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ABSTRACT

A review of literature, an update of a similar 1982 study, investigated attitudes and actions of United States high school and college students and within the business community concerning the need for language study and cross-cultural competence to promote competitiveness in international trade. Progress is seen as mixed: overall, achievements in increasing foreign language competence and cross-cultural awareness are inadequate. Americans' geographic literacy has improved little. Businesses rank foreign language skills among the least important hiring criteria. Workers see language skills as irrelevant in corporate reward systems and provide workers with little language or cross-cultural training. However, some encouraging changes in the educational infrastructure, and to some extent in the corporate environment, are found. International studies are receiving more attention at the high school and college levels, although they remain largely Eurocentric. Language training among businesspeople is increasing slowly. Specific programs at the levels of elementary, secondary, higher, and continuing education illustrate movement in a positive direction. Further development of these efforts and others is recommended. A 27-item bibliography is included. (MSE)

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DISMANTLING SELF-IMPOSED TRADE BARRIERS REVISITED: THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT TEN YEARS LATER

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Introduction and Background

Ten years ago, the author conducted a secondary data study (Guy 1982) to examine just how extensive apathy and disinterest regarding outside cultures, international affairs, and foreign languages really were among the general population and especially among those whose interests were in business and commerce. Given the attention which has been focused for some time now on the United States' decreased international competitiveness, no great amount of suspense or curiosity likely remains as to the outcome of that research. However, to serve as a point of comparison for our current status, a brief summary of the results follows.

Essentially the 1982 study showed a declining interest in foreign language development among high school and college level students, and this disinterest basically paralleled that of the business community. For example, the President's Commission on Foreign Languages and International Studies (1979) indicated that only one percent of the nation's graduate and undergraduate students were studying the languages used by three-fourths of the world's population, and the percent of high school students studying a foreign language had decreased to only fifteen percent. Those who did study a language rarely studied beyond the second year, although four years is considered a minimum prerequisite for useable language fluency.

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Yet foreign language competency is just part of the larger issue of cross-cultural literacy as a whole. As of the late seventies and early eighties, Americans' interests failed to extend much further than national borders. A UNESCO survey of 100 nations showed the U. S. last in television coverage of international items, and not much better in terms of print media coverage (Simon 1980). As well, a 76 nation survey of foreign language study showed the U. S. in last place. According to the Presidential Commission cited earlier, the percentage of high school students knowledgeable regarding major geographical locations and political figureheads of high profile nations was between 20 and 40 percent, depending on the question asked. Additionally, over half of adult Americans polled were unaware that importing petroleum was a necessity and fewer than 10% realized that more than half of U.S. energy resources were imported (Gallup poll 1977).

As for business education and industry, the American Council on Education revealed that 75 percent of Ph.D's and DBA's had never had any international studies courses, and that many current and prospective presidents of multinational corporations had no international course background or experience (Simon 1980). Private corporate funding in these areas represented less than 2 percent of all grants and gifts given (Hayden 1977). While it was found that almost all European and Japanese executives and representatives sent to conduct business in the United States spoke fluent English, very few American expatriates had even a conversational grasp of the host country's language (President's Commission 1977, Simon 1980). Such ignorance has

resulted in numerous embarrassing and costly mistakes in the areas of product design, advertising, business negotiations, and research and development ventures. Such mistakes have been tirelessly documented through the years.

Since that time, there have been cries from all fronts - government, education, and business - that it was imperative to reverse these trends. The conclusion of the first study was that numerous barriers to trade with other nations existed, and while the lack of foreign language competency and cultural sensitivity was among them, these were barriers which could and had to be dismantled at home. Still, the U.S. negative balance of trade ballooned to \$170 billion as of 1987, and while this deficit had been reduced slightly to \$105 billion by 1990, our desire and ability to reestablish a strong international competitiveness has been seriously and repeatedly questioned by many of our foreign partners and competitors.

The purpose of the current study is to conduct a one decade update of U.S. attitudes and actions towards acquiring greater foreign language capabilities and cross-cultural sensitivity. Although there has been much lip service given to the idea that education and business must increase their focus in these areas to regain a competitive edge, the question is how much progress has actually been made, and what remains to be done?

### The Ten-Year Update Findings

A review of several current secondary sources provides a mixed review of our progress. Overall, our achievements in increasing foreign language competencies and cross-cultural awareness remain discouraging and inadequate, although some encouraging changes are taking place in the educational infrastructure, and to some extent in the corporate environment.

As of 1985, over sixty percent of universities and colleges in the U.S. offered no course curricula in international business at all (Copeland and Griggs 1985). However, a 1986 survey revealed that many business schools were introducing courses or concentrations in this area (Thanapoulos 1986). In 1988, the Council on Competitiveness gave the United States a "report card": a grade of "C" overall, breaking down to a "B-" in business, "C" in higher education, "D-" in elementary education, and "C/C-" in all levels of government. The report concluded that our weaknesses extended past mere "myopia" and were, rather, "systemic" in nature, linked to our focus on short-term goals.

Some specific performance measures are revealing. A Gallup poll commissioned by the National Geographic Society and conducted in 1988 shows little overall improvement in Americans' geographic literacy. One in seven Americans cannot find the United States on a blank world map, while one in four cannot locate the Pacific Ocean. In the same poll, students aged 18-24 came in last among ten countries tested in geography (Allis 1990). Additionally, given our current preoccupation with Japan as both a rival in international trade wars and a potential market for our goods, it is discouraging to find that many highly

educated and otherwise successful Americans do not know even the basics of Pacific Rim geography. Once again, quick return and bottom-line preoccupations still dominate our discussions of what should be done in that part of the world (West 1989).

The United States business community, while often those who make the loudest noises about what must be done to compete on the world scene, probably does not deserve even the "B-" awarded it by the Council on Competitiveness. Studies conducted by organizations including the National Foreign Language Center and personnel hiring and training companies such as Moran, Stahl, and Boyer of Boulder, Colorado and Los Angeles' International Search Associates point to the fact that U.S. companies, even those conducting numerous international transactions, rank foreign language skills among the least important factors in decisions on new hires (Fixman 1989) and executive advancement (Machan 1988). "The feeling that CEOs sometimes express that business in general should do something to cosmopolitanize its executive corps and increase its foreign language competencies does not seem to translate into individual corporate policy. In particular, the message does not seem to penetrate the personnel officers, who believe that foreign language skill is an abundant commodity that can be bought if and when it is needed" (Fixman 1989, p. 48). According to Linda Ulrey of Proctor and Gamble, "(it is) helpful, of course, but it's certainly never a requirement". Bilingual businesspeople are still rare, even for the highly emphasized Japanese language (Cramer 1990). Apparently most employers feel it is easier for an employee with good business skills to acquire

a language after employment than for someone with good language skills to pick up business acumen after being hired (Machan 1988).

Fixman (1989) conducted a survey of college graduates who studied business and achieved competence in one or more foreign languages. Almost half reported that these skills are totally irrelevant in their companies' general reward systems. More than half say these skills have no bearing on promotion, and that American companies only infrequently use employees with these skills in foreign assignments. And, according to a recent study at Columbia with Fortune 500 personnel managers, while seventy percent reported that American expatriates were sent abroad when local nationals were not available, only thirty to forty-five percent of those multinational corporations provided expatriates with some form of cross-cultural orientation (Dunbar and Katcher 1990).

Still, in spite of these negative indicators, there are some encouraging developments. With regard to the educational system, international studies are beginning to receive more emphasis in both high school and college texts. More attention is being focused on international education than ever before. Mass efforts are being undertaken to reform curricula and upgrade the general educational system (Rickman 1990). However, much of the content has a Eurocentric concentration, and may only skim or even ignore entirely the other geographic areas. According to West (1989), educators are responding to a growing demand for Asian-related curricula, but much of this still remains on the periphery of high school, liberal arts, and business education.

Additionally, the National Geographic Society indicates that geography is making a comeback in the United States. In some states, enrollment in geography-based courses has increased as much as 100 percent since 1987 (Allis 1990).

Some improvements may even be noted within the resistant corporate culture. An increasing number of executives are learning a second language. There has been a steady upswing of corporate clients in programs such as those offered by Berlitz International (Teitelbaum 1989). Enrollment increased by approximately 50 percent between 1985 and 1988. DuPont's chief executive completed a crash course in Japanese and other DuPont executives are taking on various languages. Similar movements have been noted in such corporations as Eastman Kodak, Citicorp, and General Electric.

While these indicants of our nation's progress towards cross-cultural literacy are perhaps still discouraging, it seems as if we are finally moving in the right direction, albeit slowly. Perhaps it would even be somewhat unfair to have expected much more progress given that a decade ago most government officials, business persons, and the general citizenry exhibited such minimal awareness of the importance of international trade and the skills necessary to compete against other nations in both foreign markets and our own. Unfortunately, the reformulation of education, corporate, and cultural systems is not a task which is fully accomplished in a short period of time. Nonetheless, it is imperative that we accelerate this process as much as possible to ensure a

continuing role in global business and international affairs.

### Trends in Globalizing General Education and Executive Development

As important as what goals and objectives we are moving towards are the means we are using to accomplish these goals and objectives, and the levels at which we are employing these means. This section identifies some of the specific programs, courses, and actions which are being implemented at each of four levels: 1) elementary education, 2) high school education, 3) colleges and universities, and 4) continuing education and executive development.

#### - Elementary Education

Those who realize the importance of a global mind set agree that it must be taught and integrated at the earliest levels of education. A review of secondary sources revealed just a few examples of what trends may be taking place with children of elementary school age. One school approached the subject of geography in a uniquely holistic and participative fashion (Beach 1991). Students in the class described "took a trip" to Taiwan. First the students studied the globe and chose their destination. Then the students read and listened to the news to gain additional information about Taiwan. Different students were given the responsibilities of making hotel reservations, consulting travel brochures, calculating and comparing costs via exchange rates, examining maps to prepare trip routes, making meal selections, and so forth. The class as a whole made their passports, constructed an airplane for the trip and wrote a daily

"travel log" of their activities. Not only did the class learn extensively about another culture, but they also gained age appropriate skills in math, reading, writing, social studies, and problem-solving.

Other avenues for children of this age to acquire greater cultural understanding come from extracurricular culture immersion camps (Skow 1990). Some of these camps take children as young as age seven and emphasize foreign conversation and the notion of the global village. As with any type of children's camp, counselors make learning fun through a variety of interactive and play activities.

#### - High School Education

Geography, foreign language, and international affairs are just a few of the areas being broached at the high school level. While these have been a fairly traditional part of the high school curricula for some time, the approaches being taken are changing with the changing needs. One geography teacher requires students to draw a world map during the first class meeting. Needless to say, most of these maps are largely incomplete and error-ridden. Through reading, attention to world maps, and plain old-fashioned rote memory, students are able to draw complete and correct world maps by the end of the term. Overall, the students are proud of their accomplishment and exhibit a greater ongoing interest in world affairs after taking the course (Allis 1990).

While foreign languages have always been available at the high school level, more schools are making them a requirement for

graduation, and more teachers are focused on teaching languages within the overall cultural context, rather than focusing on grammar and vocabulary alone (Pfister 1989). The objective in these classes is to turn out a student who is in control of specific foreign language skills and who possesses sufficient cultural awareness to permit future growth and eventual mastery. A total-culture approach to learning a foreign language prevents embarrassing mistakes and allows students to compare foreign cultural values to their own. A technique discussed at length by Pfister (1989) involves using readings and a cultural inventory worksheet to analyze surface and deep culture elements, formal and informal culture components, and cross-cultural contexts in which to interpret information and values.

As international affairs becomes a more popular area of study at colleges and universities, high school students must also have a better background in history, political science, economics, and geography to be prepared to address a variety of international issues (East 1990). This necessitates the appropriate emphasis on high school social studies since this area provides most of the core components needed for dealing with international affairs.

Culture or immersion camps are also available for high school-aged students, though they are more rigorous than those designed for younger children. They do operate on the same basic principle which is to make the experience fun (Skow 1990).

- College and University Education

Especially at the college and university level, three major educational trends can be identified (Ricks 1990). The first is inter-disciplinary or cross-disciplinary study. This means more programs are utilizing a variety of their resources and course study areas to create well-rounded course and curriculum programs. This is necessary to develop students with a greater world view.

The second trend is the offering of more area study programs such as Asian Studies Programs, European Studies Programs, or Third World Studies Programs. Cornell University offers a program called FALCON, which stands for Full-Year Asian Language Concentration, and in which language is rooted in the overall cultural context and understanding. However, a noted Eurocentric focus appears to dominate, while areas like the Middle East may be virtually ignored (Ricks 1990).

Third, there is a greater emergence of academic alliances or collaborations between multiple schools and between schools and industries or specific companies. These alliances include foreign exchange study, foreign travel tours, and overseas internship experiences.

As far as foreign language studies go at the post high-school level, there continues to be an emphasis on European languages (Lambert 1990). Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, and Eastern European languages are much less well-represented, and those who had studied them were found to have a relatively low level of competence upon graduation.

All in all, most college business schools have adapted to some degree to the need for a greater global orientation, especially at the graduate level (Main 1989). It has been proposed that MBAs speak a foreign language fluently and be intimate with a foreign culture. In addition, they should be familiar with the political, economic, and regulatory situations in the U.S., Europe, and Asia. Such schools as these are attempting to turn out graduates who are capable of coping with rapid change, global markets, sharper competition, and new ethical and political concerns.

Schools such as Virginia and Georgetown have already responded to calls for quantum changes in how business schools prepare students for the dynamic and global marketplace (Main 1989). Georgetown's MBA recasts courses in a global setting and the only two required courses are Global Business Strategy and Ethics/Public Policy. Virginia's Darden School MBA emphasizes political and international courses the first year with the second year comprising all electives.

Despite such positive movements, there are barriers to any changes in the system at the college and university levels which will have to be dealt with. Among these are inertia, faculty incentive systems, the time required for restructuring, professors trained by functional specialty, and the cost and time required for more "out of classroom" experiences such as overseas study and work experiences. In this last area, corporate support will be critical.

- Continuing Education and Executive Development

Since most employees with substantial influence on the ongoing operations of the country's multinational organizations have not received adequate formal education in the areas discussed above, ongoing education and professional development become critical. Indeed, even those entering the workforce having had training in foreign languages and the political, economic, regulatory, economic, geographic, and lifestyles of other cultures will require continued training due to the complex and dynamic nature of the world we live in. It is believed that such training will be adequate only when it includes all the aspects of foreign language competency, cultural and business orientation, family consultation, on-site mentoring, and a career management approach to expatriation (Dunbar and Katcher 1990).

The problems encountered in developing bilingual abilities among existing executives include the difficulty of learning a language while employed full-time as well as the suspicion often engendered in home country colleagues that an expatriate has "gone native" (Cramer 1990). More young Americans are coming into the ranks with some preparation in foreign languages and cultures, but existing executives are poorly equipped. Using Japanese for example, good Japanese speakers are those who start early, between the ages of 19 and 21. As with many languages, especially those which are high context, Japanese is more than a language, it is a way of thinking.

Expatriates are often sent to Berlitz cram schools or one of several college language centers for one to two weeks of training (Machan 1988). And, as noted previously, a number of

executives from such notable companies as DuPont, GE, and others have also undertaken the challenge of sharpening foreign language skills through the Berlitz programs (Teitelbaum 1989). Culture camps also offer language crash courses, classes for families, etiquette, business practices, and overall cultural orientation (Machan 1988). These camps may last from a few days to several weeks and they involve total immersion. A boom has been seen in the demand for Asian programs of this nature. Expatriates are usually reimbursed for the monetary cost of these courses or seminars, but most often they are accomplished on the expatriates' own time, as release time from work may not be offered (McEnery and DesHarnais 1990).

While some of these trends are obviously encouraging, it can be seen that corporations do not largely provide the full-scale support needed and deserved by employees attempting to better themselves for the global business environment. Quite possibly, it is necessary to contrast these approaches with those used by many Japanese multinationals to fully appreciate how significantly U.S. companies lag behind.

Tull (1990) provides a comprehensive view of how the Japanese handle executive development for employees involved in global operations. Training in the target country language is fundamental to any orientation program for international assignments with any Japanese multinational corporation. Most have in-house training programs which take from three months to a year prior to departure for overseas assignment, and some form of continued training is common after arrival in the host country.

Some Japanese multinationals select "elite trackers" to attend graduate programs abroad in engineering, business, or law for up to four full years.

External agencies such as the Japanese American Conversational Institute (JACI) and the Institute for International Studies and Training (IIST) exist for extensive executive training purposes. JACI offers day programs lasting from eleven to twenty weeks and evening programs lasting up to two years. A course entitled "Thinking in English" teaches the subtleties and nuances of language (both spoken and "silent") and culture. The IIST provides graduate level training for selected qualified individuals focusing on careers in international business and international affairs. Full-time residential programs last up to one year and provide up to 540 hours of English language training. Additionally, the IIST program can provide for language competency in a second foreign language.

Japanese multinational corporations also give field experiences to career employees. This may involve travel abroad just to observe the company's operations or to attend school and pick up some non-work related skill or talent within the foreign culture. This immersion provides a better "feel" for the host culture in which the employee will be functioning.

These approaches, contrasted with those undertaken by U.S. based multinationals, reveal a greater awareness among the Japanese of the the importance of cross-cultural training and understanding. The techniques currently being taken advantage of by U.S. employees tend to be crash courses and/or focused just on one or two aspects of a foreign culture. They are far from

holistic in nature. As point in fact, a survey conducted with businesses listed in the Michigan International Business Services Directory revealed that while many considered knowledge of a foreign country's business practices and foreign language skills important, they rated knowledge of the target culture as significantly less critical (McEnery and DesHarnais (1990)). This sample had a higher awareness of the need for foreign language skills than did samples in other studies, but this should be expected given their direct involvement in international business. Still, even this group underestimates the need for cultural understanding.

American executives need to become more aware of developing resources such as the International Society for Intercultural Education, Training, and Research (SIETAR). This organization has chapters throughout the United States and the world, and offers conferences, seminars, and annual "Training of International Trainers" workshops. The organization also publishes books and other reference materials (McEnery and DesHarnais (1990)).

Other options must be considered as well, such as returning to universities for preparation and education, and participating in liaisons and consortiums. An example of one such developing opportunity is Williams College which conducts five-week seminars for companies such as IBM, GE, Polaroid, and others. Participants are slated as fast trackers and study subjects such as politics, art, classical music, literature, and human behavior in cross-cultural contexts. The cost is up to \$5200.00 per

employee, but participating corporations are increasingly recognizing that not all needed skills are conveyed through business and technical courses alone (Tung 1990).

#### Conclusions: The Current Status and Future Mandate

In the evolution from being a purely domestic business to one which is truly global in nature, Cateora (.990) describes three orientations to international marketing management. They are 1) the Domestic Market Extension concept, 2) the Multidomestic Market concept, and 3) the Global Marketing concept.

The first, the Domestic Market Extension concept describes organizations whose focus is primarily in the home market, but who may make occasional sales into foreign markets. Usually these sales are not actively sought as part of overall strategy, however, they may result from a desire to liquidate excess inventory or from unsolicited purchase inquiries from other markets. There is no inclination to make many or any adaptations of products and operations for these foreign customers.

The Multidomestic Market Concept represents the orientation companies take once they have recognized the ongoing importance of foreign markets and also the inherent differences between the these markets and the domestic one. Organizations follow the belief that each market is unique and likely requires a separate marketing mix from the other markets. That is, organizations tend to decentralize and operate on a country-by-country basis.

Finally, the Global Marketing Concept arises when firms view the world as one global marketplace, much as U.S. firms view the

U.S. as one unified marketplace with various identifiable segments for different products. Organizations seek to identify converging commonalities across all markets and seek to establish products and market mixes which are as standardized as possible given varying cultural and legal environments. Economies of scale and global brand awareness are possible benefits of such an approach. "This means operating as if all the country markets in a company's scope of operations (including the domestic market) are approachable as a single global market and standardizing the marketing mix where culturally feasible and cost effective" (Cateora 1990, p.25). This view forwards the notion that all business is global, therefore blurring or even erasing the distinction between domestic and foreign operations.

Using these orientations as a measure of the evolution of global thinking, we may compare them to the results of this study and the previous one to pinpoint what our educational systems reflect about our progress as a nation. The original study clearly showed that the country was firmly rooted in a Domestic Extension mind set. Not only did we not see the differences between ourselves and other cultures, we did not see the importance of doing so.

The current review indicates that at least our priorities and perceptions have begun to change. The evolving status of our educational and training systems appear to reflect more of a Multidomestic orientation to global business. One such indicant of this is the growing number of international courses in college and university business curricula which supplement the basic

courses in most subject areas. This would include adding International Marketing as a course offering in a marketing department, International Communications in a Communications or Management department, or International Finance in the finance area, to give but a few examples. The implication of this is both positive and limiting in the same turn. On the positive side is that it indicates a growing awareness of the importance of an international mindset. However, the fact that these courses are separate and distinct from the traditional core courses shows that we still approach the global marketplace as something in addition to, something different and unique from how we conduct business normally.

We will hopefully continue to evolve towards the Global Marketing concept in which we will recognize integrated global operations as the normal course of everyday business. In order for the educational and training systems to accommodate such a move, international courses as "add-on" features to the traditional curricula will be dropped and the concepts will be integrated into the teaching of the basic courses. For example, instead of having a basic Principles of Marketing course which teaches marketing through the scope of the domestic market and makes some side reference to how one might adapt to foreign markets, the basic course will approach marketing as a fully-integrated, naturally global activity. All courses would take this integrated global approach, thus reducing or eliminating the need for additional courses or training to produce an effective global employee.

Obviously, we are quite some way from evolving into this stage. Even with the inclination to do so, there are many practical barriers to the final accomplishment of such a goal. One may only hope that the ability to evolve can and will keep pace with the growing need to do so.

To summarize, it is no longer possible to take for granted common American perceptions of the world or the values of "white Anglo-Saxon Protestants" to meet the imperatives of a global industrial civilization (Hirsch 1987). Optimal performance in competitive world markets requires a sensitivity not often associated with American behavior in international trade. Industrial imperatives are no longer ours to define as the rules of the game are increasingly determined in Asian and other terms (West 1989). Still, Kotkin and Kishimoto (1988) highlight American creativity, innovation, and principles of an open economy as aspects of competitive advantage, and believe that the future edge will go to nations who can and will nurture individual initiative, creativity, and quick decision-making. In conclusion, creating the appropriate environment to foster global awareness and competitiveness will not be easy. Education systems will be challenged to provide graduates capable of instilling greater understanding of other cultures and a global awareness into a corporate world which has dominated world trade for much of this century without them.

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