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SHIFTING THE CURRICULUM TO LANGUAGE FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

ABSTRACT

As English emerges as the lingua franca of many international corporations worldwide, academic institutions are erroneously retracting funds from language-learning programs, citing the lack of need or the inability to support nonessentials. With this approach, the true needs of language learners have been neglected. The blame can easily be placed on institutions that misunderstand the additional benefits learners garner while pursuing language studies (i.e., culture). However, it can be argued that the blame is actually that of the language educators who fail to arm themselves with the proper ammunition to argue their side properly. The administrators who decide the fate of language programs often remain uninformed about the reality of foreign language curricula. Language programs that focus on specialized purposes (LSP) can prepare students linguistically and culturally, as well as complement their education in content areas such as business and the sciences. A curriculum shift that encompasses important language and cultural nuances found in traditional classrooms, but also includes topics relating to the professional world outside of academia, is essential. Courses in LSP provide learners with a global perspective and language skills that surpass the qualifications of their monolingual counterparts. Funds and support will continue to be stripped from language programs across the US unless language instructors can demonstrate that language learning is not an isolated discipline, but rather part of a merging of complementary fields.

KEYWORDS: German instruction, language curriculum, language for specific purposes (LSP), alternatives to literature

INTRODUCTION

A student recently remarked to me, “I’ve changed my major from Sociology to Business, so my advisor says I can’t minor in German anymore.” This statement really stunned me. At first I wondered what better to pair with German than Business? It seemed like an even more ideal pairing than with Sociology. With the change of the major from the humanities to business also came the change of advisors from one school of thought to another. The

advisor in the Business Department did not approve of German courses that did not explicitly fulfill the student's business degree requirements. I was frustrated and disheartened that our German program lost a motivated and talented student, but I soon realized that the problem was much bigger than the loss of a student from our program. The true problem was that language was viewed as a separate, non-integrateable skill set that detracts from a student's major. This situation caused me to reflect on other conversations with students about choosing German as a major or minor. I recalled another exchange with a student the year prior who excitedly added a German major to his Electrical Engineering major. This made sense to me. He was a stellar student who was passionate about both fields. The next semester I followed up on him and his upper-level German classes. His response was much different from that of the giddy student I had had just a few months prior. He felt pressure to drop his introduction to German literature course because it was too much of a time commitment that interfered with his other major. "I had no time. I had to decide between German or EE. Sorry, Frau, but EE won," he wrote. These are just two examples of many such discussions between language instructors and students. As I further recalled conversations with students about their decisions to include or exclude German in their plans of study, I saw a tendency for German to be discarded when course loads got tough. Many instructors have questioned the reason why language learning is seen as an obstacle rather than an important contributor to a well-rounded and better-prepared professional.

Student discussions such as those above demonstrate students' desire to learn a new language. Unfortunately the incongruence between two vastly different disciplines often results in students choosing between one field that promises a bright future and another field, one fading in the shadows of the more pragmatic sciences. In addition, given the lack of support for language studies throughout the United States, it is not surprising that so many students do not understand the real value of language study.

Too often faculty members in programs other than the humanities view language learning as inessential and unworthy of their students' time. If languages would receive their support, classroom numbers would increase and more college graduates would be trained in their major areas, as well as an additional language. Perhaps the lack of support stems from the perception that a foreign language is a separate skill that cannot be integrated into other fields. To some extent, critics have a valid point. Traditional language courses do not meet the needs of students pursuing careers outside the humanities. While lesson plans designed to analyze *Death in Venice* by Thomas Mann are

exciting and have their value, they do not contribute directly to the preparation of a future chemist. Critical thinking skills are essential and are rooted in literary analyses, but the analyses of the passion Gustav von Aschenbach feels for the young Tadzio do not educate a student of chemistry in the German terminology for molecular formulas, for example.

Traditional language instruction that clings tightly to the notion that classrooms that discuss literature are the best places to develop critical thinking skills and that these skills should be the major focus of intermediate and advanced language courses will only keep more students away. By refusing to adapt to the needs of modern students, programs will shrink and budgets will be reduced. Furthermore, traditional curricula only confirm the suspicion that learning a new language does not better prepare students for careers outside of an academic institution.

PREVIOUS LITERATURE

Enrollment in language courses at the university level is often a contentious discussion that pits the humanities against the sciences. The humanities have recently been hardest hit by budget cuts resulting from the economic slowdown. Thus, administrators are forced to make tough decisions that reallocate the limited funds to the sciences with programs being slashed in hopes of saving other programs in the soft and hard sciences (Watson 2010). The impact is huge. Cuts come at the expense of students who desire an opportunity to explore and analyze the world from another standpoint, one that views society and culture as fundamental in understanding the world. The elimination of such programs also sets students up for failure. Bickson and Law (2000) point out that US students are globally “at a serious competitive disadvantage ...” and cannot compete in a global job market (66).

Few universities and colleges have been spared the frustrating and tense repercussions of limited funds. Well-respected schools such as the State University of New York at Albany have had to eliminate programs offering undergraduate-level majors in language (Foderaro 2010). The University of Maine determined after a process of prioritizing its degree programs that German, among other majors in the humanities, would no longer be offered except to satisfy core studies requirements (Bloch 2010). The list of public universities struggling to keep language programs afloat continues to grow, despite their ability to show more profit than programs in other disciplines (Watson 2010). The removal of programs that focus on language instruction confirms the suspicions that language learning is often viewed as superfluous at the university level.

The elimination of core curricula that include the humanities results in a missed opportunity for students to expand their narrow view and market themselves to multinational companies. According to Grosse (1998), language is not necessarily the only focus; “openness and sensitivity toward other cultures” is more important to employers (2). Language learning provides a new lens for seeing other cultures as a whole. The study of a language and culture different from one’s own brings about awareness and appreciation for a multitude of other ways of life, not just those connected to the language being studied. Cothran and Gramberg (2000) concur that the goals are not only to be competent in language and culture, but also to be open-minded toward other groups of people. This cannot be achieved without exposure to another way of life.

Schorr (2000) insists that we cannot ignore the immediate need to prepare cross-culturally competent, bilingual, and multilingual job candidates. Students must be proficient in an additional language in order to take the notion of general global awareness to the next level. Another goal of second language instruction should be to make students competent in their academic field in the target language (Cothran & Gramberg 2000). The reduction of language programs suddenly makes this goal very difficult and does not facilitate an increase in bilingual graduates entering the workforce.

Rice (2011) argues that educators in the humanities, not administrators outside the field, have direct control over their programs’ destinies: “it’s our job to find better arguments.” From this standpoint, if language instructors could prove that bilingualism is not just a bonus added to a resume, but rather a necessity in keeping students competitive in the soft and hard sciences once they graduate, administrators would be more likely to support language learning. As a result, language instruction would have to follow through with a curriculum that benefits students in fields other than the humanities.

Language for specific purposes (LSP) courses have helped many language programs that have suffered a decline in enrollment and subsequent budget cuts. Bridging language study to other disciplines attracts more students and bolsters the language program. Both the students and the university benefit from offering LSP courses. In particular, the German language provides opportunities for students to gain a competitive advantage in the fields of business, science, engineering, and technology. Such programs are also vital in training future language educators who will pass along their expertise to others in these vast fields and keep the language-learning cycle in motion (MacLeod 2009). LSP diversifies the tradition of literature-only courses and provides a practical approach to language learning.

It has been more than a decade since Grosse (1998) examined employer expectations in order to identify the foreign language skills expected of job candidates. This current study aims to investigate the present state of language requirements for new hires, in foreign language generally and in German more specifically. Additionally, German programs of 11 Midwestern universities will be analyzed to identify to what extent LSP is available to students wishing to link language learning to other disciplines.

METHODOLOGY

The initial step of this investigation identifies the workplace demand for employees with foreign language skills. "Foreign language" was entered into two job search Web sites, *Monster* and *Snagajob*,¹ with the location of "nationwide" selected. Each result was viewed to determine that *foreign language* appeared in the "skills required" section of the job listing. Any listings that did not meet these requirements were not included in the analysis. Then, each job listing was categorized as either "Industry" or "Education." Jobs were categorized as education-related if the job candidate would be required to teach; all subject areas and institution types were included.

A second search with keywords "foreign language" was conducted, but this search was limited to Chicago and its surrounding area. Also, this search included the job search Web sites *Indeed*, *Career Builder*, and *Monster*. An additional search was conducted on the United States Government job search site. No exclusions were made based on the locations of these positions (stateside or abroad).

The next set of searches was designed to examine the need for candidates with skills in one specific language. For this set German was selected. The procedures were identical to those previously described, replacing "foreign language" with "German." Positions available nationwide, in the Chicago area, and with the United States government were analyzed in the same manner.

Additional analysis was conducted with the results from the nationwide search via *Monster* for positions requiring candidates to have some level of German knowledge. These results were further analyzed to determine which proficiency level employers expect job candidates to have. The hits were grouped in five categories based on skill level, and one additional category was created for results where proficiency level was not specified.

¹ All job search Web sites used are listed on eBiz as being among the most popular for search job listings.

In order to identify whether universities are meeting the needs of students and preparing them for their future careers, the course requirements of German majors at 11 Midwestern universities were identified.² First, via an examination of the German department/program Web site at each of the universities, the total number of credit hours required in German-specific courses beyond the fourth-semester level was noted. Of those required courses, it was then determined how many credit hours were required in each of the following course categories: Literature, Linguistics, Business German, and Scientific German. For eight of the universities it was also determined how many courses were offered, or at least listed in the course catalogue, for each of the four categories. In the cases where the university offered more than one track for German majors, i.e., Business German and German Literature, each program was analyzed separately.

ANALYSIS

The first set of searches—examining a general need for job candidates to have foreign language knowledge or experience—yielded results indicating that there is in fact a need, and that the majority of the positions fall outside the field of education.³ In fact, for the *Snagajob* search, all 33 of the job listings posted are industry jobs, not education. In the *Monster* search, 94% of the jobs listed are in non-education fields. Only in the government sector did education-related jobs surpass the number of private sector openings (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. NATIONWIDE SEARCH FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE SKILLS

Web site	Search Location	Total Hits	Specific Hits	Education	Industry
USA Jobs	All US govt.	92	89	67	22
Snagajob	nationwide	33	33	0	33
Monster	nationwide	774	719	43	676

²The 11 universities were chosen because of the online availability of their information regarding degree requirements and course catalogues.

³All listings categorized as “Industry” in Tables 1–4 required either foreign language or German in addition to a degree and/or experience in another field.

In the Chicago-area search for jobs requiring foreign language skills, similar results were found. Between 80% and 90% of the positions listed on each of the job search Web sites were for industry jobs and not for positions in the field of education (see Table 2).

TABLE 2. REGIONAL SEARCH FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE SKILLS

Web site	Search Location	Total Hits	Specific Hits	Education	Industry
Career Builder	Chicago	43	43	5	38
Indeed	Chicago	93	93	19	74
Monster	Chicago	10	10	1	9

Once the nonspecific term “foreign language” was changed to the specific term “German,” the only noteworthy change occurred in the listing for government jobs. As seen in Table 3, with a specific language requirement of German, the job listings reflected more industry jobs than education-related positions, even if only slightly (3:2). The other two searches yielded 95% industry positions each.

TABLE 3. NATIONWIDE SEARCH FOR GERMAN SKILLS

Web site	Search Location	Total Hits	Specific Hits	Education	Industry
USA Jobs	All US govt.	30	29	26	3
Snagajob	nationwide	84	24	1	23
Monster	nationwide	162	143	7	136

Similar results were also seen among the searches for German positions within the Chicago area. Between 80% and 100% of the positions listed, depending on the job search Web site, were non-education positions (see Table 4).

TABLE 4. REGIONAL SEARCH FOR GERMAN SKILLS

Web site	Search Location	Total Hits	Specific Hits	Education	Industry
Career Builder	Chicago	16	10	2	8
Indeed	Chicago	66	42	6	36
Monster	Chicago	30	30	0	30

A deeper analysis of the search results from Monster for German positions nationwide provides a clearer idea of the expectations employers have in terms of the language proficiency of the job candidates. Although it cannot be certain that employers have the same definitions for terms such as *bilingualism* or *fluent* as an educator in language does, it can nevertheless be surmised that employers do view language skills along a continuum. As presented in Table 5, the left end of the table describes a very advanced level that is either required or preferred. The right end of the table represents a minimal expectation for the job candidate, whereas the middle of the table indicates that candidates able to communicate in German would have an advantage over similar candidates without language proficiency.

TABLE 5. EMPLOYER EXPECTATIONS FOR CANDIDATES

Bilingual, fluent, native-level required	Bilingual a plus/highly desired	Proficiency advantage/skills a plus	German language skills preferred	German knowledge required	Unclear
34	21	56	12	11	2
25%	15.4%	41.2%	8.8%	8.1%	1.5%

The online examination of course offerings reveals that literature courses heavily dominate the course catalogue at all of the universities surveyed. University A leads the group with the most credit hours of literature offered, but the same university does not even offer a scientific German course and lists only one 3-credit course in Business German. According to online information, each university offering a Bachelor's degree in German Studies

or the equivalent requires more literature courses than Business German or Scientific German combined. In fact, Business and Scientific German courses are not required for German majors at any of the universities offering a general degree in German; nor are they required for teaching certification at any of the 11 schools. The left side of Table 6 shows the number of course credits required for a German major and how many of the required credits fall into the categories of literature, linguistics, business, or science.

Even linguistics is overshadowed by literature in both course offerings and degree requirements. The right side of the table shows how many total credit hours are offered in each of the categories according to each university's Web site. In three of the eight universities with degrees in German Studies, only literature is absolutely required; the other three areas are part of the students' electives.

TABLE 6. GERMAN MAJOR REQUIREMENTS AND COURSE OFFERINGS

Univ	Total CRs	Req. Lit	Req. Ling	Req. Bus.	Req. Sci	Total Lit	Total Ling	Total Bus	Total Sci
A	20	6	0	0	0	48	21	6	0
B	26	NS	NS	0	0	18	6	3	0
C	27	NS	NS	NS	NS	42	9	3	0
D	30	NS	NS	NS	NS	18	6	9	3
E	30	3	3	0	0	NS	NS	0	0
F	31	3	0	0	0	27	9	3	3
G	34	3	0	0	0	12 min	3 min	3 min	NS
H	35	9	3	0	0	18	6	6	3

NS=Not specified, CR=Number of credits required.

Three universities of the eleven surveyed offered two tracks for students majoring in German. In each of the three universities, students can choose between a literature track and a business/commercial track. Table 7 presents the total number of credits required for each of the tracks as well as a breakdown of those requirements. University I surprisingly requires Commercial

German students to take at least one 3-credit course in literature and one in linguistics, but Language and Literature students are not compelled to reciprocate. They are required to take 15 credit hours in literature, only 3 in linguistics (reflecting an imbalance between literature and language), and none in either of the specialized fields. Only in Universities J and K was a clear distinction made between the two tracks, which was reflected in the courses required for each. Appropriately, Business German dominated the required courses for the Business German degree, and literature dominated the required courses for the literature track. Neither area was required for the opposite area of study.

TABLE 7. DUAL-TRACK GERMAN MAJORS

Univ	Track	Total CRs	Req. Lit	Req. Ling	Req. Bus.	Req. Sci
I	Commercial German	31	3	3	6	0
	Language & Literature	31	15	3	0	0
J	German Business	29	0	0	9	0
	Culture & Literature	29	3	0	0	0
K	Business German	37	0	0	6	0
	German Literature	37	6	0	0	0

DISCUSSION

The results of the online searches for available positions requiring either general foreign language or German-specific experience reflect a job market that is not just for educators. According to these searches, industry employers are seeking individuals with multidirectional skills. Foreign language is a skill that can be, and in some cases must be, combined with skills in areas such as business or engineering. Knowledge of any additional language beyond English is advantageous to those on the job market, but proficiency in a specific language will help the candidate more.

The level of proficiency that is expected of job candidates varies from job to job, and the description of the language level varies from employer to employer. It is somewhat difficult to determine the exact expectation the employer has of its future employee's language skills based on a simple job post; however, it can be determined that foreign language skills do enhance a candidate's chances for employment. For example, if two applicants, each with a Bachelor's of Science in Marketing and a similar GPA upon graduation, compete for a position at a company with German clients, the candidate who has been able to move beyond the traditional literature path toward LSP will be aware of the language and culture associated with the German clients. Reading Goethe, although an enjoyable, challenging, and worthy endeavor, will not have the same impact.

Employers' expectations of their new hires and the language skills being taught at the university present a great disconnect. Universities continue to offer traditional, literature-dominated curricula even at a time when students need practical language skills for careers outside academia's walls. Students who want to pursue a double major or even choose language courses as electives are often not provided with the opportunity to enroll in many courses, if any, other than literature. Courses ranging from the Middle Ages to post World War II fill course catalogues while LSP courses are scarce. As a result, students graduate underprepared for the current job market.

CONCLUSION

If we educators want other disciplines to view our work and our courses as essentials in a student's education, we must meet them in the middle. Our courses have to provide practical skills that students will use in their careers. If students desire a degree in German that is full of early seventeenth-century German literature or female German writers of the eighteenth century, then they should have that opportunity. However, if students prefer to couple their bio-chemistry degree with a scientific German course, this opportunity should also be provided.

Additionally, the communication lines must be opened wide inter- and intradisciplinarily. Language programs must be proactive in determining a curriculum that best addresses student's needs and not necessarily one that is safe and comfortable for the students. LSP courses that are already in the catalogue must be advertised, not just within language departments, but also among the advisors who play key roles in students' course selections. Furthermore, there must be a commitment that new faculty hires be adept at teaching LSP

courses. Simply because a literature professor retires, it does not automatically mean that a similar specialist should be hired to fill the vacancy. The faculty must reflect the goals of the department and facilitate the movement toward a curriculum that has been designed with students' futures in mind.

Ideally, students could design a language track that reflects their areas of interest and prepares them for their careers, in whatever field that may be. This plan continues to support literature programs while encouraging LSP. Students still interested in German literature should be allowed the opportunity to study some of the best writers and thinkers in the discipline. Likewise, business students should have the opportunity to enroll in courses that interest them and that are explicitly connected to their majors. Administrators will surely ponder the costs of adding courses to programs that have uncertain futures. Similarly, current and future literature professors will most definitely be concerned how this will impact their jobs. The truth is that administrators and faculty cannot afford not to encourage LSP courses. LSP courses attract new students who are needed to bolster programs that without an enrollment increase may otherwise vanish.

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