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Why 'foreign' language education misses the mark:
The historical undervaluing of multilingualism in U.S. schools

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Before the bombing of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, there were approximately 5,505 students studying Arabic in 1998 in institutions of higher education in the U.S¹. This number doubled by 2002, and tripled again to 34,908 students of Arabic in 2009, according to the MLA Language Enrollment Database (Modern Language Association, 2015). Unfortunately, it took a national tragedy to boost Arabic to one of the top ten most common languages taught in the U.S. At the turn of the 21st century, federal support for Arabic hit its lowest point after years of decline, despite Arabic's critical importance in navigating U.S. relations with the Middle East (Al-Batal, 2007). However, despite the government's call to action to immediately increase funding for Arabic language programs, the FBI in 2006 still only had thirty-three agents who had even a limited proficiency in Arabic, with none of them working on investigations of international terrorism (Eggen, 2006). As Al-Batal (2007) explains, "These problems for the Arabic field stem from a much larger problem caused by long years of neglect and the absence of a national agenda for foreign language education in the United States," (p. 269). Undoubtedly, our nation has lacked a clear initiative in foreign language education for many years. This thesis will highlight the variety of ways in which our education system has failed to provide successful foreign language instruction and will investigate the reasons behind the historical undervaluing of multilingualism in the U.S.

According to the 2006 General Social Survey², only 25% of American adults reported being able to speak a language besides English, and only 43% of this population said they can

¹ See the 1998 data from the MLA Language Enrollment Database

² General Social Survey (2006). GSS Cumulative Dataset (1972-2006). Retrieved April 01, 2017, from <http://sda.berkeley.edu/D3/GSS06/Docyr/gso6.htm>

speak the language very well. More shockingly, a meager 7% of these multilingual Americans reported acquiring that language in school (with the majority learning the language at home)³. Foreign language study has not always been a requirement in American schools. In the 1970s, for example, “white-collar” employment began to require undergraduate degrees, and students who were now obligated to go to college voiced opposition to the addition of foreign language courses to their vocational studies. For colleges who weren’t committed to language education in the first place, this opposition encouraged them to reduce or eliminate foreign language requirements to appease students at their institution (Turner, 1974). Most secondary schools today have a minimum 2-years of foreign language study, which is insufficient to sustain the development of bilingual Americans through our school systems (Commission on Language Learning, 2017).

A quick search online with the keywords “language learning” and “U.S.” is quite telling about the current state of foreign language education. A flood of online articles such as “America’s Lacking Language Skills,” “America’s Foreign Language Deficit,” and “Learning a Foreign Language: A Must in Europe, Not So in America” reveal the widespread recognition of the failures in our foreign language education system. For example, if we compare statistics between the U.S. and the European Union, we find that the U.S. is clearly less developed in our language education. To be clear, the European Union does not have the same challenges that such a large nation like the U.S. does in their education program, however, these European countries that share Anglo-Saxon backgrounds, similar visions of elite education, and similar resources are best suited for the general comparisons of language education being made here.

³ General Social Survey (2006). GSS Cumulative Dataset (1972-2006). Retrieved April 01, 2017, from <http://sda.berkeley.edu/D3/GSS06/Docyr/g06.htm>.

According to “Second Language Acquisition: By the Numbers,” an infographic designed by Middlebury Interactive Languages (2013), 53% of citizens in the European Union are bilingual, versus only 18% of Americans. Similarly, 44% of Europeans are fluent in two or more languages, whereas only 9% of Americans are. An important distinction that the graphic makes between our education systems is that most American students do not start learning a foreign language until age fourteen, and only study languages for two years, in comparison to the European Union where most students begin foreign language study between age 6 and 9, for a total of 9 years. Evidence for the emphasis on multilingualism is also found in Asia. For example, primary schools in China have students interact in Cantonese, receive instruction in Mandarin, and learn English as a foreign language (García, 2009).

Although we do not have the same close proximity or connection to a variety of linguistic communities in the way that the Europeans or Asians do, Americans have their own linguistic resources to draw from. Historically, the US was considered the “melting pot” of the world, welcoming waves of immigrants from Great Britain, Europe, China, and more recently, a variety of Latin American and Asian countries. Although the US has no official national language, the status and prevalence of English as the *de facto* American tongue has led to the country becoming a “language graveyard” of other languages brought to North America through immigration (Rumbaut, 2009). Where has this historical undervaluing of multilingualism come from?

Kathleen Stein-Smith (2016), the chair of the American Association of Teachers of French (AATF) Commission on Advocacy, and an established expert on the subject matter of the U.S. foreign language deficit, suggests that “perhaps the most subtle and insidious challenge is a

pervasive lack of interest in other languages and cultures among many Americans, as this interest, or intrinsic motivation, is the most effective driver of successful foreign language learning,” (p. 2). Despite Americans’ apparent lack of motivation to study a foreign language, numerous research studies have confirmed the benefits of learning a second language. For example, ACTFL cites language learning as having a positive correlation with improvement in academic skills such as reading ability, linguistic awareness, ability to hypothesize, print awareness, self-efficacy, and achievement on standardized tests. Middlebury Interactive Languages affirmed this claim in 2013 with data showing that American students who studied at least four years of another language scored higher on the SAT: almost 140 points higher in Math, 140 points higher in Critical Reading, and over 150 points higher in Writing⁴. ACTFL explains that bilingualism also shows correlation between improved cognitive abilities, intelligence, attention, memory, problem solving, and verbal and spatial abilities⁵. Riestra and Johnson (1964) also performed a study showing that learning a foreign language led to more positive attitudes toward native speakers of that language. Despite the empirical evidence of the benefits of language learning, the U.S. education system still lacks the support needed to sufficiently improve language programs and educate more Americans to become bilingual or multilingual.

In terms of funding, professional development for teachers, national and district-wide policy, time allocated to classes, and access to up-to-date resources, the US offers little support to foreign language departments in comparison to other academic subjects such as Math and Language Arts. Supports such as these are fundamental for improving language education at the

⁴ Middlebury Interactive Languages, Visual.ly, & HUFFPOST Partner Studio. (2013, December 06). Second Language Acquisition by the Numbers [Digital image]. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12/06/second-language-infographic_n_4136915.html

⁵ See <https://www.actfl.org/advocacy/what-the-research-shows> for a comprehensive list of research on the benefits of language learning

instructional level as well as the ideological level (e.g. increasing interest in foreign languages) in the U.S. In 2003, the Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages surveyed 165 school districts to investigate large cuts in foreign language programs. They found that 39% of schools reported scaling back instructional time for foreign languages, 24% reported eliminating language teachers of all grade levels, and 22% reported getting rid of at least one language offered in the department (Rosenbusch, 2005). Most schools explained the major causes as being budget cuts, lack of administrator support, and state testing priorities in core subject areas (Rosenbusch, 2005).

In response to concerns about the United States' deficiency in foreign language education, language educators and policymakers have founded organizations to centralize efforts in the improvement and expansion of foreign language education in our nation's schools. The central player of this educational movement is ACTFL, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. ACTFL's vision statement, adopted in May 2005, insists "that language and communication are at the heart of the human experience, and that the U.S. must nurture and develop indigenous, immigrant, and world language resources, and that the U.S. must educate students to be linguistically and culturally prepared to function as world citizens," (ACTFL, 2005). They also developed the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines to help standardize the assessment of language proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, which would be applicable to the large range of language programs in the U.S. Another recent attempt to popularize foreign language study is taking the pragmatic approach of advertising to students how proficiency in a second language will improve your marketability on job applications (Reagan & Osborn, 2002). Other studies have been used to advertise language learning for

improving the development of empathy and effective interpretive skills as well improving effective communication through increased practice in perspective-taking (Fan, Liberman, Keysar, & Kinzler, 2015). Despite the efforts of organizations such as ACTFL, MLA, and the Commission on Language Learning to make these benefits known and consolidate efforts to improve language education, the U.S. as a nation still undervalues multilingualism as part of our development as educated citizens.

This thesis investigates the components required to successfully learn a foreign language, and seeks to uncover the main trends in language education that have led to a foreign language deficit in U.S. public schools. First, the methods section will briefly explain how research was collected to develop the main body of evidence for the two complementary literature reviews. I will outline three key research questions that guide the reviews on how foreign language education misses the mark. Chapter 2 will lay out the five necessary components of successful language learning, based on language acquisition theories and recommended pedagogical practice. Chapter 3 will describe the findings of the second literature review, which explores the history of foreign language education in the U.S., the development of popular language acquisition theories and ideologies, as well as popular instructional approaches. This body of literature will serve to uncover the main trends in foreign language education that have led to the undervaluing of multilingualism and the ultimate failure of most Americans to become proficient in the foreign language they studied in school. Chapter 4 will offer concluding thoughts to summarize the key findings from the literature review, and will look ahead to future possibilities of foreign language education in the U.S.

Methods:

My first step was to answer the question of what components are necessary for successful foreign language learning. This framework reflects both the principles and processes of language learning, combining perspectives from the fields of linguistics, psychology and education. Many of the theoretical concepts embedded in my framework have been developed from my coursework at Swarthmore College in classes including (but not limited to) Language Minority Education, Educational Psychology, and Teaching English as a Second Language. By understanding the components required to learn a language, we can better understand the weaknesses of foreign language programs, which lead to less American students becoming bilingual in school.

To conduct a successful review of the literature on the instructional approaches and deficiencies of foreign language education in the U.S., I examined three types of sources: news articles, scholarly works, and data and publications from professional organizations such as ACTFL and the U.S. Census. The key words “U.S. foreign language education,” “language ideology,” “foreign language deficit,” and “language policy,” yielded the most relevant results. By cross-referencing these materials, I gained a more comprehensive outlook on the trends in foreign language education to write the literature review. In addition, I completed a hand search in McCabe and the Educational Materials Center at Swarthmore College to gain an overview of the types of literature available in the discipline of language learning and teaching. As both a life-long language lover and a pre-service language educator, I combine these sources with my own observations and experience to provide the basis for my framework of successful language learning, the overview of trends in the history of language education in the U.S., and my analysis

of the causes behind the U.S.'s failure to meet the needs of foreign language learners. As a teacher candidate in Spanish K-12 education and ESOL, my experiences in my theory and methods courses, field placements, and semester of student-teaching have drawn my attention to this struggling field in education.

Before continuing, I would like to clarify the choice of terminology used to refer to the languages of study in this thesis. In my review of academic articles, a variety of terms apply, including “foreign” language learning, “world” language learning, “modern” language learning, and “second” language learning. First, “second” language learning was too broad for this purpose, since in the U.S. it includes both immigrants learning English as a second language and native English-speakers learning an additional language in school. “Modern” language learning also was not entirely appropriate since it is based on the distinction between languages actively spoken today versus classical languages of study, (Latin and Greek), which I also refer to in the history of language study in the U.S. Furthermore, “world” languages technically refer only to languages that have a large number of speakers and a wide geographical distribution (in contrast to endangered indigenous languages), which would inadvertently limit the scope of this review. Finally, the term “foreign” can in fact be controversial when applied to languages, implying a certain “otherness,” however, it is precisely that sentiment that I want to reveal in how some native English-speaking Americans think about other languages as not being applicable to their lives within the U.S. Nonetheless, it is important to consider how the term “foreign” may gradually become inapplicable to other languages commonly spoken within the U.S., such as Spanish, which 13.3% of Americans speak as their home language, according to Census data

from 2015⁶.

Research Questions:

To uncover the causes behind the failures in our foreign language instruction in U.S. schools, I pose the following three research questions:

1. *What instructional components are necessary for a learner to successfully become proficient in a foreign language?*
2. *Why have Americans historically failed to become proficient in foreign languages in school?*
3. *How can foreign language programs meet the components of successful language learning, given the widespread constraints of the subject in the US?*

The findings of the first literature review will highlight what exactly is necessary to learn a foreign language, providing a basis for the second literature review, which explains the main trends in language education in the U.S. that have led to such a low percentage of Americans becoming fluent in a foreign language. Finally, I will explore how the U.S. foreign language classroom may best support students to acquire another language, given the existing constraints and demands on the public education system.

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau (2016, October 12). Newsroom. Retrieved April 09, 2017, from <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/facts-for-features/2016/cb16-ff16.html>

CHAPTER 2: COMPONENTS OF LANGUAGE LEARNING

What is actually required to learn a language? The sheer number of language learning theories and approaches tells us that this wide-ranging debate lacks a conclusive answer. Successful language learning is heavily dependent on the learning environment, the characteristics of the students, the proficiency and instructional practice of the teacher, and the policies that govern it (Brown, 1994; García, 2009; Lightbown & Spada, 2013). However, there are five key components that consistently surface in discussions on language pedagogy, which are essential for successful second or foreign language learning. These include:

1. Extensive exposure to both authentic language and comprehensible input
2. Teacher proficiency using the target language, modeling learning strategies, and differentiating instruction
3. Appropriate feedback, balancing an emphasis on communicative ability and grammatical accuracy
4. Interactive environment that fosters a variety of opportunities for production for multiple purposes and functions amongst both students and teachers
5. Positive attitudes and motivation for language learning

The following sections will explain each component in further detail to explain their significance for successful language learning.

Component 1. Exposure

The first component that I propose has been the subject of a multi-decade debate from teachers, linguists, and psychologists alike. Of course, every student needs exposure to the target language in order to learn it, but the role of listening (or *input*) in foreign language learning has greatly ranged in importance from being viewed as the sole factor necessary to acquire a

language (Krashen, 1982), to being a secondary factor below the importance of repeated acts of speech production (Lado, 1964). For example, the *audiolingual approach* of the early 1900s focused entirely on mimicry and drills, having learners practice pronunciation by repeating exactly what the instructor said, aligning with the behavioral perspective that language could be developed through habit formation (Brooks, 1960; Lado, 1964). The goal was accurate foreign language “production” from the beginning, rather than thinking about ways to communicate authentically for meaning. This method came to be known as the “Army Method” during WWII to train military intelligence in the languages of both our allies and our enemies (Brown, 1994). However, Lightbown and Spada (2013) explain that “learners receiving audiolingual or grammar-translation instruction are often unable to communicate their messages and intentions effectively in a second language,” (p. 159). It was evident that pure repetition was not enough to bring language learners to full fluency in a foreign language.

In response to the Audiolingual Method’s deficiency in more authentic communication skills, other researchers proposed that one has to go through the process of *producing* the language (e.g. forming an original sentence on their own) in order to learn and understand it. This “Let’s Talk” perspective described in Lightbown & Spada (2013) emphasizes the importance of negotiating for meaning while trying to express oneself in conversations with others using the target language, rather than learning the language simply through exposure to input. In 1967, Dell Hymes, a sociolinguist, coined the term “communicative competence” to differentiate himself from Chomsky’s (1965) notion of competence in a language, which was limited to an understanding of the language’s grammar and structure, rather than looking at language learning in terms of meaningful communication. This idea of communicative

competencies led to the adoption of a *communicative approach* in schools starting in the 1970s, which emphasized fluency over grammatical accuracy in meaningful interactions with other speakers that have clear communicative functions (e.g. apologizing, planning, agreeing, asking) (García, 2009). This approach still forms the basis of foreign language pedagogy today, as it values real-world application of language skills.

To successfully become a proficient speaker of a foreign language, I argue that we need a balance of authentic language and comprehensible input. Here, *authentic language* refers to the unfiltered, everyday language used by native speakers. *Comprehensible input* is part of Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which states that the learner successfully acquires new language when they are exposed to comprehensible input at the level ($i + 1$), where i is the current stage of the learner's linguistic competence (Krashen, 1985). Language acquisition takes place when learners are exposed to language they can understand through listening and/or reading (Krashen, 1985). Coelho (2004) explains, "Input is comprehensible when students can use their prior knowledge, visual support, or context to infer the meaning of new words and expressions" (p. 183). This allows learners to build connections in the language on their own, before being required to speak on their own.

In order to get students accustomed to authentic language, teachers can scaffold learners to work with authentic language texts (e.g. a talk show, newspaper article, film, or interview involving native speakers of the target language) which will expose them to new accents, rhythms, colloquial expressions, and slang, which the teacher would not be able to provide within their own language of instruction (García, 2009). If provided with practice in specific comprehension strategies, students can develop the skills to decipher meaning in fast-paced or

advanced authentic language. If students are never given the opportunity to practice using authentic language in the classroom, they may be too overwhelmed to communicate successfully when in an immersive experience. Furthermore, some teachers may believe they are helping students by using English in the classroom to explain new concepts, rules or management issues, when in fact this deprives students of valuable communication opportunities in the target language. Here lies the clear advantage that I saw while teaching Language Arts in a Spanish immersion program in Philadelphia: By using Spanish as both the language of study and the language of instruction, students had ample time to study the language use in literature, while also becoming accustomed to using Spanish for everyday communicative competencies, such as following instructions, discussing plans, making agreements, asking for permission.

Although there is some dispute amongst language acquisition theorists, the sheer amount of exposure time to the foreign language is believed by many to be one of the most critical factors in building our language proficiency (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). For example, U.S. students are exposed to a maximum of 150 hours of language instruction a year in the average American high school, not counting absences and other interruptions such as fire drills (Reagan & Osborn, 2002). Jim Cummins (1984) argues that students need about two years of exposure to the target language to develop fluency in interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and between five and seven years to develop proficiency in “academic” language (CALP) - neither of which can be achieved with a meager 150 hours of language instruction in U.S. secondary schools. Regardless of the type of input being given, or the age at which instruction began, increased hours of exposure to the language will greatly benefit the fluency of the learner (Lightbown & Spada, 2013; Reagan & Osborn, 2002).

Component 2. Teachers' Linguistic and Pedagogical Proficiency

Secondly, teachers themselves need to be proficient in the target language and have the proper training to differentiate language instruction according to the needs of a variety of learners. The NCLB Act redefined the requirements for language teachers in public schools, which vary by teaching level (elementary, middle, or high school), though it essentially comes down to the state to determine how those requirements will be met (Rosenbusch, 2005). Many states require pre-service language teachers to pass the Praxis exam of general content knowledge in math, English, social studies, and science, in addition to the comprehensive Praxis exam of the language they plan to teach, assessing their reading, writing, listening, speaking abilities and cultural knowledge (arts, geography, history of indigenous populations, etc). If a test taker in Pennsylvania, for example, scores at least 168 points out of 200 on the Spanish Praxis, this indicates they are proficient enough to teach that language. However, for the 2014-2015 testing season, the Pennsylvania Department of Education posted passing rates of only 37.4% of Spanish Praxis takers passing on the first attempt, with a total passing rate of 42.9%.⁷ If our population of pre-service teachers (which includes Native Spanish speakers) are having that much difficulty passing the language proficiency test at the end of their teacher preparation programs, what does this say about the quality of our language education in the U.S.?

Throughout my own observations of language teachers in the field, the cycle of unsatisfactory foreign language education has clearly led to a deficiency in the number of proficient models to serve as language teachers.

⁷ Pennsylvania Department of Education (2015). Teacher Preparation Program Pass Rates. Retrieved April 19, 2017, from <http://www.teacherpassrates.ed.state.pa.us/Screens/wfPassRates.aspx?PID=4490&AUN=410147201&Y=2015>

Another significant factor in reaching proficiency in a foreign language is spending time abroad. The *Heart of the Matter* report, from the American Academy's Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences, explains that "while foreign language study is a crucial step toward a more productive, reciprocal engagement with other cultures and governments, language study alone cannot provide the cultural and historical context in which such exchanges take place."⁸ This need can best be met by the immersive experience of study abroad. Research studies as early as 1967 report that more time spent abroad is one of the main predictors of higher language proficiency (Carroll, 1967). This invaluable experience enriches not only the linguistic capacity of the teacher but also the cultural competence required to understand the backgrounds of native speakers better and differentiate between authentic and touristic materials. Despite the clear advantages of taking a semester abroad, it is not a requirement of all language teachers, nor is it always a feasible option, financially or logistically (Commission on Language Learning, 2017).

To ensure higher quality language instruction, teachers must be well-versed in differentiation and learning strategies. In order to differentiate language instruction for beginners, the teacher first has to be metalinguistically aware about the way in which they present the foreign language to the class as input. This is not to say that the teacher needs to "dumb down" all language production, but rather they should be conscious of using more authentic expressions rather than needlessly introducing a complicated structure which native speakers would typically avoid. Coelho (2004) provides a helpful list of advice to ESL teachers, which serve as basic instructional principles that can be applied to any language teacher:

⁸ American Academy of Arts and Sciences (2013). *The Heart of the Matter: The Humanities and Social Sciences for a Vibrant, Competitive, and Secure Nation*. Cambridge, MA: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 58–59.

- Provide comprehensible instruction
- Teach key words *before* a lesson
- Recycle new words in various contexts and mediums
- Provide nonverbal cues and visuals
- Check often for comprehension
- Speak naturally, but slowly
- Provide enough response time
- Reduce anxiety levels
- Provide supportive feedback (p. 183)

These instructional modifications help language learners build as much of their own connections in the language as possible, without relying on the teacher to translate in their native language. By giving students extra supports such as visuals, body language cues, context, and extra wait time, the teacher makes input more comprehensible to the learners, who now have the means to use these scaffolds to infer meanings of new words or expressions on their own (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

Ofelia García, a renowned scholar in the field of bilingual education, provides another helpful list for language teachers, which denotes scaffolding strategies that support beginning language learners to understand new input in the target language (García, 2009). In addition to the contextualization strategies that Coelho supports (such as offering visuals or gestures), García suggests routines, modeling, bridging or schema-building, thematic planning, and multiple entry points as effective strategies to scaffold language learners. Routines, for example, provide “clear language patterns and phrases day to day” which help students become accustomed to high frequency phrase and structures in the language, such as greetings, morning announcements, instructions, and clean-up routines (García, p. 331). Strategies such as identifying cognates help students become more self-sufficient in their language-learning progress, as they learn through bridging and schema-building rather than pure translation and

memorization (García, 2009). It is important to remember that many students will need explicit modeling and instruction in how to best use these scaffolds in their learning strategies. Finally, García (2009) suggests providing *multiple entry points* to the material, in order to allow students of different linguistic abilities to demonstrate understanding in different ways. Inspired by Gardner's (1993) *theory of multiple intelligences*, these multiple entry points can allow students to access the language through charts, prose, visuals, or audio tracks where possible. All of the above techniques for differentiation and scaffolding are examples of the myriad of strategies that competent language teachers need to be familiar with in order to ensure understanding of all students in their classrooms.

Component 3. Feedback

The third component of successful language teaching is giving appropriate feedback to language learners. Feedback, in the context of the language classroom, encompasses not only the scores and grades given to assignments, but also the recognition and correction of errors made in oral speech during a regular class period. Depending on the pedagogical approach being used (e.g. grammar-translational or communicative), feedback from the teacher will either have a focus on fluency, accuracy, or a combination of the two. "Fluency" in terms of language education, has many definitions, but ultimately refers to a speaker's ability to communicate a clear meaning using the conventional structures of a language at a natural cadence (Bohlke, 2014; Hartmann & Stork, 1976). When teachers offer feedback to encourage fluency, they tend to emphasize the importance of using language for meaning and for authentic messages so that students may produce a greater quantity of language, rather than getting stuck on details. "Accuracy" on the other hand, refers to the correctness of students' language production,

focusing on precision in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary choice, also referred to by Jim Cummins as “discrete language skills” (2003). Though it can be very tempting for a teacher to direct their focus on accuracy, using worksheets to practice accent placement or the difference between imperfect and preterit, for example, I argue that an overemphasis on these rules can inhibit students from producing language for meaning, as they become focused on perfecting isolated language patterns on exams rather than focusing on learning how to use the language to communicate authentically with other speakers.

Aside from the fluency/accuracy debate of feedback, the *form* and *frequency* of the feedback is equally important for an educator to consider. Oral feedback, for example, could take the form of explicit correction of errors (interrupting a student when they are incorrect), or the form of *recasts*, where the teacher correctly reformulates what the student intended to say, after they finished speaking. These two examples of feedback can affect the learner in drastically different ways. In *How Languages are Learned*, Lightbown and Spada (2013) explain that language learners can be easily discouraged if they are unable to produce a full sentence in class without the teacher calling out their errors. Stephen Krashen (1982) referred to this emotionally-based impediment to language acquisition as the *affective filter*. Although these teachers may think they are being the most helpful by identifying all of the mistakes for a learner, they are actually devaluing the feedback in and of itself, as students’ emotional reactions (e.g. embarrassment or frustration) will likely overshadow their cognitive ability to process the feedback in time.

In the field of the learning sciences, K. Ann Renninger (2010) describes the relationship between interest development, self-efficacy, and self-regulation, in connection to students’ desire

to seek and make use of feedback in the learning process. In their four-phase model of interest development, Hidi and Renninger (2006) explain that learners in different phases of interest development require different types of feedback during the learning process. For example, a learner who reaches the second phase of *maintained situational interest* has positive feelings toward the content but still depends on the support of others to find connections to the material and to continue developing their knowledge. This learner may need more praise as feedback and explicit instructions for what to do next, while a learner with well-developed individual interest (phase 4) may request more critical feedback to align their work with the higher standards of the discipline and challenge themselves to keep improving (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). These same principles apply to the language classroom, where teachers need to be aware of students' changing needs as they develop their knowledge and interest in the language, in order to provide the most appropriate feedback that will support their language development.

Part of the reasoning behind letting inconsequential errors slip is due to studies of first language acquisition. When students are in the natural process of learning to use language to communicate, parents tend to address them based on the intended meaning, rather than stopping and correcting every error in form. Parents only tend to correct the errors that their children make if they “impede comprehension or appropriateness,” (Lightbown & Spada, p. 41). In general, children will gradually correct their own errors (which tend to be caused by overgeneralization of rules) as they advance through the developmental sequences of first language acquisition (Brown, 1973). However, in second language learning, feedback from the teacher or another model speaker is essential in becoming proficient in the language. Numerous studies of ineffective feedback practices show us that language teachers have to be more thoughtful in the

types of errors they chose to correct at different stages of a language learner's proficiency, as well as the manner in which they correct them. For this reason, professional development should have a greater emphasis on instructional strategies and feedback to encourage language teachers to be as efficient as possible.

Component 4. Interaction and production

The fourth component of successful foreign language learning that I support is the development of the classroom as an interactive environment that fosters a variety of opportunities for production for multiple purposes and functions amongst both students and teachers. One of the original researchers to propose this style of language instruction was Michael Long (1996), whose Interaction Hypothesis emphasized how learners' *negotiation for meaning* (e.g. engaging with the other speaker to repeat, ask questions, and clarify any misunderstandings) provides an opportunity for language development in a communicative context. Language classrooms based around meaningful interaction and production are often task-based, requiring students to practice *communicative functions*, which include apologizing, agreeing, accusing, persuading, commanding, and praising (García, 2009). Lightbown and Spada (2013) explain the benefits of this style of instruction:

In communicative, content-based, and task-based language teaching, there are more opportunities not only for a greater variety of input but also for learners to engage in different roles and participant organization structures (for example, pair and group work). This enables learners to produce and respond to a wider range of communicative functions. (p. 67)

This type of approach supports students in becoming comfortable communicating in a variety of more authentic settings and purposes, often through collaborative activities.

Though schools in the U.S. have been traditionally teacher-centered, research studies at

home and abroad have shown that foreign language learning requires a much more active role of the student in order to develop oral communication skills (Mackey, 1999; McDonough, 2004). Interactive activities such as skits, role-playing, peer interviews, and games encourage students to develop communication skills to interact with others in the target language. Coelho (2004) explains that “cooperative learning encourages collaboration instead of competition, and allows for heterogeneous groups to be successful” learning from one another, rather than the popular perception that the more advanced students would be slowed down (p. 190). Through these interactions, teachers can help support students in checking that their language is courteous and appropriate, teaching key phrases and expressions to the whole class to help guide their more informal exchanges with one another. This type of interactive environment proves to be much more successful in producing competent speakers of a language that can converse with others, versus students who study grammar rules intensively with few authentic opportunities for communicating with the goal of conveying meaning.

Component 5. Positive attitudes and motivation

The sixth component of successful language learning is the development of positive attitudes and motivation for language learning in the students. The first step in creating a positive relationship between the teacher, the students, and the language of study, is to start by acknowledging all language backgrounds of the students. As learners, they need to know that their existing linguistic and cultural knowledge is a valid resource, and that every language holds value. This will help them create a more positive identity as a language learner, attributing value to their studies and furthering their motivation (Oyserman & Destin, 2010). Oftentimes, negative attitudes around foreign language learning in the U.S. arise because students do not have a

choice in the matter, and are required to take two years of a foreign language in high school with only Spanish or French as options, or occasionally German. Though other school subjects are compulsory as well, none of them have the same all-consuming cognitive effort of starting a content area from scratch as a teenager. All attempts at early communication by the students should be praised to encourage more participation and less anxiety around “getting it wrong.” Rather than going for a sink or swim method, as in many lecture-style classes, it is the job of the language teacher to provide ample scaffolding and explicit strategy instruction so that students may have more agency in developing their own understanding of the language. To help foster positive attitudes regarding the foreign language, teachers can help by clearly explaining the benefits of learning a second language and how it can help them succeed in other facets of their life (such as career paths and travel opportunities) while developing empathy and a critical awareness of other cultures (Commission on Language Learning, 2017).

For more difficult subject matter, interest and motivation are essential to keep students working through challenging tasks (Renninger & Hidi, 2016). Motivation in SLA (second language acquisition) has been defined based on the learners’ communicative needs, and their attitudes towards the L2 (second language) community (García, 2009). A negative attitude toward the community of native speakers of the language could hurt the learner’s chance of becoming proficient in that language (Krashen, 1982). To illustrate the inevitable challenge of language learning, Bonny Norton Peirce (1995) describes the decision to study a foreign language as requiring an “investment” in the learning, rather than “motivation,” which is likely to wax and wane during more frustrating stages of language development. In fact, H. Douglas Brown (1994) lists the development of intrinsic motivation as one of his “Ten Commandments

for Good Language Learning” (p. 130). In contrast, if you are required to learn a foreign language for a new job position, such as in the military, your motivation to become proficient in that language will be much more extrinsic, (based on a *utilitarian* belief), rather than a learner who opted into studying the language in their free time with the hopes of traveling to that country one day or building relationships with people of other cultures (based on a *humanistic* belief) (Lantolf & Sunderman, 2001). Those who *are* intrinsically motivated to learn foreign languages often do so for cultural or humanistic enrichment, rather than for the defense of our nation in the international community, as some accounts of national emergencies may suggest (Phillips, 2007). Regardless of the teacher’s personal instructional methods and philosophies are, as a language teacher in the US, it is important to remember that a lot of the attitudes students hold towards foreign languages will reflect the greater influence of educational policy and ideologies, which in turn affect their motivations to learn those languages.

CHAPTER 3: FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATIONAL POLICY IN THE U.S.

Moving forward with our understanding of Chapter 2's components of foreign language learning, this next literature review of language ideologies and foreign language education policy shows three clear trends in how and why the U.S. education system fails to meet the needs of foreign language learners. The first is the heavy influence of language ideologies on people's attitudes towards learners and speakers of a foreign language. Language ideologies describe the ways in which people think about and attribute value to languages, often interrelated with language policy, which determines a language's function or use within a society (Johnson, 2013). The second trend noted in the literature is the role that international relations play in foreign language study, especially in regard to sudden shifts in language courses offered in schools and in professional organizations, both in terms of quantity of instructional hours offered as well as the selection of languages offered (Phillips, 2007). Finally, the third main trend is the influence of national educational policy (such as No Child Left Behind) on the attention and resources that are allocated to foreign language instruction in our schools. Together, these shifts in language ideologies, international relations, and educational policies can provide answers as to why U.S. foreign language education misses the mark.

Trend 1. Language ideologies and language policy

A large factor behind shifts in foreign language education in the U.S. comes from underlying language ideologies. According to Rebecca Freeman-Field's (2008) definition, "language ideologies are beliefs about languages and speakers of languages that are reflected in what people say and do." These beliefs about language can shape our attitudes towards speakers of other languages as well as our perception of their class and their level of education. Although

foreign language education at the state, school district, and building levels can be highly varied, an overview of the shifts in language ideologies can be a useful support in understanding its widespread influence on our language education. Language ideologies are so prevalent in our society that Schieffelin et al. (1998) and Blommaert (1999) compiled an entire historiography of language ideologies, i.e., “a study of ways in which certain discourses, beliefs, and attitudes come into being and become hegemonic, while others remain in the background or disappear without a trace,” (Pavlenko, 2003, p. 314). This phenomenon describes how certain languages have historically received more attention and value in Western culture, thus influencing the number of Americans who study and speak those languages. Although the U.S. has no nationally declared language, English still holds power over all other languages spoken in the country. Pan et al. (2011) explains the ideology behind this:

“The assumption that English is a tool for getting ahead in social life and that teaching English is empty of ideological content is exactly an exemplification of ideological hegemony. And requiring individuals to learn English for education and jobs and for social development often helps to sustain existing power relationships.” (p. 253)

This pattern of holding English above other languages in the U.S. has been a historical trend, revealing the undervaluing of other languages in American history, as well as the consistent use of languages to help enforce a power dynamic between cultural or ethnic groups. In multilingual societies, *language policies* are used to allocate language functions (e.g. functions of government, functions of education, private functions, etc.) where the more prestigious language variety is allocated to more powerful functions (Ferguson 1959; Fishman, 1967). For example, in Haiti, virtually all civilians speak Creole to one another, while their schools, government, and the press use French as their official language of communication, despite the fact that only about

42% of the population can speak it (Nathan, 2014). This is due to Haiti's history as a colony of France, combined with the historical perception of French as a language of high prestige-value both in academics and politics. However, the continued top-down language planning of Western powers has led to a severe decline in linguistic diversity around the world, endangering indigenous languages (Chimbutane, 2011). Unfortunately, Americans have followed these same patterns of oppressive language policy.

Historically, ethnic groups such as Asian Americans and Latinos who have entered the U.S. education system have been clear victims of discrimination for speaking with an accent or speaking languages other than English in American schools (Lippi-Green, 2012). The "English-only movement" began in the late 1800s and became popular again in the 1980s when specific states or counties (such as Dade County, FL, and the commonwealth of Virginia) argued for the official use of English. Even Native Americans were chastised for speaking their "barbarous languages" and were forced to attend boarding schools that essentially replaced their indigenous languages with English in the nation's efforts of "civilizing this savage people," as was sanctioned under Congress's 1887 *General Allotment and Compulsory Education Act* (Johnson, 2013). The trend of upholding English as the language of success in the U.S. is still reflected in immigrant families, as less than one in ten of third-generation Americans in a 2006 study reported being able to communicate well in their heritage language (Portes & Rumbaut, 2012).

In the U.S. and around the world, there is an abundance of ESL and TOEFL programs, requiring other ethnic groups to learn English in order to benefit from the same educational and occupational opportunities as native English speakers. With English serving as a *lingua franca* of trade and international politics, "bilingualism has become less and less of a priority," (Freidman,

2015). This widespread view that foreign languages are not an essential part of an American education is evident in a Gallup poll from 2001, which shows that only 19% of Americans believe it is essential to speak a second language in general. In contrast, about 81% of White Americans responded that it is crucial for immigrants coming to the U.S. to speak English (McComb, 2001). This double standard is even more pervasive in America's upper and middle classes, where foreign language study is encouraged for cultural and cognitive enrichment, while the native language maintenance of immigrant children is discouraged due to its perceived threat on English as the language of education for our children (Pavlenko, 2003).

In this way, *linguistic imperialism* highlights how our patterns of thinking around multilingualism have revealed clear trends of repressing minority and indigenous languages and replacing them with the dominant language of the majority group (Johnson, 2013); in this case, English in the United States. Skutnabb-Kangas (1996) would define the above phenomenon as a manifestation of *linguicism*: a set of “ideologies, structures and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (material and immaterial) between groups which are defined on the basis of language” (p. 437). Clearly, these historical trends in language ideologies and policies are a root cause for much of the undervaluing of multilingualism in the U.S., which is reflected in the lack of support for foreign language programs in our schools.

Trend 2. International relations

The second major trend in the history of foreign language education in the U.S. is its close connection with shifts in international relations. Historically, foreign language study has

had to undergo similar restrictions that Social Studies has as a discipline,⁹ in terms of being obligated to uphold national ideologies and navigate cultural biases (Reagan & Osborn, 2002, p. 8). If we examine significant events in U.S. or World history, such as the World Wars or national crises such as terrorist attacks, part of the government's response has been to refocus the attention and resources on the study of foreign languages, as I will explain below. Foreign language education in times of international conflict can either be an extension of patriotic discourse, a mechanism of defense in decoding the "language of the enemy" or a tool for negotiation and diplomacy (Cooper, 1996; Luebke, 1980; Pavlenko, 2003). Most often, language study in the context of international relations has been rationalized by *utilitarianism*, the belief that the language has a practical use or function at that time (Lantolf & Sunderman, 2001). However, English-speaking Americans who are against foreign language learning often use a utilitarian discourse to argue that learning another language is "a waste of time for an American child who would have no practical use for such knowledge," (Pavlenko, 2003, p. 320). Some Americans tend to view "other" languages as being useless in everyday life unless you are entering into a vocation that requires their use.

In contrast, English-speaking colonists during the Age of Exploration saw Spanish as an instrumental tool in expansion to engage in trade and commerce, negotiations, and proselytizing with Spanish speakers, for the utilitarian purpose of expansion rather than cultural growth or prestige (Leeman, 2007). Whereas the study of Latin was viewed as "excellent mental training [which] promoted psychological discipline," the view of Spanish at that time was not for cultural or cognitive enrichment (Leeman, 2007, p. 33). In reality, our negative relationship with the

⁹ For example, social studies instruction has long been a subject of dispute as to which ideologies and perspectives teachers should or should not include in controversial discussions. See (Byford, Lennon, & Russell III, 2009).

Spaniards at that point in history actually tainted our perception of their language as well. The Spanish colonization of the Americas was viewed as “brutal and barbaric” in comparison with the British colonization that formed the basis of the United States (Leeman, 2007). Similarly, the Spanish-American War further hurt Americans’ perception of the study of Spanish as a foreign language, which struggled to compete with France as a country dedicated to democratic values, and Germany as a model of science and education (Cook, 1922).

Language ideologies and distrust of foreigners during war also led to reservations in the U.S. around foreign-born language teachers, due to the belief that these teachers would not share the same point of view as the students, and therefore only American-born teachers would be acceptable, nurturing our children’s use of English and their understanding of American traditions (Whitney, 1918). As international relations took a turn for the worse in 1914, language studies in the U.S. drastically shifted. Pavlenko (2003) describes the shift of German from a language of academic prestige to the “language of the enemy” during World War I. The increased anti-German prejudice during WWI caused many schools to cut German language classes for fear of being associated with Nazism. In fact, many German instructors were forced to abandon their posts as language teachers or retrain as teachers of Americanization and English as a second language (Pavlenko, 2003). Pavlenko (2003) also claims that many speakers of German during the war were threatened with “accusations of participation in subversive pro-German activities,” (p. 317) heightening the propaganda around not just Nazis but the language of Nazis, which the American Defense League argued was “not a fit language to teach clean and pure American boys and girls,” (Luebke, 1980, p. 5). This anti-German sentiment, combined with the a rising interest in *Pan-Americanism* caused Spanish enrollment to increase to 11.3% of

high school students, versus only 0.6% enrollment in German (Drapers & Hicks, 2002). French, however, remained at 15.5% of enrolled students, and maintained its status as the most popular foreign language studied in America until Spanish gained an increased utility-value (in terms of its usefulness in our relations with Latin America and Spanish-speaking immigrants) as well as the reputation of being an easier language to master (Leeman, 2007).

While certain wars prohibited the instruction of specific foreign languages in the U.S., other international tensions *obligated* increased training in foreign languages. For example, during the Cold War, the U.S. was fighting to compete with Russia in the newest technologies and advancements, causing a huge surge in the study of Russian. Al-Batal (2007) explains, “Foreign language educators often refer to the surge of American national interest in language study in the late 1950s as the ‘Sputnik Moment’” (p. 271), acknowledging the need for the U.S. to keep up with language studies as part of international competition in academics, communications, and trade. In its desire to define itself as a global competitor and take advantage of niche markets, the U.S. took part in the rise of *academic capitalism*, which combines market driven activities with academics at the university level to present students to employers as marketable “output/product” (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004, p. 2). With the overall decline in popularity of the humanities, proficiency in a foreign language is now marketed as a “job skill” rather than a symbol of cultural capital or prestige (Leeman, 2007, p. 37). For this reason, language study under the *humanistic* or *intellectual rationale* declines during shifts in foreign language education policy caused by international relations, as students are drawn away from learning languages for the purposes of intercultural understanding and tolerance, and are encouraged to learn them for national defense or promotion of our nation as a global power.

This same call to action for foreign language study is noted in times of terrorism. As explained in the introduction, the impact of 9/11 created a shocking wave in the field of language study. Federal support for the study of Arabic was “at an all-time low” in the years leading up to September 11, 2001, mostly due to shortages in funding (Al-Batal, 2007, p. 269). However, after the bombing of the World Trade Center, Welles (2004) reported a 92% increase in the number of students studying Arabic at American institutions of higher education. .As a result of 21st century economic globalization and international terrorism, it has never been more urgent to develop American citizens who fully understand and can communicate effectively with people of other cultures,” (Jackson & Malone, 2009, p. 1). Leeman (2007) argues that the current rise in Spanish study, then, is not due to heightened prestige value or genuine interest in the language, but rather, “the commodification of language and the contemporary fixation on the marketability of particular types of knowledge and education” (p. 38). Until we have more continuous national support for language learning, it seems that these trends will remain salient in U.S. schools.

Trend 3. National Educational Policy

National educational policy has influenced the study of foreign languages for centuries. Stemming off of national policy, we have *educational language policy*, which David Cassels Johnson (2013) defines as “the official and unofficial policies that are created across multiple layers and institutional contexts (from national organizations to classrooms) that impact language use in classrooms and schools,” (p. 54). Language education policy refers to decisions made in schools by the teachers about the language, in contrast to *language-in-education policy*, which refers to top-down policy decisions that affect the use of languages in schools (e.g. standardized testing) (Johnson, 2013). Although bottom-up efforts have been made to promote language

learning in many communities of the U.S., top-down policy at the federal level has repeatedly created obstacles in development of language education.

In the history of higher education, the study of Latin and Greek was a crucial part of the classical humanistic education, preserving ancient traditions through colleges (Rudolph, 1990). This type of language program emphasized the study of literature to promote intellectual growth. It is still remarkable that this traditional style of language study (based on the grammar-translation method) pervaded our higher education system for so many years, without having a practical application of the classical languages in daily life. The Morrill Acts of 1862 showed a shift in educational policy to a more practical curriculum geared toward providing an agricultural or technical/professional education to students in more rural areas. In their attempt to humanize college education and make it more relevant to contemporary society, the land-grant colleges of this era rejected the dominance of the classics in higher education (Leeman, 2007). Despite the shifts in policy leading to a more practical outlook on languages in education, reading was still considered the most important element to master in learning a new language. Leeman (2007) comments on the tension between studying a language and studying its literatures:

It's surprising that the new utilitarian view of modern languages didn't uproot the study of literature, which was historically the objective of academic language study. Although lower level courses were always on the language itself, higher levels continued to focus on literature as the content, creating a divide that still exists today in modern language majors. (p. 36)

This focus on literature and other classical academic texts as the main point of study also influenced the selection of foreign languages being offered in educational institutions. It was these institutions of higher education in the U.S. that maintained the view of "high culture" and

literature being esteemed. German and French had been used internationally in scientific and academic publications, whereas Spanish had not (Leeman, p. 34). This may explain why Spanish wasn't mentioned when the MLA was founded in 1883, and only became "barely visible" in conventions/journals (Leavitt 616). In fact, "in 1910, none of the approximately 33% of United States colleges that required two to four years of modern language study for entrance accepted Spanish," (Herman, p. 34). In this way, higher education served as the model of both the nation's language ideologies and educational policies, which high schools had to mimic in their own course offerings, perpetuating the study of languages with higher prestige value.

If anything, U.S. policy in regards to other languages has often been of a repressive nature, rather than a promotional one, as evidenced in the creation of institutions such as the forced boarding schools for the assimilation of Native Americans. In fact, before the Native American Languages Act was passed in 1990, there was no official federal policy that supported Native American languages, which were typically excluded from American classrooms (Commission on Language Learning, 2017). Hernández-Chávez (1995) highlights this trend:

Except for very brief periods during which private language rights have been tolerated and certain limited public rights have been permitted, the history of language policy in the United States has generally been one of the imposition of English for an even wider range of purposes and the restriction of the rights of other languages. (p. 141)

This trend reflects how the language ideologies and *linguicism* in the U.S. are intricately tied to national educational policy.

Furthermore, the shifts in value that we attribute to foreign language study often reflect what educational policy¹⁰ determines as essential for the success of our students. Since the No

¹⁰ Though NCLB has had the largest impact on language programs, other policy changes such as the Goals 2000 Educate America Act and the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning Project (1996, 2000) have also

Child Left Behind Act of 2001, these measures of success have come in the form of standardized testing. The goal of NCLB and its new emphasis on testing was to “raise the achievement of all students in the nation and eliminate the achievement gap seen among students differentiated by race, ethnicity, poverty, disability, and English proficiency,” (Rosenbusch, 2005, p. 250).

However, the new testing requirements were based on student performance in reading, writing, and mathematics, causing a shift in allocation of instructional time between subjects. In a survey of nearly 1000 public schools in 2003, conducted by the Council for Basic Education,

“approximately three quarters of the principals reported an increase in instructional time in reading, writing, and mathematics, all core content areas in which AYP is measured under the NCLB Act, and a decrease in time for the arts, elementary social studies, and foreign languages,”

(Rosenbusch, 2005, p. 252). A 2008 study from Pufahl and Rhodes shows the gravity of the recent cuts in foreign language programs, through interviews with 177 U.S. elementary schools.

When they were asked why they did not offer foreign language programs for their students,

Pufahl & Rhodes report the following six general responses from schools (p. 262-3):

- Lack of funding
- Decision making at the district level, not school level
- Languages not seen as a core component of an elementary school curriculum (e.g. “We don’t teach foreign language, we’re an elementary school.”)
- Previously existing program no longer feasible
- Shortage of language teachers
- Extracurricular foreign language instruction available (e.g. paid lessons)

Due to these constraints in funding, decision-making, teacher shortage, and overall lack of support for language learning at the elementary level, students often do not have the opportunity to be exposed to foreign language until middle or high school, with the common age to start foreign language study averaging around fourteen years old in the U.S., in comparison to

shifted federal influence over language study.

between ages six and nine in the European Union (Middlebury Interactive Languages, 2013).

The influence of national policy such as the NCLB Act often steers schools away from creating bilingual or immersion programs that would alternate the language of instruction between English and a second language, educating students to become both bilingual and biliterate. King & Benson (2004) argue that this form of *language-in-education policy* is important because using a language as a medium of instruction may raise its status and expand its corpus. However, these intensive language programs are increasingly difficult to promote in a country where top-down policy mandates curricula, assessment, and resource materials (García, 2009). Due to the restructuring of the educational priorities and budgeting under NCLB, the number of middle schools offering world languages went from 75% in 1997 to 58% in 2008, and out of public elementary schools, only 15 percent offered a language program in comparison to 50% of private elementary schools¹¹. As previously explained, education has essentially fallen victim to the new trend of *academic capitalism*, where schools are obligated to defend their funding and prove their worth based on comparisons of standardized test scores, college acceptance rates, and attendance. Since under national policy foreign language does not hold the same weight in these categories as “core” subjects do, it is commonly deprived of the same attention and resources that are distributed to other academic departments. Test scores hold so much weight over the fate of schools today that standardized testing essentially creates a *de facto* language policy, prioritizing the mastery of academic English as a route to success (Kate Menken, 2008). Without direct support from federal policymakers, language programs will continue to decline.

¹¹ American Academy of Arts and Sciences, *The State of Languages in the U.S.: A Statistical Portrait* (Cambridge, Mass.: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2016), 11.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

The findings of this literature review clearly reflect the weaknesses of foreign language education in the U.S., as well as the various challenges that inhibit its growth and improvement. The three major trends in the literature on foreign language study point to language ideologies, international relations, and national educational policy as having the greatest influence on Americans' beliefs about learning languages, as well as on their access to satisfactory foreign language programs. First, language ideologies reflect the variety of attitudes that Americans hold in regards to foreign languages, such as doubting the purpose or value behind studying them or seeing them as unrealistic to master in the school setting, especially given that many districts offer only two years of language classes (Lantolf & Sunderman, 2001). Other common language ideologies in the U.S. reflect the historical pattern of valuing the study of classical languages or European languages (such as French and German) to take part in the elite academic society, versus studying them to build cultural understanding and communicate in meaningful ways with people around the world. Unfortunately, the historical undervaluing of multilingualism in the U.S. has led to a *de facto* language policy, prioritizing the language of the dominant social group (as evidenced by the "English-only" movement), thus depriving those speakers of their linguistic freedom in school and in the workplace, while limiting English-speakers' opportunities to be exposed to other languages.

Though the old mentality of language study as a demanding mental exercise has largely fallen out of popular opinion, the lingering effects of the grammar-translational approach still heavily influence our perception of how languages are meant to be taught today. For example, many schools still advocate for teaching language through a strict progression of grammar rules,

practicing verb conjugations as drills, and memorizing lists of vocabulary (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). This traditional style of language instruction focuses heavily on learning the correct form of the language in order to be able to read and appreciate that culture's literature, rather than to communicate for meaning in a real-world setting. Furthermore, these traditional language classrooms "where the dominant interaction pattern was 'teacher initiation - learner response - teacher feedback' and where the emphasis was almost always on producing full sentences that were grammatically correct," provided limited opportunities for students to practice a variety of speech acts (Lightbown & Spada, 2013, p. 67). They also naturally allow for more use of English as the language of instruction, to learn *about* the target language, rather than using immersion in the target language, which benefits students by increasing their exposure time and communicative competencies in the language. Without this component of having a variety of opportunities for production and interaction, as well as extensive exposure, proficiency in the target language becomes increasingly difficult to attain.

These underlying beliefs regarding foreign languages have historically been challenged during times of international crises, where our outlook on language learning has had to shift to support the defense of our nation. This can either mean the restriction or the promotion of languages taught in the U.S. For example, the elimination of German language programs during WWI shows how the language of the enemy was perceived as another corruptive force in the lives of our students, in our attempt to promote American nationalism (Pavlenko, 2003). On the other hand, our response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 led to a near doubling of the Arabic language programs offered in our colleges and universities (Al-Batal, 2007).

Foreign language offerings have also been strongly affected by federal education policy,

following the priorities of national initiatives in education. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 made a heavy impact on foreign language programs in the U.S. due to the increased emphasis on standardized testing in Math and English to measure school success rates (Rosenbusch, 2005). As more time and resources were allocated to these core subject areas, support for foreign languages fell. The small amount of funding, resources and qualified teachers that *are* available generally limit the number of high school students that can study languages, as well as the variety of languages being offered - evidenced by the fact that in 2013, less than 1% of high school students were studying non-Western languages, with 69% studying Spanish and 18% studying French (Middlebury Interactive Languages, 2013). Reagan and Osborn summarized the complications and constraints of the public school system in the U.S. to include:

... the amount of time actually devoted to foreign language teaching and learning, institutional and individual biases with respect to which languages are offered and who takes which language, the public justifications for foreign language education, the articulated goals of foreign language education, and finally, what might be termed the social expectation of failure with respect to the learning of languages other than English in the U.S. context. (p. 3)

These challenges clearly align with the trends that have surfaced in the literature review of the American deficiency in foreign language learning, highlighting the impact that language ideologies, international relations, and national educational policy have on the number of Americans becoming proficient in foreign languages at school.

Despite the obvious challenges, language study in the U.S. is an important discipline to promote, as students can greatly benefit from studying foreign languages by improving their cognitive abilities, study strategies, sense of empathy to people of other cultures, possibility for travel and cultural enrichment, as well as their marketability in the job hunt (Bamford & Mizokawa, 1989; Commission on Language Learning, 2017). Not only does proficiency in a

second language improve the opportunities of the individual, but the opportunities of the nation as well: “As a result of 21st century economic globalization and international terrorism, it has never been more urgent to develop American citizens who fully understand and can communicate effectively with people of other cultures,” (Jackson & Malone, 2009, p. 1). However, in order to access the benefits of foreign language study, the U.S. needs to channel more support into language programs in schools in order to meet the five components of successful language learning described in Chapter 2.

In their 2017 publication entitled “America’s Languages: Investing in Language Education for the 21st Century,” the Commission on Language learning offered five key recommendations for how the nation can best support and improve foreign language education in the U.S.:

1. Increase the number of language teachers at all levels of education
2. Supplement language instruction across the education system through public-private partnerships among schools, government, philanthropies, businesses, and local community members.
3. Support heritage languages already spoken in the United States, and help these languages persist from one generation to the next
4. Provide targeted support and programming for Native American languages as defined in the Native American Languages Act.
5. Promote opportunities for students to learn languages in other countries

These initiatives reflect the current lack of support for foreign language programs, and reveal the ways in which they could benefit greatly from increased funding, resources, and ideological support from the top-down perspective. But even at the classroom level, teachers can fight to hold language learning to higher standards. If given more opportunities for professional development and training programs, teachers can develop the strategies necessary (such as giving effective feedback and using differentiation) to help diverse groups of students succeed at

becoming proficient in a foreign language. However, many of the rigorous master's programs or teacher residencies (such as Match Education and the Penn Residency Master's in Teaching) have a large focus on the core (tested) areas, with no programs offered exclusively for the benefit of language teachers. If we support our teachers with increased opportunities for professional development, the language programs we *do* have in place will benefit immensely.

In the face of restrictive national educational policy, teachers can be critical about the ways they use/teach language and can influence both *implementational spaces* in macro-level language policy and *ideological spaces* (Hornberger, 2002). Here, implementational spaces refer to the ways in which a language can be used for various functions in society, whereas ideological spaces refer to the attitudes people hold in regards to the ways they conceive of language (or multilingualism) as having a place in their society. Although there is no one clear answer detailing the exact influence the teacher has on the language classroom, I argue that language teachers can in fact challenge the status quo of foreign languages by disempowering educational discourses and thinking critically about the way language ideologies manifest themselves in the classroom. Johnson and Freeman (2010) argue that educators can create local spaces to preserve the linguistic diversity of students within a school district and these efforts merit the support of district-wide language policy. With the dedication of motivated teachers and supportive parents, children can be encouraged to see language learning as a positive opportunity for growth. Brown (1994) explains the holistic approach that is required to successfully learn and teach language: "Total commitment, total involvement, a total physical, intellectual, and emotional response is necessary to successfully send and receive messages in a second language," (p. 1). If we support Americans in recognizing how the myriad of benefits of foreign language learning outweigh the

costs, the road to successful foreign language education and an increased multilingual population will feel less daunting as we continue to call for increased support from federal policy makers, state governments, school districts, teachers, students, and families.

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