

Current Perceptions and Beliefs Among Incoming College Students Towards Foreign Language Study and Language Requirements

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Abstract: *Opinions of foreign language study, as well as attitudes toward specific cultures and languages, influence student motivation and success. The purpose of the present study is to catalogue and report the perceptions and attitudes of recent incoming college students (freshman and transfer students) concerning foreign or second language (L2) study and foreign language requirements in a post-9/11 context. The results offer insights into students' evolving beliefs and concerns, which can be used to inform and subsequently improve the teaching-learning process through the development of timely, meaningful, and responsive language learning environments.*

Key words: *beliefs, culture, motivation, perceptions, requirements*

Language: *Relevant to all languages*

Introduction

Growing popular support for foreign language study and international education has been recently documented among both students and the general public. For example, a 2001 Art and Science Group publication *StudentPoll* targeted 500 college-bound high school seniors and reported that students enter college with a strong interest in international education and that the majority of seniors want to continue foreign language study at the postsecondary level. It also found that virtually every college-bound student had studied a foreign language in high school

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(98%), more than half (57%) planned to take a foreign language in college, and nearly half (48%) planned to participate in a study abroad program. Moreover, 50% of the respondents planned on taking courses that focused on the history or culture of other countries and 37% planned on taking courses in international studies.

A 2000 survey by the American Council on Education (ACE) of 1,006 Americans aged 18 or older revealed similar reactions, wherein over 85% of the respondents indicated that knowledge of a foreign language was important. According to Hayward and Siaya (2001), this is a significantly higher percentage than was found in a Gallup Poll conducted some 20 years ago. The ACE survey also found that 85% of the respondents believed that knowing a foreign language would help them in the future, 75% stated that foreign language training should be mandatory for high school students, and over 70% were in favor of making foreign language study a requirement at the post-secondary level (Gascoigne, 2004).

Summarizing the results of both surveys, Hayward and Siaya (2001) concluded that the public presently “supports requirements for foreign languages and courses that include an international dimension and believes it important that students have access to international study and internship opportunities” (p. 6). Clearly, “students, parents, and the public are looking to higher education to provide strong international and language programs” (p. 6).

This recent sentiment, however, is in direct opposition to that expressed in two separate surveys conducted in the early 1970s. Walker (1973) analyzed 1,200 questionnaires completed by university students wherein the majority of respondents felt that the foreign language requirement should be abolished. Also targeting university students in the same year, the 265 respondents to Schotta’s 1973 questionnaire overwhelmingly shared a desire to eliminate the foreign language requirement.

These beliefs about language learning and its importance are woven into

the fabric of society. They are influenced by history and current events, as well as hopes and fears about our future. Indeed, “beliefs about language learning are prevalent in the culture at-large [and] foreign language educators must consider that students bring these beliefs with them into the classroom” (Horwitz, 1988, p. 283). To this end, researchers have begun to catalogue the types, and examine the effects, of student beliefs and attitudes toward second languages (L2s) and the second language acquisition (SLA) process.

Not surprisingly, these studies suggest that certain attitudes and beliefs can have a notable impact on the language learner’s affective state and that this affective disposition plays a central role in SLA (Gardner, 1985; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Tse, 2000; Young, 1991). In a seminal 1985 work, Gardner proposed a socioeducational model of SLA in which the successful learning of an L2 ultimately requires that the student take on the patterns and behaviors of the target culture. According to this model, student “attitude towards the other (target language) community and beliefs about language learning will help determine individual differences in success” (Tse, 2000, p. 70). Kamada (1986) also found that the extent to which a student likes the L2 and the target culture fuels motivation and, subsequently, the acquisition of specific language skills, such as speaking or listening comprehension.

Certainly, one can envision “many instances where preconceived notions about language learning would influence a learner’s effectiveness in the classroom” (Horwitz, 1988, p. 283). For this reason, it is imperative that language educators gain an understanding of and become sensitized to the variety of beliefs held by today’s students, as well as the consequences of these beliefs on the L2 teaching–learning process. Indeed, “knowing the implication of the social environment for motivation can help with the development of teaching strategies and communicative styles that will sustain

and promote learning” (Noels, Clément, & Pelletier, 1999, p. 31).

Earlier Findings

According to Tse (2000), “little systematic study has been made of how students perceive their foreign language experiences when given an open opportunity to comment on them, unrestricted by surveys or forced questionnaires” (p. 69). A notable exception, however, is Roberts (1992). Roberts wanted to discover what, if anything, college freshmen believe concerning the importance of foreign language study, and what type of arguments and opinions they offer. In other words, what do these students “hear, remember, or believe about the curricular requirements that reverberate around them” (p. 275). Using qualitative, open-ended techniques, Roberts’s study involved 547 incoming college freshmen at a large midwestern land-grant university. Specifically, Roberts’s participants composed an open-ended essay on their perception of the importance of foreign language study or lack thereof. The topic was designed to elicit a variety of viewpoints and provide a framework for specific substantiating arguments.

Roberts found overwhelming and enthusiastic support for foreign language study in general, and foreign language requirements in particular. Student arguments fell into 10 major categories presented in Table 1.

Roberts also found that culture was “without a doubt” the most commonly cited argument (p. 277). Culture (and its subcategories) was mentioned in 80.6% of the student essays as a reason to study foreign languages. These subcategories included knowledge about important people and events, knowledge about traditions, reduction in ethnocentricity, understanding a multicultural U.S. heritage, exploring other cultural mindsets, and expanding one’s own cultural mindset. Culture outranked the second most commonly cited argument, business, by 32.9%. Subcategories under business included competing in the

TABLE 1

Roberts’s Categories of Arguments for Studying a Foreign Language

1. Travel
2. Job, career opportunities
3. Business
4. Interpersonal communication
5. Strengthen U.S. foreign relations
6. Need for world peace, harmony
7. Understanding culture
8. Well-rounded education
9. Rejection of monolingualism
10. Comparison with other educational systems

TABLE 2

Ely’s Categories of Arguments for Studying Spanish

1. Department requirement for major
2. Interest in Hispanic culture
3. Interest in other cultures to understand the world better
4. Benefits in seeking employment
5. Benefits in future career
6. Use in study abroad
7. Use in travel abroad
8. Interest in own Hispanic heritage
9. Desire to communicate in Spanish with relatives
10. Desire to use Spanish with Spanish-speaking friends
11. To converse with Spanish-speakers in the United States
12. Desire to speak more than one language
13. Insights into English grammar
14. To gain a well-rounded education
15. Mental exercise, challenge
16. Spanish is an important language in the world
17. Course is less demanding than others
18. University requirement

global marketplace, dealing with overseas operations, concern for foreign takeovers in the United States, cost of translators, and dealing with non-U.S. markets. Moreover, culture was ranked first in number of times mentioned across all demographic categories (race and gender).

Relatively similar findings were revealed in a 1986 survey of freshman university students of Spanish. Ely (1986) asked 75 participants to indicate "all of their reasons" for studying Spanish (p. 28). The 184 reasons were collapsed into the 18 categories presented in Table 2.

Ely further reduced his findings into three motivational clusters: an integrative culture-driven cluster, an instrumental or career-driven cluster, and a third requirement cluster. The culture and career clusters were found to have a significant positive motivational effect; whereas, the requirement cluster possessed a weak but negative relationship to motivation.

Present Study

Overall opinions of foreign language study, as well as attitudes toward specific cultures and languages, influence student motivation and success. These attitudes, as a function of our society, are affected by the social context in which they are embedded. The purpose of the present study, therefore, is to catalogue and report the perceptions and attitudes of recent incoming college students (freshman and transfer students) concerning L2 study—a snapshot of current student beliefs. General student attitudes and opinions have shifted from a negative position in the early 1970s (Schotta, 1973; Walker, 1973), to one of tremendous support (ACE, 2000; Art and Science Group, 2001; Roberts, 1992), with a host and range of arguments given in substantiation. This study, however, examines the position of incoming college freshmen in a post-9/11, mid-War-on-Terror America. Indeed, understanding the interests, attitudes, and opinions of today's students can help language teachers develop approaches and create an educational environment

that is conducive to success (Ely, 1986; Horwitz, 1988; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Roberts, 1992; Tse, 2000). Although originally intended to report general trends, several outlying or extreme beliefs are shared as well.

Research Question

The question posed in this study was: In general, what, if anything, do today's college students believe concerning the importance of foreign language study and what type of arguments and opinions do they offer? In addition, what are the perceptions and attitudes of today's college students concerning postsecondary foreign language requirements?

Institution and Student Demographics

The study took place between 2003 and 2005 at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO), a metropolitan institution located in Nebraska's largest city. During this period, UNO offered nearly 200 programs of study to approximately 15,000 students—13,997 of which were undergraduates. The diversity of the undergraduate student body at this time is presented in Table 3.

While 3.15% of the students did not offer ethnicity data to the university, it is clear that UNO is a predominantly White

TABLE 3

Undergraduate Enrollment by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	% of students
White	82.87%
African American	5.25%
Hispanic/Latino	2.95%
Asian Pacific Islander-American	2.73%
Native American	.49%
Non-Resident Alien	2.54%
No Response	3.15%

institution with a growing, albeit small, diversity composition. Indeed, only 5.25% of the students self-identified as African American, 2.95% as Hispanic, 2.73% as Asian-Pacific Islander, and less than .5% as Native American. At this time, 45.3% of the undergraduates were male and 54.7% were female.

Core high school course entrance requirements include 4 years of English, 3 years of math, 3 years of social science, 3 years of natural science, and 2 years of the same foreign language. Once admitted to UNO, its College of Arts and Sciences imposes an additional four-semester foreign language requirement for receipt of the Bachelor of Arts degree. Two other colleges require foreign language study (the College of Communication, Fine Arts, and Media, and the College of Education), but other colleges and programs use foreign language study to fulfill distribution requirements in the humanities.

Materials

The essay portion of the English Placement and Proficiency Examination (EPPE) was used as an open-ended tool to capture student perceptions of foreign language study and requirements. This instrument was developed by the Department of English at UNO to place incoming students into (or out of) the appropriate level of first-year composition, a two-semester, six-hour sequence of composition.

The exam consists of a standardized vocabulary and reading comprehension test (Nelson-Denny, 1993) and a locally developed prompted essay. Students are allowed 15 minutes for the vocabulary portion of the exam, 20 minutes for the reading comprehension section, and 90 minutes to complete the essay (See Appendix A for the full essay portion of the EPPE). The EPPE has remained structurally unchanged since its implementation in the late 1970s, although the writing prompts are updated on a regular basis and the entire testing and evaluation process is reviewed by faculty committee.

Methodology

Approximately 1,700 students completed the EPPE between January and December of 2003, the vast majority being traditionally aged, first-year college students coming directly from high school. All those taking the exam were asked to select one of four writing prompts from three different sets of topics (a total of 12 prompts). One of the twelve prompts (A3) focused on foreign language study and requirements:

One goal of a college education is to become a well-educated person. In the past, most degrees required that students study a foreign language, but many degree programs have dropped that requirement. As a new student, write an essay in which you explain both sides of this issue: why students should and why students should not be required to study a foreign language. Include your personal opinion in your response.

During the spring of 2005 the authors reviewed all English placement exams on file for the 2003 calendar year. Of the nearly 1,700 test takers, 161 students selected prompt A3 as their essay topic. The 161 essays were then randomly and equally divided between the two authors for detailed analysis. The authors determined that six of the essays were off topic, bringing the total to 155.

Both authors identified and categorized each student's specific substantiating arguments for and against foreign language learning and requirements under pro and con categories; the authors also noted the overall stance of the essay (whether it supported a foreign language requirement, rejected it, or was neutral on the matter).

Finally, the authors tabulated the languages other than English that students specifically referenced. A total of 74 individual "pro" and 42 "con" arguments emerged from the data. The authors then met to catalogue the specific arguments under more general headings where possible. For instance, both listed specific themes of

TABLE 4**Final List of Pro and Con Categories Cited by Students****Pro**

1. Cultural understanding
2. Individual job/career success
3. Broadening of personal perspective
4. Communication
5. Education
6. Business/firm success
7. Travel
8. Self-improvement
9. National security
10. Miscellaneous

Con

1. No need for foreign language
2. Too time consuming
3. Too expensive or costly
4. Limits choice of course selection/a forced requirement
5. Negative immigration issues
6. Detracts from major field of study
7. Difficult to learn
8. Proficiency unattainable in prescribed time
9. Lack of interest
10. Lack of travel plans
11. Miscellaneous

“better salary” or “pay” under the pro category; however, these arguments were later combined under the general topic heading: “Individual Job/Career Success.” The final list of 10 main pro and 11 main con categories is presented in Table 4.

The authors then calculated the average number of student citations per category. It should be noted that a student’s writing ability had no bearing on the data collected. An essay that would be deemed by standard writing conventions as underdeveloped or poorly written could (and often did) offer as much information as a well-developed, well-executed essay.

Findings

Analysis of student essays revealed overwhelming support for foreign language study in general and foreign language requirements in particular. Although the prompt asked students to “explain both sides” of the issue, 57% ($n = 83$) of the essays were judged to be solidly pro-foreign language study, a distant 22% ($n = 34$) contained only or predominantly anti-foreign language sentiments, and 21% ($n = 32$) took a neutral stance, citing both positive and negative aspects of foreign language study without committing to either position.

Among the reasons given in support of foreign language study, cultural understanding, or a mild derivation thereof, was cited in 174 cases; that is, cultural understanding accounted for 32.46% of all pro-foreign language arguments. Examples of positive culture-based comments include, “foreign language classes are an excellent way to learn about new and exciting people and their cultures.” The second most commonly cited argument in support of foreign language study was individual job/career success at 22.76%, “a bilingual applicant for a job has a better chance at receiving the position.” Broadening personal perspectives accounted for 16.79% of the pro-foreign language arguments and communication was a distant fourth at 8.96%. Other less recurrent reasons included education (5.97%), business/firm success (5.6%), and travel (4.85%). Infrequent rationales included self-improvement and national security. Pro categories and response rates are given in Table 5. Additional pro and con comments are provided in Appendix B.

Among the con categories, the most commonly cited reason for not studying a foreign language was that the student simply did not find it necessary, or “no need” (30.92%). The second and third most commonly cited reasons were the time (15.27%) and cost (14.12%) of foreign language study. Most often, these two reasons were paired. Eight percent of the anti-foreign language study statements lamented the fact that language requirements are

TABLE 5

Pro Category Response Rates

Pro Categories	# of Responses	Percentage
Cultural understanding	174	32.46%
Individual job/career success	122	22.76%
Broaden personal perspective	90	16.79%
Communication	48	8.96%
Education	32	5.97%
Business/firm success	30	5.60%
Travel	26	4.85%
Self-improvement	6	1.12%
National security	3	0.56%
Miscellaneous	5	.093%
Total	536	100%

imposed against one's will (choice/forced requirement) and another 8% mentioned the need for immigrants to learn English: "If you come to the U.S., you should have to learn English. If I move to Germany, I will have to learn German." Seven percent of the comments mentioned that foreign language study detracts from one's major,

6.11% of the arguments cited the difficulty of the subject matter, 2.29% lamented the resulting level of proficiency, (e.g., "A few semesters is not enough to become proficient,") and another 2.29% expressed a general lack of interest. Finally, less than 1% of the comments (*n* = 2) alluded to the student's plans to remain in the United States,

TABLE 6

Con Category Response Rates

Con Categories	# of Responses	Percentage
No need	81	30.92%
Time	40	15.27%
Money/cost	37	14.12%
Choice/forced requirement	22	8.40%
English immigration	21	8.02%
Detracts from major	19	7.25%
Difficulty	16	6.11%
Proficiency	6	2.29%
Interest	6	2.29%
Lack of travel plans	2	0.76%
Miscellaneous	12	4.58%
Total	262	100%

or lack of future travel. Con categories and response rates are given in Table 6.

On the surface, the present findings are strikingly similar to those found by Roberts (1992). In addition to generating a similar overall list of pro-foreign language arguments (see Table 1), Roberts also found that "students' expressed perceptions concerning the required study of a foreign language were overwhelmingly positive" (p. 276) and that the "benefits derived from the study of culture in conjunction with foreign language was, without a doubt, the most common argument category" (p. 277). Finally, the general notion of national security was the least frequently cited argument in both Roberts (1992) and the present study.

However, whereas travel did not figure prominently among the data of the present study (4.85%), it was the third most commonly cited rationale for Roberts (1992). Moreover, whereas business (or the success of U.S. companies) was the second most

commonly cited argument for Roberts, and individual jobs and careers was the fifth, the inverse was true in the present study. For example, UNO students cited personal jobs/career success 23.7% of the time, and general business/firm success was a negligible 5.6%.

Given current and projected U.S. demographics, not surprisingly Spanish was the most commonly cited language at 56.63%, French was second at 14.46%, and German was third at 12.05%. All languages mentioned in student essays and their frequencies are presented in Table 7.

Limitations

This study is not intended to be scientific or quasi-scientific, but rather a descriptive exploration of the thoughts, opinions, and beliefs held by this student population. Among its limitations are that the EPPE was designed as an in-house vehicle to place incoming students into the appropriate level of first-year English composition; it was not expressly developed to gather data on L2 learning or student perceptions. Second, students self-selected the question; therefore, it is possible to imagine those with a positive attitude toward language learning being disproportionately drawn to the topic. Further, since the EPPE is a placement exam, one can also imagine students suffering from a "Pygmalion Effect," or producing responses that they believe an evaluator would want to read, despite the fact that their personal beliefs may differ.

Another important limitation is the very nature of trying to quantify writing and the writing process. Obviously, a statement like "learning another language will better my chances for a promotion" can be likened to "learning Spanish or German could help me get a better job," but not all statements were as clear cut as this. Some were vague (e.g., "learning another language would help my chances. . ."). It was here that both readers had to meet and agree upon an ultimate categorization.

Finally, this investigation was conducted at a single mid-sized midwestern metropolitan university. Differing results could

TABLE 7

Citation Rates of Languages Other than English

Language	# of Citations	Percentage
Spanish*	47	56.63%
French	12	14.46%
German	10	12.05%
Korean	3	3.61%
Russian	3	3.61%
Latin	2	2.41%
Japanese	2	2.41%
Portuguese	1	1.20%
Chinese	1	1.20%
Italian	1	1.20%
Asian (general)	1	1.20%

* Seven comments referred to Spanish in a negative context; 40 were neutral or positive. All references to all other languages were either positive or neutral.

potentially be found at other institutions differing in size, location, and mission.

Discussion

The findings of this investigation are remarkably different from those originally anticipated by the authors, and perhaps from those of many language educators. First, the authors expected to find an overall anti-foreign language study/anti-foreign language requirement sentiment. Recall that the population and sample was comprised of all incoming students taking the English placement exam; the authors did not target foreign language students, as did Ely (1986). However, this expectation was not supported by the findings wherein 57% of the essays were decidedly pro-foreign language study.

Second, the authors expected to find very practical and pragmatic reasons for foreign language study. Although this was not the case, one of the 155 essays did typify this assumption. For example, a student wrote that studying a foreign language was important because “. . . the police force can now help Spanish people in South Omaha” [Note: Southeast Omaha has a high concentration of Spanish-speaking immigrants] and from the same essay, “Doctors who know Spanish can treat patients who cannot speak English.” Certainly, this is an interesting statement about the perceived situation of incoming Spanish-speaking immigrants to the Omaha area: Perhaps underneath the good-intentioned need for communication exists a connotative assumption that immigrants strain the safety and health infrastructures at best or are harbingers of crime and disease at worst.

Third, among the rationales given in support of foreign language study, the authors anticipated overwhelmingly utilitarian justifications, such as those of a self-serving and financial nature (e.g., better jobs, higher pay), and to a lesser extent, those with a national security orientation. The events of 9/11 may have changed the lens through which many if not most Americans view the world, and while various visible outcomes may have taken place

(e.g., lawmakers passing national legislation that has restricted and monitored the movement of foreign workers, visitors, and students), this heightened sense of national security (and some would say suspicion) has not seemed to affect the thoughts and beliefs of students toward foreign language study. As stated above, the authors noted only three references to national security. Perhaps this is because the majority of these writers are still insulated, albeit mainly geographically, from national and world events.

Overall, the authors' original pragmatic expectations may have been a conditioned response to the perennial question: “What can I do with a foreign language?” which roughly translates into “What kind of job will I get?” Rare is the student who openly asks: “How much greater will my understanding of other peoples and cultures be as a result of foreign language study?” However, the results of this investigation suggest that what students ask in the advising office, and how they feel about foreign language study (and about other people's and cultures), may not necessarily be in accord. With very few exceptions, these students clearly value foreign language study, and do so less in the name of practical and financial gain, and more for personal growth and promoting understanding. When given an open-ended 90-minute forum to articulate their feelings about foreign language study—rather than a rushed meeting whose focus is to build schedules and accelerate graduation—today's student claims to support language study for reasons such as gaining cultural understanding, broadening their personal horizons, and improving communication skills.

Conclusion

What do these results mean to the foreign language teacher? The authors take it to mean that the profession's relatively recent focus on promoting cultural competence (and understanding), rather than isolated facts or stereotypes, has been a successful one. Second, these findings, along with the 2001 *StudentPoll* survey of high school

seniors, the 2000 ACE survey of American adults, and Roberts (1992) show strong support for foreign language study and requirements at the postsecondary level. It, therefore, provides an additional source of data for those needing to justify the continuation of foreign language requirements, the expansion of existing language programs, or the creation of new programs of study.

Finally, it is hoped that the perceptions of foreign language study held by this representative group of incoming college students can be of use to educators, authors, and administrators who design postsecondary language curricula and materials. Indeed, a better understanding of these students' evolving beliefs and concerns can inform and subsequently improve the teaching-learning process through the development of timely, meaningful, and responsive language learning environments.

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APPENDIX A*English Placement/Proficiency Essay Exam***Instructions:**

1. Choose one of the questions below. In the upper right hand corner of your essay sheet, write the letter and number of the topic you have chosen, for example, A 2.
2. Write on both sides of the paper; please use ink.
3. Answer the question fully. Since you have a short time to write, you may wish to use the familiar structure of an introductory paragraph (containing a thesis statement or, in this case, the answer to the question) body paragraphs establishing the major points supported with examples and explanations, and a concluding paragraph.
4. Leave yourself time toward the end of the time period to clear your mind of what you think you have written so you can proofread what you have, in fact, written.
5. Please fill out the information about Name, Soc. Sec. #, etc., carefully. Print your last name first. The question about transfer hour credits applies only to college credit received for English Composition.

Questions:

- A-1. In most states, you have to have your parents' permission to get a tattoo or body piercing if you are less than 18 years of age. Assume that you are a state legislator who has been approached by some tattoo business owners about dropping the law. Write an essay in which you explain why some people are in favor of keeping the law and why some people are in favor of dropping the law and include your opinion as to how you would vote.
- A-2. Explain how technology has both positively and negatively affected your life.
- A-3. One goal of a college education is to become a well-educated person. In the past, most degrees required that students study a foreign language, but many degree programs have dropped that requirement. As a new student, write an essay in which you explain both sides of this issue: why students should and why students should not be required to study a foreign language. Include your personal opinion in your response.
- A-4. Describe one of the global community's greatest threats or challenges in the new century.

APPENDIX B*Selection of Pro and Con Comments***Pro**

“Foreign language classes are an excellent way to learn about a new and exciting people and their culture.”

“Through foreign languages students learn about different groups and many stereotypes could be broken.”

“Studying a foreign language can raise test scores in other areas.”

“Knowing multiple languages provides greater job opportunities in life.”

“I believe language study is essential because communication and expression are what separate humanity from savagery.”

“Foreign languages push an individual’s ability to think differently. If a student were mostly taking math related classes, other parts of their brain could be neglected and taking a foreign language could help that problem [sic].”

“I believe that students should be required to study a foreign language because a different language can help with the grammar of your original language.”

“Cultural stereotyping and misunderstanding lead to racism and conflict, while cultural understanding leads to tolerance.”

Con

“If you come to the US, you speak the language spoken in the US. Everyone in the US should not have to learn Spanish.”

“The US was founded in English, let’s keep it that way.”

“We are Americans and our language is English.”

“Many students don’t want to pay money for a class they do not need. Maybe they do not need the class for their degree.”

“A student who goes to college for chemical engineering may have no interest in becoming a polyglot.”

“If it’s not required for their job, it’s a waste of time to study.”

“There are those students who have barely ever left the confines of their suburban America and see no use in pursuing another language.”

“If someone sees the need to know more than English, let them study their hearts out [sic]. Don’t make the rest of us have to shell out extra cash and be bogged down with even more homework if we feel complete speaking our native language.”

“There are so many foreigners entering our country, both legally and illegally, who do not know the English language, that we now have to learn their language just to get by from day to day.”

“In the Constitution of the United States you have to be able to read, write, and speak English.”