The Discourse of Foreignness in U.S. Language Education

Glenn S. Levine

> *I believe that language pedagogy is a significant tool of political power. I believe that only where the tools of power are openly known, openly critiqued, and accessible to everyone can anything like a true democracy work.*
>
> (Scollon 2004, p. 275)

> *Regardless of what they are called, in U.S. schools languages other than English are in fact perceived, by both adults and students, as profoundly foreign.*
>
> (Reagan 2002, p. 23)

Abstract Levine's chapter presents and analyzes public discourses about the teaching and learning of languages other than English in the U.S. It proposes that several interrelated and often superficially opposing messages create a "discourse of foreignness" that may help inform our thinking about U.S. language education. The strands of this discourse are discussed in categories that embrace both its historical forms and more currently dominant ones. Individual acts of discourse in public venues, such as Congressional hearings, TV interviews, op-ed pieces, and political speeches, complementary arguments supporting "English only" movements as well as positive discourses that stress the utility and global need for an American citizenry that is bi- or multilingual are presented. Because the public discourse about language education lags behind current best practices recommended by current language research, it is suggested that educators need to engage in shifting such perceptions by entering into media discussions of why foreign language study remains significant both personally and in the national interest.

Keywords Public discourse · Foreign language education · Global competitiveness · Bilingual education · Culture

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1 Discourses as Political Power

In the following, public discourse about language teaching and learning will be presented in the senses outlined theoretically by Bourdieu (1977, 1991), de Swaan (2001), Fairclough (1995) and Searle (2002), all of whom stress the symbolic power of language use as conveying authority onto a speaker, an authority that can have ideological implications for language education. In this analysis, the term "discourse" will be used in line with these authorities' more functionalist and critical perspectives that stress language use in context as evidence of the issues of power and ideology implicated in public speech (Schiffrin 1994, p. 31; Fairclough 1995; van Dijk 2008). Merging multiple perspectives in recent scholarship, Schiffrin et al. (2001, p. 1) discourse broadly in ways that help to open out the practical implications of the examples presented here: "(1) anything beyond the sentence, (2) language use, and (3) a broader range of social practice that includes nonlinguistic and nonspecific instances of languages."[1]

Some other potentially troublesome terms also need clarification at the outset of this discussion because they emerge as problematic. The term "foreign" is used here in the dictionary sense of "being situated outside the United States" or characteristic of some place, values, behaviors or attitudes alien in character to, abnormal for, or unconnected with U.S. citizens (Foreign 2013). In the field of cultural studies, this term is often associated with perceptions of "the Other," a designation anchoring the term in the point of view of a given speaker or social entity (see Bhabha 1994; Kristeva 1991; Said 1978).

Using these parameters, I will examine particular ways that statements about language, culture and language learning index meanings beyond the sentences uttered, to the detriment of the project of foreign language teaching. My aim is to illustrate how specific language use vis-à-vis word and phrase choices, mirror assumptions (often negative or limiting ones) that also exist at the nexus of social practices surrounding beliefs about and approaches to foreign language education.

Views on language and the role of language learning are never created in a vacuum; such assertions are all part of larger sociocultural and sociopolitical discourses, each with its own historical arc (Gee 2005), discourses that may overlap or coincide, but which also can conflict. Like many other academic fields, language education has long grappled with multiple and often conflicting narratives, narratives that have both driven public support for the teaching of languages other than English, as well as eroded or even destroyed that support for certain languages or for language education overall at certain times (Kramsch 2005). But more than this institutional problem, conflicting discourses also intersect with similarly conflicting public perspectives about approaches to and purposes for language teaching and

[1] I am also guided in the examination of public statements about language learning and teaching by four of Blommaert's five principles for the analysis of discourse (2005, pp. 14–15). These include focusing on what language use means to its users, the ways language operates differently in different environments, the unit of analysis of actual and densely contextualized forms in which language occurs in society, and communication events that are influenced by the structure of the world system.

learning, where the pedagogy may or may not align either with parents or students' own beliefs or priorities, or with what empirical research on student performance has identified as advantageous ways to teach languages.

I would summarize popular conceptions of the multiple purposes of instructed foreign-language teaching and learning in the U.S. in these ways:

- A means to enhance cognitive abilities in the individual
- A means to connect with one's family heritage
- A resource for enhancing or improving career prospects
- A vehicle for cross-cultural or intercultural humanistic inquiry
- A tool for global competitiveness of multinational corporations
- A means of engaging in international diplomacy, protecting national security, supporting law enforcement, or enhancing military capabilities
- A luxury of the privileged, an elective add-on to core academic subjects

All of these suppositions are accompanied by particular recurring narratives among politicians and other public figures, school and university administrators, and faculty at all levels teaching in languages other than English. Some voices, such as those whose rhetoric resonates with the last item in the list, are openly antagonistic to the whole endeavor of offering language instruction. Most, however, support the teaching of FLs, but in ways that suggest ambivalence about or qualifications for its status as a core component of U.S. education. Indeed, historically, languages other than English were associated until the post-WWII era with an elitist education. This thread remains an undercurrent in contemporary discourses about the value of language learning, one that bears consideration here.

Let us now turn to the groups of statements currently at play in the discourses about foreign language teaching, pro and con, to uncover the assumptions on which they rest– the undercurrents that need to be directly addressed for the future of the practice.

2 The History of Foreign Language Learning as a Luxury

The marginalization of foreign language education in the U.S. can be seen from many perspectives, but it originates in a long and entrenched history of language learning as a luxury, peripheral to the life of a U.S. citizen and consequently not deemed a critical component of education for all but a select number of exceptionally well-educated individuals.

On the website of the advocacy group "Global Language Project" (2013), which aims to foster language instruction in schools, the section entitled "Why Language Learning" opens with the assertion that "[l]earning a second language is no longer a luxury; it is a necessary skill that students must have in order to compete in a global economy." This discursive strand stressing global competitiveness is front and center in the group's message (they also emphasize the many cognitive advantages of learning languages), but indeed it is the first part that is notable in initiating

a discussion of discourses about language learning, because it expresses a powerful and usually unacknowledged strand of the discussion that I suggest may undermine even many of the utilitarian or instrumental arguments in favor of language learning and teaching. The statement presupposes that language learning has been viewed as a "luxury" up to now.

While many view the teaching and learning of algebra, geometry and calculus in functional, utilitarian or instrumental terms (as key to the much-touted STEM disciplines—Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics—considered to be the core of practical teaching and learning), learning languages remains stigmatized as a curricular luxury (Reagan 2002). The reason is related to two realities of life in the U.S. up until around World War II. The first is that few Americans engaged in international travel before the mid-twentieth century. Such travel was regarded as fairly exotic, and up until the advent of air travel, and really into the 1960s, international travel indeed remained the luxury of the wealthy, with only a small a fraction of the population ever traveling abroad. With so few Americans actually venturing overseas, coupled with the assimilatory pressures on immigrant populations to shift entirely to English and the geographical isolation of the U.S. at that time, learning a foreign language was viewed as the pastime of the privileged.[2]

The demographics of education up until the same period, the early twentieth century, also support this robust view of foreign language learning as a luxury. With the waves of immigrants from Ireland and Eastern Europe as well as China and Japan entering the country in the second half of the nineteenth century, the educational emphasis was consistently on how to teach English to immigrants and their children and to have those children abandon their native languages as soon as possible (Fishman 1966; Pavlenko 2002, 2003). Until the turn of the twentieth century, in fact, there were few secondary schools in the United States (around 200,000 students in high school in 1890 and still only around 1,000,000 by 1910). When, states began building more high schools, their curricula were not primarily designed for college-bound students.

To be sure, in the 1920s and 1930s, schools began to introduce modern language instruction as a regular part of the curriculum, though almost never as a requirement (Pavlenko 2002). Up until that time, around 1910, high schools were intended primarily as college preparatory schools, thus focusing on Classical language learning or languages important as auxiliary tools to other disciplines. German became important in secondary schools toward the end of the nineteenth century for medicine and the sciences, and French after World War I as the language or the country's ally in WWI. Historically, then, the United States was not focusing on having its citizens learn languages other than English until the period during and after World War II.

[2] It would exceed the scope of this chapter, but a further dimension of the Luxury strand relates to gender identity. Some scholars have observed and analyzed the ways that foreign language learning has long been regarded as a particularly "feminine" undertaking, which may help explain why there is a disproportionate number of female students in language classes at all levels, and in the choice of particular languages (see Carr and Pauwels 2006; Chavez 2001; Pavlenko 2004; Schmenk 2004; Sunderland 2000).

The influence of this history echoes in recent comments by a former Harvard President about language learning not being "worthwhile," or when government officials state that the learning of Spanish, French, German and Italian stands at odds with the "real" world (Summers 2012; see also Berman 2010). Both of these assertions still index the roots of the language-as-luxury discourses of the turn of the century, unnecessary to meet the demands of the contemporary world or practical employment.

3 Foreign Languages' "Problematic" Subjects

Turning to examples of media voices that address failures in foreign language education, (foreign) culture, and bilingual abilities in the U.S., the statements that follow illustrate a major aspect of the problematic image of foreign language education that derives from the luxury discourse. Again, it behooves the foreign language profession to address the tacit over-entailments of these statements, because public images can and often do affect educational practices, not just reflect them, once they become entrenched, as happened with the luxury discourse.

What ties all of these expressions in this strand of discourse together is an emphasis on inadequacies or impossibilities: the overall expectation of failure made by different sectors of society, including language teaching professionals, that accompany the alignment of language learning with luxury, and hence the property of an upper or otherwise rarified class. Some proposals from educators even today assert that "most students, parents, teachers, and policy-makers do not seriously expect it to succeed" and that "[e]ven among the best educated persons in our society … competence in a second language is often seen as irrelevant …." (Reagan and Osborn 2002, pp. 6–7). Administrators' concerns about the relatively small student numbers that characterize traditional foreign language classes—and especially language learning achievement—use economic arguments to dispense with all but minimal language programs (see Berman 2010). The presumption appears to be that, from the outset, foreign language teaching is bound to fail and so that it cannot be part of an ordinary curriculum.

To this point in time, the negative view of language teaching in the U.S., as sketched by scholars like Reagan and Osborn (2002; see also Reagan 2002), does not necessarily reflect either prevalent public opinion or that of language professionals. On the other hand, its shortcomings are clear and emerging to the general public (and to students who "never learn" the language they have been taught, sometimes for years): U.S. language education by and large does not help the majority of its students to reach what Byrnes (2006) and others have described as "advanced language capacities," the very sorts of capacities that the public sector (i.e. members of the U.S. government) have called for. In fact, second-language (SLA) researchers as a whole seem to agree that language education in the U.S. has failed to bring the majority of the students learning in classroom settings either to a significant level of communicative competence (Hymes 1992), or, more recently, what the MLA (2007) has called translingual/transcultural competence—the abil-

ity of the bi- or multilingual person to use all the languages *at any learning level* to acquire knowledge and negotiate communicative exchanges (Canale and Swain 1980; Swain 1985).

To answer such calls, foreign language teachers would be charged with a new set of curricular goals: not just teaching a language, but somehow facilitating their students' critical awareness and appreciation of other peoples and cultures, a goal explicitly targeted in many secondary and postsecondary curricula (Byram 1997) and exemplified in the ACTFL Standards (ACTFL 2010). Crucially for the analysis offered here, the language professions have made this claim to facilitate such awareness in the face of an overall mistrust of "foreign" peoples and cultures that appears to be deeply rooted in U.S. mainstream media and which by no means has been alleviated or transformed, aggregated as it is with discussions about immigration.

Awareness of this link is not new. Dell Hymes (1996), one of the founders of sociolinguistics and ethnographic studies, has detailed what he identified as a cautionary list of "six core assumptions" about language that prevail in the U.S., which appear to be the pernicious subtexts of the nation's discourse of foreignness, discourses he saw as frequently represented in print, radio, and television presentations:

- Everyone in the United States speaks only English, or should.
- Bilingualism is inherently unstable, probably injurious, and possibly unnatural.
- Foreign literary languages can be respectively studied, but not foreign languages in their domestic varieties (it is one thing to study the French spoken in Paris, another to study the French spoken in Louisiana).
- Most everyone else in the world is learning English anyway, and that, together with American military and economic power, makes it unnecessary to worry about knowing the language of a country in which one has business, bases, or hostages.
- Differences in language are essentially of two kinds, right and wrong.
- Verbal fluency and noticeable style are suspicious, except as entertainment (it's what you mean that counts). (Hymes 1996, pp. 84–85)

Some might ask how U.S. language education could overcome the shortcomings detailed above when faced with the practical limitations of an educational system that includes a sorely restricted amount of instructional time devoted to language study. Moreover, these problems are acerbated by institutional articulation problems between primary, secondary and university-level instruction. As frequently decried in profession literature, a serious language/literature division exists in departments themselves that moves these inadequacies into post-secondary contexts, beyond their historical appearances in primary and secondary education (MLA 2007; Reagan 2002; Swaffar and Arens 2005). Such disparities contribute to the general "social expectation of failure" decried by Reagan and Osborn (2002, p. 6). Overall, this strand of discourse emphasizes failure without addressing the fact that foreign language teaching was in many ways (and often still is) set up to fail from the first—after all, luxuries *cannot* be conveyed to the general public.

This discourse of failure, coupled with the lack of attention to structural issues that perpetuate the actuality of failure within curriculum, is perhaps the most difficult legacy for foreign language professionals to counter. The work of reconciling counter-productive public perceptions and transforming public and professional discourses in order to change both disciplinary practices and public perceptions of the field necessarily involves a different mirror for the objectives and outcomes of language education.

Some remediations are in fact the thrust of other chapters in this volume. As they address, changing the present negative status of language learning in the U.S. begins with language teachers, their institutions, and their professional organizations—with adjustments to both structural and social understandings of its reality. As Ron Scollon states in the epigraph to this chapter, language pedagogy is a significant tool of political power. Transforming perceptions involves the commitment of language professionals themselves to help frame the parameters of the discourse (see also Byrnes this volume; Kramsch 2005; Swaffar 2003).

This situation is by no means only an artifact of the past and of U.S. history. The remainder of this chapter turns to equally damaging directions of current discourses of those inside and outside the field of foreign language education. Two major outsider discourses, commencing with language used by public figures as represented in the media, figure prominently in discourse strands growing increasingly prominent since the millennium. The first of these discourses is that foreign language knowledge can threaten national as well as citizen identity and makes the related case for "English only" as part of national identity and security—a threat rhetoric. The second, more positive discourse stresses the utility and global need for an American citizenry that is bi- or multilingual, defined as possessing the ability to use those abilities in acquiring new information and succeeding in a degree of communication that demonstrates awareness of culture difference and the need to work within that framework to achieve common goals.

4 Foreign Language Learning as a Threat to Upward Mobility and Assimilation

One insidious discourse about language education suggests that languages other than English threaten the position and presumed superiority not only of English as a language but also, of "American culture" and even perceptions of the American Dream. For example, the mother of a ninth grader in Georgia, Dina McDonald, talks on National Public Radio about excluding presumably Spanish-speaking, "low-achieving students who can't even speak basic English" from a grant funding the study of Mandarin in her child's high school in Georgia (Ragusea 2012). When she questions whether "low-achieving" children should learn how to say "Do you want fries with that?" in Mandarin, she indexes Hymes's (1996) caveats about English-only arguments, bilingual education debates, and threat narratives about "foreigners" in the U.S. who do not assimilate—in this case, school populations of Spanish

speakers who ostensibly need to adopt English and abandon their heritage language (see also Crawford 1992).

The fact that such views are controversial is illustrated by public responses to similar perspectives proposed by House Speaker Newt Gingrich, in a 2007 speech to National Federation of Republican Women. There he stated: "We should replace bilingual education with immersion in English so people learn the common language of the country and so they learn the language of prosperity, not the language of living in a ghetto" (NBC News 2007). Gingrich's equation of bilingual efforts to educate in learners' two languages with ghetto status sparked a vehement outcry from many, including Hispanic organizations and the public at large. He subsequently made a formal apology in Spanish.[3] The fact that these words did spark such a response suggests just how important issues of language and cultural identity are to the public at large. Yet together the Georgia parent quoted earlier and Mr. Gingrich's statements channel two central messages that have a long discursive history in the U.S. The first is the notion that the use of Spanish in schools is indeed "foreign." In other statements Gingrich has explicitly stated that the children in bilingual education programs should be immersed in English-only programs rather than encouraged to maintain or enhance the standing of Spanish in U.S. schools and communities. Pratt (2003) offers brief but poignant analyses of several "misconceptions" about bilingualism and bilingual education in the U.S., including the observation that the bilingual education debate has too long been one-sided, viewed primarily from the perspective of the English side, as exemplified by Mr. Gingrich's assertions.

The ghetto message, the association of Spanish as a foreign language in the U.S. as associated with poverty, is similar to the message of the Georgia mother quoted earlier who implied that Spanish speakers in her district are underachievers. Both assertions index a discourse of non-native, disenfranchised learners in an English-dominant U.S. society. That message reframes the prevailing argument for studying Spanish because it is a utilitarian choice given the number of speakers and the prominence and importance of Hispanic communities in North America. Instead, it contextualizes the Spanish language as indicative of second-class citizenship, foreign even within our borders.

Foreign languages also have been a scapegoat for impugning the probity and integrity of individuals using them. Republican candidate Mitt Romney was castigated in this way by Newt Gringrich in early 2012, who used a campaign ad with the following text:

> UNIDENTIFIED MAN: Mitt Romney. He'll say anything to win. Anything. And just like John Kerry…
> JOHN KERRY: Laissez les bon temps roulez.
> UNIDENTIFIED MAN: …he speaks French too.

[3] This retraction, despite his apology for his choice of words, had in fact gone on the record because Mr. Gingrich had expressed similar sentiments before. In his 1995 book, *To Renew America*, he wrote: "Without English as the common language, there is no (such) civilization" (Gingrich 1995, p. 162, cited in Lo Bianco 1999, p. 48).

MITT ROMNEY: Bonjour. Je m'appelle Mitt Romney.
NARRATOR: But he's still a Massachusetts moderate.
(SOUNDBITE OF LAUGHTER) (National Public Radio 2012)

The ad does not explicitly state why speaking French is laughable, nor is the connection between speaking French and being a "Massachusetts moderate" discussed. The two components are linked only by their juxtaposition in the same short TV spot. In this context, the discursive claim of moderation suggests that speaking French and English becomes a variant of the old saw "talking out of both sides of one's mouth," thereby equating anyone who speaks French as untrustworthy (or hopelessly elitist, which alludes to Romney's personal fortune). A further discursive implication: knowledge of *any* other language but English renders that U.S. citizen less trustworthy.

A similar discursive juxtaposition is exemplified in Michelle Bachmann's 2005 remarks made during a debate sponsored by the Taxpayers League as reported in the *Huffington Post*. In the course of the event, Bachmann makes several assertions about French culture in the context of rioting that occurred there following the shooting of two suburban teenagers. Attributing the riots to al Jazeera and jihadists, she deplores the threat to French culture by characterizing it as "diminishing," "going away," and being taken over by "a Muslim ethic." She casts the U.S. policies that embrace multi-cultural diversity in similar terms, as threatened by Arabic "tribalism." "Multi-cultural diversity says out of one many. And if we go with tribalism we will not long be one nation united under God."[4]

Ms. Bachman indexes here several discourses that at face value relate to "culture" without specific reference to language, yet implicit in her statements is an understanding of culture and language together as part of necessary "assimilation" and threatening multi-ethnic diversity. To be sure, Ms. Bachman's remarks about a "Muslim ethic" and the position of Arab culture relative to Western/French culture reflect her own particular slant. Yet, as was illustrated earlier in the controversy over bilingual instruction in Georgia, such remarks index discourses prevalent in the U.S. that often have very real consequences for foreign language programs.

Just an example of the real consequences that such negative public discourse can have on school programs is found in the debates over the announcement by of Mansfield Independent School District Superintendent Bob Morrison of a million dollar government grant to the community to be used for instruction in Arabic and Arab cultures. The cultural biases apparent in the ensuing controversy were, as is frequently the case, reflected in the style of reporting presented on local television news about the grant to the Dallas suburb.

[4] For the full transcript of Ms. Bachman's statement, see Appendix. It should be stressed that both the moderator's and Ms. Bachman's assessment of and assertions about the situation in France in 2005 were fairly inaccurate. According to the "The Uptake" section of the *Huffington Post*, "the unrest was no jihad, had nothing to do with religious faith or Muslim culture or al Jazeera. It was more akin to the riots in the U.S. for expanded civil rights in the 1960s or those that followed from the Rodney King police beating in Los Angeles in 1991. The European riots came after two suburban youth were killed in a police chase. The unrest centered on decades of discrimination that had manifested itself, for example, in school acceptances and hiring practices and police force racial profiling" (Michelle Bachman 2008).

The report described an uproar that soon garnered the interest of national media. The initial local news coverage of the events opened with news anchor stating that "the unknown can be scary, and for some parents at a school in Mansfield the unknown can be upsetting too." He went on to (inaccurately) report that mandatory Arabic would be taught in every class at one school. The TV news reporter, Chris Hawes, at the public meeting in question, opened her report with the following: "Parents and teachers packed a Mansfield ISD school cafeteria to hear learn more about why Arabic language and culture could soon be embedded in everything their children learn" (Hawes 2011). In the video, Ms. Hawes emphasized the words "embedded" and "everything." The piece then moved to the case of a student who had been adopted from Russia as a small child and whose exasperated mother spoke in an on-camera interview bemoaning that "[s]he had to learn Spanish when she was in elementary school, and now they want her to learn Arabic" (Hawes 2011).

While the story also interviews a Muslim parent, it makes clear that the mother's concerns stem from fear that Islam will be taught to their children, not just Arabic. Yet the reporter also includes a sort of rejoinder by the mother of the adopted Russian child, saying, "If it were up to me, it would just be Christian [religion taught], but my student can benefit from learning different religions." The district put the implementation of the grant on hold and later submitted a revised version to the Department of Education. The revision was rejected, and the grant was cancelled. In the fiscal year 2012 the funding for the Foreign Language Assistance Program was ended by Congress, with no plans to reinstate it.

The slanted framing of this TV news report is not unusual. Rather than opting to describe the grant initiative as an innovative languages-across-the-curriculum program integrating Arabic learning into parts of the children's school day, or rather than emphasizing the introduction the students would receive to the significant contributions of Arabic art, astronomy, science, medicine, and literature in a region with considerable connections to the world's history and cultures associated with the language, it styles the proposal as having "Arabic language and culture ... embedded in everything their children learn." The choice of the word "embedded," along with its prosodic emphasis by the speaker, suggests both an invasion of some sort, or an effort at integration. These connotations arise in part from current media references to American troops who are "embedded" with Afghani forces in a given region. Thus immediately after priming the TV viewer that "the unknown can be scary," the Arabic language and culture are semantically equated with the subsequent comments as a foreign enforcement for an intrusive element.

5 The Case for English Only

The popular assumptions that since "most everyone else in the world is learning English anyway," and that "together with American military and economic power, it is unnecessary to worry about knowing the language of a country in which one has business, bases, or hostages" (Hymes 1996, p. 85) still resonate today as the

flip face of the discourse strand just addressed. Certainly, the claim is bolstered by American hegemony in many parts of the world (often for military and economic reasons), and consequently, it is often used as a rationale for trimming or eliminating language instruction at schools and universities. Many prestigious voices make a case for the centrality of English as the most significant global language and link technological advances to the practicality of using English even in localities where it is not understood. Such a spokesperson, former Harvard President Lawrence Summers, sums up this position as follows:

> English's emergence as the global language, along with the rapid progress in machine translation and the fragmentation of languages spoken around the world, make it less clear that the substantial investment necessary to speak a foreign tongue is universally worthwhile. While there is no gainsaying the insights that come from mastering a language, it will over time become less essential in doing business in Asia, treating patients in Africa or helping resolve conflicts in the Middle East. (Summers 2012)

Despite his role as a university leader, Mr. Summers reduces multilingualism to the status of adjunct helpfulness for achieving "insights," at least for speakers of English. Implicit here is the message that the rest of the world will continue to learn English rather than the languages of emerging new economic and military powers in the twenty-first century, or rely on translation machines in order to do business, treat patients and help resolve conflicts.

Like the "Babel fish" in Douglas Adams's (1979) *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, a device which ensures that no one need learn another's language because with the small animal, inserted into the ear, everyone can receive and send instantly translated dialogue. The caveat here is that Adams's narrator concludes that, like the biblical Tower, "by effectively removing all barriers to communication between different races and cultures, [the Babel fish] has caused more and bloodier wars than anything else in the history of creation" (Adams 1979, p. 61). As recent findings in sociolinguistics and discourse analysis have demonstrated, language isolated from background knowledge and appreciation of situational contexts denies communicators critical affective and cognitive information necessary to engage in a contextually anchored critical analysis of messages that is vital if speakers are to engage in productive communicative exchanges (Kern 2000).

While machine translation still lacks the power or convenience of the Babel fish, the discursive thread underlying Mr. Summers's statement indexes a discourse with a long and powerful history. As discussed earlier, the major contributing factors in the rise and spread of English was its role as the language of the global British Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and its position was cemented after World War II with the rise of the U.S. as a global superpower Pavlenko (2002). Moreover, the decades since World War II have witnessed a massive expansion of transnational corporations, all of whom do a great deal of their business in English. And of course, since the advent of global telecommunications and the Internet, the benefits of knowing English in all sectors of society have increased.

All these developments have indeed created a global marketplace for the learning of English as a second language. On the surface, these realities go a long way toward supporting a widespread assumption that learning a foreign language is not

necessary in the U.S. (see Thomas 2012). As a result, the power, implicit or explicit, that goes with being a *native speaker* of English, buttresses a worldview in which especially being a monolingual native speaker enjoys a considerable prestige.[5] Reagan (2002) claims that "native speakers of languages of wider communication [in particular English] have a huge advantage over nonnative speakers in their communicative interactions, just as native speakers of more prestigious varieties of the languages of wider communication are disproportionately advantaged over speakers of non-prestigious varieties" (see also Tonkin 2001, pp. 3–4).

In short, English has come to occupy what Abram de Swaan (2001) calls a "supercentral" position in the constellation of languages in the world (see Chap. 1). He categorizes a number of other major languages that represent millions of speakers as significant, but with one important qualification. Languages such as Spanish, Mandarin, and Arabic he views as central to particular regions in the world whereas English dominates as the universal lingua franca. In this sense, a dichotomy exists between English and other languages, even the major ones representing world powers with global economic and military strength that could at some point eclipse the preeminent status of the U.S.

It is this dichotomy that President Summers indexes in his *New York Times* op-ed piece where he dismisses the value of foreign languages in a college or K-12 curriculum. The implications for foreign language education cannot be understated. This dismissal means that whereas learners of languages around the world can invoke straightforward utilitarian and pragmatic motivations for learning languages other than their home-country's languages, such utilitarian arguments are not feasible in U.S. contexts, in particular in educational settings where resources have been severely limited in recent years.

For foreign language educators, the most significant outcome of this strand of public discourse about language and language learning is that universities have come to see foreign language instruction as outside of their core mission. A recent decision, in fall 2010, to eliminate most of SUNY Albany's European language degree offerings reflects this trend. At that time, SUNY president George M. Philip announced the closure of theater and language programs for advanced students as a cost-saving measure, a list which included majors in French, Italian, Russian, and Classics (the degree program in German had already been eliminated; see Jaschik 2010).

A public outcry ensued in the mainstream media, including interviews with students bemoaning the loss of their programs (e.g. see Jaschik 2010), and numerous editorials lambasting President George M. Philip for the severity of the cuts. Some of these editorials appeared to convey the SUNY administration's belief that language learning was unimportant or at least less important than other academic subjects (see, for example, the scathing editorial critique by Petsko 2010). Nonetheless, many held up the university's own motto, "The World Within Reach," accusing President Philip of hypocrisy and of undermining of the university's mission (see Feal 2010).

For his part, in the FAQ section of his official website, the president pointed out that SUNY Albany still offered instruction in 13 languages although primarily only at the introductory and intermediate levels. To his critics, Philip answered that

[5] Moreover, U.S. English has profited from this shift; in earlier decades, British English was the standard for educated speech.

these cuts would be supplanted with a strategic plan for "further internationalizing our institution across the entire curriculum by incorporating, where appropriate, global perspectives in all our courses, by encouraging more participation in study abroad, and by creating a welcoming environment for international students here at UAlbany" (Philip 2010).

In this representation, English remains the primary vehicle for bringing "the world within reach" by incorporating "global perspectives" across the curriculum. Ignored or dismissed is extensive evidence to the contrary conducted for decades by researchers in sociolinguistics and discourse analysis. In these venues, very different premises about language study emerge, because cultural expectations and speaker or writer contexts are viewed as essential features of any language's messages. Theses pragmatic meaning signals are frequently the sources of significance not evident in translated statements (van Dijk 2008). In other words, language study involves more than learning a language. These pragmatic considerations have slowly gained credence in the increasingly dominant discourses about foreign language instruction in the U.S.: its role in the nation's global future. Unlike the rhetoric of English only, that discourse commences with the realization that global issues cannot all be addressed in English.

6 Utility and Global Competitiveness: A Corrective?

These statements about "English only" emerge as problematic almost immediately, even by those who espouse them. Despite English's current linguistic hegemony and despite the pervasive belief that all one really needs to do business, treat patients and resolve world conflicts in English, recent public discourses give a great deal of attention to arguing for the inherent utility of knowing languages other than English (see CLS 2012; Kramsch 2005; Scollon 2004). In many statements by public officials, from then U.S. Representative Paul Simon in his landmark book, *The tongue-tied American* (1980), to recent Senate hearings on issues of foreign language "capabilities" in the U.S. government (National Security Crisis 2012), to comments made by political candidates, a two-sided coin emerges: individual enrichment on the one hand versus global competitiveness on the other. Statements made in connection with a 1989 congressional initiative, entitled the "Foreign Language Competence for the Future Act of 1989" (1990), exemplify this rhetorical dichotomy. At a hearing on this proposal Senator Christopher Dodd observed that "[s]tudents who have the opportunity to learn a second language will improve their chances of getting into a competitive college or university, they will be more attractive job applicants, and they will be personally enriched by the literature written in the language they are studying" (Foreign Language Competence 1990, p. 29).

Here the message is about individual benefits: learning a foreign language will improve a person's chances of "getting into a competitive college or university" in addition to being "personally enriched" by the experience—a striking reversion to older, class-based arguments about culture and acculturation. The second related

message emerges almost immediately, however: he or she will be "more attractive" on the job market. It is this second message that is increasingly emphasized in recent political and governmental rhetoric about foreign language learning. Thus in a 2011 town hall meeting, President Obama represented the utility of foreign languages with observations such as the following:

> ... if you go to a company and they're doing business in France or Belgium or Switzerland or Europe somewhere, and they find out you've got that language skill, that's going to be important as well … (White House 2011)

Reagan (2002) presents the contrarian view to this popular pragmatic argument for language learning, asserting that "[t]he United States … is in fact a profoundly monolingual society ideologically if not empirically, and relatively few students … really believe that second language skills are necessary for the marketplace" (25). Such attitudes can change, however, given current technologically driven communication opportunities that abound worldwide. As increasing numbers of Americans travel and work abroad, the "all you need is English" argument becomes increasingly suspect—one hopes. Most tourists can recognize that a grasp of circumstances and a few polite inquiries in a foreign language can foster effective exchange of information even if one lacks fluency.

Such insights, however fragmentary, have begun to expand the complex of discourses related to the role of foreign language knowledge of the U.S. in comparison with other countries of the world. The new focus on pragmatic foreign language use has lent the "competitiveness" discourse greater impetus for affecting government policy, funding of research and curricular initiatives, and university administrators' decisions about how much to support language instruction. Pragmatics also have influenced decisions about which languages to teach (see Kramsch 2005; Ortega 1999).

The complementary discursive message persists that U.S. has "fallen behind" or needs to "catch up" to other nations in the area of language learning. Senator Dodd's assertions in 1989 that U.S. students should "exceed the performance of students from other industrialized nations" and that "the United States lags far behind other industrialized nations," and that "the Soviet Union … has more teachers of English in Leningrad alone than we have students of Russian in the whole of the United States" (Foreign Language Competence 1990, p. 29) index a discourse that began with Sputnik and the subsequent National Defense Education Act of 1958, which poured significant federal support into language education and continued through the Cold War decades.

Kramsch (2005) observes that this discourse underwent pendulum swings in its different iterations from the 1950s through the 2000s in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, oscillating between a greater concern for U.S. national security and the desire to understand other cultures and peoples. Nonetheless, at the core, the U.S. sees itself essentially in competition with other countries, politically, economically, and, increasingly, militarily as well. In the years after the September 2001 attacks the U.S. government supported several foreign language initiatives that focused on creating and improving advanced capacities in "critical" languages.[6]

[6] See Kramsch (2005) for a critique of the relationship between governmental responses in the public sector and the foreign language education community.

Examples of the "fallen behind" message in public discourse stem from advocates of foreign language education in government, as the remarks made in 2010 by Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (Department of Education 2010) and Representative Judy Chu suggest. Both speak of the need to compete successfully. As Chu points out:

> As a nation, we have fallen behind with regard to the number of people learning second languages. Twenty out of the 25 leading industrialized countries start teaching second languages from K to 5th grade; 21 of the 31 countries in the European Union require 9 years of another language. In order to catch up with these countries, we have to promote bilingual education or dual-language education in preschool, when students have the best chance to learn those languages and sustain it through later grades. It would be something that benefits them for the rest of their lives. (Po 2010)

Ironically, to have "fallen behind" presumes that we were at one point *ahead*. As Kramsch (2005) and Scollon (2004) point out, it is somehow nearly uniquely American to frame language learning in terms of a competition.[7] By comparison, the Council of Europe has most often framed the task of second-language learning in terms of cooperation, mutual cultural understanding and the fostering of European integration (Byram 2008; Council of Europe 2001; Trim 2012). Whether for national security purposes, or for economic competitiveness, those who index this discourse do so out of a conviction that the U.S. must assert itself as a global leader even on this front, the language learning front.

Indeed, while bilingual education on such a scope will probably continue to be challenged by local school boards (a problem many European countries do not have), such messages are now being heard more and more in a different context: that of the military as well as economic competition (Foreign Language Competence 1990; State of Foreign Language Capabilities 2001; National Security Crisis 2012). The disjunction between these strands of discourse are clear, but they remain unreconciled.

The Department of Defense and the Chairman of the House Committee on Armed Services frequently index discourses of global competitiveness in terms similar to those of Duncan and Chu. The opening the statement made by Representative Vic Snyder, Chairman of the House Committee on Armed Services, Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee, in a hearing on "Transforming the U.S. Military's Foreign Language, Cultural Awareness, and Regional Expertise Capabilities" summarizes these discourses in a typical way:

> To address today's strategic and operational environments, the Department [of Defense] is training and equipping our military force not only in conventional combat skills but also in the skills needed to conduct missions across the full spectrum of operations. Those missions include fighting terror, conducting counterinsurgency, building partnership capacity in foreign countries, carrying out stability operations and humanitarian relief, and building coalitions. All these missions highlight the need for greater foreign language proficiency, cultural awareness and regional expertise (Transforming 2008, p. 5)

An analysis regarding language as a type of military "capability," stresses here both the utilitarian discourse and that of transcultural knowledge, components often not

[7] Interestingly, the overall decline of U.S. global competitiveness may be due more to macroeconomic instability than to a lack of workforce skills and knowledge, according to a recent study by Mathis (2011).

fully articulated in current language programs. Suggestions for introducing program and training transformations designed to address the scope of desiderata indexed in the "competitiveness" discourses described here are suggested throughout this volume and particularly in the chapters by Maxim, Allen-Willis, and Arens.

One issue surfacing in the pragmatic strand of discourses raises the question of which languages should be taught. As suggested by the program cuts in the SUNY system, schools can offer more of those languages deemed more useful if less emphasis is put on traditionally more dominant languages such as French or German.

Throughout the recession that began in 2008, not just SUNY, but dozens of other universities and colleges across the country cut language programs and, sometimes, whole degree programs (see Berman 2011). The fiscally pragmatic emphasis of global competitiveness as a guiding discourse caused consternation at the annual American Council of Foreign Language Teachers (ACTFL) convention in 2010. There, Council on Foreign Relations president Richard Haass' delivered the keynote which, according to Russell Berman, countenanced "only a narrowly instrumental defense for foreign language learning, limited to two rationales: national security and global economy" (Berman 2010). In a subsequent interview, Haass elaborated on his position about the relative value of European and other languages as follows:

> "My argument wasn't so much against this or that language," Dr. Haass, a former State Department official, said in an interview. "But if we're going to remain economically competitive and provide the skill and manpower for government, I think we need more Americans to learn Chinese or Hindi or Farsi or Portuguese or Korean or Arabic. In an ideal world, that wouldn't mean fewer people would know Spanish, French, German and Italian. But in a real world, it might." (Foderaro 2010)

For Haass, as for many who assess the future of teaching languages that are not perceived to contribute significantly to U.S. national security, political standing, or economic competitiveness, the competition is not only abroad, but at home, in the form of a competition for dwindling resources at schools and universities.

In that sense the profession faces its own discourse of threat, in the form of Darwinian decision-making in which language learning, and ultimately language knowledge, is viewed primarily in terms of its utility for national interests and secondarily for its utility for the career of and value to the individual. On the local level, global competitiveness disappears as a viable narrative for self-justification.

7 Conclusion: Moving Beyond the Discourse of Foreignness

The thesis of this chapter has been that all of the narrative strands presented above reflect significant faces of a broad-based discourse about the role of foreignness in American culture. Most of the discourses of foreignness presented here have had direct or indirect influences on educational institutions, language departments, their programs, and individual language learners. Some aspects of several strands, notably the threat and competitiveness discourses, lend support for language education in the U.S., particularly when articulated by President Obama or witnesses before Congress

on the importance of language education for maintaining U.S. economic and military strength. Yet the underlying premises of many strands remain stuck with foreign language instruction as an "add on," just as it was in secondary education before WWI.

In some ways, the 2007 MLA *ad hoc* Committee Report that stressed the need to teach language and culture together still reinforces discourses of foreignness, opening as it does by framing language education in terms of a response to the 9/11 attacks. But the bulk of the report represents a plea for language professionals to begin to think in larger curricular and programmatic terms than they have to date—to find new strands of discourse based on more robust principles. The suggestion that postsecondary departments move beyond the two-tiered structure of most current curricula, for instance, connects that observation to the shift from a focus on teaching language *per se* to viewing language as a component of the larger complex implied by terms such as translingual and transcultural. Such assertions confront the foreignness discourses head-on by addressing instruction in foreign languages as keys to addressing what foreignness constitutes to a U.S. citizen and how to deal with it.

However, if all of the discourses uncovered here (1) reveal a widespread fear of the foreign Other, (2) assume the hegemonic and expanding role of English in the world, (3) reject the inherent utility and global competition motivation for foreign language learning, and (4) unpack the ways the 'luxury' perspective of language learning is no longer valid and should be rejected, then the profession confronts a formidable task. At the same time, such public discourses flow and change in complex, dynamic, and hence unexpected ways over long periods, as millions of separate actions and interactions take place, like the flock of birds described by Larsen-Freeman and Cameron as an example of a complex adaptive system (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008). A viewer can recognize it as a flock and yet remain unable to predict the exact form of the flock at a given moment or its trajectory through the sky. Trends have emerged in recent years that may well be moving discourses about foreignness and foreign languages in new directions:

1. the evidence about the relation between foreign language use and maintaining mental acuity
2. the adaptations of technology to classroom use and resulting trends in hybrid and blended pedagogies (see Goertler 2009, 2014)
3. the reduced linguistic isolation of the U.S. through the Internet
4. the rise of interest in language learning outside the context of educational settings, such as through language learning social media sites (e.g., livemocha.com) and the popularity of autodidactic foreign-language learning programs such as Rosetta Stone,[8] indicating the U.S. population's increasing interest in learning languages other than English.

[8] According to a 2009 report in *Time*, Rosetta Stone "generated $209 million in revenue in 2008, compared to $25.4 million in 2004—that's a 723% increase." They point out that around 95% of Rosetta Stone's revenues came from the U.S. market (Gregory 2009). While their stock has since fallen considerably (see http://quotes.wsj.com/RST for the trends), the drop may in fact be due to the increase in competition from other sources prospective language learners find in the digital world.

5. the number of university students, both U.S. and foreign born, who come to the university as bilingual/multilingual language users
6. the increasing numbers among young people who grow up in the U.S. with languages other than English who are not abandoning their home languages in favor of English only (Brinton, Kagan and Bauckus 2008; Polinsky and Kagan 2007; Kondo-Brown 2003), and
7. the concomitant increase in heritage languages as an academic subject in colleges and universities.

These trends, taken together, suggest that the U.S. population is gradually increasing its interest in and reasons for learning and using languages other than English. These are addressed in terms of their institutional and pedagogical implications for the role of foreign language in postsecondary institutions in the chapters by Arens, Melin, Watzinger-Tharp, and Willis Allen in this volume.

This chapter has sought to highlight some of the ways historical and sociological forces manifest the way people talk and think about language, culture and language education. I have sought to illustrate the ways that discourses of foreignness are expressed by constituencies at all levels, from parents and students, to language professionals, administrators, the media, and even the U.S. government. It behooves the profession to vigorously address these discourses with transformed and transforming programs, trends, and research that points to new directions about learning and using languages other than English in the United States. Some of these challenges are taken up in subsequent chapters in this volume, which are unified by an important assumption: these discourses will not change until we fundamentally alter how we, as professionals, think about the ontology of foreign language teaching.

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This chapter is dedicated to the memory of Leo van Lier, whose work has taught me so much. He was one of the rare scholars who could convey through every page he wrote the profound importance of the study of language as a human phenomenon. His many contributions on language and the teaching and learning of languages will continue to serve countless scholars and teachers for a long time to come.

Appendix: Transcript of Michele Bachman during the Minnesota Republican 6th Congressional District Debate Sponsored by the Taxpayers League, November 2005 (Michelle Bachman 2008)

Moderator: Given the recent rioting in France that is the result of a sub-culture that has not assimilated, what would you do to make sure that a similar situation does not take place in America? […]

Michele Bachmann: I just want to say only in France, only in France could you have suburban youth rioting because the welfare benefits aren't generous enough. And that's… that's what they're telling us now is happening there. And only in France could that happen.

And what we're seeing is just the fruits of leftism. It's suburbanites, the kids, that are watching cable TV, did you know that? In a lot of these high rises where a lot of the suburban youth are doing rioting or doing they have cable TV in their apartments. They're listening to al Jazeera, and they're being encouraged and prompted to go ahead and start these riots all over France.

There is a movement afoot that's occurring and part of that is the whole philosophical idea of multi-cultural diversity, which on the face sounds wonderful. Let's appreciate and value everyone's cultures. But guess what? **Not all cultures are equal. Not all values are equal.**

And one thing that we're seeing is that in the midst of this violence that's being encouraged by al Jazeera and by the jihadists that's occurring, is that we are seeing that those who are coming into France—which had a beautiful culture—the French culture is actually diminished. It's going away. And just with the population of France they are losing Western Europeans and it's being taken over by muh… by a Muslim ethic. Not that Muslims are bad. But they are not assimilating.

And that's what I had mentioned in my previous response is that America is a great nation, with great values. We are equal opportunity for all. And it's because we all came here and we came together as one. Out of many one. Multi-cultural diversity says out of one many. And if we go with tribalism we will not long be one nation united under God.

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