



THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE CONFERENCE

AN INTRODUCTION TO AMERICA'S LANGUAGE NEEDS AND RESOURCES

BRIEFING DOCUMENT
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This briefing document is intended to support discussion at the National Language Conference. The data, views, and approaches presented are those of the authors at the Center for Advanced Study of Language and not necessarily those of the Department of Defense or of any other agency of the U.S. government.

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The Nation's Strategic Language Needs

Today's headlines leave little doubt concerning the strategic needs of the nation for a globally educated citizenry, aware of the role of language and culture in meeting the challenges of the 21st century. The pressing needs of the nation, however, are for more professionals with higher levels of proficiency in more languages. The Department of Defense has indicated immediate needs in a range of languages, including Arabic, Central and South Asian languages, Chinese, Farsi, Indonesian, Korean, Kurdish, Phillipine languages, Russian, Serbian/Croatian, Spanish, Sub-Saharan African languages, and Turkish. In addition to these current requirements, the nation must also recognize its continuing need for skill in hundreds of languages, including both commonly and rarely taught languages, that will better enable the country to engage in trade, diplomacy, and collective security.

The nation's requirements for language proficiency arise in the following areas:

National Security, e.g., political, military, diplomatic

Economic Competitiveness, e.g., trade, tourism, quality control of goods and services

Social Well Being, e.g., public health, international development, assimilation and social justice

Language Needs for National Security

Prior to September 11, the Intelligence Community was not prepared to handle the challenge it faced in translating the volumes of foreign language counterterrorism intelligence it collected. Agencies within the Intelligence Community experienced backlogs in material awaiting translation, a shortage of language specialists and language-qualified field officers, and a readiness level of only 30% in the most critical terrorism-related languages used by terrorists.

—*Report of the Joint Inquiry into the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001*, Systemic Finding 6, p. xvi

Ensuring U.S. security, foreign policy leadership, economic competitiveness, an[d] our ability to solve global problems that affect the nation's well being depend on Americans who have an understanding of and ability of function effectively in other cultural, business and value systems, as well as foreign language proficiency.”

—Committee on Appropriations, *H.Rpt. 107-229* (2001), p. 126

... our ability to understand the terrorist intent ... will require a dramatic increase in linguistic support. Consequently, all government agencies will review their language programs to ensure adequate resources are available to meet this demand.

—White House, *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* (2003), p. 16

Additional professional staff for public diplomacy dedicated to issues of the Arab and Muslim world is urgently needed. The professional level of fluency in the local languages and the level of knowledge about Arab and Muslim societies must be dramatically enhanced.

—*Changing Minds, Winning Peace: A New Strategic Direction for U. S. Public Diplomacy in the Arab & Muslim World*, US Department of State, 2004

Language Needs for Economic Competitiveness

According to the Localization Industry Standards Association, the yearly value of trade in language services in the United States exceeds \$15 billion.

65% of the world is inaccessible to members of US-based professional-services associations, e.g., the American Institute of Architects and the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology.

- Of four barriers to expanding abroad, the top two are language and culture.

—Center for Quality Assurance in International Education,
*The Globalization of the Professions in the United States and Canada:
A Survey and Analysis*. Washington, DC: CQAIE, 2000.

Language Needs for Social Well Being

The Federal Government provides and funds an array of services that can be made accessible to otherwise eligible persons who are not proficient in the English language. The Federal Government is committed to improving the accessibility of these services to eligible LEP [limited English-proficient] persons, a goal that reinforces its equally important commitment to promoting programs and activities designed to help individuals learn English. To this end, each Federal agency shall examine the services it provides and develop and implement a system by which LEP persons can meaningfully access those services ... and thus [Federal agencies] do not discriminate on the basis of national origin in violation of title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

—Executive Order 13166, August 20, 2000

Language Needs for a Globally Aware Citizenry

The only sound foundation for a sustainable American foreign policy is a clear sense of America's national interests. ... Clarity about American national interests demands that the current generation of American leaders think harder about international affairs than they have ever been required to do.

—National Commission on America's National Interests, *America's National Interests* (2000), Executive Summary, p. 2

Current Demand for Language Expertise

The market forces of supply and demand are tactical-level concepts. Underlying these are strategic concepts of needs and capacity.

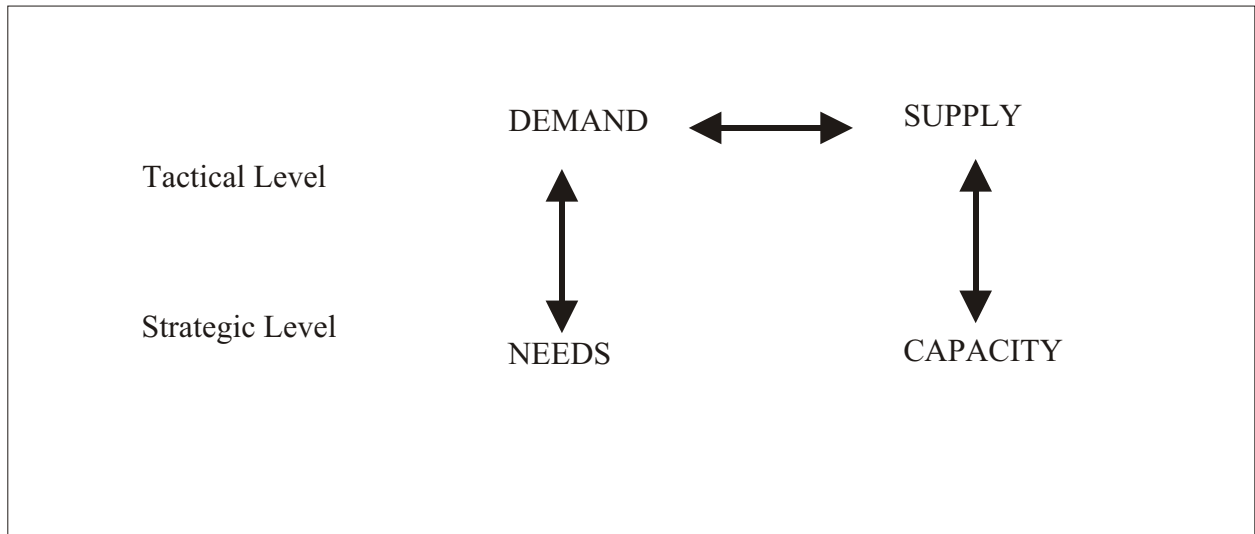


Figure 1.

Demands for Language Skills in the Public Sector

[National Security Agency] plans to hire 7,500 people, especially linguists, over 5 years.

—A. Sabar, “Want to Be a Spy? NSA Is Hiring,”
Baltimore Sun, April 10, 2004, 1.

The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States has released findings that the shortage of linguists persists: “Despite the recent hire of 653 new linguists, demand exceeds supply. Shortages of translators in languages such as Arabic, Urdu, Farsi, and Pashto remain a barrier to the FBI’s understanding of the terrorist threat.”

—*The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (2004), Staff Statement 12.

A review of translation and interpretation found that more than 80 federal agencies — from the State Department to the Patent and Trademark Office — depend in part on proficiency in more than 100 foreign languages

—T. Crump, *Translating and Interpreting in the Federal Government* (2001).

Demands for Language Skills in the Private Sector

Example from the Language-Services Sector

Operations in Iraq have drawn heavily on the limited capacity in the US to handle Iraqi Arabic, with several companies having hired more than 5000 translators and now reporting difficulties in finding qualified personnel.

—“Translation Mixed Success,” *Washington Post*, March 30, 2003, B2;
R. Merle, “Iraq War Strains U.S. Business,” *Washington Post*,
May 20, 2004, E1.

All business is global, yet all markets are local. This globalized multicultural world needs leaders with a keen understanding of national cultures. By learning from other countries, these leaders develop the best thinking and best practices from around the world enabling them to leverage culture as a tool for competitive advantage.

—R. Rosen, *Global Literacies* (2000), p. 171.

Supply of Language Expertise

Five Sectors of Supply

Language expertise is acquired from five principal sources.

Ethnic heritage communities

Education system

US government language programs

Private language-services sector

Outsourcing/localization in foreign countries

Data Sources

Data on language supply and capacity come from the following sources:

Among the general populace, data come from the 2000 Census and other social surveys and polls, such as the University of Chicago's 2000 General Social Survey.

Data on education enrollments come from studies undertaken by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, the Center for Applied Linguistics, and the Modern Language Association

Proficiency data are derived from the American Council of Teachers of Russian, the National Security Education Program, and other sources.

Data Limitations

The utility of available data is constrained by the absence of key pieces of information concerning specific areas.

General population

- Low-density languages may be underrepresented because of limited sample sizes
- The census and General Social Survey (GSS) do not collect data on proficiency across skills
- Only the census addresses proficiency in English
- Data are self-reported, not verified for accuracy

Heritage languages

- Unknown number of schools and incomplete coverage of languages
- Extent and demographics of enrollment unknown
- Proficiency and achievement of students in heritage programs are unknown

Higher education

- Unknown distribution across levels
- Severely limited information on proficiency attained

Adult language use

- Limited data on languages used across occupational fields

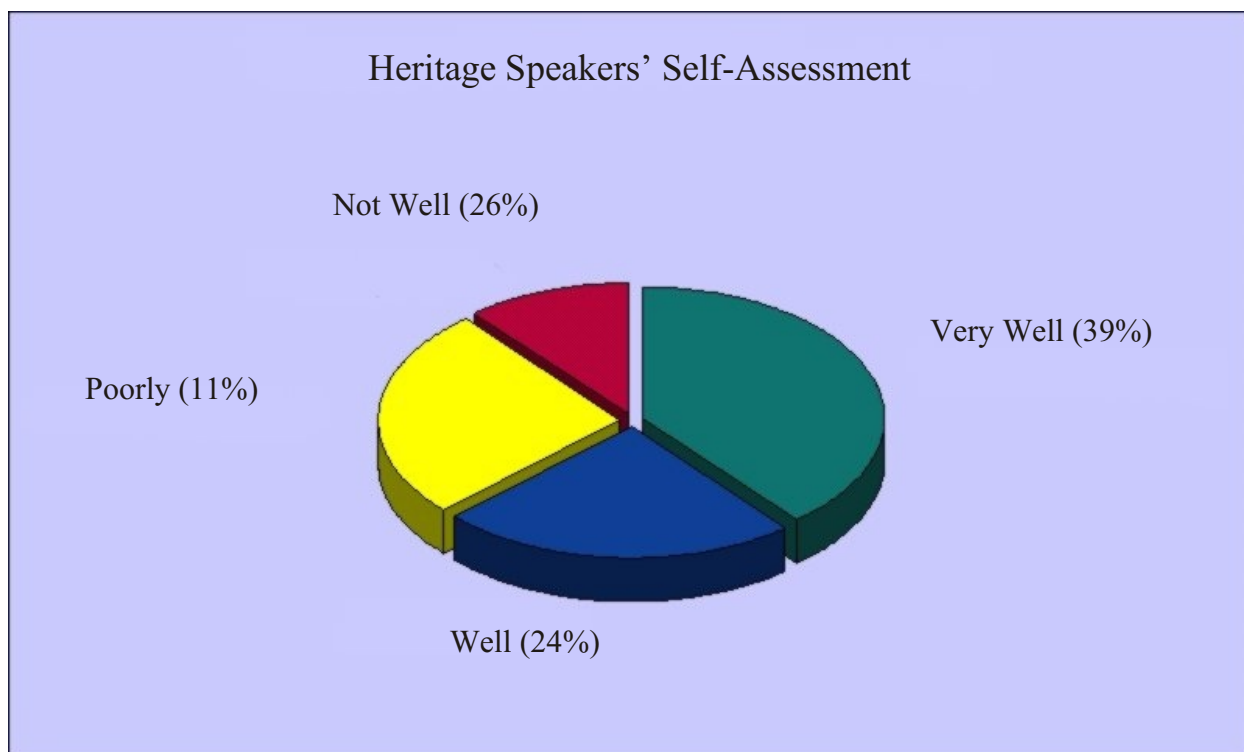
2000 Census and General Social Survey Data Constraints

Census questions include an inquiry whether another language is spoken at home, whereas the similar GSS question simply asked whether the respondent speaks another language (perhaps at work). The level of ability in English is a census concern, but the questionnaire does not inquire about level of ability in the other language. The limited language questions on each instrument become evident in comparison to an ideal set of questions, as indicated below.

Table 1. Data Constraints Compared with Ideal Language Questionnaire			
	<i>2000 Census</i>	<i>GSS 2000</i>	<i>Ideal</i>
Ability to Speak English Subjective	✓	–	✓
Objective	–	(✓) via follow-up	✓
Where Was Other Language Learned?	–	–	✓
At What Ages?	–	–	✓
Language Used at Home or Elsewhere	–	–	✓
Ability to Speak Other Language? Subjective	–	✓	–
Objective	–	–	✓
Where Was Other Language Learned?	–	✓	✓
At What Ages?	–	–	✓
Is Other Language Now Used at Home, Elsewhere?	–	✓	✓
Citizenship	✓	–	✓
Willingness to Become Citizen?	–	–	✓
Proportion of Residents Speaking Other Languages	18% at home	26% any- where	✓
Of residents who speak another language, what proportion speak, read, write a specific language?			
Spanish	59.8%	50%	✓
French	4.4%	15%	✓
German	2.9%	9%	✓
Tagalog	2.6%	3%	✓
Italian	2.1%	3%	✓
Russian	1.5%	2%	✓
Other	26.7%	18%	✓
Key: ✓ = question is asked by instrument – = question is not asked by instrument			

Heritage Sector

The General Social Survey monitors social life and trends in the United States. Its 2000 iteration (GSS 2000) asked whether individuals speak another language; if so, what language and how well? Of the 26% of Americans who indicated they speak another language, the following figure shows respondents' characterization of their facility with that language.



Citizenship and English Proficiency

Subject to constraints such as those mentioned above, data from the 2000 Census allow for such inquiries as the number of persons in the United States who speak a given language, whether they speak English well or poorly, and whether they are citizens. Inquiries of this database show that for some languages, there are considerable numbers of citizens who speak the language, whereas for others, speakers are primarily non-citizens (e.g., refugees).

The following figure illustrates these variables for a small selection of languages chosen to include some of current emphasis related to world events and two (French and German) of enduring interest for a variety of reasons. The scale is logarithmic, i.e., each gradation indicates a tenfold increase in speakers of the language.

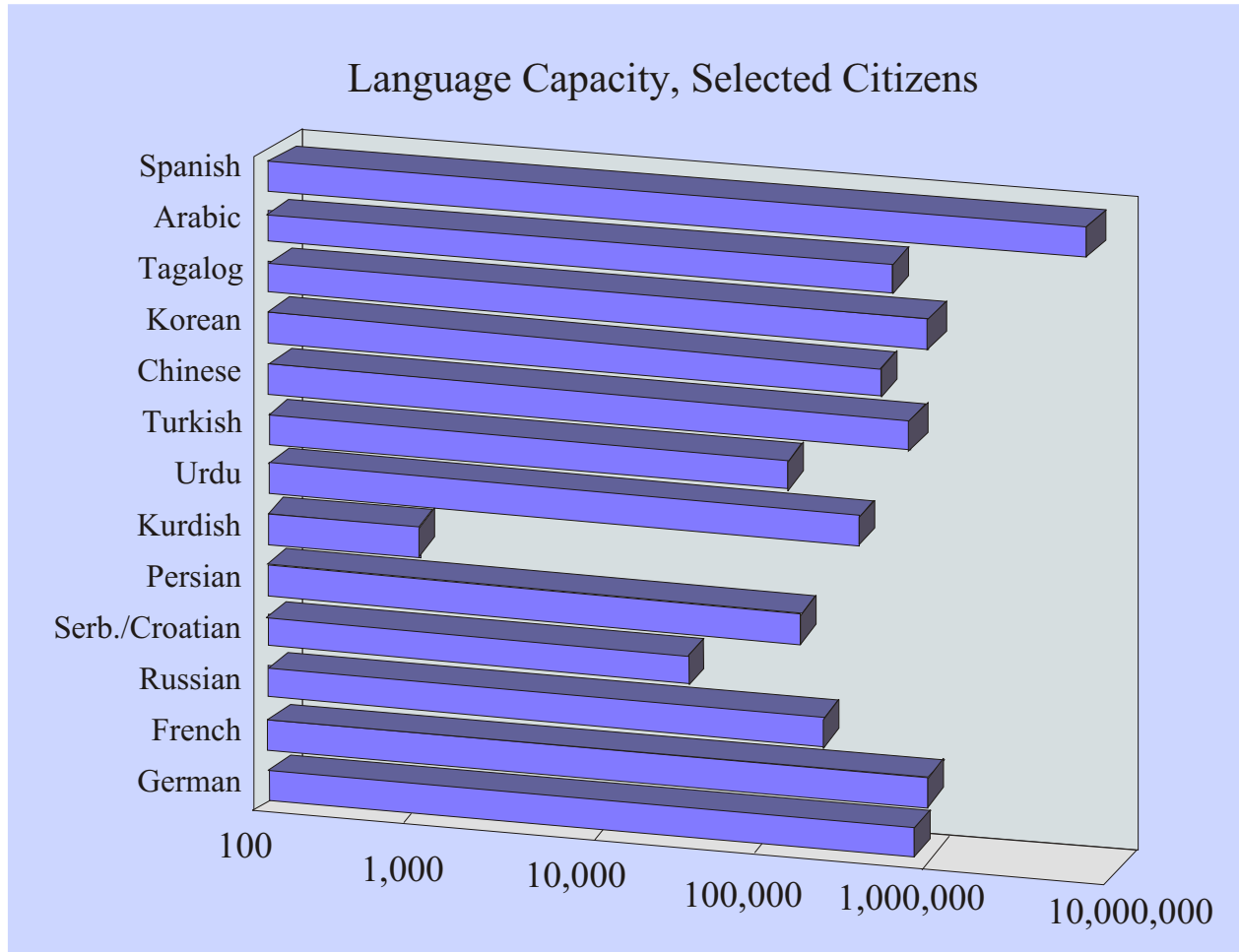


Figure 2. Other Languages of Citizens Who Speak English Very Well

Academic Sector

Students in higher education pursue language study for a great variety of reasons. Enrollments in languages of current strategic interest tend to be small, but the academic sector offers the nation's greatest opportunity to develop interest in particular languages and cultures among students whose professional interests cross the full variety of societal domains. By comparison to Spanish, with enrollment of 656,590 in 1998 and 746,267 in 2002, enrollment in other languages is miniscule, as evident in the following two figures.

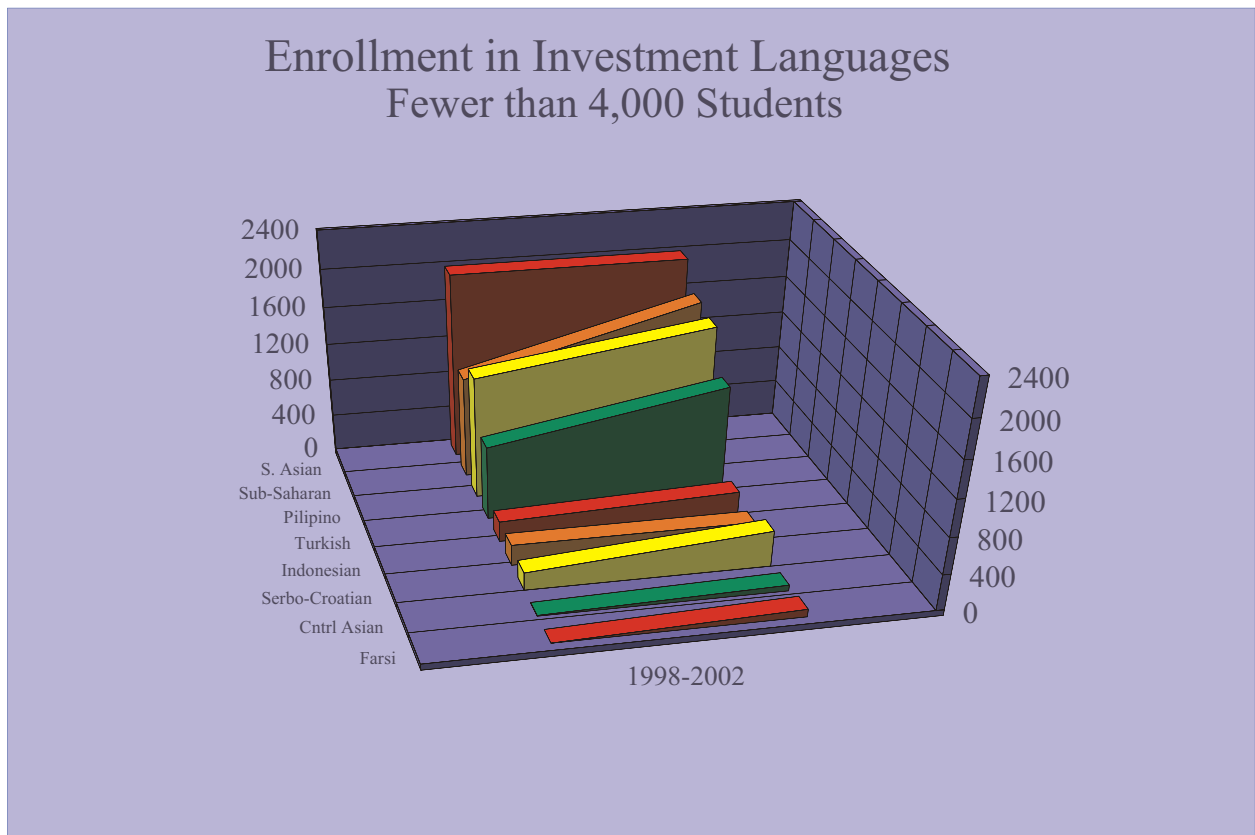


Figure 3. Enrollment in the Least Commonly Taught Investment Languages

Proficiency Developed in Academic Programs

American language study generally starts late and demonstrates a fraction of the duration of study encountered in other societies. Not surprisingly, proficiency is limited, as shown in data acquired by the American Council of Teachers of Russian and the National Security Education Program: 9% of students reach level 2 in listening, 11% in speaking, and 35% in reading in difficulty categories 3 and 4, as defined by the federal government's Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR; see appendix).

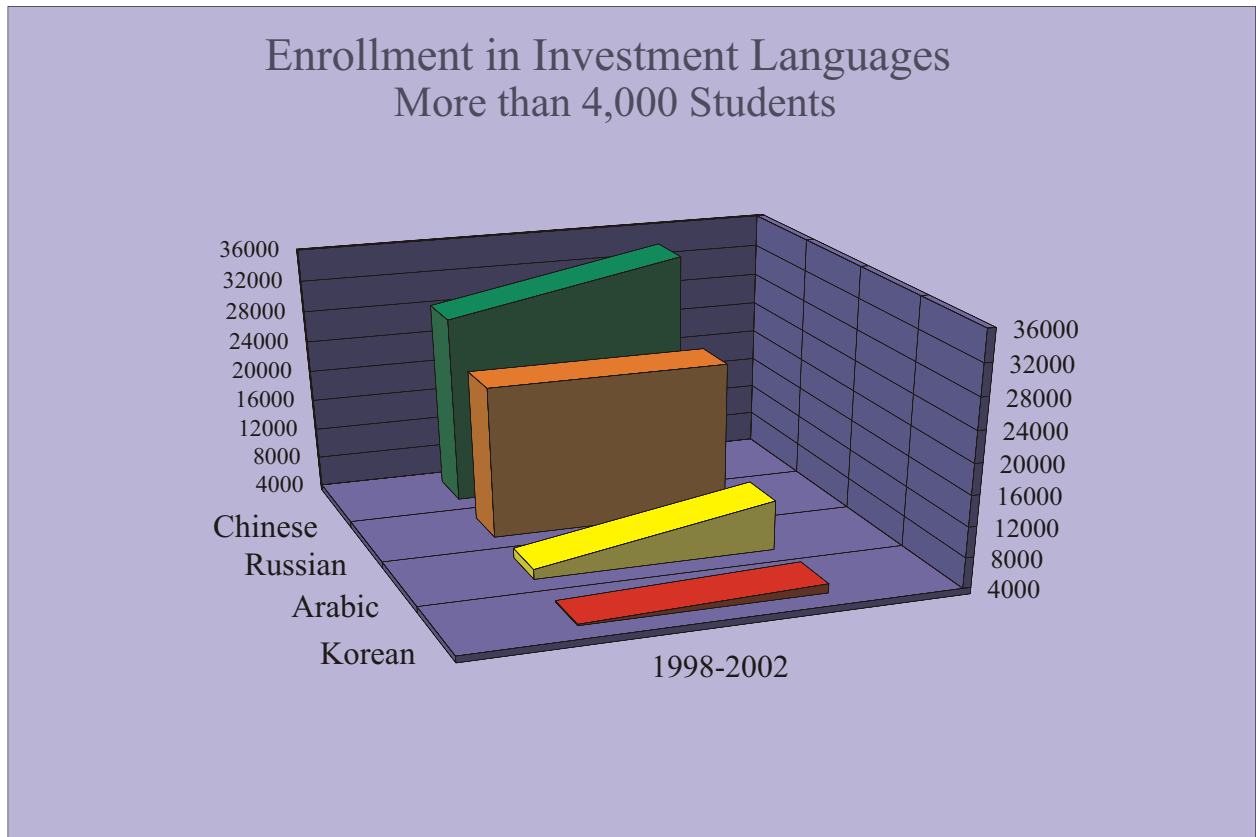


Figure 4. Enrollment in Less Commonly Taught Investment Languages

According to databases compiled by the American Council of Teachers of Russian and the National Security Education Program, the factor of adding high-school study had no measurable impact on the proficiency level students achieved through undergraduate study. Not until one adds graduate study does the experience of high-school exposure to Russian become a factor in achieving higher levels of proficiency, thus reinforcing the conviction that time on task is essential to build higher-level skills.

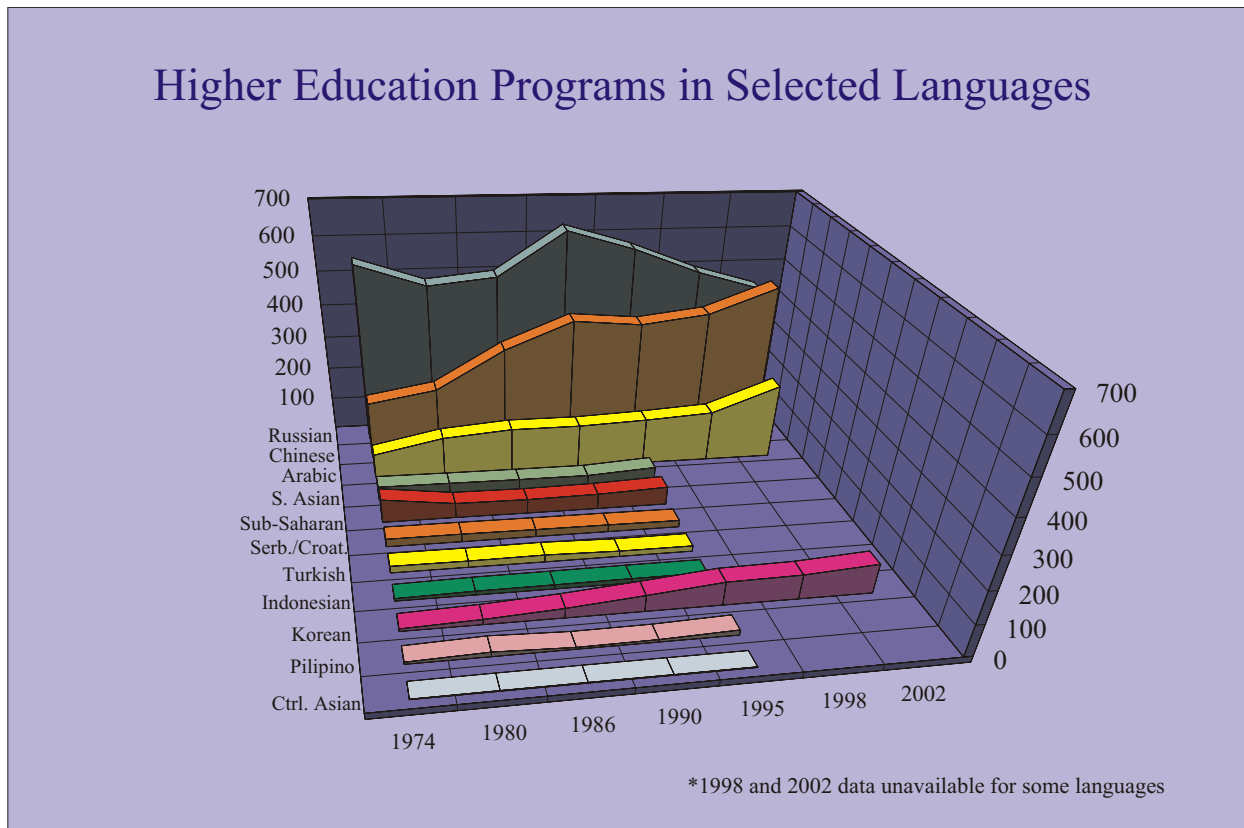


Figure 5. Colleges Offering Selected Languages

Government Sector

Various government institutions conduct language training for federal personnel.

Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center

- >1000 faculty
- 23 languages
- 5,000,000 student hours of instruction annually
- 90% of students reach goal of S1+/L2/R2

Foreign Service Institute School of Language Studies:

- Trains US Foreign Service Officers and others in over 100 languages
- More than 1500 students per year
- Proficiency target: S3/L3/R3 (senior officers); S2/L2/R2 (junior officers)

National Security Agency and Central Intelligence Agency maintain in-house language training elements as well

Federal Initiatives to Build Language Capacity

Strategic planning

Improving current job performance of USG Foreign Language Professional

Building strategic reservoirs of language capacity

Strengthening national infrastructure in language

Building a broad recruiting base for language

Strategic Planning

The Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness) is leading the Department of Defense Language Transformation Initiative to change the way language and regional area expertise is valued, developed, and employed within the Department.

Director, National Security Agency, has made Level-3 proficiency the standard requirement for working at the agency and has developed a strategic plan, “Transformation 2.0: Cryptology as a Team Sport,” underlining the need for more advanced language skills for employees of the NSA.

The Director of Central Intelligence has created a roadmap for improving the language capabilities of the Intelligence Community: “Strategic Direction for Intelligence Community Foreign Language Activities,” (5 May 2003).

The US State Department has launched the “Language Continuum” initiative, a major effort of the Foreign Service Institute to raise the language competence of State Department personnel beyond the 3 level.

Improving Job Performance

The National Flagship Language Initiative of the National Security Education Program to address advanced skills built through academic programs in specific languages for individuals who will serve in government.

School for Continuing Studies at the Defense Language Institute to address advanced skills.

On-demand access to language learning and teaching resources in the Advanced Distributed Learning mode: LangNet at the National Foreign Language Center and GLOSS at the Defense Language Institute to facilitate independent study.

Foreign Language Proficiency Pay properly administered and adequately resourced as an incentive to acquire and maintain language skill.

Building Reservoirs of Language Capacity

The DoD National Language Skills Registry is an attempt to identify individuals with skills needed in crises.

LEILA is an effort by Federal Law Enforcement agencies to share language resources.

The National Virtual Translation Center facilitates contract translation for a range of federal agencies.

The Civilian Linguist Reserve Corps would create a structure of volunteers for use during crises.

- Feasibility study authorized in the 2003 Intelligence Authorization Act.

Strengthening Language Infrastructure

A new Defense Language Proficiency Test to address advanced proficiency levels

The reemphasized mandate for Title VI/F-H of the Higher Education Act to focus on languages critical to the current security needs of the nation.

The Center for Advanced Study of Language (CASL), responsible for basic and applied research in language on behalf of the security interests of the nation.

Broadening the Recruiting Base

National Flagship Language Initiative of the National Security Education Program is a partnership between the federal executive branch and academic institutions to encourage advanced study of investment languages.

National Security Language Act (H.R. 3676) would

- encourage partnerships to begin language study early
- offer summer workshops
- facilitate postsecondary programs that tie foreign language to study of science and technology
- identify heritage communities across the country
- expand the National Security Education Act
- provide a federal emphasis on the study of languages in schools and colleges

DoD Heritage Recruiting for tactical interpreters is a program to reach out to heritage communities to recruit, train, and deploy individuals with linguistic and cultural proficiencies.

Alignment and Mobilization of Language Resources

The nation has multiple sources of language capacity and means of developing expertise. Sources, pipelines for development, and the labor pools that use (or should benefit from) a language-competent citizenry can be depicted graphically, as well as the initiative to develop them.

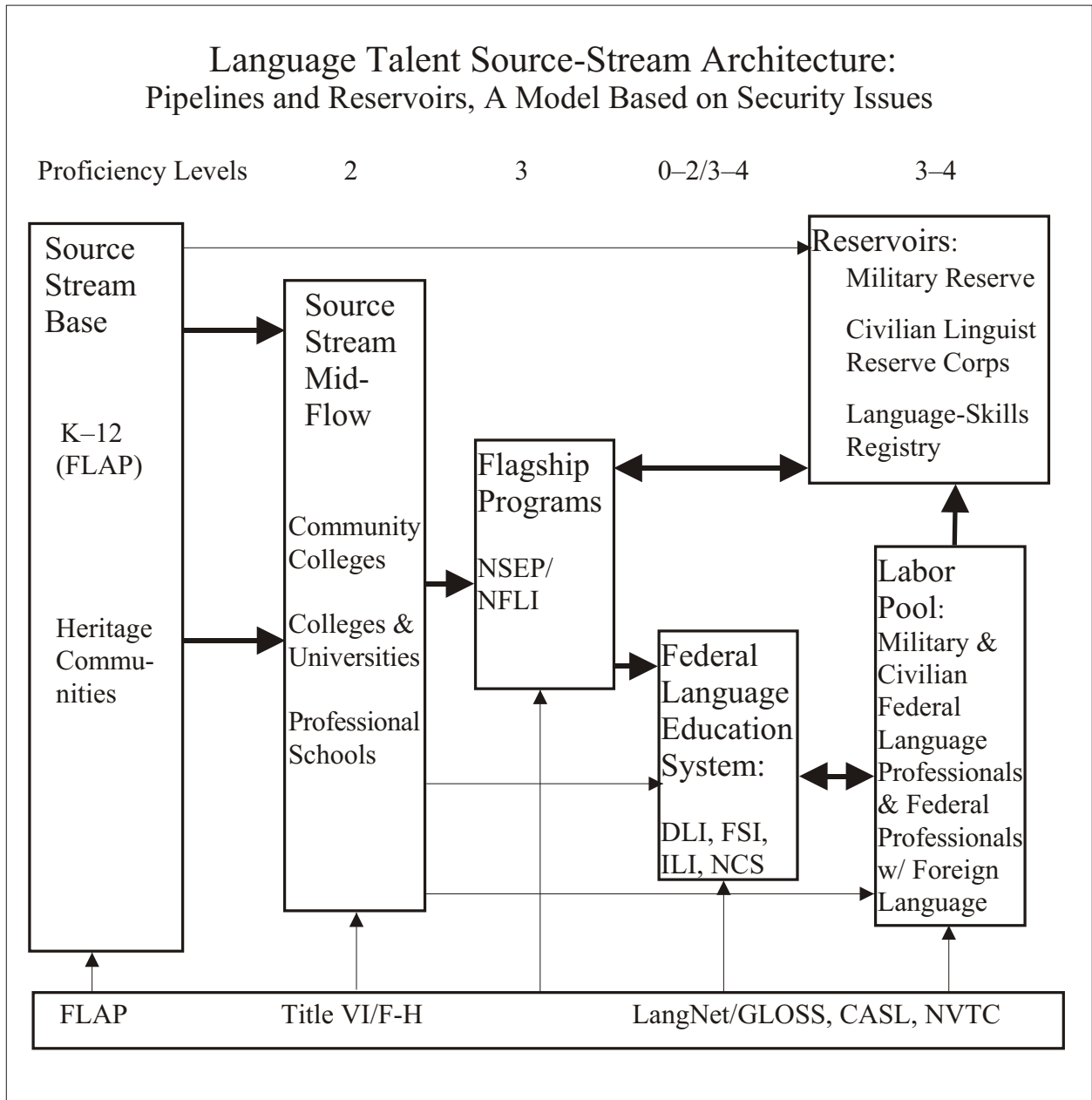


Figure 6. Source-Stream Architecture of Language Expertise

Summary

The needs of the country for language are unprecedented. The resources available to meet these needs are rich and varied, but they are neither aligned nor mobilized for maximum impact.

Purpose of Conference

Language ability and regional area expertise in the Department of Defense have not kept pace with the transformation of warfighting and the changes in world events. Recent operations in Afghanistan and Iraq have dramatically illustrated the necessity for a transformed language capability. Further, the need for expanded language capability is evident in other federal agencies (e.g., the State Department), as well as state agencies and US industry. Competition for language skills will intensify. While the US education system will serve as the primary source of these needed skills, language instruction (particularly in non-traditional languages) needs to be strengthened in primary, secondary, and university curricula and students need to be encouraged to study more difficult languages. The potential that heritage speakers bring to our schools can present a national asset to be developed. A focused, needs-based research effort to understand and expedite the acquisition of advanced foreign language is just beginning. Only by pursuing a nation-wide resolution to the growing demand for language skills will the Department of Defense be able to meet complex defense needs of the changing world.

Conference Outcome

Participants will provide the foundation for the Department of Defense white paper recommending the initial steps toward a national language agenda. The document will outline reciprocal responsibilities within the federal and state governments, industry, education system, and research community for actions that would move the United States toward a language-competent nation.

Appendix. Interagency Language Roundtable Proficiency Scale

The Interagency Language Roundtable, a group of language experts across federal agencies, has devised a numeric scale of language proficiency that is applicable across domains of use, languages, and specific skills. The scale is applied to measure skills separately: Listening (L), Reading (R), Speaking (S), and Writing (W), skills are then described as, for example, S-2, R-3, for someone who reads at level 3 and speaks at level 2. Each higher level subsumes the skills that characterize the achievement of a lower level, and a + designates that proficiency substantially exceeds the level but not does fully meet the criteria for the next level. Skill assessments are determined by an authorized language examination.

0	No Proficiency
0+	Memorized Proficiency
1	Elementary Proficiency
1+	Elementary Proficiency, Plus
2	Limited Working Proficiency
2+	Limited Working Proficiency, Plus
3	General Professional Proficiency
3+	General Professional Proficiency, Plus
4	Advanced Professional Proficiency
4+	Advanced Professional Proficiency, Plus
5	Functionally Native Proficiency

Languages are also grouped into categories of difficulty for a speaker of English to acquire. The experience of various federal agencies differs with regard to this categorization.

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