

Patterns and Policies: The Changing Demographics of Foreign Language Instruction

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Editor

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The Foreign Language Class: A Forum for Intercultural Communication

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Between 1970 and 1990 the foreign-born population of the United States doubled from 9.74 million to 19.767 million. Including U.S.-born individuals who speak a language other than English at home, language-minority speakers numbered close to 32 million in 1990 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1994). This demographic trend is most apparent in cities like Los Angeles and New York where there are high concentrations of immigrants. Public school and university enrollments in these and other urban centers reflect the shifting population patterns. For example, the City University of New York, the largest public urban university system in the country, estimates that by the year 2000 approximately 50 percent of its 208,000 students will have been born outside the United States or in Puerto Rico (CUNY 1995).

The implications of these changing demographic patterns on foreign language instruction are clear. As the traditional model of a monolingual, monocultural student body fades away, instructors need to adapt their teaching styles and strategies to accommodate a new generation of multilingual, multicultural students. It will not be unusual, for example, to find students from Poland, Greece, Korea, and Colombia sitting alongside U.S.-born students in a French class that is being taught by a Haitian-born instructor.

This chapter documents the experience of one foreign language department as it explored the linguistic and cultural diversity of its student body and discovered that diversity in the classroom can be a valuable educational tool rather than a source of conflict, misunderstanding, or confusion, as some might fear. This department found that diversity is a built-in resource that can enrich the language learning experience and transform the foreign language classroom into a forum for intercultural awareness, understanding, and communication.

Table 1.**States with More Than 100,000 Persons Five Years Old and Over Who Speak a Language Other Than English at Home: 1990**

State	Number (x 1,000)	Percent of total population
U.S.	31,845	13.8
California	8,619	31.5
Texas	3,970	25.4
New York	3,909	23.3
Florida	2,098	17.3
Illinois	1,499	14.2
New Jersey	1,406	19.5
Massachusetts	852	15.2
Pennsylvania	807	7.3
Arizona	700	20.8
Michigan	570	6.6
Ohio	546	5.4
New Mexico	494	35.5
Connecticut	466	15.2
Virginia	419	7.3
Washington	403	9.0
Maryland	395	8.9
Louisiana	392	10.1
Colorado	321	10.5
Georgia	285	4.8
Wisconsin	264	5.8
Hawaii	255	24.8
Indiana	246	4.8
North Carolina	241	3.9
Minnesota	227	5.6
Oregon	192	7.3
Missouri	178	3.8
Rhode Island	159	17.0
Nevada	146	13.2
Oklahoma	146	5.0
Tennessee	132	2.9
Kansas	132	5.7
Utah	120	7.8
South Carolina	113	3.5
Alabama	108	2.9
Maine	105	9.2
Iowa	100	3.9

U.S. Bureau of the Census 1994

Background

Multilingualism has a historic tradition in the United States,¹ rekindled by the new wave of immigration that began in the 1970s. Figures from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1994) show that 13.8 percent of the population speak a language other than English at home in 1990 (see Table 1). While every state is affected by this phenomenon, 36 states count more than 100,000 speakers of other languages. Those states with the highest concentrations are New Mexico, 35.5 percent; California, 31.5 percent; Texas, 25.4 percent; Hawaii, 24.8 percent; New York, 23.3 percent; Arizona, 20.8 percent; New Jersey, 19.5 percent; Florida, 17.3 percent; Rhode Island, 17.0 percent; Massachusetts, 15.2 percent; and Connecticut, 15.2 percent.

Table 2 shows the number of persons five years old and over speaking a language other than English at home, by language, in 1990. The 17,339 million Spanish-speakers constituted the largest language-minority group in the country. French, German, Italian, and Chinese each had well over 1.2 million speakers. Those languages that counted 330,000 or more speakers were Tagalog, Polish, Korean, Vietnamese, Portuguese, Japanese, Greek, Arabic, and Hindi (Urdu). Twelve other languages had at least 100,000 speakers. Such linguistic diversity implies even greater cultural diversity since each language group may contain several sub-groups of different ethnic and national origins. Spanish speakers, for example, come from Spain, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Cuba as well as from many other Central and South American countries.

The linguistic and cultural diversity of the general population is reflected in schools and colleges across the country and has particularly significant implications in the foreign language classroom. We can no longer assume that all students come from similar cultural backgrounds and speak English as their native language. To the extent that foreign language instruction compares and contrasts the target language and culture with the learners' native language(s) and culture(s), adjustments have to be made. Instructors need to understand how cultural differences affect such characteristics as learning styles and strategies, tolerance for error and error-correction, and willingness to take risks and make mistakes. Cultural differences also affect the way learners relate to each other and to the teacher. Above all, instructors need to know how to create a supportive, positive, and cooperative learning environment in which students of different cultural backgrounds can learn to understand, value, and respect

Table 2.**Persons Speaking a Language Other Than English at Home, by Language: 1990**

Language	Number (x 1,000)
Total Number	230,446
Speak Only English	198,601
Spanish	17,339
French	1,702
German	1,547
Italian	1,309
Chinese	1,249
Tagalog	843
Polish	723
Korean	626
Vietnamese	507
Portuguese	430
Japanese	428
Greek	388
Arabic	355
Hindi (Urdu)	331
Russian	242
Yiddish	213
Thai (Laotian)	206
Persian	202
French Creole	188
Armenian	150
Navaho	149
Hungarian	148
Hebrew	144
Dutch	143
Mon-Khmer (Cambodian)	127
Gujarathi	102

U.S. Bureau of the Census 1994

one another while working together in paired or group activities and communicating in the target language.

Many instructors may wonder if it is possible to bring about effective cooperation and communication among students of widely diverse backgrounds. There is concern that diversity might actually be a barrier to such interaction. Colleagues who teach in parts of the country with large multilingual, multicultural populations and who have experience in dealing with these issues understand the complexities, challenges, and opportunities that are inherent in diversity.

The pages that follow describe a project undertaken by the faculty of one foreign language department at a four-year commuter college that is part of the City University of New York. The purpose of the project was to explore the cultural and linguistic diversity on the campus and to develop strategies for integrating that diversity into the language curriculum to promote better intercultural awareness, understanding, and communication.

Exploring the Diversity of the Foreign Language Class

The 15,000 undergraduate students of Queens College reflect the rich cultural and linguistic diversity of New York City. A survey of the student body of the City University of New York (CUNY 1990) indicated that 51 percent of Queens College students spoke a language in addition to English, representing a total of 66 different languages. Of the undergraduate population in 1989, 63 percent were white, non-Hispanic; 10 percent were black, non-Hispanic; 13 percent were Hispanic; and 14 percent were Asian or Pacific Islander. A similar survey conducted five years later (CUNY 1994) reflects the shifting demographic patterns of the local community. By 1994, the white and black undergraduate populations of Queens College had decreased to 60.7 percent and 9.4 percent, respectively, while the Hispanic and Asian or Pacific Islander populations had increased to 13.8 percent and 16 percent, respectively (see Table 3).

Table 3.

Undergraduate Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity

Year	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/Pacific Islander
1989	63.0	10.0	13.0	14.0
1994	60.7	9.4	13.8	16.0

Of the more than 30 countries "of primary identity" cited by students in 1989, those with the largest representation were the following: Italy, 12 percent; Ireland, 10.6 percent; Germany, 7.5 percent; Poland, 7.3 percent; Russia, 5.6 percent; Greece, 4.7 percent; Haiti, 3.9 percent; Israel, 3.9 percent; and Colombia, 3.1 percent. Twenty-eight percent of students were born outside the U.S. mainland or in Puerto Rico and approximately half of those born on the mainland had at least one parent who was born elsewhere.

To encourage reflection, debate, and action on diversity-related issues, the Ford Foundation established an urban diversity initiative program for commuter colleges. In 1991, Queens College received one of these diversity initiative grants. Faculty were invited to act as catalysts for promoting diversity and stimulating colleagues to confront issues of diversity within their departments. Members of the Department of Romance Languages took up this challenge and designed a one-year faculty development project with two main objectives. The first was to explore the dimensions of diversity in the foreign language class. The second objective was to develop creative teaching strategies that incorporate diversity and improve intercultural communication and understanding.

The project was launched in the spring of 1992 when 21 instructors of French, Italian, and Spanish attended the Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages in New York City. The group consisted of full-time junior and senior faculty, part-time adjunct instructors, and graduate teaching assistants. The three-day conference on the theme "Languages for a Multicultural World in Transition" provided ideas on teaching culture and promoting intercultural communication in an increasingly diverse and rapidly changing society.²

The following semester, the department organized a series of seminars and workshops on the theme "Teaching Foreign Languages in a Multicultural Setting."³ A panel discussion focused on the history of multicultural education in the United States, the evolution of the concept of multiculturalism, and current initiatives in dealing with multicultural issues on campus. A second panel explored the dimensions of diversity in the foreign language class with particular attention to the faculty, the languages and cultures taught, and the student body.

A survey of the foreign language faculty revealed a rich mosaic of U.S.- and foreign-born, native and non-native speakers of French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese. Most spoke two or three languages in addition to English. A discussion of the implications of our own diversity led to reflection on how we relate to one another, to our students, and to our roles as

culture bearers in our classrooms. While much of the literature on this subject addresses the role of the instructor as consultant about the target culture and mediator between the target culture and U.S. culture (Cottenet-Hage, Joseph, and Verdaguer 1992; Lafayette 1988), we realized how much more complex these issues were in our particular context. French instructors, for example, came from France, Russia, Poland, Canada, Algeria, and the United States. Members of the Spanish faculty came from Puerto Rico, Cuba, Argentina, and Colombia, as well as from Spain and the United States mainland. They each brought a different perspective of the target culture and of U.S. culture to their teaching.

A survey of the students enrolled in our language classes revealed the dramatic demographic changes that had occurred over the previous decade. Senior colleagues remembered when the majority of students were second- and third-generation New Yorkers of European background whose native language was English. Now, many more students were recent immigrants or children of immigrants from countries all over the world speaking many native languages other than English. In one typical first-semester French class, 11 out of 21 students were native speakers of languages other than English. There were six Spanish speakers and one native speaker each of Greek, Arabic, Russian, Polish, and Cantonese. In an elementary Italian class, 14 out of 20 students were native speakers of Spanish, Greek, Polish, Korean, Romanian, or Russian.

Since so many of the students in our French, Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese classes had already mastered one or more foreign languages, including English, they brought varied perspectives to the language-learning process. We reflected on the implications of their linguistic sophistication and considered how we could exploit this resource in our teaching. Although we agreed with García (1992) that "our task as language educators encompasses not only knowing the language and culture of the people whose language we teach, but also the language and culture of the people whom we teach" (p. 3), we realized that our task went beyond a single language and culture to encompass many languages and cultures among our students. Just as we, the faculty, represented different dimensions of many target cultures, our students exemplified the multilingual and multicultural nature of U.S. society.

We also found a significant number of bilingual and bicultural students in our classes. These are students who may have been born in the United States or have come here at an early age, but who were raised in environments where the language and culture of their country of origin was dominant. We considered the important distinction that needs to be

made between elective and circumstantial bilinguals. Valdés (1992, p. 38) defines elective bilinguals as those individuals who choose to become bilingual but who spend the greater part of their time in a society in which their first language is the majority or societal language. Circumstantial bilinguals are individuals who, because of their circumstances, find that they must learn another language in order to survive. These individuals find themselves in a context in which their ethnic language is not the majority, prestige, or national language.

The situation in Spanish is particularly complex. The majority of students in our beginning-level courses are native speakers of English or languages other than Spanish. On the other hand, many intermediate-level students and most advanced-level students are circumstantial bilinguals who speak Spanish at home and have learned English as a second language. Their abilities and needs vary widely depending on how much formal schooling they have had in their native countries, how long ago, and in what circumstances they continue to speak Spanish.

The faculty discussions gave substance and direction to the workshops that followed. Our objectives were to integrate diversity into the foreign language curriculum and to create a classroom environment that would encourage understanding, communication, and cooperation among students of different cultures. The remainder of this chapter describes some of the strategies and activities that were developed with these objectives in mind. They can be adapted to all languages and levels and are compatible with any curriculum or textbook. One important feature, especially in departments that rely heavily on adjunct instructors and teaching assistants, is that they are easy to implement.

Integrating Diversity into the Curriculum

There are many ways to integrate linguistic and cultural diversity into the foreign language class without making any major changes in familiar routines or curriculum. The most important change is in the instructor's increased awareness of and approach to diversity. Cottenet-Hage, Joseph, and Verdaguer (1992) encourage the instructor to "think culturally" and to transform the language classroom into a cultural laboratory. This begins with a critical awareness of one's own cultural identity and an understanding that language and culture are interconnected.

Once the instructor learns to think and plan from a cultural perspective, many ideas for adapting the standard curriculum come to mind.

When introducing new vocabulary, for example, one can tap the rich variety of languages that are spoken by students in the class to find cognates and to make associations and comparisons. Students draw on their own language resources and apply their prior knowledge to the new language-learning experience. This can lead to a better understanding of the origins of language and how languages work. Those who have learned English as a second language, or any other foreign language, quickly learn to transfer and adapt their language-learning strategies to this new language.

Topics that are typically found in any elementary textbook can become the medium for an exploration of cultural identity and diversity and lead to an expanded knowledge of how societies are structured and how these shape attitudes and values. A lesson on the family can stimulate a discussion about the family structures and relationships of the different cultural groups represented in the class. A lesson on food and meals can lead to a comparison of different food preferences and meal-taking habits. Even a simple lesson on the use of articles and prepositions with place names can become a global adventure when students are asked where they were born, where their parents were born, or where they used to live.

A discussion of descriptive adjectives is transformed into an examination of cultural stereotypes when students are asked to describe the typical North American man or woman, the typical French man or woman, or a typical person from any other country with which they may be familiar. Questions for composition and conversation might ask students to relate their own experiences in adapting to a new culture, thus leading to stimulating discussions about culture shock, cultural misunderstandings, defining attitudes and values, and exploring cultural identities and differences.

While instructors are encouraged to use the target language as much as possible, this decision should be based on students' linguistic proficiency, their cultural sophistication, and the complexity of the issue under discussion. At the elementary level, students can exchange information about themselves, their native countries, their daily habits, and their families in the target language. If the curriculum includes discussions of culture that require more complex language structures such as making comparisons, expressing opinions, or advancing hypotheses, these are best conducted in English at the elementary level. As students reach more advanced levels of linguistic proficiency, they can participate in more sophisticated discussions in the target language.

It is important to exercise caution and discretion in discussions of cultural identity and diversity. Students of different cultural backgrounds who

lack a common ground of shared experiences may be reluctant to volunteer information about their personal lives in public with strangers. They may also hesitate to take risks and experiment with the target language. It is the instructor's responsibility, therefore, to create a friendly, relaxed, and supportive environment where students from different educational, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds can get to know one another and feel free to communicate both in English and in the target language.

Creating a Forum for Cultural Interaction

Several models for improving intercultural communication between U.S. students and foreigners have been developed. Sacco (1987) describes a communications course, conducted in English, that was designed to increase the cultural knowledge and sensitivity of American students at a largely monolingual, monocultural midwestern university. An original feature of the course is the cross-cultural case study based on the Gudykunst and Kim (1984) model of intercultural communication. U.S. and international students are brought together to get to know each other and to learn as much as possible about each other's cultures. The A.M.I.G.O. project (Stohl 1985) is another program designed to improve intercultural communication skills by pairing U.S. students with foreigners living in the community. Each partner benefits from the opportunity to meet, interact, and socialize with people from other cultures.

At Queens College, opportunities for intercultural communication are everywhere. Students need only look to the person sitting next to them to find someone from another country or culture. Communication, however, does not happen automatically, especially through the medium of a language that is foreign to both partners. Activities must be carefully planned and orchestrated if they are to achieve the dual objectives of communication and cooperation in the target language. The instructor must find creative ways to engage student interest and create a fertile environment for the exchange of information, ideas, and opinions.

The following activities encourage students to get to know each other while they use the target language to perform specific tasks (conducting a survey, analyzing photographs, writing and performing skits). Working in pairs and in small groups helps create a supportive, non-threatening environment in which students feel more comfortable about taking risks with the language. As students get to know each other, they are more willing to share information about themselves and their families, to express their

opinions and feelings, and to learn about others in the class. This whole process gradually helps to break down cultural and linguistic barriers, destroy stereotypes, and build lasting friendships.

The Class Profile Survey. This activity exploits diversity while facilitating communication and cooperation. It is based on the fact that each class has its own distinct profile of linguistic and cultural diversity and that students are naturally curious to find out about each other. Through paired interviews in the target language, students ask questions and share information about themselves and their families. Later, in small groups, they evaluate information, make comparisons, and express their feelings and opinions. Several language skills (grammar, vocabulary, conversation, writing, and reading) are involved.

The Class Profile Survey is conducted over four days in segments of 10–15 minutes. We begin with a brainstorming session during which the class draws up a list of questions that they would like to ask each other. Even as early as the first semester, students can formulate questions in the target language about country of origin, languages spoken, family members, work, and after-school activities. The instructor then prepares a one-page survey containing the questions. On the second day, working in pairs, students interview each other and fill out the survey for their partners. The instructor collects the surveys and tallies the results. On the third day, the class is divided into groups of four or five. Each group receives data for one section of the questionnaire and writes a paragraph summarizing the results for that section. One group of students in a first-semester Italian class wrote the following paragraph in Italian:

There are twenty students in our Italian class: seven men and thirteen women. Sixteen students live in Queens, two in Brooklyn, and two on Long Island. They are of many different nationalities. Nine students were born in the United States and two were born in Poland. The others were born in the following countries: Korea, Romania, Bolivia, Russia, Colombia, Nicaragua, Peru, Guam, and Iceland. Three students have been living in the United States for less than two years. Five students have been living in the United States for between four and ten years. They speak many languages. These languages are: English, Spanish, Greek, Polish, Korean, Romanian, Russian, and Italian.

The instructor collects all of the summaries and combines them into a one-page narrative. This “class profile” is then distributed for students to read and discuss. At the beginning level, discussion in the target language can focus on exchanging factual information and developing awareness of

linguistic and cultural diversity in the class. Students discover how many different languages and countries are represented in the class. Many are interested to learn that they are not the only newcomers to this country and that they share similar experiences with others in the class.

The Family Album. Another effective way to celebrate and give voice to diversity was inspired by Scanlan's technique for analyzing photographs of the target culture (1980). The main objective is to train students to make tentative hypotheses about a cultural context using visual clues provided in a photograph and applying prior knowledge of the target culture. Students discover how difficult it is to reconstruct the cultural context and learn the importance of collecting as much information as possible before drawing any conclusions or making any hasty generalizations. They also learn not to judge by appearances alone but to ask questions and seek out as much information as possible.

The instructor first distributes a series of photographs depicting scenes of everyday family life in the target culture. Working in small groups with one photo per group, students describe what they see in the photo in the target language. Slides of all photos are then shown to the whole class as each group reads their description. After this literal or descriptive phase, the class proceeds to an interpretive phase in which, with the instructor's guidance, they try to reconstruct the context of each photo (time, place, circumstances, relationships). They then consider how much information was available in the photos and how much had to be supplied by the instructor to fully understand the scenes. By the intermediate level, this discussion could be conducted in the target language.

The third phase deals with making responsible generalizations about family life in the target culture. Students first consider how much information is contained in an individual photo and how this is enhanced by viewing the other photos in the series. They then think about the information that the instructor-informer provides and how this adds to their understanding of the scenes and characters depicted. Finally, they consider what other sources of information could be tapped to complete the cultural context and begin to make tentative generalizations.

We can introduce another dimension of intercultural awareness and communication by repeating this process with family photographs taken in the United States and in other countries familiar to the students. Students can also bring in photos of their own families that they exchange in pairs or in small groups. By discussing what cultural information is visible in the photos (dress, setting, gestures, facial expressions) and what

information they must provide (family relationships, customs, holidays, meals) for classmates to fully understand what they see, students develop insights into their own and their classmates' cultural identities and into the complex process of learning about another culture.

Interactive Team Projects. This activity is designed to promote cooperation and communication among students of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Many instructors use it early in the first semester because it helps students get to know one another and begin to feel more comfortable with each other and with the instructor. It integrates several language skills (writing, speaking, listening, and pronunciation), creates a cooperative language learning environment, and provides opportunities for students to correct themselves and each other.

These interactive team projects are conducted in five 10–15 minute sessions over a two-week period. Students work in groups of three or four to plan, write, rehearse, and perform short scenes on various topics assigned by the instructor. Topics vary depending on students' interests and abilities and on instructional objectives. Some topics that can be used successfully as early as the first semester are: ordering dinner in a restaurant, making vacation plans at a travel agency, foreign tourists visiting New York, U.S. tourists traveling abroad.

On the first day, students begin to work on plot outlines and role distributions while the instructor circulates among the groups to provide assistance and make suggestions. The next two sessions are devoted to script-writing, editing, and rehearsing. A day or two between each session gives students time to work on their scripts and rehearse at home. Skits are never more than two or three minutes long, so students can learn their parts by heart and focus on pronunciation, intonation, and gestures.

By the fourth day, groups are ready to act out their skits before the class while the instructor videotapes them. As each group performs, the rest of the class listens, watches, and prepares to answer three questions on an audience response sheet: Where does the scene take place? Who are the characters? What are they doing? The answers to these questions provide feedback to the students and the instructor about comprehension of the content and serve as a summary of the activity. The videotape is played back on the fifth day to allow students to evaluate their own and their classmates' performances. Although optional, the videocamera is recommended because it provides valuable feedback for error correction, especially pronunciation, and gives the instructor a tangible document for evaluating speaking skills.

Table 4.
Summary of Integrative Activities

Type of activity	Number of sessions	Time per session	Format	Cultural issues addressed	Linguistic skills and functions	Support materials
Class Profile Survey	4	10-15 minutes	Whole class: * brainstorming * discussion Paired interviews Small groups	Information Awareness Understanding Communication	Asking/Answering questions Making comparisons Vocabulary: * languages * countries * leisure activities * family members Writing paragraphs	Photos and slides of target culture
Family Album	3	10-15 minutes	Whole class discussions Pair work Small groups	Information Observation Analysis Making/Testing hypotheses	Asking/Answering questions Describing Narrating Vocabulary: * family members * leisure activities * food * clothing	Video camera and VCR (optional)
Interactive Team Projects	5	10-15 minutes	Groups of 3-4	Awareness Understanding Communication Cooperation	Writing Speaking Pronunciation Listening Self/Peer correction	

This entire project may take up to two weeks depending on how many times a week the class meets and how frequently time is set aside for the project. While everyone's attention is focused on the final "production," the real social and cultural benefits are in the process. As they work together toward a common goal, students learn to cooperate and communicate with one another. They share ideas, feelings, and opinions and learn mutual trust and respect. Indirectly and informally, whether in English or in the target language, students of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds learn to interact effectively with one another. The activities of the project are summarized in Table 4.

Conclusion

As the cultural and linguistic diversity of our student body continues to increase, foreign language instructors are faced with the challenge and responsibility of preparing students to work together and communicate effectively in the classroom and the outside world. We have seen how the faculty of one foreign language department succeeded in giving voice to and celebrating diversity by integrating it throughout their foreign language curriculum. They discovered that diversity, far from being a barrier to effective interaction, is a valuable, built-in resource that can enrich the language learning experience and transform the foreign language class into a forum for intercultural awareness, understanding, and communication.

Notes

1. See García (1992) for a thorough discussion of multilingualism in the United States.
2. See Byrnes (1992) for a collection of reports related to the Conference theme.
3. An Instructor's Reference Manual (Sawicki 1992) includes summaries of the seminars and workshops, samples of the cultural materials collected, and suggestions for teaching culture and intercultural understanding in the foreign language class. It also includes an annotated bibliography of resources on multicultural education in the United States, cultures of the French-speaking, Italian-speaking, and Spanish-speaking communities, cultural diversity in Europe, classroom strategies for teaching language and culture, and developing cross-cultural understanding. This 43-page manual is available as an ERIC document on microfiche.

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