

Breakout 6, Presentation

Less Commonly Taught Languages of Emerging Importance: Major Issues, Cost Problems, and Their National Implications

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Abstract

After a quick definition of “less commonly taught languages” (LCTLs) we will describe the current state of LCTL education in the United States today—enrollments, trends, varieties of LCTLs taught, as well as the role of National Language Resource Centers (NLRCs) in teaching LCTLs, including the several languages of emerging national importance. Why people study LCTLs will lead to a discussion of the goal of LCTL study and what the demand for trained LCTL specialists is. Common needs identified by sixty LCTL teachers at a recent LCTL summit meeting will be summarized, including material development, cooperation, and teacher training. By presenting summaries of the activities of the NLRCs by category, we will demonstrate the width and breadth of NLRC undertakings. Several suggestions for cooperation among all Title VI grantees will conclude the paper.

Introduction and Definitions

The LCTL project, funded through the National Language Resource Center at the University of Minnesota, defines less commonly taught languages as all world languages except English, French, German, and Spanish. Other frequently used names for this group of languages, which share some characteristics across specific languages but are quite distinct in other areas, are critical languages, uncommon languages, less commonly spoken languages, exotic languages, exceptional languages, and the Australian term “LOTE” (languages other than English). David Dwyer uses the term “less commonly studied languages” to emphasize the learner-oriented philosophy he and many other language teachers find most appealing (Dwyer 1996, 2).

Richard Brecht and A. Ronald Walton subclassify LCTLs into four groups, implying that the language programs that comprise each group

share characteristics and concerns (Brecht and Walton 1994, 4):

1. **The principal less commonly taught languages** are Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Russian. They are generally available at colleges and universities, but their difficulty makes it virtually impossible for students to reach a functional ability solely on the basis of academic programs in this country.
2. **The much less commonly taught languages** consist of approximately thirty non-European, non-North American languages that have enrollments in the hundreds across the United States (for example, Armenian, Czech, Hausa, Hebrew, Hindi, Indonesian, Korean, Thai, and Turkish).
3. **The least commonly taught languages**, include approximately eighty languages, occupying a marginal position in the U.S. educational system, and offered at one or two institutions on an on-demand individual

basis.

4. The rarely (or never) taught languages.

Many other of the world's thousands of languages that can be viewed as critical to our national needs are rarely or never taught in the United States. Of the twenty-three languages given highest priority by Africanists, only six were taught in 1990.

Enrollments and Trends in Foreign Language Education in the United States

The fact that some languages are taught less frequently and to fewer students than other languages is not at all surprising, given the history of foreign language study in this country, and the attitudes of many Americans toward both foreign languages and studying a foreign language. Table 1 below compares the relative percentages of (1) speakers of seventeen languages around the world (*World Almanac* 1996, 642–43); (2) speakers of each language among all speakers in the United States whose primary language is not English (*Information Please Almanac* 1997, 834); and (3) the percentage of enrollments in two-year and four-year college and university language courses for each of the

seventeen languages (Modern Language Association 1995). For example, Hindi (also listed in MLA data as Hindi-Urdu and Urdu) ranked as the second most commonly spoken language in the world. Between 130 million and 200 million people speak Hindi as their primary language and between 300 million and 700 million speak it as a second language (Crystal 1987, 439). According to the MLA enrollment study for Fall 1995 (which may be somewhat inaccurate but certainly gives an approximation of the total number of students), Hindi had a total enrollment of 1,045 undergraduate and graduate students in the United States. That amounts to less than 0.1% of all U.S. foreign language enrollments. There is no overriding reason why U.S. foreign language enrollments need to mirror external factors such as total numbers of speakers in the world closely, but these comparisons show that languages with vast numbers of world speakers are neglected here as important languages to learn and speak.

According to the preliminary findings of the MLA's 1995 survey, which tallied responses from 2,707 two- and four-year institutions (out of the 2,772 contacted), registrations in modern foreign languages have held fairly steady since 1977, ranging from 7.3 to 8.2 per hundred college students (Modern Language Association 1996, 4).

Table 1. Ranked Percentages of World and United States Populations, and of U.S. College Enrollees, Who Speak or Study Particular Languages

Percent of World that Speaks Each as First Language		U.S. Population that Speaks Each Language at Home*		Percent of U.S. College Enrollees of All Languages Who Took Each Language**	
Mandarin	14.4***	Spanish	54.4	Spanish	53.2
Hindi	5.8	French	5.3	French	18.0
Spanish	5.8	German	4.9	German	8.5
English	5.6	Italian	4.1	Japanese	3.9
Bengali	3.3	Chinese	3.9	Italian	3.8
Arabic	3.2	Tagalog	2.6	Chinese	2.3
Russian	2.9	Polish	2.3	Latin	2.3
Portuguese	2.9	Korean	1.9	Russian	2.2
Japanese	2.1	Vietnamese	1.6	Ancient Greek	1.4
German	1.4	Portuguese	1.3	Hebrew	1.2
French	1.2	Japanese	1.3	Portuguese	0.6
Malay/Indonesian	0.9	Greek	1.2	Arabic	0.4

* 5 years and older. % is of population of Americans who do *not* speak English as their first language.

** 1995 MLA data.

*** 844 million speakers.

Statistics for specific languages show mixed trends: Spanish enrollments jumped 13% in the last five years (with approximately half of all FL enrollments), Chinese was up 36%, and Arabic grew by 28%. On the other hand, French, German, and Russian have fallen sharply, with Russian losing almost 45% of its 1990 enrollment. The category “other languages”—excluding Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Ancient Greek, Hebrew (biblical and modern), Italian, Japanese, Latin, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish—showed a 42% increase in enrollments, with ASL, Korean, Vietnamese, and Hawaiian accounting for a large portion of the growth in this category.

Motivation for Students to Study LCTLs

Why people study particular foreign languages—what motivates their choices—is an important question for anyone concerned about enrollment trends. More than half of the teachers we surveyed at a recent meeting of sixty LCTL teachers hosted by the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) at the University of Minnesota cited heritage as the primary reason their students enrolled. This response included first or second generation Americans who wanted to solidify ties to their culture and talk to parents and grandparents, and also those whose ancestry is more distant but who are interested in discovering more about their roots or ethnicity.

According to the respondents of a premeeting questionnaire, those who find LCTL courses necessary or desirable (i.e., immediately relevant) for their studies include graduate students doing research in anthropology, art history, history, linguistics, or literature, and undergraduate students in area studies, international relations, business, or law, or those in a language/literature major in the language.

Others take courses because they see the language as potentially relevant for study abroad or for jobs or internships in another country, or because they have a personal or romantic relationship with a (nonrelated) native speaker of the language.

A number of students become interested in a LCTL through interest in or experience with some aspect of the culture, such as martial arts or Japanese animation, Irish music and dance, films from Scandinavia or India, or literature and art from a number of cultures. Travel to the country, whether completed or anticipated, is also a significant factor. This includes students who have returned from year-abroad programs and recreational travelers. Some students take a LCTL because they are interested in languages and perceive the LCTLs as more challenging or exotic than—or different from—languages they have taken before.

Often the study of a foreign language (not any particular one) is deemed as career enhancing, a means of self-development, and a source of knowledge about another culture (Dwyer 1996, 4). In designing and encouraging students to take language courses (LCTLs as well as the more commonly taught languages), teachers and program administrators need to bear these factors in mind.

Impact of Title VI Funding

The MLA survey covers 136 languages taught at 2,722 U.S. institutions (Modern Language Association 1996, 1–9). In order to get a fix on the impact that Title VI funds are having on training students in LCTLs spoken in nations of emerging importance, we compiled a list of twelve languages, culled from three regions:

- I. African languages (Hausa, Swahili, Yoruba, and Zulu).
- II. Southeast Asian languages (Indonesian, Tagalog, Thai, and Vietnamese).
- III. Central Asian and East European languages (Kazakh, Serbian/Croatian, Ukrainian, and Uzbek).

For each language we compared the number of students enrolled at colleges and universities that have National Resource Centers for that area with students enrolled at non-Title VI institutions. The results summarized in Table 2 show that the percentages of students enrolled at Title VI institutions range from 100% of the students taking Hausa, Kazakh, and Uzbek to 20% of the total number of students taking Vietnamese.

Table 2. Enrollments in African, Southeast Asian, and Central Asian/East European Languages at Title VI and Non-Title VI Schools

Language	Enrollment at Title VI Schools	Enrollment at Non-Title VI Schools	Percent of Students Registered at Title VI Institutions
Hausa	52	0	100
Swahili	478	707	40
Yoruba	62	46	57
Zulu	52	9	85
Total African	644	762	46
Indonesian	204	54	79
Tagalog	196	352	38
Thai	171	55	76
Vietnamese	202	808	20
Total Southeast Asian	773	1269	38
Kazakh	5	0	100
Serbian/Croatian	230	153	69
Ukrainian	34	46	43
Uzbek	12	0	100
Total Central Asian and East European	281	199	59
Total all 12	1698	2230	43

Needs of LCTL Teachers in the United States

The greatest needs, wants, and desires of LCTL teachers, according to the LCTL Summit survey, were adequate training for LCTL teachers and development and materials availability. Most of the participants in the presummit survey did not know of any special training or preparation for LCTL teachers at their institution or elsewhere, although it was not uncommon for departments to train their own TAs and new instructors. Participants expressed a need for learning to use and then maintain skills in newer pedagogical approaches. Related to this need is the urgency to have a more up-to-date set of teaching materials in many LCTLs. While almost everyone at the summit used printed textbook material in their elementary level courses, there was almost nothing available at intermediate and advanced levels. The general agreement was that while some material exists, it is adequate for grammatical explanations and exercises, but lags behind in competency/performance teaching

approaches, and is inadequate in imparting crucial cultural information.

The scarcity of sound technological and pedagogical LCTL materials is especially great. The participants at the summit desired more and better computer-assisted teaching programs, video tapes, material on the World Wide Web, and CDROMS with texts and other target language material.

The United States needs to have a ready and steady supply of well-trained experts in many languages. Even with the end of the cold war, we cannot predict the situations and needs that lie ahead, and it takes a long time to develop expertise. The cost of training a student in a less commonly taught language is much higher due to more personalized teaching (often a full professor with a class of five or fewer students, compared to full classrooms taught by TAs). In addition, many LCTLs require more seat time to attain proficiency than do French, German, or Spanish. A rough estimate is that it is two to three times more expensive per student per semester to train a student in a LCTL than a

MCTL. For example, the Yoruba teacher at University of Wisconsin had two students in Fall 1995, Ohio State three, Cornell five, and Yale six. The cost of material is often more, because it is produced in small numbers, by specialized publishers. If the cost is less, it is often because there are fewer supplementary materials such as workbooks and audio cassettes.

National Language Resource Center Activities

National Language Resource Centers have been engaged in a number of projects that address at least some of the needs noted by LCTL teachers. The list below is an attempt to categorize some of the activities by the seven existing NLRCs. It is not exhaustive, however.

Material Development

- CD-ROM teaching how to score ACTFL speech;
- Self-study materials for Chinese, Russian, and Hausa;
- Arabic material introducing the language, geography, and literature of each Middle Eastern country;
- Distance education programs (summer institutes, interactive Russian and Chinese courses);
- Immersion workshops on Southeast Asian and Pacific Island languages;
- Summer institute on self-instructional materials;
- Hypermedia environments (Japanese, Chinese);
- Japanese and African language content-based instructional material development;
- Task-based communicative grammar exercises;
- Media literacy training program (on use of material in a specific language in a variety of media);
- Indexical meaning in Japanese;
- Heritage school language programs in public schools;
- Multimedia material for economics in Japanese.

Technology Development

- Video tape of teacher training in specific LCTLs;
- Workshops on integrating Internet resources in foreign language curriculum for LCTL teachers;
- Video and videodisk applications in FL classrooms;
- New technologies workshop for K-12;
- LCTL material/technology development workshop;
- Integration of disparate technologies into a coherent plan for language instruction.

Dissemination of Information

- Database of 250 tests available currently in 69 languages;
- Database of where 290 LCTLs are offered in North America, listing contacts, levels, and availability;
- Database of LCTL material (more than 900 languages, with 12,000 entries of texts, reference books, tapes);
- Workshops for K-12 teachers in curriculum development, strategies, materials, technology, assessment, articulation, standards, new technologies, multimedia authoring, children's literature, and culture;
- *Language Learning & Technology* journal;
- Foreign language publications, a joint project with a publishing house;
- Pathways to advanced skills, scholarship, guides, and frameworks in Japanese, Korean, and African languages;
- Semiannual newsletter, *Foreign Languages in the Global Economy*;
- Summer study institute on proficiency-oriented assessment tools;
- American Immersion network;
- Summer workshop for immersion teachers;
- Japanese CALL (Computer Aided Language Learning) and Internet workshop;
- Meeting for LCTL teachers across languages and institutions to discuss common problems and issues.

Learning Strategies

- Lesson plans to help high school and college teachers incorporate learning strategies in their teaching;

- Guides to strategies, workshops;
- Research on elementary immersion strategies;
- Research on psycholinguistic aspects of oral language use;
- Study of native vs. target language use in FL classrooms;
- Development of strategies based in cooperative learning.

Assessment

- SOPIs (Simulated Oral Proficiency Interviews) rater kits, training, and assistance for testers;
- Assessment of cross-cultural pragmatics (functions of language);
- FL performance tests;
- Alternate assessment methods, for K-8;
- Student Oral Proficiency Assessment validation (for use in FLES programs);
- Development of extended Oral Proficiency Assessment Modules;
- Test of computer adaptive listening comprehension, Chinese;
- Japanese skills test;
- Performance tests, Video Oral Communication Instruments, focus on administration and interpretation;
- CAT (Computer Adaptive Testing) reading tests.

Articulation

- Mandarin, and articulation between Peking University and U.S. institution, training Chinese teachers on current U.S. pedagogy;
- Cooperation with Minnesota Articulation Project in statewide articulation.

Improving Delivery (Other than Self-Study and Distance)

- Study of low achievement among traditionally under-served minorities;
- Study of national need for a bilingual workforce;
- Program to hire native speaker high school students as tutors for university level;
- Plan to create a writing component in high school foreign language instruction;

- Evaluation of U.S. postsecondary language programs;
- Evaluation of advanced language skills required in various professions;
- Teacher training for Japanese, Korean, African languages;
- Multilanguage LCTL training workshops;
- FL program evaluation kits;
- Establishment of internship for training advanced language learners in theory and practice of translation, in the context of international business;
- Research into effective immersion teaching.

Cooperation among Title VI Programs

When an informal poll was taken of the directors of National Language Resource Centers about actual and potential cooperation among the sibling organizations funded by the Department of Education's Title VI programs, several gave specific instances of sharing and cooperating with various National Resource Centers. Most said they had never been approached to begin a program of cooperation, but thought that it was a timely idea and could lead to productive cooperative ventures. Some of the directors' comments are summarized here:

We are working closely with area studies centers and through CIBER to identify and respond to the language needs of their students through the establishment of different types of course structures. In addition, the FLC and Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures have cooperative projects with CIBER in the development of Individualized Instruction in Japanese and Chinese. The FLC has a project, "Pathways to Proficiency" with the International Studies Center for the development of what we have called a proficiency questionnaire whose purpose is to identify the language needs and goals of the FLAS fellows and to suggest concrete ways in which they can reach these goals, using resources both on and off campus.

This university's NRC is currently running a program in the Yucatan for which they wanted to develop some content-based courses in Spanish. The NLRC have considerable experience with content-based instruction and offered to mount a pilot project in collaboration with the Spanish language instructors. The details are not yet

worked out, but this is one instance of an NRC coming to an LRC for support and collaboration.

Our 1994 Summer Institute consisted of four four-week workshops to develop materials for languages of the Pacific: Vietnamese, Samoan, Hawaiian, and French in the Pacific. The Samoan workshop was jointly sponsored by our LRC and the Pacific Islands NRC (we paid for U.S. participants; they paid for participants from Australia, New Zealand, and Western Samoa). One benefit of this was that an international association of teachers of Samoan was formed where none existed before.

We have continued to work cooperatively with the Center for Pacific Islands Studies to train teachers and develop curriculum and materials. One concrete result of that is that we [the LRC and the NRC] are copublishers of a new series of texts [over the last two years] for Samoan. The University of Hawaii Press and Pacifika Press of New Zealand have also signed on as copublishers.

Together with the University's CIBER and the Governor's Office of International Relations, we produced and distributed a handbook of language resources in our state. This includes schools, programs, courses, sources for materials, interpretation, and translation services, etc. In connection with the handbook, we and the CIBER cosponsored a conference on the importance of foreign language skills for economic development and diversification.

We supported the development of multimedia materials for Vietnamese, which we [the LRC] now distribute as a CD-ROM. These materials were then adapted to focus on Vietnamese business and cultural themes, and that version [also a CD-ROM] is distributed by the CIBER.

Summary

The richness of LCTL offerings in the United States, and the encouraging news that many LCTL enrollments are holding steady or increasing, points to the dynamic potential for LCTL study. An ever-increasing body of students and potential students with ethnic backgrounds and some experience in the target LCTLs is both a challenge and a relatively untapped resource for LCTL expertise. Programs in LCTLs throughout the United States need support to develop materials, encourage cooperation among institutions with similar goals, and establish training programs for teachers. While some programs appear healthy, others are on the verge of extinction.

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Breakout 6, Rapporteur

Less Commonly Taught Languages of Emerging Importance: Major Issues, Cost Problems, and Their National Implications

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The session was excellently conducted by the breakout group cochairs Professor Michael Metcalf and Dr. Louis Janus of the University of Minnesota. The participants represented a wide spectrum of scholars who hold a variety of academic and administrative positions that require them to consider the issues suggested by the title of the session. The number of participants present at the session and their lively, spirited participation left little doubt that these issues constitute a major area of concern for those interested in the role of Title VI in area studies and foreign language education. While the focus of attention was totally on LCTL problems and opportunities, in no way did the participants want to suggest that they were less interested or concerned with issues related to the teaching of the commonly taught languages. It was noted, however, that the primary rationale for the establishment of Title VI foreign language fellowships was to provide motivation and resources for the establishment of teaching and learning opportunities for LCTLs.

The deliberations of the session were guided by three basic questions; namely, What are the (changing) national needs? What contributions can be made by higher education in meeting those needs? and What is the role of Title VI in facilitating the development and implementation of programs to meet both existing and projected national needs?

From earlier plenary presentations at the conference, considerable information was offered regarding the languages of the world that fall

under the rubric of LCTLs (as well as those that can be considered Less Commonly, Much Less Commonly Taught Languages, the Least Commonly Taught Languages, and those that are Rarely, if ever, Taught Languages—see Brecht and Walton, this volume). We were also able to identify current and future national needs; for example, Professor JoAnn McCarthy (in this volume) informed us that the major markets of the world early in the next century (she called them “Big Emerging Markets” [BEMs]) would include Brazil, Turkey, Indonesia, Korea, Poland, and India, whose languages all currently fall into one of the LCTL categories. We also took note, thanks to information presented by Professor Janus, that when we look at the number of speakers of some of the world’s languages, we find many with huge numbers; for example, Hindi, Bengali, Arabic, Portuguese, and Indonesian, that are certainly among those underrepresented in our instructional programs. Taking cognizance of these figures helps to define national needs.

It was also noted that our schools and universities now have substantial populations of “heritage language” students whose ancestral languages often fall into the LCTL category. Many of these students, and the communities they represent, are demanding that they receive instruction in the languages of their forebears. There is a clear need to devise means to satisfy their aspirations and it is equally clear why it will be in the nation’s best interest to try to provide them the instruction they desire. Unfortu-

nately it is the case that we presently lack the expertise base to design, implement, and evaluate quality instruction for most of these languages.

National needs are thus partially defined by these observations. The question then arises as to what issues need to be addressed if institutions of higher learning and other language teaching agencies are to meet those needs.

Distilled from a long list of candidate topics offered by the participants in the breakout session, near consensus was reached on the following:

1. To satisfy goals and to meet national needs, there must be increased coordination and collaboration between and among NRCs and NLRCs, and both of these must integrate, and aggregate the efforts of other language education entities dedicated to the teaching and learning of the LCTLs. These include public (especially the multiplicity of resources of the federal government) and private-sector institutions in this country and abroad.

This coordination, it is hoped, will expedite the development of: (a) technology that will enhance instructional programs both for language teaching and teacher training; (b) teacher education programs; (c) instructional and assessment materials; and (d) basic reference materials (e.g. dictionaries and linguistic analyses and, especially, in-depth cross-cultural studies).

2. Intensive summer language institutes, in this country and abroad, for the benefit of both students and teachers of LCTLs, are deemed to be a major contributor to the enhancement of LCTL instruction. It is recognized that what was said above about developing the expertise base that will govern curriculum content and the methodologies best suited to implement summer institutes need the close attention of the nation's most accomplished language educators.
3. It was agreed that full recognition must be given to the intrinsic value of the linguistic and cultural knowledge that heritage language speakers bring to our schools and universities.

It has been said elsewhere (Campbell 1996, for example), that many five-year-old Korean-American children have attained a higher level

of proficiency in Korean than those who have studied Korean for many years in traditional foreign language courses in our schools and universities. It follows that to meet national needs for this language, full advantage should be taken of this resource. It is the case now, however, that foreign language courses offered in our schools and universities typically do not meet the needs of heritage students since they are typically designed for speakers of English. A challenge to the modern language teaching profession is to design and implement curricula for training teachers and preparing appropriate instructional assessment materials to meet the needs of heritage students.

It was also suggested that institutions of higher learning might seriously consider ways in which they can support and enhance programs in elementary, middle, and secondary schools that would result in early development of heritage student literacy skills, thus preparing them for advanced language and area studies programs at the tertiary level.

The three issues discussed above do not include review of a number of other topics presented in Richard Brecht's plenary address nor the paper prepared by Professors Metcalf and Janus. Furthermore, participants in the breakout session introduced a number of other issues, listed below without further discussion here.

1. What sort of center would be the most economical, efficient, and beneficial to serve curriculum designers and teachers of specific languages or family of languages? Is this the responsibility of NLRCs or will other types of centers need to be established? (See Brecht's paper in this volume.)
2. How are languages identified that are emerging in terms of their significance to meet national needs and, subsequently, how and by whom is the development of instructional and assessment materials, and teacher training, supported?
3. What responsibility does higher education have for the development of language competence at the K-12 levels?
4. As a subcategory of questions regarding the contributions of technology to modern language teaching, what role will distance education play in the teaching of LCTLs and the training of teachers to teach them?

There was consensus in the breakout group that Title VI funding will be the most important, but not the only, source of support of language educators as they strive to resolve the formidable task of developing successful LCTL programs.

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