used in each case, and apart from the fact that using the telephone required that the

researcher record the information by taking notes and the fact that online surveys exhibited fewer written-out answers, there was no noticeable variation apparent in the quality or quantity of data collected based on the means of delivery.

Data analysis procedures

For Research Question 1 (*How important do graduate students in History and Political Science feel that languages are to their work?*), respondents chose one of four possibilities (see Appendix B, Question 1), the results were tabulated, and then the percentage of the total was calculated for each of the four possibilities.

For Research Question 2 (*What advantages are there to knowing languages in carrying out research, from the point of view of graduate students in History or Political Science?*), respondents' comments on the advantages of having language ability and on disadvantages of not having language ability (see Appendix A, Questions 3 and 4; Appendix B, Questions 5 and 6) were examined. Answers were grouped into general categories based on the reasons that emerged from the responses given—such as access to data, access to an interpretive tradition of the field, comprehensiveness, and prestige among colleagues.

For Research Question 3 (*What languages do graduate students in History or Political Science report being able to use in research, in comparison to those reported by multilingual graduate students from a range of other departments?*), a list was made of all the languages in which at least one student from a particular group said he or she could discuss (see Appendix A, Question 1a; Appendix B, Question 2a), and then for those languages in which the students in that group said they could read (see Appendix A,

Question 1b; Appendix B, Question 2b), and finally for those languages in which they said they could decipher a text (see Appendix A, Question 1c; Appendix B, Question 2c), counting each language only once, in order to establish which languages and the number of languages for which one or more in the group had some ability to use in research. I let the respondents determine themselves whether they “knew” or “had learned” a language sufficiently well to use it in discussing their work, reading, or deciphering a text, on the grounds that, as scholars-in-training, they need to be able to judge what they are capable of in relation to conducting research.

The number of respondents who claimed ability to discuss in a particular language was tabulated and expressed as a percentage of the group (e.g., 5 of the 25 graduate students in History said that they are able to discuss their research in Spanish, or 20% of that group). That number was then increased by adding the number of respondents who said they were able to read that language, and expressed as a percentage, and increased again by the number of respondents who said they were able to decipher a text in the language.

For Research Question 4 (*How many languages do individual graduate students in History and Political Science report being able to use in research, in comparison to the multilingual graduate students?*), the number of languages in which respondents reported being able to discuss their work (see Appendix A, Question 1a; Appendix B, Question 2a), being able to read (see Appendix A, Question 1b; Appendix B, Question 2b), and being able to decipher (see Appendix A, Question 1c; Appendix B, Question 2c) was tabulated for each student, the range for the group was given, and the median determined for each group (History, Political Science, multilingual graduate students).

For Research Question 5 (*Are there particular patterns apparent in the language combinations that the graduate students in History or Political Science report knowing, in comparison to patterns apparent in the language knowledge reported by the multilingual graduate students?*), the study tabulated the number of students within each group who reported being able to decipher two or more languages (see Appendix A, Question 1a-c; Appendix B, Question 2a-c) from a major language family of typologically-related languages (those which emerged from the data were Romance, Germanic, Slavic, Celtic, African, and Indo-Aryan), and the percentage was calculated. Then the same procedure was undertaken to determine the number of students in the group who had learned more than one language from a language family, in order to determine whether students were exploiting related languages, and the percentage was calculated.

For Research Question 6 (*Do the graduate students in History or Political Science see their departments and the university as helping or hindering them in learning languages, and if so, in what ways?*), the study examined responses on whether respondents felt the department or university had supported their language learning, and tabulated them according to whether the respondent had positive or negative comments, and then presented the range of reason(s) given, based on categories which emerged from the data. The percentage of positive and negative answers was also calculated.

Findings

1. *How important do graduate students in History and Political Science feel that languages are to their work?*

There was a stronger feeling among the graduate students in History than the graduate students in Political Science that languages are important to their research. Two out of three (67%) of those in History who answered the question said that knowledge of foreign languages was “crucial” or “very important” to their research, while among those in Political Science who answered the question, that figure was just under half (45%) (see Table 1). The Americanists in both departments were less likely to feel languages are important to their field than their colleagues studying regions outside the U.S., although this was not always the case.

Table 2.

Relative importance of foreign language knowledge to graduate students in History and Political Science.

	History	Political
Crucial	12 responses (57%); Modern U.S. history, Africa, Latin America, Medieval (5), Early Modern Europe (2), Early Modern Spain, 19 th Century China	2 responses (6%); Politics of Indigenous Peoples, International Relations/Comparative Politics
Very important	2 responses (10%); Early American, Modern Europe	8 responses (36%); Comparative Politics & Methods (5), International Relations, Political Theory (2), American Politics
Could be useful	7 responses (35%); U.S. or American History (4), U.S. Cultural History, American Indian, “History”	8 responses (36%); American, International Relations (2), Comparative Politics & Methods, History of Political Thought, Comparative Politics/Theory, Gender & Politics, Judicial Politics, Human Rights & Conflict
Not at all important	0	4 responses (18%); U.S. Congress, American/U.S. Politics (2), Judicial Politics

Totals do not add up to 25 because 4 graduate students in History and 3 graduate students in Political Science did not indicate importance.

One Americanist student, in U.S. history, claimed that, “language is not as important as in other fields in history” (H1), and another also specializing in U.S. History (H8) made the observation that most sources are in English. Still, a specialist in Early America stated that, for work on the American Revolution, “many sources from which I would draw are written in other languages” (H3), and a student of American Indian History stated that “[m]any sources, especially in the colonial period, are in Spanish and French” (H10). Another student focusing on Modern U.S. History maintained that, “U.S.-Mexico relations requires a proficiency in Spanish” (H4). A student of Modern Europe said “I study the British Empire, so getting two sides is very important” (H23)—the implication here is that getting only the English-language sources is missing “the side” of those “outside” the center of the empire. An African specialist noted that other languages were crucial “[b]ecause English isn’t a medium of communication for [the] majority of Africans” (H6). A specialist in Chinese History explained that “all [the] documents, primary [and] secondary sources, are in Chinese” (H25).

For Political Science, the numbers are supported by comments on the relative importance of foreign languages for the respective field. One graduate student political scientist, specializing in the U.S. Congress, took the position that languages were not important for his subfield, arguing that “there is little research [on this subject] done by scholars in other languages” (PS1). Along similar lines, a student of International Relations (IR) maintained that “[m]uch of the research I am interested in involves economics, which is mostly mathematics” (PS2). However, another student specializing in IR said that, “[s]adly”, languages were “desirable, but certainly not required” because

“relatively few [IR scholars] do in-depth field work in areas requiring knowledge of local languages” and “a lot of IR scholars work exclusively with data” (PS9). Students with a specialization in Comparative Politics, on the other hand, emphasized the need for languages in their work; one asserted that the scholar in this area “will not be able to do good country case study research (expected in my subfield) without language skills” (PS3). Another claimed that

- (1) [m]ost people in [this] subfield need to do extensive fieldwork in other countries[;] [i]f your research is in non-English speaking countries, you need to know the language in order to conduct interviews, read archives, etc. (PS8).

One of the graduate student IR specialists explained that

- (2) [d]ata only tells us so much; to know the world, we must experience it; to experience it, we must be able to understand it. Languages allow us to access completely different cultures and ways of being ... I'd find it hard to call myself an expert in an area if I didn't speak the language (PS9).

2. What advantages are there to knowing languages in carrying out research, from the point of view of graduate students in History or Political Science?

The majority of the graduate students, in both groups, stated that they saw advantages in knowing languages as a way of accessing research resources. The most-often cited reason of the respondents was the importance of gaining access to non-English primary and secondary sources, and to traditions and modes of scholarship and intellectual inquiry outside the Anglo-American sphere. Several respondents brought up the idea that their research was “more complete” due to having access to a broader range

of sources. One graduate student in History stated, “I wouldn’t have been able to look at some very interesting and vital sources for my dissertation” (H8). A student of Political Theory wrote that

(3) many of the philosophical and theoretical texts [from this area] are translated texts, often poorly or outdated, [and] ... [h]aving access to the texts in the original language is key for nuanced interpretive work. It is also [key] for effectively covering the secondary literature on primary texts, as there's often much more written about a particular text in the text's original language, most of which never gets translated (PS7).

Respondents also mentioned the need to evaluate and compare translations, and to understand un-translated quotations and theoretical concepts borrowed from other languages.

Other advantages included interacting with local scholars and the scholarly community, and getting through the “gatekeepers” of primary and secondary sources. A graduate student political scientist noted that his/her French language ability helped him/her to participate in broader scholarly debates: “there is also a divide between continental academia and Anglo-Saxon academia, and I'm able to bridge this divide” (PS9). A graduate student of History wrote:

(4) I was able to travel to [a restricted country] for research. There was a three-day wait for the letter that I presented to be processed. During these three days, I was not going to be let into the archive. With the daily cost of living in a foreign country and a short license, this was very problematic. *Since I speak [the language] very well*, I convinced the archivist to let me view the file cards while

I waited for the authorization. ... A few days later, I got to know some of the Americans. They told me that they thought that I was [native], because of the treatment that I received the first days that I was there and because I seemed to get along so well with the other [native] researchers. ... They were very surprised to learn my nationality. Later, comparing experiences, it became clear that I had had easier access to the archive than any of the other foreigners [italics are mine] (H13).

The respondents said the advantages of knowing foreign languages extended to interviewing local subjects, understanding recordings, and professional credibility. A graduate student political scientist noted that French gave him/her a research edge, “because many of the places I study (areas of humanitarian crisis) have French as an official language” (PS9). A few respondents said that knowing languages helped them to carve out a research niche in an under-studied field: a political scientist said he was able to include the Portuguese-speaking countries in his comparative analyses of Latin America, and a student of European History claimed he/she was able to include primary source material from countries like Greece, Ukraine, and Bulgaria. A specialist in Comparative Politics gave an instrumental reason: “knowing a foreign language to conduct a field study enhances your chances of getting published in an English journal greatly” (PS10).

Additional benefits respondents brought up included insights into the nature of language, cultural background for understanding one’s topic, and a broadening of perspective on the field.

The respondents noted many disadvantages for those who do not have the same command of languages; these were largely the reverse of the advantages cited above. The most frequently cited disadvantage was having limited or reduced access to research resources. Research in some fields, such as Chinese History, is “impossible” without language ability, one student in History stated. A student of Political Theory even noted that he/she had advantages his/her professors did not, saying,

(5) I’ve worked as a research assistant and translator several times. Here, language has opened a door for me; [however,] lack of language skills has made attaining area-specific knowledge that much more difficult for the professors for whom I’ve worked (PS9).

Others described colleagues who were forced to rely on translations, or who processed data more slowly because of low language ability. A literature specialist recalled having been at conferences where presenters had been “called out” for relying on “a questionable translation” of a piece of literature. A student of Political Theory stated that, in his/her field,

(8) various scholars make arguments that hinge upon the meaning of a particular word or phrase, often not consulting the original text to see what the word or phrase was in the original language, [which] leads to questionable and sometimes downright poor scholarship and claims (PS7).

Other disadvantages included incompleteness of research or a limited perspective on the field. One graduate student in History stated that he/she knew of examples of colleagues who were writing in areas that were already over-researched, such as Europeanists who felt forced to write primarily about Great Britain, because they

lack the language ability to write using sources for the other, non-English, countries of Europe. The work of some historians with limited language ability who focus on England, he/she claimed, sometimes appears to be similar to scholarship already carried out, or with only slight variations, or they are recreating scholarly work which exists in some other language, even a language as fundamental to the field as French or German, but a work which they are not aware of.

A graduate student political scientist said that colleagues without language ability were inclined to produce quantitative work instead of qualitative, because qualitative research would require being able to read documents such as newspapers. Such scholars are generally reliant on other scientists' data, or only on data provided by governments or international organizations, the political scientist said.

Several of the respondents warned that not having languages or having insufficient language ability could lead to further risks of making mistakes ranging from confusion to being fooled, or creating cultural misunderstandings amid a hostile native population. Other respondents noted the risk of a loss of credibility among colleagues due to insufficient language knowledge. According to one graduate student in History:

- (8) Not only was a language aptitude test a part of the application for the ... grant [I] am now on, but it is obviously necessary here [in NAME OF COUNTRY]. I don't just mean to function and live my life, but to have the discussions with fellow scholars, archive staff, and others that have been so instrumental to my research. I would say too that as a scholar, the first 5 minutes or so of a conversation are integral in proving that you know what you're talking about and that your project is worth someone else's time. If you cannot express

yourself reasonably in the language of the culture you supposedly study, you're at a real disadvantage in this. This is especially true in [this country] where [local] researchers are somewhat protective of their own history; if you cannot even speak their language, they reason, how can you interpret their past? (H15).

Additionally, numerous respondents observed that lack of language knowledge had implications for being able to meet or uphold standards in the department.

3. What languages do graduate students in History or Political Science report being able to use in research, in comparison to those reported by multilingual graduate students from a range of other departments?

If we look at the range of languages in which respondents from History and Political Science reported being able to discuss their work, read scholarly articles, or decipher a text, in all three categories it is clear that Spanish, French, and German dominated (see Tables 2 and 3). As a group, the graduate students in History reported ability to use 11 languages at the level of discussion, 19 languages at the level of reading, and at the level of deciphering a text, 28 languages (including Latin and two “dead” languages). As a group, the graduate students in Political Science reported ability to use seven languages at the level of discussion, eight languages at the level of reading, and 13 (including Latin) at the level of deciphering.

Table 3.

Number and percentage of respondents from History reporting ability to discuss, read, or decipher in a particular language, by language

Language	Discuss (N)	Discuss (%)	Read (N)	Read (%)	Decipher (N)	Decipher (%)
<i>Spanish</i>	5	20%	11	44%	16	64%
<i>French</i>	5	20%	16	81%	18	72%
<i>German</i>	3	12%	7	28%	11	44%
<i>Italian</i>	1	4%	3	12%	4	16%
<i>Portuguese</i>	1	4%	3	12%	5	20%
<i>Mod. Greek</i>	1	4%	1	4%	2	8%
<i>Latin</i>	0	0%	2	8%	7	28%
<i>Korean</i>	0	0%	1	4%	2	8%
*	1	4%	1	4%	1	4%
**	0	0%	1	4%	1	4%
***	0	-	0	0%	1	4%

**Russian, Welsh, Kiswahili, Kinyakyusa, Kindali*

*** Turkish, Yiddish, Dutch, Bulgarian, Ukrainian, Middle English*

****Arabic, Chinese, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, Finnish, Icelandic, Lambya, ScotsEnglish*

Table 4.

Number and percentage of respondents from Political Science reporting ability to discuss, read, or decipher in a particular language, by language.

Language	Discuss (N)	Discuss (%)	Read (N)	Read (%)	Decipher (N)	Decipher (%)
<i>Spanish</i>	8	31%	10	38%	15	58%
<i>French</i>	5	19%	7	27%	13	50%
<i>German</i>	3	12%	5	19%	6	23%
<i>Turkish</i>	2	8%	2	8%	2	8%
<i>Italian</i>	1	4%	1	4%	4	15%
<i>Portuguese</i>	1	4%	3	12%	3	12%
<i>Dutch</i>	1	4%	1	4%	1	4%
<i>Latin</i>	0	0%	1	4%	2	8%
*	0	0%	0	0%	1	4%

**Chinese, Arabic, Maori, Haitian Kreyol*

For the multilingual respondents, the rankings (Spanish, French, German, followed by the less commonly taught languages) were largely comparable to those for

the graduate students in History and Political Science. However, the percentages, especially among the more commonly taught languages, were generally higher for the multilingual graduate students. The multilingual students as a group reported ability to discuss in 16 languages, read 25, and achieved total language coverage of 36 languages (including Latin, Ancient Greek, and four other “dead” languages) at the level of being able to decipher a text (see Table 5).

Table 5.

Number and percentage of multilingual respondents reporting ability to discuss, read, or decipher in a particular language.

Language	Discuss (N)	Discuss (%)	Read (N)	Read (%)	Decipher (N)	Decipher (%)
<i>Spanish</i>	9	36%	15	60%	19	76%
<i>French</i>	7	28%	20	80%	22	88%
<i>German</i>	8	32%	10	40%	14	56%
<i>Italian</i>	1	4%	6	24%	15	60%
<i>Portuguese</i>	3	12%	7	28%	8	32%
<i>Dutch</i>	1	4%	2	8%	5	20%
<i>Swedish</i>	2	8%	2	8%	2	8%
<i>Norwegian</i>	1	4%	2	8%	4	16%
<i>Danish</i>	2	8%	2	8%	3	12%
<i>Russian</i>	-	-	3	12%	4	16%
<i>Latin</i>	-	-	3	12%	5	20%
<i>Turkish</i>	2	8%	2	8%	2	8%
<i>Japanese</i>						
<i>Czech</i>						
<i>Hungarian</i>	1	4%	1	4%	2	8%
*	1	4%	1	4%	1	4%
<i>Anc. Greek</i>						
<i>Ukrainian</i>	-	-	1	4%	2	8%
**	-	-	1	4%	1	4%
<i>Polish</i>	-	-	-	-	2	8%
***	-	-	-	-	1	4%

**Chinese, Basque, Finnish*

***Catalan, Galician, Old Norse, Old English, ScotsGaelic*

****Hebrew, Romanian, Latvian, Somali, Welsh, Manx Gaelic, Irish, Hindi, Marathi, Persian*

While it may be argued that political scientists probably have little need for “dead” languages such as Middle English, this does not detract much from the conclusion that the multilingual students and the graduate students in History have much broader coverage of languages, and especially less-commonly-taught languages. At the levels of reading and deciphering, the graduate students in History reported knowing roughly twice as many languages (19; 28) as the graduate students in Political Science (8; 13), and the multilingual graduate students nearly three times as many languages (25; 36) as the graduate students in Political Science did. If the more-commonly-taught languages (Spanish, French, German) are excluded in order to arrive at coverage of the less-commonly-taught languages, the group of Political Science graduate students is able to read just five less-commonly-taught languages, compared to History’s 16, and the multilingual graduate students’ 22.

4. How many languages do individual graduate students in History and Political Science report being able to use in research, in comparison to the multilingual graduate students?

The total number of languages which the respondents report being able to discuss, being able to read, and being able to decipher is shown for each group as an aggregate, along with the range in number of languages they reported being able to use at each level, and the median of the number of languages per person at each level (see Table 6). For example, in History, at the level of discussing, if we add up the number of foreign languages per individual, we arrive at a total of 23 languages (many of which are the same language but are counted because they are spoken by different individuals).

Additionally, at the level of being able to discuss their work, the median graduate student in History is able to use one foreign language.

Table 6.
Aggregate, range, and median number of languages respondents report being able to use per person.

	Discuss Agg. (Range, Med)	Read Agg. (Range, Med)	Decipher Agg. (Range, Med)
History	23 (0-5, 1)	57 (0-8, 2)	86 (1-10, 3)
Political Science	24 (0-3, 1)	34 (0-3, 1)	57 (0-4, 2)
Multilingual	43 (0-4, 2)	87 (2-6, 3)	133 (2-13, 5)

While the median number of languages the graduate students in History claimed to be able to use and the median number of languages graduate students in Political Science claimed to be able to use are equal at the level of discussing, the median number of languages they reported being able to read is higher for the graduate students in History than in Political Science (2 vs. 1), and also at the level of being able to decipher a text (3 vs. 2). The comparable median numbers of languages reported by the multilingual students were higher: 3 for reading and 5 for deciphering.

If we look at the range of languages each person reported being able to use, per task type (discuss, read, decipher), we find that in each group there is broad variation. For each task type, there are individuals with no or very little language mastery, and individuals who can use several languages, or even many languages. Certain graduate students in History, like the multilingual graduate students, seem to be doing much more

to acquire ability to use multiple languages in research than the graduate student political scientists in this study.

5. Are there particular patterns apparent in the language combinations that the graduate students in History or Political Science report knowing, in comparison to patterns apparent in the language knowledge reported by the multilingual graduate students?

If we look at the typologically-related languages known by each respondent, we find that approximately three out of four of the graduate students in History reported knowing two or more languages from one language family, and that two out of three reported knowing two or more Romance languages well enough to at least decipher a text (see Table 7).

Table 7.

Number of respondents in History reporting ability to decipher two or more languages in a typologically related group, by language group.

	Decipher (Number)	Decipher (Percentage)
Romance Languages	17	68%
Germanic Languages	2	8%
Slavic Languages	1	4%
African Languages	1	4%
One of the above groups	19	76%

In Political Science, the numbers were somewhat lower: 42% reported knowing two or more languages in a related language family at least well enough to decipher a text, while one-in-three reported knowing two or more Romance languages at that level (see Table 8).

Table 8.

Number of respondents in Political Science reporting ability to decipher two or more languages in a typologically related group, by language group.

	Decipher (Number)	Decipher (Percentage)
Romance Languages	9	36%
Germanic Languages	1	4%
Slavic Languages	1	4%
One of the above groups	11	44%

The number of respondents in the multilingual cohort who indicated ability at least to decipher in two or more languages from a group of related languages was 23 of 25 (92%) (see Table 9).

Table 9.

Number of multilingual respondents reporting ability to decipher two or more languages in a typologically related group, by language group.

	Decipher (Number)	Decipher (Percentage)
Romance Languages	20	80%
Germanic Languages	7	28%
Slavic Languages	3	12%
Celtic Languages	1	4%
Indo-Aryan Languages	1	4%
One of the above groups	23	92%

Many of those who reported knowing multiple languages were in language-oriented departments, with those who reported knowing the most languages often in the linguistic or medieval track of a language and literature department (this included Classics and Comparative Literature), or in linguistics, ESL, or specialists in an ancient or medieval area in Archaeology.

Eleven of the multilingual respondents (44%) volunteered that they had reading access to an additional language or languages due to their ability to exploit similarities to a related language they already knew. A Classics graduate student wrote:

(8) I studied French in high school twenty years ago. I took 4 semesters of college Latin and 3 of German. I took a class on Chaucer, in which we read the Middle English. The others [Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, Icelandic, Scots-English] I can make out due to their relation to Latin/German (H14).

An Anthropology graduate student wrote that she had studied three languages but was able to use an additional seven due to “self-study and intuition.” A graduate student in German/Scandinavian/Dutch stated:

(9) Anyone with a languages background who develops conversational skills in one of the major Scandinavian languages (by which I mean Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian) can usually read the others with a dictionary, and eventually without a dictionary. With practice (and patience), one can also learn to communicate orally with speakers of the other languages. For example, I've never studied Norwegian in any formal way at all, but I have had many conversations, even telephone conversations, with native Norwegian speakers (M19).

6. Do the graduate students in History or Political Science see their departments and the university as helping or hindering them in learning languages, and if so, in what ways?

Approximately one-third of the history students expressed dissatisfaction with the university or their department, saying that their department did not have sufficient understanding for the time needed for language study in the semester schedule and for the number of years it may take to develop sufficient proficiency when evaluating what constitutes “timely progress” toward the degree. Other graduate students in History mentioned the lack of suitable language course offerings, failure to incorporate language courses into the list of degree requirements, the fact that language-based fellowships such as the FLAS do not cover the most common research languages, and the fact that non-U.S. citizens are not eligible for FLAS language fellowships.

One respondent from History provided extensive comments on problems with language learning within the department. There is some pressure from faculty to keep language study secondary in order to focus energy primarily on departmental coursework, the respondent stated, and some faculty members seem to expect that students should be able to acquire sufficient language ability solely through summer reading courses. This respondent also claimed that taking upper-level courses in language departments for graduate credit was generally not a reasonable option, as those courses generally focused on the literature/theory or linguistics tracks of the departments’ own students, and were generally not targeted to the needs of students from outside the language department, like graduate students in History. The respondent provided an instance of a fellow student who left the university after failing to find structures at the university to support further language learning.

- (10) One of my classmates who tried to make a more serious effort at language acquisition took the only viable option, which was to enroll in graduate level

language classes. This would have counted toward 'timely progress' because this class would count as one of the required 'outside' classes. This did not work. My friend was met with considerable hostility in the language department, with the focus of the class being literary criticism... There was no option for him/her to improve language skills, since the literature classes assume that the student has already learned the advanced language skills that are required. This student is no longer at the U (Study identification number kept confidential).

Three political scientists made comments that the university or their department had not helped them in learning languages; one said that both entities had been “fairly indifferent” to students’ language study.

Roughly half of the graduate students in History gave examples of how the university or their department had supported them in learning languages, primarily through funding for language study during the academic year, in summer, or for travel to take a language course. Other students of History mentioned reading courses, a tele-course for a less-commonly-taught language, and the willingness of professors to write letters of recommendation for fellowships, such as the Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS), as examples of supportiveness. Among the Political Science graduate students, approximately one quarter of the respondents provided a comment claiming the university or department had supported their language study. Three noted that they appreciated being able to partially fulfill a research methods course requirement with intermediate proficiency in a language.

Although the survey of the multilingual students did not explicitly ask whether respondents saw their departments as being supportive of language study, three

respondents voluntarily provided negative comments touching upon this matter. A multilingual specialist in literature said that funding criteria were keeping him/her from getting the financial support necessary to study languages that he/she said were fundamental to the field but were not a part of his/her dissertation topic.

Discussion

The main findings of the study are:

- substantial percentages of the respondents from History (67%) and Political Science (42%) said that knowing languages was “crucial” or “very important” to carrying out research in their field.

- respondents gave a broad range of advantages and disadvantages in connection with possession or lack of language proficiency, primarily related to the issue of access to research sources.

- the median number of languages in which respondents reported being able to discuss their work was one language for the students in History and Political Science, while at the level of deciphering a text, the median graduate student in History could use three languages, and the median student in Political Science, two (compared to the median multilingual student who reported being able to decipher texts in five languages).

- at the high end of the range of number of languages a respondent reported being able to use, several respondents in Political Science reported being able to decipher in four different languages, compared to ten languages for a respondent in History, and 13 for a multilingual graduate student.

- the languages most graduate students reported being able to use tended to follow standard enrollment trends on most-commonly-taught languages, followed by scattered less-commonly taught languages. The language coverage of all three groups was respectable: as a group, the graduate students in History reported being able to discuss in 11 languages, read 19 languages and decipher 28; the group of graduate students in Political Science reported being able to discuss in 7, read 8, and decipher 13 languages, and the group of multilingual students reported being able to discuss in 16 languages, read 25, and decipher 36. For the political scientists, reported coverage of less-commonly-taught languages was low (at the level of reading: 5 languages).

- The data on language coverage and on exploitation of related languages suggest that at least some students in History and Political Science might benefit from being taught to expand their language repertoire by learning languages related to those they already know. Research on Third Language Acquisition suggests this is possible and not an onerous burden.

- A third of the graduate students in History expressed frustration with departmental and university support for learning languages, while three of the graduate students in Political Science (12%) stated that they would like more support from the department and the university.

The respondents reported advantages and disadvantages in knowing or not knowing languages primarily in terms of the direct access this mastery provides to bodies of knowledge and data, but also because language proficiency helps in other professionally-related situations involving interaction with colleagues, bureaucrats and

guardians of repositories of data, and students from other cultures. This finding seems to be in line with the MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages recommendation that faculty in non-language departments such as the social sciences should work with colleagues to strengthen language requirements in the design of their majors and graduate programs (MLA, 2007). The disadvantages the respondents saw for those who lack the command of multiple languages included: lack of access to bodies of knowledge and data, but also a consequent narrowed or skewed perspective, difficulty meeting departmental requirements, or having to rely on possibly inaccurate or misleading translations. Overall, most respondents seemed to view language proficiency as a fundamental component of their professional activity and a central skill, and lack of language ability as a professional liability.

The data suggest that successful learners of multiple languages have deliberately learned related languages, in particular the Romance languages, and to a lesser extent Germanic ones. The responses indicate that many multilingual respondents are exploiting what they already know, using a known language as a stepping-stone to learn another related language, and in some cases using a set of related languages to develop deciphering or even reading knowledge of additional languages without formal study, simply on the basis of the ability to recognize similarities. The fact that the percentage of those multilingual graduate students who learn related languages is so high (92%) suggests that this is a conscious strategy on their part. It is likely not only that they see the acquisition of additional related languages as useful but that they also find that the learning goes quicker and is easier than the learning of previous languages. This is potentially an area that could be exploited much more in U.S. higher education. In

Europe, the systematic acquisition of multiple related languages or languages with high shared cognate lexicons, as reflected in the research and teaching materials of the EuroCom project, suggests that this approach might be worth pursuing in the U.S., particularly for scholars in European fields. Also, the data suggest that many graduate students are engaging in self-directed language learning, possibly in connection with specific research projects, and would benefit from support for this sort of ad hoc, situated, learning.

The survey responses related to departmental and university support suggest that there is real need and interest in improving the system and framework conditions for acquiring better language skills to use in disciplinary research, and that if this were to happen, many of the students would be motivated to expand their language knowledge. Based on respondents' comments, it appears that in some disciplines, graduate faculty vary in the degree to which they support the students' efforts to attain proficiency, and enforce proficiency and testing requirements. The criticisms made by some of the respondents about the role of the departments in students' achievement of useful levels of language proficiency seem to bear out the findings of the May 2007 report from the MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages that graduate departments are lax about enforcing language requirements (MLA). The comments would also seem to support the report's recommendation that departments implement more courses to assist students in acquiring high levels of usable language skills and applying those skills in research.

To what extent is the situation described in this study generalizable to other arenas of U.S. higher education? The top languages mastered by the respondents in the study are Spanish, French, German, in percentages and distribution that roughly mirror

those of foreign language enrollments in U.S. institutions of higher learning in 2002 and 2006 from the MLA (2007); with the exception of Italian (which appears to be unusually popular at the University of Minnesota in comparison to national trends), they correspond to the 2000 survey of the population at large (Robinson, Rivers, & Brecht, 2006). The rankings from the Brown survey showing Spanish and French as the most common language students would be able to teach also correspond roughly to the language rankings in my study, although the percentages for the graduate students at Brown are somewhat lower (Brown University, 2008). Thus, the rough distribution patterns in the MLA enrollment study and the Brown University language teaching competence survey suggest that the data on language mastery of the graduate students in the present study may have some larger representational validity for the U.S., particularly among the more-commonly-taught languages. When it comes to languages in this study that three or fewer respondents can use, I would be hesitant to claim that the percentages from this study reflect the situation for U.S. higher education with any degree of accuracy.

Apart from the data on enrollments and language teaching competence mentioned in the previous paragraph, there appear to be no corresponding data published to which the present findings from this study can be compared—whether on how important graduate students think languages are to their respective field, or on whether they feel they are receiving sufficient support for language study from their department or university. However, the higher numbers of languages known among graduate students in History vis-à-vis those in Political Science seems to mirror findings regarding the importance of languages to one's research agenda from Stevens and Miller-Idriss (2009), who linked this pattern to a divide between humanists and social scientists where the

humanists focused on area-specific, “context-based” knowledge, while social scientists were more likely to frame their work in terms of universal theoretical approaches.

Limitations

A central limitation of this study is that it does not verify graduate students’ self-assessment of ability to discuss and interview, read, or decipher; research suggests that some individuals normally overstate, while others understate their own ability to use a language (Yule, Yanz, & Tsuda, 1985). But, testing each student for the ability to discuss, read, or decipher in each language claimed would be cumbersome and complicated, and more in line with the aims of a socio-cultural study. It is difficult to locate some sort of objective standard for evaluating the quality of graduate student scholarship, apart from looking at the grades the work has earned, since the systems of academic evaluation, such as peer reviewed publications and citation counts, are not applicable as a general rule on the graduate student level.

An additional possible limitation is that there may be considerable variation in language ability at the designated levels of “able to discuss”, “able to read”, and “able to decipher a text”. While being able to read a scholarly article in another language may seem common across all disciplines, what it means to ‘read’ may include ability to comprehend or even read between the lines or grasp nuances. Being able to discuss and interview can also range from a fairly elementary level of expression to a level of sophisticated communication. Being able to decipher an inscription or determine the potential relevance of an article might also entail different levels of ability, or seem to be an umbrella term for highly disparate activities that are sufficient in one field or context

and so superficial as to be nearly meaningless in another, so that it is not clear that one respondent's ability to decipher is comparable to another's. In one sense of "deciphering" it might be sufficient for an anthropologist to be able to parse an inscription in another language, but that same proficiency level might be wholly insufficient for another sense of "deciphering" for someone in another field who needs to figure out enough of the language in order to determine the potential relevance of an abstract in a foreign language. It might be advisable in future studies to build in an outside measure of the graduate student's actual ability to use the language, particularly in those areas which are easily comparable across discipline lines (reading an article in another language or discussing one's work with colleagues).

The revised version of the survey, for the phase on History and Political Science students, contained a question asking whether students had actually used their languages in research. The number of respondents who reported actually having used their languages was very low, and focusing on this information would have changed the topic of the study and would not have the same usefulness as focusing on capability. Still, apart from the possible temptation this question offers respondents to engage in self-flattery, there is little objective incentive for them to misrepresent their ability, and it could be argued that asking them about actual use of a foreign language in research may have encouraged respondents to think more seriously about their level of ability in the foreign languages they know. Also, it should be borne in mind that these are professionals who are trained to weigh their assessments carefully, and whose pronouncements are challenged daily by colleagues.

The pool of respondents is relatively small (25 in each of the three groups); we should not assume the numbers and percentages to be an accurate representation of the actual situation or for higher education in the United States or even at the University of Minnesota. Still, the numbers and percentages from this study seem to be consistent with general trends reported in the literature for in U.S. higher education.

The study initially divided up language ability into three category-based levels targeted to typical research-related tasks, which were then elaborated during tabulation based on variant responses received: 1) “high level” spoken and listening comprehension ability sufficient to discuss professional work, conduct interviews, or transcribe recordings; 2) “intermediate to high level” reading ability for comprehending scholarly articles and other written texts; and 3) “sufficient” reading comprehension to “decipher” subject matter and determine if an article might be useful for research or analyze an inscription or a grammatical construction. However, it might make sense to interview scholars in different fields to see if there are still other field-specific tasks and corresponding levels of language proficiency required to perform those tasks.

Suggestions for further research

Considerably more research on this topic is needed; the literature review revealed that the question of how scholars and “emerging scholars” are, should, and could be using languages in their disciplinary research is an area that has been largely unexamined. It would be good to expand the study to graduate students at other departments across the same university, or in different universities, or to find out how many of the “emerging scholars” actually will go on to conduct research in their careers, and to what extent they

make use of their language ability in carrying out research. It would be useful to find out to what extent professors at the university can and do actually use languages in their own research, and to establish and investigate connections between the type and ‘quality’ of the research done in these disciplines, and the researcher’s knowledge of multiple languages. It would be interesting to further investigate the nature of motivation for the graduate students to learn languages, and the role played by the university and department in supporting or discouraging additional language learning, and the implications of identity in which languages scholars choose to use. Additionally, it might be beneficial to examine whether some kind of ad hoc ‘language coaching’ would be more effective for self-directed graduate students than attending a sequence of courses designed for undergraduate beginning language learners.

Implications

This study suggests that neither the monolingual scholar nor the scholar with minimal proficiency in a single foreign language is a desirable norm. There are ways for graduate students to exploit known languages to acquire reading ability in related languages with relatively little effort. Presumably, if this sort of skill were to be taught in a systematic way, as it is in multiple European contexts, U.S. scholars could efficiently expand their access to bodies of data and knowledge, and cover more understudied areas within their fields, with expanded comparative analysis. Foreign language departments could include more options to support the research needs of students from other disciplines with particular focus on the special purposes of those disciplines. Additionally, undergraduate coursework could include incentives for using primary

source materials in languages other than English--even to a limited, more manageable extent--such as in a history course using cartoons with captions in a foreign language--as part of research projects. Finally, universities already provide ad hoc support for researchers who need assistance with special types of English language writing, technology, and statistics; along these same lines they could have staff ready to help with research-related foreign language reading and writing tasks.

The results here also have implications for what regions of the world American researchers study. While all three groups demonstrated coverage of a respectable number of languages, there are of course innumerable languages that are not among the languages the students knew, which means the corresponding regions, cultures, and peoples would be accessible to these students only via translation and less likely to be a subject of research. As one respondent pointed out, in subfields like Comparative Politics, languages tend to some extent to guide research interests and questions (e.g., people who speak Spanish usually study Spain and Latin America, and people who speak French study France and its former colonies); in this way, lack of language mastery may lead to some areas being understudied. While the government has established criteria for designating some languages as critical for security or economic reasons, and provided incentives for their study, the university research community has taken few if any steps to encourage study of the less-commonly-taught languages that might be relevant to particular academic disciplines.

It seems clear that it would be beneficial for students and departments at this university, as at all U.S. universities, if proficiency requirements for graduate study were codified and enforced, and if those requirements were related to functional requirements

of the disciplines, and thus did not appear to be arbitrary. Additionally, it would be good if faculty saw language study as an essential component in training competent researchers, and encouraged long-term, in-depth language acquisition opportunities, instead of short-term reading courses (which at least one respondent called ‘ineffective’).

The university community should consider investigating the possibility of making assistance available to encourage ad hoc individualized language learning in connection with particular disciplinary projects in situated contexts. This would conceivably build on the fact that much third and fourth language acquisition for the respondents in this study is already occurring outside the classroom as graduate students become aware of the opportunities and benefits for doing so. Just as various government entities are offering language services as units ready to respond directly as the situation requires (U.S. Department of Defense, 2005), so also a set of language professionals could augment the work of the language departments by focusing specifically on the needs of students and researchers in the disciplines, either on an appointment or walk-up basis, or as auxiliary advisers for students in specific departments or classes.

Conclusions

It seems a commonplace notion that researchers are made and not born, and that they are produced by graduate programs, but it is worth repeating. In order for a university to produce top-quality researchers who conduct top-quality research, particularly in fields with an international focus, that university needs to encourage and support graduate students in their efforts to develop the requisite linguistic tools for their disciplines, and not just to meet an arbitrary and general minimum standard. The present

study provides direct evidence from graduate student researchers themselves that increased facility with multiple languages can provide numerous professional advantages in the academic disciplines. If the university and nation seek to participate and take leading positions in global research in fields of cross-cultural and transnational subject matter, then we ought to do more to help graduate students expand their access to bodies of data and interpretation in foreign languages.

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APPENDIX A

Email message to respondents in multilingual component of survey

Thanks for replying to my request for graduate students who know more languages than required by their program, and for agreeing to be interviewed.

Can you let me know a time and place which is convenient for you? The interview should take approximately five to ten minutes.

Also, if you have taken any language proficiency test, would it be possible for me to get your scores (speaking, listening, reading, writing) and the date of the test(s)? I will record the scores so that they will be anonymous and not traceable to your name.

Dave Graber

INTERVIEW

I'm Dave Graber, and I'm conducting research on graduate students who are learning and using more languages than required by their program.

Before we start, as a matter of standard procedure, I need to have you sign a consent form which says that you may opt out of the interview if you wish.

May I record this? It will make the interview go faster and save you from having to write out your answers.

1. You have identified yourself as someone who is functional in more languages than required by your program. Typically, useful language proficiency can range from being able to carry out interviews to listening to recordings to reading articles to being able to figure out the subject area of an article.
 - a. List the languages in which you have sufficient speaking ability to carry out interviews or discuss with colleagues.
 - b. List additional languages in which you can read articles.
 - c. List additional languages in which you can Table out the subject area of an article.
 - d. Other purposes for which you use/could use a language in your field.

- e. Have you taken a proficiency test in the languages you mentioned? What score did you get, and when was it?
2. How did you come by your knowledge of the languages mentioned in question 3?
3. Can you give examples of advantages the added language ability has given you in your studies and research?
4. What disadvantages do you see for your colleagues who do not have the same language aptitude as you? Can you give examples or stories of this?

APPENDIX B

Survey used in second phase of study

Name: _____ Email: _____

Dept: _____ Specialization: _____

5 MINUTES OF YOUR TIME? Please fill out/return to David Graber, [CAMPUS ADDRESS], or email me/call me (grab0169@umn.edu) / (612-437-6304) for pickup from your department office.

If you would prefer to answer these questions by email, over the phone, or in person, let me know, and I will arrange it.

SURVEY ON GRADUATE STUDENT USE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

1. For many graduate students, learning a foreign language is part of program requirements. How important are foreign languages to your field of specialization?

Not at all – could be useful – very important – crucial

Why or why not?

2. Typically, useful language proficiency ranges from conducting interviews to listening to recordings to reading articles to being able to figure out the subject area of an article.

a. Please list the languages in which you have sufficient speaking ability to carry out interviews or discuss with colleagues.

b. Please list additional languages in which you can read articles.

c. Please list additional languages in which you can Table out the subject area of an article.

d. Are there other purposes for which you use/could use a language in your field? If so, what are they?

3. How did you come by your knowledge of the language(s) mentioned in question 2?

Foreign language #1 _____

home - school - university course - lived in country – self-study

Foreign language #2 _____

home - school - university course - lived in country – self-study

Foreign language #3 _____

home - school - university course - lived in country – self-study

What is your native language? _____

4. Have you used foreign languages in your research? Which ones, and how have you used them?

5. Can you give examples (as specific as possible) of advantages the language ability has given you in your studies and research?

6. What disadvantages do you see for your colleagues who have little knowledge of languages? Can you give examples or stories of this? (Please be as specific as you can WITHOUT mentioning names).

7. Has your department or the university supported or hindered your language learning?

In what way?