

How to Say “National Security” in 1,001 Languages

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E pluribus unum, semper fidelis. . . . Whether it's words on our currency or a motto for an entire branch of our military, Americans love dabbling with foreign expressions. In today's threat environment, however, such a superficial approach leaves the American military and, ultimately, the American people vulnerable in a hostile global neighborhood where others frequently understand more than we do.¹ It's time for our military to comprehend fully that maintaining world leadership and security requires a broader understanding of other cultures, thought processes, and, of course, languages.

At any age, the human mind has the capacity to become multilingual. If the Department of Defense (DOD) wanted to improve its language capabilities from within, it could. This article demonstrates how, with proper motivation, the department can do so. It explains the importance of why we must begin this process now, how anyone can learn a second language, why attempts of the past have failed, and what steps we must take to improve our national security through increasing the DOD's language capability.



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The Need

In 2006 the Iraq Study Group clearly indicated that our military still experiences a severe shortage of qualified Arabic linguists:

All of our efforts in Iraq, military and civilian, are handicapped by Americans' lack of language and cultural understanding. Our embassy of 1,000 has 33 Arabic speakers, just six of whom are at the level of fluency. In a conflict that demands effective and efficient communication with Iraqis, we are often at a disadvantage. There are still far too few Arab language-proficient military and civilian officers in Iraq, to the detriment of the U.S. mission.²

Gen David Petraeus concurs, emphasizing how even basic "survival Arabic" is a significant force multiplier for troops in the field.³ Soldiers have to be careful because small misinterpretations can create large controversies. In one instance, as the Army attempted to coordinate an insertion of US troops into a local Iraqi tribe's area, tribal leaders strongly objected to the US presence. The Army resolved the impasse only when an interpreter discovered that the leaders' real concern was the presence of military working dogs, which Muslims consider unclean. After the Soldiers removed the dogs, the tribal leaders allowed the troops to enter the village. Thus, a perceptive interpreter proved key to mission success. Situations like these occur repeatedly on the battlefield.⁴

The effort in Afghanistan needs linguists as well: "The recurring theme [there] is, demand [for linguists] is great, competition is keen, supply is limited."⁵ Gen Stanley McChrystal once noted that "[in Afghanistan] the people are the prize."⁶ He knew that reaching the people demanded properly communicating with them. Along those lines, to win the Afghanis' hearts and minds, General McChrystal developed a unique approach that required at least one person from every platoon, in addition to any interpreters or linguists already working with the unit, to maintain at least a basic level of proficiency in the local language.⁷

The general understood that improving relations with any group of people necessitates face-to-face interaction and understanding. Indeed, "while they may not carry rifles, explosives or other combat gear, interpreters are integral to mission success in a war in which winning the support of the Afghan people is equally important as defeating extremists in combat."⁸

Simple linguistic ability can also help save lives. According to Gerardus Wykoff, a command sergeant major and the Military Intelligence Corps senior enlisted adviser, "It is important to have basic language skills. If you have a basic understanding of what folks are saying out there, you can save lives. . . . You can listen and see if insurgent activity is going on in a town. You can save lives by having this information." His experience also taught him that "if you can understand the basic writings and scribbling on the walls, it could be more than just scribbling. It could mean anything, like an [insurgent] meeting or an IED [improvised explosive device] emplacement."⁹

Without question, our military leaders understand the need for linguists on the battlefields of Afghanistan and Iraq. But our global responsibilities are clearly much broader than the ones in these two conflicts. Every day we spend millions of dollars in equipment and training around the world, providing our allies defense support and interoperability. Here too, linguists are essential. Col Walter Kraus, former commandant of the US Army Language School, stated unequivocally that "every day, thousands of American officers and men are brought into cross-cultural situations with people around the globe and are, whether they realize it or not, our principal weapons in the struggle for the minds of men." He also identified stewardship as a major factor for improving language proficiency in the military: "If we send billions of dollars in equipment to allied countries, it is essential that we also send persons who can explain the maintenance, operation and tactical employment of that equipment."¹⁰ Colonel Kraus wrote those words over 50 years ago, recommending improvements to our lan-

guage capabilities. The DOD has implemented some of his ideas, but, chillingly, in all the years since then, it has yet to close our language gap.

Improving a military's overall linguistic competence offers rewards. For example, Colonel Kraus told the story of a Soviet transport plane landing in Indonesia. Down to the very last man on board—a janitor—everyone spoke fluent Indonesian. Shocked, the Indonesians processed the passengers in record time. The Jakarta leadership never forgot that calculated gesture of goodwill.¹¹ When, if ever, has the United States performed such an incredible yet simple act of diplomacy and propaganda?

Indeed, one wonders how much of an advantage al-Qaeda has in a world in which

War on Terrorism might well determine the success or failure of counterinsurgency operations. Our combat training will be for nothing if our linguist does not tell us the truth or fails to recognize it because of a lack of training. A lack of foreign language skills is our Army's Achilles' heel. Timeliness and accuracy is everything in intelligence, and thus, a linguist's skills are more important than firepower. With the former, you might not need the latter.¹³

Anyone Can Do It

"Language comes so naturally to us that it is easy to forget what a strange and miraculous gift it is." This opening statement

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English is already the language of trade, navigation, and international communication, yet we struggle to produce an adequate number of Arabic linguists able to interact in the terrorists' world.¹² Are they really that much smarter than US forces simply because they tend to speak multiple languages while we do not? The answer is a resounding no; however, the question does raise an important point. If anyone can learn a language, why aren't members of the DOD doing just that? Without a doubt, improving our language capability will enhance our chances of winning a modern war. Maj John Davis, a retired Army intelligence officer, points out that

how accurately and well we analyze the indigenous people we deal with during the Global

of Steven Pinker's book *Words and Rules* serves as a primer for discussing the simplicity of language acquisition. Pinker points out some important truths:

Though it is sometimes easy for Americans to forget, English is not the only language spoken in the world. Humans babble in some six thousand languages falling into thirty-odd families.

First, no one is biologically disposed to speak a particular language. The experiments called immigration and conquest, in which children master languages unknown to their ancestors, settled that question long ago. . . .

Finally, no one supposes that language evolved six thousand times. We find different languages because people move apart and lose touch, or split into factions that hate each other's guts.¹⁴

Although the existence of 6,000 languages seems incomprehensible, the fact that all of them are somehow related means that, given the right circumstances, most people can learn at least one additional language.¹⁵ The problem is not that language is inherently difficult to acquire but that after we become comfortable conversing in one language, we may not see the need to learn others. We ourselves, then, oftentimes represent the biggest obstacle to second-language acquisition—by switching on what one linguist calls the “affective filter.”

The Affective Filter

Prof. Stephen Krashen, a noted linguist, theorized that adults have difficulty learning a second language because they turn on an affective filter that allows their motivation, attitude, self-confidence, and anxiety to inhibit that process. Take away the filter and anyone can learn a second language.¹⁶ For example, despite the deplorable conditions endured by Warren Fellows—a Western journalist imprisoned in Thailand—upon his release, he left with one new skill set: fluency in a new language.¹⁷ Naturally, we would hope that our Soldiers do not learn languages by becoming prisoners, but how much more effective would they be if they learned a language before interacting with people from other countries? We should give them that skill now—by removing the affective filter.

Professor Krashen linked a variety of affective variables relating directly to the success with which an individual can learn to speak a foreign language, ranking motivation as the principal factor.¹⁸ It follows then, that, lacking motivation, service members will likely never even attempt to learn another language.

The US Army’s special forces exemplify an organization whose members have fully embraced language proficiency. To become a special forces Soldier, each individual must demonstrate proficiency in a foreign language. In his book *Chosen Soldier*, Dick Couch, former Navy SEAL and noted au-

thor, provides a keen view of the grueling process involved in turning Army Soldiers into Green Berets—one that includes language training. Each time he introduces either Soldiers in special forces training or their instructors, he points out their language proficiency. One young Green Beret whom he met in western Iraq could speak Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Korean, and Tagalog—not to mention his growing fluency in Arabic. The young man’s response to Couch’s question about how it felt to have such a knack for languages embodies just the type of motivation needed to learn a foreign language: “‘It’s not a knack,’ he informed me evenly. ‘It’s commitment. Anyone can learn a foreign language if they [sic] want to. It takes a genuine desire to learn and the discipline to practice. And you have to go out of your way to find and practice with native speakers. The second language is easier than the first, and they get easier each time, but you have to make a personal commitment to learn the language.’”¹⁹

Throughout *Chosen Soldier*, Couch emphasizes the commitment necessary to enter the special forces, with language acquisition just one of the many demands. Failure to complete the language requirement negates all of the other hours of intense training. Special forces focus on a number of areas extremely important to our missions overseas, which include training and assistance with foreign military defense. Clearly, their specialized work demands fluency to enable them to communicate with the forces they train. But all service members, regardless of their location, might very well find themselves in a situation calling for communication with non-English-speaking allies, enemy prisoners, or other civilian strangers—a situation that could determine the success of the joint mission. We cannot simply rely on our special operations forces to do all the work for us. Each service member needs to be ready to engage in a foreign environment if necessary. Language engagement, even on a rudimentary level, can contribute significantly to the overall mission.

Since the beginning of the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, we have repeatedly found that simply learning a few words and phrases can “break the ice” in any social context. Saying hello to someone in his or her native tongue demonstrates not only respect for that person’s culture but also a sincere attempt to reach across barriers to form friendships and alliances. Along those lines, if Soldiers learned to speak only 10 words and phrases in the language of the country where they are deployed, the possible benefits, even of such a simple engagement, are immeasurable. Indeed, nothing is more personal than one’s native language. But consider the value of learning additional terms. Specifically, conversing on an introductory level would require proficiency in only 100 words—and the more terms, the greater the fluency.²⁰

Notwithstanding English’s extensive lexicon, mastery of only 1,000 key words would enable someone to understand roughly 72 percent of practically any standard written text. A vocabulary of close to 2,000 words brings understanding to around 79 percent of most written texts. Clearly, at least from a lexical standpoint, it is not difficult to develop basic understanding of a language. Going beyond 1,000–2,000 words is just linguistic icing on the cake. A thorough understanding of most English texts requires knowledge of roughly 16,000 terms.²¹ Granted, after 1,000 words, the process slows considerably, but the point is that one can bolster comprehension by learning a relatively small number of terms.

Mastering those 1,000 words demands basic motivation—something we would expect of hardworking service members. Unfortunately, they have no incentive to do so. Instead, they put up their affective filters and make excuses for not learning a new tongue. In that case, the military should accept no excuses.

The Effect of Aging and Brain Function

Service members who have decided not to learn a foreign language offer many com-

mon excuses. Some linguists and other skeptics point to age as the ultimate predictor of proficiency, declaring that Soldiers who did not learn a language in their youth will never master one in adulthood. But this “younger is better” argument is not entirely accurate.

Professor Krashen concludes that because older children learn faster, can better regulate quality and quantity of their speech, and can persuade native speakers to modify their speech (by saying, for example, “Please slow down; I don’t understand you”), they have greater “conversational competence.”²² Such children and adults may also find it easier to follow instructions, search dictionaries, and understand the intricacies of grammar. Unfortunately, though, as Krashen points out, the affective filter “hardens” after puberty.²³ These individuals can still learn a foreign language, but their affective filters grow stronger, becoming artificial mental barriers to learning new languages. Removal of those barriers (by education or necessity) allows adults to learn to speak a new language more easily.

Science shows that an adult probably cannot learn to speak a language as fluently as a child who has learned it from birth.²⁴ Indeed, young children seem better at the nuances of acquiring proper phonetics and phonology.²⁵ This does not mean, however, that adults cannot become proficient in a second language.

Regarding age and its effects on linguistic fluency, Prof. Lydia White, a linguistics professor at McGill University, cited strong research indicating that acquisition of languages does not decline with age but that the possibility of becoming a near-native speaker of a second language decreases after reaching a “critical or sensitive [period]” of brain development, which ranges from six to 15 years of age.²⁶ For these reasons, older immigrants may not speak with a perfect accent but can still learn the dominant language of their new environment.

Fortunately, in the context of military readiness, functional communication doesn’t

depend upon phonetic perfection. Learning a new language later in life will certainly leave the speaker with an accent, but local citizens rarely care about that. Rather, they will appreciate the Soldier's attempt to speak their language. Only extremely atypical and inconsiderate foreigners would refuse to converse with a nonnative speaker because of his or her strong accent.

Accents and native-like language precision aside, few would doubt that learning a first language is an inherent human characteristic. Indeed, Noam Chomsky (considered the father of modern linguistics) first arrived at the idea of a "universal grammar" because he believed that children could not so easily learn to speak a language if it were not for an "innate language faculty to guide them."²⁷ Although not completely accepted, universal grammar does offer one strong theory to describe how people learn to communicate and explains second language acquisition. Regardless, developing at least rudimentary skill in one additional language is a function not only of motivation but also of our minds' predisposition to learn new languages, even into adulthood.

Past Attempts

In 1957, after the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, the United States felt threatened by the possibility of losing the space-and-technology race. In response to our new second-place position behind the Soviets, a wave of legislation and patriotic fervor spread across the country, leading within a year to initiatives in many areas that needed improvement. Among these was the National Defense Education Act, which "suddenly poured millions of dollars into support for foreign language learning and teaching."²⁸ Not much has changed during the more than 50 years since passage of the act. In fact it seems that every time the military becomes aware of a language shortage, it throws millions of dollars at the problem, hoping to overcome the deficiency. One

such investment involves finding linguists who have the desired proficiency.

Recruiting Natives

After the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 (9/11), the military realized it faced an acute shortage of Middle Eastern linguists. Because training individuals from scratch could not meet the immediate need, the military resorted to contracting with linguists willing to fly to Afghanistan and Iraq. Unfortunately, this strategy was not always very effective. One report noted that some contracted translators in Afghanistan were in their 60s and 70s "and in poor physical condition—and some [didn't] even speak the right language"; in fact, the military immediately sent some of them back to the United States because of their physical problems.²⁹

Realizing that contracting translators is not an ideal long-term solution but also recognizing that native speakers are an extremely useful resource, the DOD has promulgated new programs to recruit and enlist them. In 2008 the Army initiated the 09L military occupational specialty (recruits are referred to as "09 Limas"): "This new military occupation employs heritage speakers as interpreters and translators, representing a new phase in the service's reinvigorated approach to foreign language."³⁰ During the 09L program's pilot stage, the *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap* of 2005 directed that all services study the program for possible DOD-wide implementation.³¹ Such initiatives are effective if they identify the very best civilian linguists, but finding them can prove quite difficult. For example, according to a 2000 census, only 7,700 Pashto speakers live in the United States.³²

Other programs championed by the DOD call for funding more travel abroad for service academy cadets and midshipmen during their studies. Reserve Officer Training Corps programs have also allowed cadets to learn more about foreign lands.³³ Some innovative schemes currently encourage development of language capabilities from

elementary school through high school. For instance, the National Language Flagship Program seeks to nurture students of the future in strategic languages such as Arabic, Hindi, and Urdu.³⁴ Unquestionably, we need strategies like these to seed our nation with future talent, but what about current efforts within the DOD to improve the language capabilities of those who already wear the uniform?

The Defense Language Institute

Offering exceptional instruction, the Defense Language Institute (DLI) leads the charge for language training in the military. Students will not progress in their linguist career field without successfully passing a particular language course at the institute, which sets its students up for success. Despite the difficulty of finding qualified instructors, the DLI is fulfilling its training mandate.

The institute has also enjoyed great success in its predeployment basic language instruction. For example, from 2005 until 2008 the Army's Language Familiarization and Cultural Awareness training saw a 78 percent growth in outreach. As of 2008 the training had reached over 66,572 service members.³⁵

Today's environment demands that predeployers receive the DLI's training in key strategic languages at the survival skill level. However, the military should also encourage troops not yet deployed to take advantage of language instruction, which, for the most part, is entirely voluntary. Fortunately, the military has tools to help those who so choose.

Rosetta Stone and Other Self-Help Programs

Self-help computer programs like Rosetta Stone, popular in the military for several years, are nothing new and have produced mixed results. In 2006 the Air Force chief of staff directed Air University to begin language instruction in the Air War College, Air Command and Staff College, and Senior

Non-Commissioned Officer Academy.³⁶ Face-to-face instruction seemed to work well at the Air War College, whose students enjoyed it. Unfortunately, the mandatory usage of language software proved less successful. Air Command and Staff College students (required to use Rosetta Stone) became frustrated with the software and lost their motivation to learn. In fact, many of them began to concentrate on "beating" the software rather than learning from it.³⁷

Similarly, students enrolled in distance learning programs had a less than satisfying experience. According to one observer, "Although this voluntary program initially generated enthusiasm, as evidenced by a rather lengthy waiting list for license use, completion rates for software modules were abysmal. Over a 15-month period, a total of 2,667 SOC [Squadron Officer College] students signed up for licenses, but only 67 of them (2.5 percent) completed 50 or more hours."³⁸

Self-help language software can provide very successful instruction. The key factor, however, as noted previously, is the motivation of the learner. Those who lose either their focus or motivation will not learn. Currently, other than certain professional military education programs, few areas demand that military members use language learning software. Even those areas lack incentives for students to learn a language, other than completing the particular course. Clearly, service members need additional motivation to help inspire them to learn a language. Simply providing access to self-help software is not enough.

Other Language Training Programs

For over 40 years, the Army has had a very robust foreign area officer program that allowed officers to specialize in the language and culture of certain regions. The Air Force attempted to copy this model with a part-time program wherein members could also obtain a secondary specialty as a foreign area officer. Realizing that this effort did not meet the needs of our increased op-

erating tempo following 9/11, the Air Force went back to the drawing board and devised a new regional affairs strategist program.

The Air Force selects officers for this program at about the seven-to-10-year point in their careers, giving them 24–33 months of additional training that usually results in a master's degree in the area of their language and cultural specialty.³⁹ The service then assigns them to areas in which they can best utilize their new talents.

The Air Force has also recently implemented the Language Enabled Airmen Program, which identifies junior officers motivated to learn or improve their language capability and begins their training with a language-intensive training event. As of October 2010, 25 of the service's newest second lieutenants had completed the first of these classes.⁴⁰ The program seeks to identify and train officers at an early stage in their careers and then, throughout their stay in the Air Force, give them training and assignments that will strengthen their language skills and put them to use where needed worldwide.

Both the Regional Affairs Strategist Program and the Language Enabled Airmen Program likely will help produce an effective cadre of language and cultural specialists within the Air Force. These programs accommodate individuals who wish to become language and cultural specialists; furthermore, they serve as a valuable mechanism to address the service's shortage in this field. Such efforts help the Air Force develop personnel comparable to the Army's foreign area officers. None of these programs, however, can ever fully meet the military's need for expertise in language and culture. In addition to grooming individual specialists, the Air Force should also encourage and motivate its other members to value the importance of language and culture. Allowing them to continue in the mind-set of "English only / our culture is best" will only harm our ability to master the art of global engagement.

William Lederer and Eugene Burdick's novel *The Ugly American* presents an ac-

count of the American experience in Southeast Asia.⁴¹ Despite its setting during the Vietnam War, the book's lessons remain valid today. In order to win the hearts and minds of any people, *all* of our troops must first understand what is within those hearts and minds. Sheer brute force or bulk gifts of rice are not enough. As previously mentioned, Congress enacted the National Defense Education Act a year before publication of *The Ugly American*. Since that time, our military's efforts to bridge the linguistic gap appear to have been Sisyphean. The continual focus on pouring money into training select groups of linguists will help but not solve our problem. There is only one way to do that—by changing the way we motivate our military members to learn foreign languages.

Way of the Future

To increase the number of its members who can speak a foreign language, the military must remove its institutional affective filter. Even language experts allow themselves a certain amount of filtering. Consider, for example, this statement by Lt Col Jay Warwick, USAF, retired, of the Air Force Culture and Language Center:

Attendees of the AU [Air University] language summit agreed that it was impractical and undesirable for all Airmen to be language specialists. Depending upon the language, an individual could take longer than a year in an immersion-style course to become minimally functional. . . . Additionally, experience has identified motivation and capability as the key factors in language learning. Not all Airmen possess the motivation to learn a foreign language or maintain proficiency; neither are all of them predisposed to language learning.⁴²

It is indeed impractical for all Airmen to become language specialists, but nearly every member can develop some proficiency in a foreign language. Claiming that some people are not "predisposed" to learning a new language is just the affective filter speaking. Even apes learning sign language

build a vocabulary of 500–600 words.⁴³ Given the right motivation, most humans *are* predisposed to language learning.

Perhaps Warwick's most accurate statement is that "not all Airmen possess the motivation to learn a foreign language." Herein lies the true problem as well as the solution to our shortage of proficient speakers. Motivate the troops, and the problem solves itself.

Promotion

The *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap* mandates that mastery of a foreign language be phased in as a "criterion for general officer / flag officer advancement."⁴⁴ This requirement is a good start, but we

quiring officers to attain a two level of proficiency would not entail asking them to learn a new language perfectly but merely to attain limited working proficiency.

If this policy were implemented today, junior officers would have at least six to 10 years to study a new language before becoming eligible for promotion to O-5 rank. On 5 January 2011, the Air Force announced that officer selection briefs would include a section that captures an officer's language certification levels (for reading and listening). Recognizing that "officers who have foreign language skills and cultural experience relevant to world operations play a key role in supporting joint combatant commanders," the service decided to include a foreign language section

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could expand it to become a huge motivator for all military personnel to pursue language proficiency. Why not direct that an officer's eligibility for promotion to lieutenant colonel (O-5) depend upon attainment of a Defense Language Proficiency Test level of two in any second language?⁴⁵ Such a score is reasonable on this test, which measures proficiency in reading, listening, and speaking, and whose results range from zero (lowest) to five (highest), in addition to plus signs used as midlevel range markers. These levels correspond to the system devised by the Interagency Language Roundtable: "Put another way, an individual with 1/1/1 scores in Arabic possesses 'survival skills,' while one with 4/4/4 could debate the US Middle East policy on al-Jazeera television."⁴⁶ Re-

to help identify these in-demand officers to promotion boards.⁴⁷ Certainly this is admirable, but the Air Force can do more. If officers realized that promotion to O-5 depended upon language certification, they would obtain it.

The service can assist in this matter by doing away with its anachronistic emphasis on earning a master's degree as a criterion for advancement into the senior ranks. As outlined by Col Dennis Drew, USAF, retired, most of the subject areas that our officers pursue for master's degrees are "largely irrelevant to [the Air Force's] *raison d'être*. The Air Force seems unable or unwilling to distinguish the value of a graduate degree in business from the value of a graduate degree

in national security studies or military history."⁴⁸ Or, for that matter, foreign languages.

By replacing the institutional emphasis upon these degrees with one on foreign language advancement, the Air Force could provide funding for language training in much the same way it offers tuition assistance for graduate-level education. Currently the service assists with tuition for language courses if they are tied to obtaining college credit. Unfortunately, though, this is not true of many specialized language courses, so the Air Force should underwrite any such credible course, whether associated with a degree program or not. Junior officers could then concentrate on obtaining skills they could use in an operational setting rather than on certifying skills best practiced in the civilian world.

The service could also channel the language-development process of its junior officers by offering training at its larger installations. By contracting with local universities to conduct special training on less commonly taught languages (LCTL), the Air Force could create opportunities for officers and enlisted troops to seek proficiency in languages of most benefit to the service. Given the difficulty of learning many of these LCTLs and the time necessary to do so, the Air Force could permit (or direct) members to study them during duty hours.⁴⁹

Furthermore, the service could designate officers proficient in "high-need" LCTL languages with a special identifier on their officer selection brief.⁵⁰ Needs change with regard to languages, so, to be fair, once a language was identified as high-need, that identifier on the brief would stay with the officer who earned it, but new languages could always be added or subtracted from a master list.

The military could phase in these policies over time, minimizing disruption of the current officer promotion process within each service. Additionally, the new policy would motivate all Reserve Officer Training Corps cadets entering the military to study languages as a means of enhancing their careers. Maj William Downs, a special op-

erations pilot, commented that "officers should set the example by learning at least one language fluently."⁵¹ Linking language skill to promotion will make the process natural and eliminate the affective filter.

Similarly, if a noncommissioned officer with LCTL proficiency could earn an additional five points toward promotion to senior rank, he or she would find a way to remove the affective filter.⁵² Some might argue that attaching language acquisition to promotion would benefit only linguists, foreign nationals entering our services, and those raised in bilingual families. The services could address this potential problem in a simple manner. First, since the additional points for senior promotion become a benefit only after the member has invested many years in the service, language capability would not disproportionately skew promotions in early career stages when development of vocational and leadership skill is of primary importance. Foreign language speakers in the lower grades would still be eligible for proficiency pay. Second, the new standard could be based on a language someone did not learn as a child—a second language for most people, perhaps a third or fourth for a select few. The point is that failure to give our Airmen a mechanism to disengage the affective filter will produce a military full of foreign language mottoes and clever catchphrases but no reservoir of language capability for engaging our allies and defeating our enemies. We may have a cadre of elite linguists ready to lead the charge, but we will never have enough of them to go around.

Professional Military Education

We need not wait until our officers enroll in midlevel and senior-level professional military education to give them exposure to a foreign language. Instead, we could require that officers who aspire to matriculate in-residence demonstrate a level of proficiency beforehand. For officers attending basic developmental education, the military could require a score of at least "0+" or a "1" on a

Defense Language Proficiency Test, a “1 +” or “2” for in-residence intermediate developmental education, and a “2 +” or “3” for in-residence senior developmental education.

Combining promotion with selection for developmental education (as the Air Force does) makes this process even more streamlined. An individual's officer selection briefs could list the level of language ability attained, and promotion boards could then use this information accordingly.

Initiating this approach would not impose any significant cost on the DOD. The DLI already offers a number of free programs for those who seek language proficiency. Self-help software can also lend sufficient support to motivated individuals who wish to achieve lower-level proficiency. Finally, if the Air Force shifts gears to emphasize language acquisition rather than superfluous master's degrees, this new mandate will become smoothly incorporated into our troops' already busy work/life schedule.

Cultural Change

For many years, the DOD has used various financial incentives such as foreign language proficiency pay to attract language speakers and encourage service members to learn or retain their capabilities.⁵³ At certain times, this pay applied to a wide variety of languages—at others, only for certain languages in short supply. Nevertheless, foreign language proficiency pay has served as just about the only mechanism to motivate service members. Certainly it is a good program that we should continue, but it cannot be the only method that the DOD uses to encourage its members to learn a language.

Because of individual and institutional affective filters, the DOD has not actively undertaken a serious language-proficiency campaign. Thus, each year a new study discusses the importance of languages in the military and the fact that the department faces a critical shortage of skilled linguists. The DOD then decides to throw money at the problem. Now is the time, however, to demonstrate a stronger commitment to

solving it. Promotion and individual recognition are hallmarks of membership in the service. If the DOD required linguistic skills of its future leaders, then they would step out of their comfort zones and acquire those skills.

Interestingly, of all the medals and ribbons offered by the DOD, none are awarded for language proficiency. If the department does nothing else, it should at least offer recognition in the form of a badge or ribbon to those who have demonstrated linguistic capability. True, fully trained foreign area officers have functional badges, but what about those troops who are not full-time linguists? Surely they deserve recognition for their efforts.⁵⁴ Herein lies the key to a shift in the DOD's culture with regard to language proficiency. If the military ever wishes to motivate people to learn a new language, the DOD needs to prove that it values the service of those who do so.

Conclusion

In 2002 a legend and true American hero passed away. Gen Vernon Walters never went to college but worked his way up through the ranks in the Army to become a two-star general. He served with honor during World War II and later became one of America's greatest diplomats. This man learned 16 languages, speaking eight fluently—including Chinese and Russian.⁵⁵ He even translated for President Harry Truman and President Richard Nixon. At one point in his life, “his simultaneous translation of a speech by Nixon in France prompted President Charles de Gaulle to say to the US President, ‘Nixon, you gave a magnificent speech, but your interpreter was eloquent.’”⁵⁶

Today, instead of looking up to men like General Walters, many of our young troops do not even know who he is. During deployments, they waste countless hours playing video games and watching movies. Imagine the impact these service members could have if they applied the same drive and motivation to learning more about for-

eign languages and cultures. Tying their career advancement to linguistic capability would help. Changing our culture to reflect that importance would help even more.

The Army's special forces have already incorporated this culture into their training. Even the legendary Robin Sage training exercise now makes use of languages like Arabic.⁵⁷ Special forces do indeed understand that "while developing the language and cross-cultural skills is more difficult

and more time consuming than purely tactical, behind-the-gun skills, it's what really sets the special operator apart from his conventional counterpart."⁵⁸ Perhaps if the DOD demonstrated its commitment to language growth and learned from its special operations forces, all levels of the military could reap the linguistic rewards. The impact on our overseas operations would be truly extraordinary. ☛

Notes

1. I use the number "1,001" in the title of this article in the same sense as it appears in the classic book *The Thousand and One Nights*. In that collection of stories, the Persians did not use "1,001" literally but simply to mean "a lot." Indeed, original transcripts do not contain that number.

2. Iraq Study Group, *The Iraq Study Group Report* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 92, http://permanent.access.gpo.gov/lps76748/iraq_study_group_report.pdf.

3. Lt Gen David H. Petraeus, "Learning Counterinsurgency: Observations from Soldiering in Iraq," *Military Review*, October 2006 (supplement), 45–56.

4. "US Scrambles to Find Linguists for Afghan Surge," VOAnews.com, 29 May 2009, <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/a-13-2009-05-29-voa-32-68643567.html>.

5. Ibid.

6. Kate Brannen, "Petraeus' COIN Guidance 'Prematurely Released,'" *DefenseNews*, 30 July 2010, <http://www.defensenews.com/story.php?i=4729883>.

7. Gen Stanley McChrystal, Headquarters US Forces Afghanistan / International Security Assistance Force, memorandum, subject: COMISAF/USFOR-A Counterinsurgency Training Guidance, 10 November 2009.

8. Sgt Kevin Stabinsky, "Afghan Linguists Key to Success," American Forces Press Service, 2 November 2006, <http://www.defense.gov/news/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=1998>.

9. Quoted in Brian Lamar, "3rd Inf. Div. Prepares to Deploy to Iraq with Language and Culture Training in Mind," 27 August 2009, accessed 2 February 2011, <http://www.army.mil/-news/2009/08/27/26598-3rd-inf-div-prepares-to-deploy-to-iraq-with-language-and-culture-training-in-mind/>.

10. Walter E. Kraus, "Bridging the Linguistic Gap (50 Years Ago in ARMY)," *Army*, 1 July 2008, <http://>

findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3723/is_200807/ai_n27995742/?tag=mantle_skin;content.

11. Ibid.

12. See Arnaud de Borchgrave, "Extremists Pander for Mission and Money: Terrorists Deploy News Rags to Hold Adherents' Attention," *Washington Times*, 20 January 2011, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/jan/20/extremists-pander-for-mission-and-money/>. Al-Qaeda even has its own online English language magazine titled *Inspire*.

13. Maj John W. Davis, "Our Achilles' Heel: Language Skills," *Military Review* 86, no. 2 (March/April 2006): 110.

14. Steven Pinker, *Words and Rules: The Ingredients of Language* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), 1, 211.

15. Ibid., 211.

16. Stephen D. Krashen, *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition* (New York: Pergamon Institute of English, 1982), 31.

17. Warren Fellows, *The Damage Done: Twelve Years of Hell in a Bangkok Prison* (Sydney, NSW Australia: Pan Macmillan, 1997). Fellows, who spent 12 years imprisoned, discusses how he acquired proficiency in Thai and its value to him. How did he do it? He had no choice.

18. Krashen, *Principles and Practice*, 31.

19. Dick Couch, *Chosen Soldier: The Making of a Special Forces Warrior* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2007), 382.

20. Tony Buzan, *Use Your Memory* (London: Guild Publishing, 1986), 129.

21. Paul Nation and Robert Waring, "Vocabulary Size, Text Coverage and Word Lists," *WordHacker*, 2007, <http://www.wordhacker.com/en/article/vocabularysizewordlists.htm>. See "Table 1: Vocabulary size and text coverage in the Brown corpus."

22. Krashen, *Principles and Practice*, 43.

23. *Ibid.*, 44.
24. William H. Thorpe, "The Learning of Song Patterns by Birds, with Especial Reference to the Song of the Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*," *Ibis* 100, no. 4 (October 1958): 535–70. Consider the biological evidence. Thorpe did an extensive study on the chaffinch and its unique song, finding that if a young bird is not introduced to the adult male's song during a critical period after hatching, it will never sing properly. Like the chaffinch, children seem to have the same need for exposure to linguistic nuances, such as nonnative phonemes, at an early stage; if not, such sounds will prove more difficult to pronounce and/or replicate later on. For example, in 1799 Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard discovered a boy 11 or 12 years of age whom he named Victor, known as the "Wild Boy of Aveyron" because he had apparently been raised by wolves. Victor never really developed significant ability to communicate beyond a few words. More recent examples also confirm the chaffinch phenomenon. In 1940 scientists were intrigued by "Isabelle," who had been hidden away by her parents since early infancy. Discovered at age six, she had cognitive skills below those of a two-year-old. Although she learned to speak, her linguistic skills were comparable to those of a child immigrant learning a second language. See Ray Jackendoff, *Patterns in the Mind: Language and Human Nature* (New York: BasicBooks, 1994), 116–20.
25. Jackendoff, *Patterns in the Mind*, 117.
26. Lydia White, *Second Language Acquisition and Universal Grammar* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 245.
27. Rosamond Mitchell and Florence Myles, *Second Language Learning Theories* (London: Hodder Education, 2004), 55.
28. Tom Scovel, *Learning New Languages: A Guide to Second Language Acquisition* (Scarborough, Ontario: Heinle and Heinle, 2001), 37.
29. Jason Straziuso, "Lost in Translation: Linguists Hired under Contract Struggle to Keep Up with Troops," *Sun Sentinel*, 26 July 2009, 15A.
30. A "heritage speaker" generally refers to an individual raised in a home in which the dominant language of a country (e.g., English in the United States) either is not spoken or is not the primary language. Heritage speakers generally have native proficiency in the language spoken in their home and acquire the dominant language (of the country in which they live) either simultaneously with the acquisition of their home language or later in life. John J. Kruzel, "Defense Department Navigates Language Roadmap," *American Forces Press Service*, 25 November 2008, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=52090>.
31. Department of Defense, *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, January 2005), 9, par. 2.E, accessed 14 December 2010, <http://www.defense.gov/news/Mar2005/d20050330roadmap.pdf>.
32. Straziuso, "Lost in Translation," 15A.
33. Kruzel, "Defense Department Navigates."
34. *Ibid.*
35. House, *Language and Cultural Awareness Capabilities in the Military, Statement of Gary Patton, Senior Language Authority, Office of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff / J-1, House Armed Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations*, 110th Cong., 2nd sess., 10 September 2008.
36. Lt Col Jay J. Warwick, "The Dilemmas of Providing Language Instruction for the US Air Force," *Air and Space Power Journal* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 47.
37. *Ibid.*, 49.
38. *Ibid.*
39. Secretary of the Air Force for International Affairs, "Regional Affairs Strategist Factsheet," accessed 15 December 2010, <http://www.safia.hq.af.mil/factsheets/factsheet.aspx?id=12756>.
40. Air Force Personnel Center, "Lieutenants Complete Inaugural Language Training," 1 October 2010, accessed 15 December 2010, <http://afpc.randolph.af.mil/news/story.aspx?id=123224700>.
41. William J. Lederer and Eugene Burdick, *The Ugly American* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1958).
42. Warwick, "Providing Language Instruction," 50.
43. Jackendoff, *Patterns in the Mind*, 139.
44. Department of Defense, *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap*, 8, par. 1.S.
45. "Attaining the grade of lieutenant colonel is often considered to be the hallmark of a successful career." Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-3, *Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management*, 1 February 2010, 18, par. 3-7, http://www.apd.army.mil/pdffiles/p600_3.pdf. This Army pamphlet is but one confirmation of the notion that attaining the rank of lieutenant colonel is a "hallmark" of success. As such, this author recommends making fluency in at least one foreign language a requirement for promotion to this important rank.
46. Col John L. Conway III, USAF, Retired, "The View from the Tower of Babel: Air Force Foreign Language Posture for Global Engagement," *Air and Space Power Journal* 19, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 60. The International Language Roundtable levels of proficiency roughly equate to the following: "0" = "no proficiency," "0+" = "memorized proficiency," "1" = "elementary proficiency," "1+" = "elementary proficiency, plus," "2" = "limited working proficiency,"

"2+" = "limited working proficiency, plus," "3" = "general professional proficiency," "3+" = "general professional proficiency, plus," "4" = "advanced professional proficiency," "4+" = "advanced professional proficiency, plus," and "5" = "functional native proficiency." See "Interagency Language Roundtable Language Skill Level Descriptions—Speaking," Interagency Language Roundtable, accessed 20 January 2011, <http://www.govtilr.org/Skills/ILRscale2.htm>.

47. Daniel P. Elkins, "Air Force Officials Approve Changes to Officer Selection Brief," 5 January 2011, accessed 20 January 2011, <http://www.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123236950>.

48. Col Dennis M. Drew, USAF, Retired, "Educating Air Force Officers: Observations after 20 Years at Air University," *Airpower Journal* 11, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 40.

49. John Conway provides an excellent table outlining the number of study hours necessary to attain proficiency in various categories of languages. Col John Conway, USAF, Retired, "Civilian Language Education in America: How the Air Force and Academia Can Thrive Together," *Air and Space Power Journal* 24, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 77.

50. These languages are spelled out in the DOD and Air Force strategic language lists. They change as do the needs of the Air Force/DOD.

51. Maj William Brian Downs, "Unconventional Airpower," *Air and Space Power Journal* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 22. Unfortunately, Major Downs died near Baghdad while training Iraqi pilots.

52. Col John Conway recommends awarding one Weighted Airman Promotion System point to enlisted personnel for obtaining a 3/3/3 level of proficiency. Conway, "Tower of Babel," 65. Although a good idea, it does not offer enough incentive to

prompt enlisted troops to obtain such a high level of proficiency. A more substantial incentive (i.e., more points) would basically guarantee promotion for troops who mastered a language. Furthermore, mandating only a 2/2/2 level of proficiency makes the goal easier to reach. Finally, the fact that five points is roughly equivalent to a Bronze Star demonstrates the value the Air Force puts upon foreign language proficiency.

53. See Air Force Instruction 36-2605, *Air Force Military Personnel Testing System*, 24 September 2008, 82–83, par. A14.4, <http://www.e-publishing.af.mil/shared/media/epubs/AFI36-2605.pdf>. The Air Force has authorized various forms of proficiency pay over the years; this instruction details the most current version.

54. Colonel Conway recommends granting linguists an oak leaf cluster on their Air Force training ribbons. Conway, "Tower of Babel," 65. However, this author believes that they deserve a separate ribbon or badge of distinction.

55. Henry L. Applebaum, "Vernon Walters—Renaissance Man," Central Intelligence Agency, 27 June 2008, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol46no1/article01.html>.

56. *Ibid.*

57. The final hurdle that a recruit must negotiate, Robin Sage is arguably one of the most strenuous, realistic exercises in all of the DOD, extending over a vast terrain and incorporating all facets of special forces training. To make it even more realistic, foreign language is now becoming part of this exercise. Couch, *Chosen Soldier*, 365.

58. *Ibid.*, 392.



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