

litanies, cloistered, tin, despair, and calorie. That means that seventeen percent of the words in this text are very low frequency. If we bear in mind the literature that tells us that students need to know 95-98 percent of the words in a text in order to actually read the text, we see how challenging Steinbeck's Nobel speech may be.

A numerical analysis of Steinbeck's text misses its beauty and the sheer pleasure we get from reading it or listening to it. What a memorable phrase Steinbeck gives us in "tin-horn mendicants of low-calorie despair."

Finally, when you listen to Steinbeck giving his speech, you hear him mispronounce, or not pronounce according to the phonetic standards given in the dictionaries, the word "promulgate." Who has the power to decide whether John Steinbeck, with his tremendous command of the English language and a Nobel Prize in Literature or an anonymous lexicographer, has the power to determine which pronunciation is correct?

For a second example of Steinbeck's use of English, we turn to the first paragraph from *Cannery Row*. Steinbeck writes,

Cannery Row in Monterey in California is a poem, a stink, a grating noise, a quality of light, a tone, a habit, a nostalgia a dream. Cannery Row is the gathered and scattered, tin and iron and rust and splintered wood, chipped pavement and weedy lots and junk heaps sardine canneries of corrugated iron, honky tonks, restaurants and whore houses, and little crowded groceries, and laboratories and flophouses. Its inhabitants are, as the man once said, "whore, pips, gamblers, and sons of bitches," by which he meant Everybody. Had the man looked through another peephole he might have said, "Saints and angels and martyrs and holy men," and he would have meant the same thing. (Steinbeck 1994, 5)

Once again the Gunning Fox readability index indicates that the reader should have more than twenty years of formal education to process the text efficiently. The challenge here is the length of the sentences. If we break the sentences into shorter units, without making any other adjustments, we can bring the text down to about a seventh grade

reading level. This text has fifteen words of three syllables or more, which means that there are 112 short words in the text.

Short words in simple sentences have made up some of the most powerful moments in English public speech. Hamlet says “To be or not to be.” President Reagan said, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall.” General MacArthur quips, “I shall return.” And Arnold said, “I’ll be back.” So while the proficiency skill level descriptions suggest that the highest levels reflect the highest registers of language and often, at least in the ACTFL descriptions, sound like written texts, we see that the performance of actual highly articulate native speakers can lead us to the simplest sentences and shortest high frequency words.

Finally, for a third sample of Steinbeck’s language we turn to a phone conversation between the Nobel laureate and president Lyndon Johnson recorded by the White House and available from the Johnson Presidential Library. The call took place on December 4, 1966. Johnson and Steinbeck were friends through their wives, who had spent their college days together at the University of Texas at Austin. Thomas E. Barden, editor of *Steinbeck in Vietnam: Dispatches from the War*, writes of the Johnson-Steinbeck relationship, “Steinbeck and Johnson had a great deal in common, from a general discomfort with Harvard and Yale types and a hatred of communism to their shared passion for social justice” (Barden 2013, xiv).

The call begins with a fairly traditional set of opening lines:

LBJ: Hello.

JS: Hello.

LBJ: John, how are you?

JS: Mr. President, I’m just fine.

The two then continue talking about family and the possibility that Steinbeck will travel to Vietnam to report on the war for a Houston paper. When Steinbeck asks the President about the progress of the war, Johnson switches to the first person plural.

LBJ: We never can be very optimistic, because we never know, but we think that it’s getting better every day.

JS: It sounds that way.

LBJ: We think the one thing that helped a good deal was that they felt the elections would be helpful. They were not. And we think that it’s an endurance contest and that they have about

concluded they can't win but I don't think they know where they, which way to go from there. (Johnson and Steinbeck 1966)  
The call returns to a conversational tone when the topic switches back to the president's health and the wellbeing of both their families.

Steinbeck's speech in this sample does not present the formal register we heard at the Nobel Luncheon or the carefully planned language we found in Cannery Row. The beginning and end of the conversation cover health and family issues. The center is business. The president, while maintaining his down-home style country boy speech throughout, changes registers when the topics change. He switches from the first person singular to the first person plural when the conversation changes from talk about family to information about the progress of the war. Steinbeck, the reporter, redirects the flow of the conversation with his comment, that he smells a change. When Steinbeck says that the mood in North Vietnam seems to be changing, the president responds by saying, "I know that," which seems to end that part of the phone call. And then the conversation goes back to questions about health, which had already been asked and answered. We see in this text, a very informal register yet sophisticated speech acts. Steinbeck is interviewing the President of the United States. President Johnson, while maintaining his carefully crafted persona, skillfully answers questions, pronounces on policy and ends the discussion.

This phone conversation gives important data for our understanding of high-level proficiency. The ILR does not ask us how educated an educated person can sound when an educated person wants to sound educated. The ILR tells us that high level proficiency is performance that approaches that of a highly articulate person, and we have seen that language used by such people bridges many different registers, including seemingly simple chit chat.

### **The Platitudinous Postlude**

We have seen that the yardstick against which second language performance is measured is fraught with difficulties and may be a candidate for reconsideration. We have also seen that the speech performance of people generally recognized as exemplars of highly articulate well-educated speech can be simple or even halting. We have

observed that high-level speech can be carefully crafted, but it can be many other things depending on the audience, the message and the intent to communicate.

At no point in the ILR skill level description does it say that an individual speaking at the highest level of proficiency should always sound like an educated person giving a carefully crafted lecture. People move from level to level and register to register as they speak. A highly articulate well educated native speaker talking to elementary school children about science, or talking to a hostile crowd, or exchanging pleasantries with the neighbors is performing at a high proficiency level even when the register of speech is low or informal. The ability to perform in high registers and sound like written texts without the ability to move across the whole range of registers would be a sign of limited proficiency.

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## Foreign Language Study Coupled with Internship Experience as an Entrée to Professional Opportunities

*N. Anthony Brown*

### **Introduction**

Today's global age presents its share of unique challenges, not the least of which is communication. Whereas in past centuries, fossil fuels played a central role in driving economies and influencing policy decisions, "language is the new oil" in the twenty-first century.<sup>1</sup> Some forward thinking individuals and organizations have responded to the times and teamed up with universities and government agencies to develop new and innovative foreign language programs. Consider, for example, the U.S. federally funded National Flagship Language Program that offers upwards of nine months to one year of intensive language instruction in the target language culture and experiential learning in the form of an internship, the objective of which is to produce Level 3 speakers, referring to the federal Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale, or the equivalent of Superior level, according to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) proficiency scale. Immersion-type programs, such as the Flagship Programs, reflect a response to a shortage of highly proficient learners of foreign languages in corporations, nongovernmental organizations, militaries, diplomatic services, and universities. The Flagship programs guarantee extensive contact with a target language over a concentrated period of time, while simultaneously responding to a growing demand among university students nationwide to pursue pre-professional experience in their respective target languages. Findings presented in this article focus on the professional goals and language gains

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<sup>1</sup> Speaking at Brigham Young University's Symposium "Humanities Plus: Advancing Global Dialogue and Initiatives through Experiential Learning" on 30-31 January 2014, GALA's CEO Hans Fenstermacher asserted that languages today must be a core competency of every organization that seeks to remain relevant (<https://plus.google.com/+BYUHumanities/posts/McL5H2QxDj3>).

demonstrated by students at Brigham Young University (BYU) participating in the Moscow Internship Program.

### **Review of the Literature**

Traditionally, students pursuing foreign languages have participated in study abroad programs that offer an immersion experience living in a target language culture. Such intense exposure often leaves an indelible impression on young minds and influences the way they perceive themselves and others. Yet as the global economy has expanded and demand for foreign language credentials grown<sup>2</sup>, students increasingly have sought to supplement their study abroad experience with actual pre-professional experience.

In the decade between 2000 and 2010, the number of students who traveled abroad for a credit-earning internship program ballooned from 1,700 to 16,400, with another 8,700 working abroad on a non-credit basis (Simon 2013). Perhaps this shift could most accurately be described as one of augmenting existing study abroad programs and, thereby, providing students with “work-study abroad” (Ibid.). Recognizing the added value of working and studying abroad, many humanities programs around the U.S. have retooled their study abroad course offerings and built a practicum-like experience into them that gives students an opportunity to work in the target language culture. Administrators from the College of Humanities at Brigham Young University refer to this bridging of a liberal arts education with pre-professional experience as Humanities+™<sup>3</sup> and provide students important support in the form of advisement and program discounts.

But expanding global markets are just one of many factors that have influenced college administrators to rethink their study abroad curricula. For years, the humanities have had to defend their place in the university amidst skyrocketing demand for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) majors. With shrinking

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<sup>2</sup> Annalyn Kurtz, reporting for *CNN Money*, writes that between 2010 and 2020, jobs for interpreters and translators are expected to grow by forty-two percent (not including the military sector).

<sup>3</sup> Humanities+™ represents an initiative designed “to provide ideas and resources for bridging the traditional humanities major to the professional work world” (see blog at <http://humanitiesplus.byu.edu/>).



university budgets in a flaccid economy and calls for trimming or altogether cutting programs that seemingly contribute to unemployment rates, administrators have targeted the humanities, which often are perceived as “soft” sciences and expendable. To counter this misperception of the humanities, in recent years, many foreign language departments across the U.S. have articulated clear learning outcomes by drawing on ACTFL proficiency guidelines to define expectations of their curricula.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, foreign language instructors have made important strides in the way of implementing rigorous proficiency testing that aligns with other STEM fields and that makes foreign language graduates more attractive to employers.

The question of return on investment (ROI) with regard to foreign language study and, by extension, experiential learning, remains a disputed and even polarizing one. Advocates of education for the personal growth that it provides often encounter resistance from individuals who view a degree as a means to an end – a golden ticket, so to say. Naturally, there also are those who espouse a centrist position on the issue and recognize that a college education entails some of both and that conceding such a point does not imply selling out to either extreme. After all, asks Lane Greene of *The Economist*, “What is the return on investment for history, literature or art? Of course schools are intended to do more than create little GDP-producing machines” (Greene, 2014). Greene goes on to argue that, aside from the non-economic benefits of learning a foreign language, there are many economic advantages to learning them, particularly in a world in which the number of English speakers is not growing as fast as some would like to think (Ibid.).

Although the issue of ROI has vexed academe for many years, the combination of rising tuition costs coupled with mounting student debt and a weak economy has driven home its acute nature (Carlson 2013). Some U.S. universities, such as the Texas A&M International University, have sought to streamline costs by offering a bachelor’s degree that does not require registering for a foreign language course (Riley 2010). However, such a model fails to take into consideration the

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<sup>4</sup> In their full report to the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, George Kuh and Stanley Ikenberry point out that “Another indicator of the growth of the assessment movement is the sharp increase since 2000 in the range of assessment tools and organizations devoted to some aspect of assessment” (2009, 6).

linguistic disadvantages that graduates will face when competing for international education opportunities, U.S. government work (the Foreign Service, the Intelligence communities, the armed services, e.g., ROTC candidates must now have some foreign language coursework), and the like.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, as the authors of a nationwide Russian language survey soberly concluded: “The pre-occupation with preparing a generation for the globalized economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the foreign affairs community of the U.S., and in virtually every world center today from Beijing and Brussels to Moscow, Shanghai, Seoul, and Tokyo appears to have left most of the American heartland untouched” (Davidson and Garas 2009, 17). However, programs, such as the American Graduate School of International Management at Thunderbird, require that students complete the equivalent of four semesters of foreign language study, which far outstrips foreign language requirements at most MBA programs in the country (Grosse, Tuman, and Critz 1998).

### **Program development**

Most students enrolled in upper-division Russian courses at BYU have spent eighteen months to two years living in a Russian-speaking country where they gave volunteer service. Upon returning, many opt to test out of first- and second-year Russian and matriculate directly into third-year advanced grammar. Consequently, the gradual attrition that normally occurs over the course of four years of foreign language study does not apply to foreign language study at BYU. Conversely, the numbers swell at the third year and stay consistently high through fourth year. Students in the Russian program have the option of going on study abroad to Nizhny Novgorod, but the program caters to those who are completing second-year Russian and do not have prior immersion experience in the target language culture. Even though most students in upper division courses have lived in a Russian-speaking country, they lack professional language skills and it is precisely these types of language skills that many want to develop.

For these reasons, in 2005, the researcher surveyed a cross-section of upper-division students at BYU ( $N = 190$ ) to ascertain, on a scale of

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<sup>5</sup> Correspondence with William P. Rivers in regards to the announced closing of the Russian, Italian, and French language programs at SUNY Albany, 17 October 2010.

one to five, the degree to which they considered pursuing an internship in Russia important to their overall undergraduate education and future professional development. Figure 1 illustrates students' responses, with one being not interested and five being very interested.

Figure 1: Level of Interest

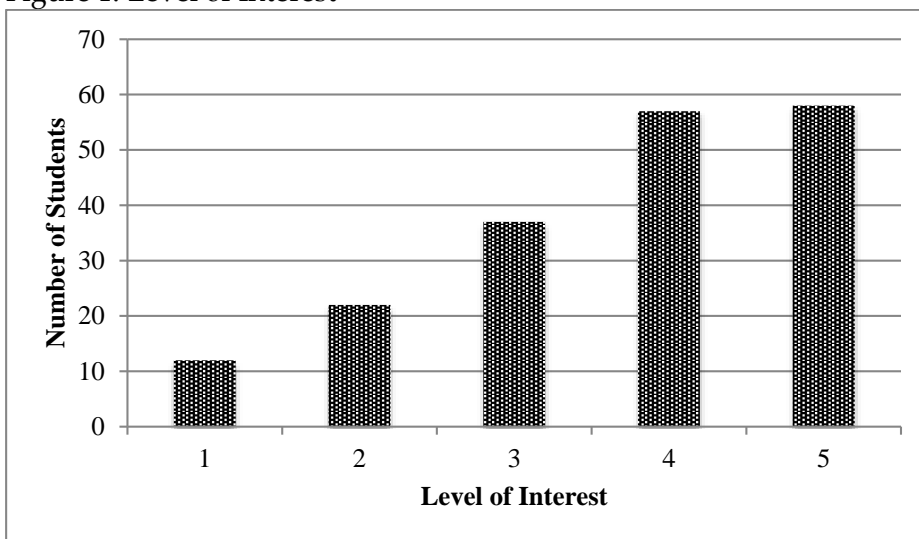
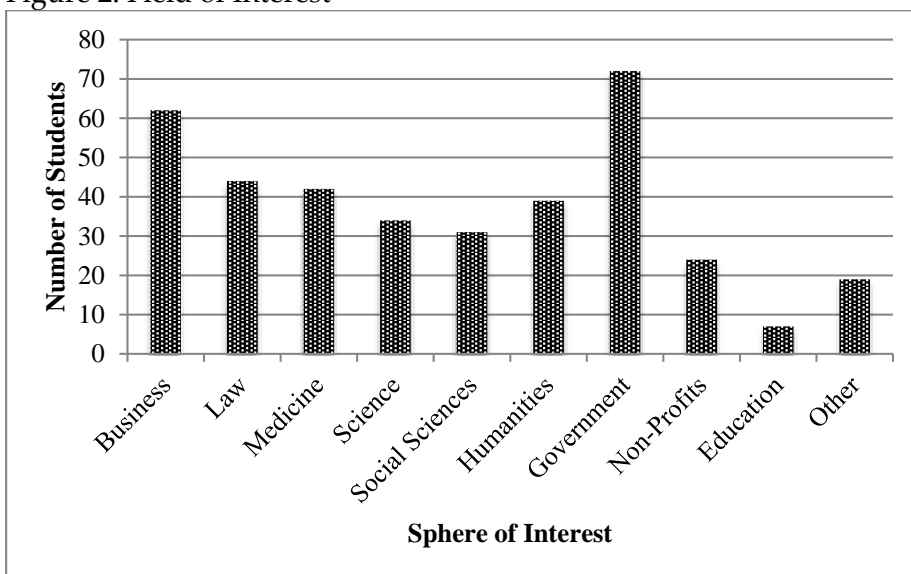


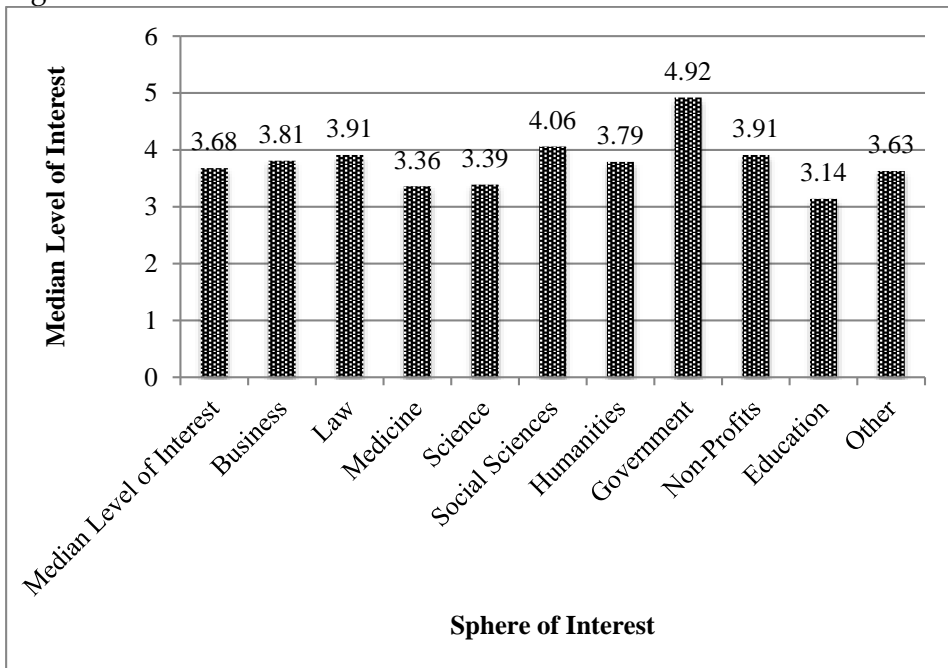
Figure 2: Field of Interest



Furthermore, they were asked to indicate their desired field of interest by checking one or more boxes next to the following options: business, law, medicine, sciences, social sciences, humanities, government, non-profit, teaching/education, and other (specify). Responses to the aforementioned question are illustrated in Figure 2 above.

Combining data from the previous two questions provided additional insight into the students' level of interest by their reported field of interest (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Cross-Tabulation of Level of Pursuit and Field of Interest



As illustrated in Figure 3, the overall median level of interest was 3.68 (out of 5) with business, law, social sciences, humanities, government, and non-profits all exceeding the average.

Such findings suggested that students, indeed, desired to couple their classroom learning with in-country experiential learning. Furthermore, they provided the basis for the creation of an internship program in Russia, which eventually resulted in a collaboration between