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A Survey of Skills, Use, and Perceptions

June 1, 2010

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ABSTRACT

No comprehensive study of academic librarians' attitudes and perceptions toward foreign language skills in libraries has occurred. Similarly, the question of how librarians use foreign languages has only been cursorily examined. The authors conducted an online survey in the spring of 2007 asking academic librarians in the US and Canada about their knowledge of non-English languages, use of languages professionally, and the perceived value of language skills. Results indicate substantial use of and value placed on language skills. Of the 1,858 respondents, more than 25 percent reported using foreign languages daily and over 75 percent desire better language skills to complete library tasks.

INTRODUCTION

Many academic librarians routinely encounter foreign languages in their daily work while selecting or cataloging materials, when communicating with faculty and students, or while giving bibliographic instruction. Exposure also continues at many college and university libraries due to the growth of user populations for whom English is a foreign language; the number of foreign students enrolled at US universities rose by 7 percent for the 2007-2008 school year and averages 3.5 percent of the total student population in the US.[1]

In 2003, Kellsey noted that university libraries in the early 2000's were having difficulty finding librarians with requisite foreign language expertise to maintain foreign language collections and to serve international students and faculty.[2][3] In response to this perceived shortage, the Western European Studies Section (WESS) of the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) created a committee in 2002 charged with recruiting individuals with Western European language skills into academic librarianship.

Anecdotal evidence of shortages notwithstanding, other indicators identify a decrease in need for librarians with language skills. A number of studies of job ads have demonstrated a decline in demand for librarians with foreign language skills compared to past years.[4] It is conceivable that with the increased use of English as a worldwide language of scholarship and commerce, many library administrators may perceive that foreign language skills among professional staff are not vital as they once were, especially given other competing needs such as knowledge and experience with information technologies. The availability of selection approval plans by foreign language vendors and options for outsourcing language cataloging adds further to this argument.

To date, no comprehensive study of academic librarians' attitudes and perceptions toward foreign language skills in their jobs and in the profession has occurred. Similarly, the extent to which librarians use foreign languages, if any, has only been cursorily examined. This study surveyed academic librarians of various backgrounds and positions regarding their knowledge of foreign languages and the extent to which they utilize them in their daily work. Additionally, respondents were asked about the demand for and perceived value of such skills. The results not only reflect librarians' attitudes about languages but also complement the existing body of literature by showing to what degree foreign language skills are used.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Much of the literature focusing on foreign languages in academic librarianship is limited to content analyses of language requirements stated in job announcements. A number of these studies focused exclusively on cataloging positions. Examining job postings for professional catalogers in *American Libraries* from 1970 to 1989, Furuta found that approximately 64.6 percent of ads from academic libraries required foreign language

skills.[5] In the study of terminology for foreign languages skills used in job advertisements for academic library catalogers in *American Libraries* from January 1989 to June 1990, Beall found that 68 percent of ads noted foreign language skills with the terms "knowledge", "working knowledge," or "reading knowledge."[6] From his analysis of cataloging job announcements from March 1995 to February 1996 in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *American Libraries*, and *Library Journal*, Towsey found that 44 percent of the ads indicated foreign language skills as necessary or preferred.[7]

Comparing job announcements from 1988 for public and technical services, Reser and Schuneman found that 37 percent of technical service advertisements list foreign language skills as required or preferred, whereas for the same time frame, only 16 percent of public service ones do.[8] Following Reser and Schuneman's study, Beile and Adams noted a slight decrease in foreign language skills in announcements from 1996 compared to 1988. Language skills, either required or preferred, were listed in 30.7 percent of technical services advertisements and in 14.4 percent of public service ones.[9] In a later study of technical service job ads in 2001, Deeken and Thomas found only a slight change, with 34 percent of ads including foreign language skills as required or preferred. The authors did note that of the technical service ads requiring foreign language skills, approximately 88 percent were for cataloging positions.[10] For collection development and management positions listed in *College & Research Libraries News* from 1980 to 1991, Robinson noted a foreign language requirement or preference in 46 percent.[11] Starr's comparison of librarian job announcements in *American Libraries* and *Library Journal* from 1983 and 2003 showed a decrease from 12.6 percent to 7.7 percent for foreign language skills.[12]

In her detailed study of foreign language requirements in academic librarian job postings from 1966 through 2003, Zhang observed an overall decrease in demand for foreign languages beginning in 1986. She postulates that this decrease could be due to a number of factors including libraries' use of "language sets" provided by the Online

Computer Library Center (OCLC) for selection and cataloging, online language tools, and the difficulty in recruiting librarians with such skills.[13] Despite this slight downward trend for foreign language skills, a majority of announcements in 2006 still asked for languages for bibliographers/area studies librarians and catalogers.[14] Zhang found that for those ads specifying languages, European ones were the ones in most demand.[15] Analyzing job ads from 2000-2003 for entry-level catalogers, Hall-Ellis found that foreign language skills were included in 61.1 percent of positions in academic libraries.[16] In a similar study for 2000-2004, she found that 40 percent of announcements for technical services managers at four-year colleges asked for foreign language skills and 28.1 percent at universities.[17] In a 2006 survey of non-English language use among catalogers and technical service managers at academic, public, and special libraries, Hall-Ellis determined that 69.2 percent of respondents felt they were proficient in multiple languages. The most common work activities associated with foreign language use were reading bibliographical descriptions, identifying bibliographical elements, and determining appropriate subject headings. 28.4 percent of respondents used their language skills daily whereas 22.1 percent used them less frequently.[18] In their study of job ads from 1970 to 2007 for Latin American and Caribbean Studies librarian positions, Alonso-Regaldo and Van Ullen noted a steep growth in demand for Spanish and Portuguese skills from the 1970s to 1990s which then leveled off and remained constant from 2000 to 2007.[19]

The above studies notwithstanding, foreign language skills for academic librarians have not been thoroughly discussed within the profession. Some articles have called for greater awareness of the need for and use of such skills in academic librarianship. Lacroix announced the creation of the Canadian Language Librarians' Blog in 2006 (http://blogs.library.ualberta.ca/cll) to foster communication among language librarians.[20] Kellsey noted from anecdotal evidence a shortage of entry-level academic librarians with requisite language skills in the early 2000s and asked that academic librarians take a more active role in recruiting graduate students and others with

language skills into LIS programs.[21] In her recent case study of the acquisition process of non-English materials at Rutgers University Libraries, Ward concludes that basic language proficiencies are needed by acquisitions staff to correctly and efficiently process orders for foreign language materials.[22]

As of yet, discussion about foreign languages in the profession has centered almost exclusively on requirements listed in job announcements and thereby focused on the perspective of the employer, i.e. the library.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, we created an online survey consisting of twenty questions to query all types of academic librarians in the United States and Canada about their non-English language skills and application of these skills in their library work. A call for participation was issued via 47 American and Canadian listservs covering various job specializations, cataloging and collection development, for instance, as well as subject matter such as the sciences or the humanities. Responses were collected for a seven-week period from late May until early July 2007. The survey generated a total of 1,991 individual responses, of which 1,858 were deemed usable; since survey participants were self-selected, the resulting data represent a convenience sample. Responses from librarians at non-academic institutions, such as public libraries and museums, were deleted in the first round of analysis. Although a question asking respondents for their country of residence was not included in the survey, each respondent's IP address was subsequently traced to identify whether it originated from the United States, Canada, or elsewhere. Responses with IP addresses outside the US and Canada were discarded.

The survey was divided into four main sections: background and demographic information; knowledge of languages and language education; use of foreign languages in daily work; and individual impressions and perceptions of the value of foreign

languages in academic libraries. The survey was designed so that participants who indicated no knowledge of languages other than English automatically skipped the sections on language education and use but could answer questions on the value of foreign languages. The final question of the survey was open-ended and allowed the participants to add any additional comments they might have.

Most variables were ordinal or categorical in nature. Three ordinal items on frequency of use of languages (reading, writing, speaking) were summed to create a language use variable that was treated as numeric for analyses. For these analyses, we treated the following as dependent variables: number of languages other than English, frequency of use of these languages, desire for additional languages, and whether a hypothetical job posting for respondents' current positions would require or prefer skills in languages other than English. Job function, type of institution, and length of employment as a librarian were common independent variables. Quantitative results were analyzed using SAS version 9.2. Bivariate relationships between variables were assessed with Chi-square statistics when both independent and dependent variables were nominal, one-way analysis of variance when the dependent variable was a numeric and the independent variable nominal, and the appropriate correlation coefficients when variables were ordinal and numeric or both numeric.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Demographics of respondents

Of the 1,858 usable responses, 92.8 percent (n=1,724) were from librarians residing in the US and 7.2 percent (n=134) were from Canada. With 60.1 percent of respondents having worked as a librarian for over ten years (n=1,112) and only 10.5 percent fewer than two years (n=257), the results may be slightly weighted towards experienced librarians. Likewise, librarians from research/university libraries were the largest group

represented with 73.5 percent of responses (*n*=1,362), compared to 15.8 percent from four-year college libraries (*n*=293), 7.3 percent from community college libraries (*n*=135), and 3.5 percent from libraries at other academic institutions such as law schools and theological seminaries. The most prevalent primary job responsibilities noted for the multiple answer question were reference (*n*=905, 48.9%), collection development (*n*=772, 41.7%), cataloging (*n*=555, 30%), and departmental liaison (*n*=530, 28.6%).

General Knowledge of Languages

A vast majority of respondents (*n*=1,669, 90.1%) indicated English as a first language or among one of their native languages. Not surprisingly, a lower percentage of 80.3 percent was noted among librarians in bilingual Canada (*n*=106). Survey results clearly indicate substantial foreign language knowledge among academic librarians. Respondents were asked about basic skills in languages other than English. For the purposes of the survey, basic skills were defined as some understanding of the components of a language (e.g. nouns, verbs) and vocabulary needed to carry out library-related tasks (e.g. cataloging, selection). Among respondents, 44.6 percent noted basic skills in one to two languages other than English (*n*=828), 29.0 percent in three to five (*n*=539), and 13.2 percent in more than five (*n*=246). Only 13.2 percent of all respondents (*n*=245) indicated no basic skills in a foreign language.

Number of languages in which respondents were knowledgeable differed by a number of characteristics. More experienced librarians had more language skills (χ^2 =49.70, =9, *p*<0.0001). Whereas 45.9 percent of respondents with more than five years of experience had basic skills in three or more languages (*n*=642), 30.6 percent of respondents with five years or less had such skills (*n*=138). Number of languages also differed by the type of library in which librarians worked (χ^2 =113.97, *df*=9, *p*<.0001).

Percentages with foreign language skills were 89.4% of respondents at university or research libraries (n=1,218), 79.6 percent at four-year college libraries (n=233), and 72.6 percent at community college libraries (n=98). Surprisingly, there was no statistical difference in the number of languages academic librarians knew in bilingual Canada compared to those in the US (χ^2=4.93, df=3, p=.1773).

Not surprisingly, our findings indicated a direct relationship between some of the job duties librarians performed and the number of languages they knew. Catalogers were more likely to have basic skills in more languages than those who did not catalog (χ^2=116.21, df=3, p<.0001). Of the 555 librarians who performed cataloging, 25.1% (n=139) had skills in more than 5 languages compared to only 8.2 percent of the 1,303 non-catalogers (n=107). Only 5.2 percent of catalogers indicated no skills in any other language besides English (n=29) whereas this number was as high as 16.6 percent for non-catalogers (n=216). Less markedly, collection development librarians also had more language skills (χ^2=10.41, df=3, p=.0154); 46.5% of the 772 respondents who indicated collection development reported skills in three or more languages (n=359) whereas only 39.2 percent of the 1086 respondents who did not have collection development duties did so (n=426). Librarians with reference as a job responsibility were less likely to have foreign language skills than other librarians (χ^2=55.17, df=3, p<.0001); 16.9 percent of the 905 librarians who selected reference noted no basic skills in languages other than English (n=153) compared to 9.7 percent of the 953 respondents who did not have reference duties (n=92). Similarly, librarians in library administration were less likely to have basic skills in languages other than English, compared other librarians (χ^2=9.93, df=3, p=.0192).

The survey results clearly showed that western European languages predominated the spectrum of languages known by academic librarians (see Table 1 below). Of the 1,575 respondents who answered the question about specific languages, 73.1 percent indicated basic skills in French, 57.7 percent in Spanish, and 49.8 percent in

German compared to 4.1 percent in Chinese, 3.9 percent in Arabic, and 3.7 percent in Japanese. With 5.6 percent (*n*=88), Dutch was the most commonly listed language in the free-text "Other" category. These findings correspond to the language proficiencies noted by Hall-Ellis in her 2006 survey of catalogers and technical service librarians.[23] Zhang's 2008 study of academic librarian job announcements found that western European languages are most often asked for in job ads.[24] Thus, it would appear that the language skills librarians possess still fill current needs.

TABLE 1		
Languages Other than English in which Respondents Have Basic Skills		
Language	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
French	73.1%	1152
Spanish	57.7%	908
German	49.8%	784
Italian	33.3%	525
Latin	24.2%	381
Russian	16.1%	253
Portuguese[25]	11.2%	177
Greek (Classical/Modern)	8.3%	131
Hebrew (Biblical/Modern)	5.0%	78

Language	Response Percent	Response Count
Chinese	4.1%	64
Arabic	3.9%	62
Japanese	3.7%	59
Other (please specify)	24.7%	389
		N= 1,575

However, in the free-text comment section of the survey, remarks from a number of respondents indicated a shift away in demand for skills in Western European languages (other than Spanish) to East Asian, Middle Eastern, and South Asian languages. Out of 668 free-text comments about foreign languages and academic librarianship received, 37 noted a rise in demand for non-European languages. As one respondent states:

> We have a significantly greater diversity in faculty and students with languages other than English but our staff facility in languages has diminished, or does not match the "new" linguistic areas, particularly Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

Another states: "I suspect the languages that are important may be changing more than the extent to which languages are important. ... I'm seeing more materials in languages that don't use the Roman alphabet." Still another notes:

> Emphasis in our research collections has probably shifted away from Western European languages such as German and French to Spanish, East Asian, and Middle Eastern languages. However, there is still a great deal of material in German and French throughout our humanities and social sciences collections.

If these comments do in fact represent a future linguistic trend for scholarship, it goes without saying that the current language skill sets of most academic librarians will not meet the need for non-European language skills in academic libraries.[26]

Language Education

Respondents (*n*=245) who indicated that they had no basic skills in languages other than English automatically skipped the survey questions concerned with non-English education and training. As shown in Table 2 below, the majority of respondents acquired their skills in languages other than English while attending an institution of higher education. Forty-four percent studied the foreign language through coursework, while the others obtained their skills in pursuit of an undergraduate (20.3%), Master's (10.7%), or PhD degree (4.0%). Native speakers of languages other than English account for 10.7 percent of the responses, while few of the participants acquired their skills through self-study (3.3%) or high school coursework (7.1%).

TABLE 2		
Highest Level of Training for the Language Other than English in Which You Are Most Proficient:		
Training	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Self-study	3.3%	51
High school study	7.1%	111
Coursework (no degree)	44.0%	690

Training	Response Percent	Response Count
Undergraduate degree	20.3%	318
Master's degree	10.7%	168
PhD	4.0%	63
Native speaker	10.7%	168
		N=1,569

Language Use in Daily Work

As Table 3 shows, over three-fourths of all respondents reported using a language other than English to complete one or more library-related tasks. For 47.9 percent and 38 percent respectively, selecting and evaluating resources and cataloging materials were the two job duties most often indicated. Tasks listed in the "Other" category include research, instruction, inter-library loan, and verifying citations. Given the extensive collections of non-English materials and the broad range of research needs of faculty and students at universities compared to four-year colleges and community colleges, it is not surprising to find a greater percentage of librarians at universities who also use foreign languages. 31.3 percent of respondents at community colleges use English exclusively in their work, in contrast to 21.5 percent at four-year colleges and 14.8 percent at universities.

TABLE 3					
Tasks for Which Languages Other than English are Used, by Type of Institution					
Purpose	**Community college libraries**	**Four-yr. college libraries**	**Research/ university libraries**	**Other Institutions**	**All**
N/A – Only use English	31.3% (*n*=30)	21.5% (*n*=49)	14.8% (*n*=175)	10.2% (*n*=6)	16.6 % (*n*=260)
Catalog materials	26.0% (*n*=25)	34.6 % (*n*=79)	38.7% (*n*=457)	55.9% (*n*=33)	38.0% (*n*=596)
Select and evaluate materials	30.2% (*n*=29)	43.4% (*n*=99)	50.1% (*n*=592)	47.5% (*n*=28)	47.9% (*n*=750)
Communicate with patrons (e.g. answer reference questions)	47.9% (*n*=46)	19.7% (*n*=45)	33.6% (*n*=397)	28.8% (*n*=17)	32.3% (*n*=506)
Communicate with vendors	11.5% (*n*=11)	10.5% (*n*=24)	21.9% (*n*=259)	15.3% (*n*=9)	19.3% (*n*=303)
Other	11.5% (*n*=11)	17.1% (*n*=39)	20.6% (*n*=243)	18.6% (*n*=11)	19.4% (*n*=304)
	100% (*N*=96)	100% (*N*=228)	100% (*N*=1,182)	100% (*N*=64)	100% (*N*=1,567)

As illustrated in Figure 1 (below), 28.6 percent of respondents indicated use of non-English language skills on a daily basis, 17.3 percent on a weekly basis, 18.6 percent on a monthly basis, and 27.6 percent two or three times a year. Only 8 percent noted no use of any language besides English despite having basic skills in at least one language other than English.

FIGURE 1 : Overall Frequency of Non-English Language Use
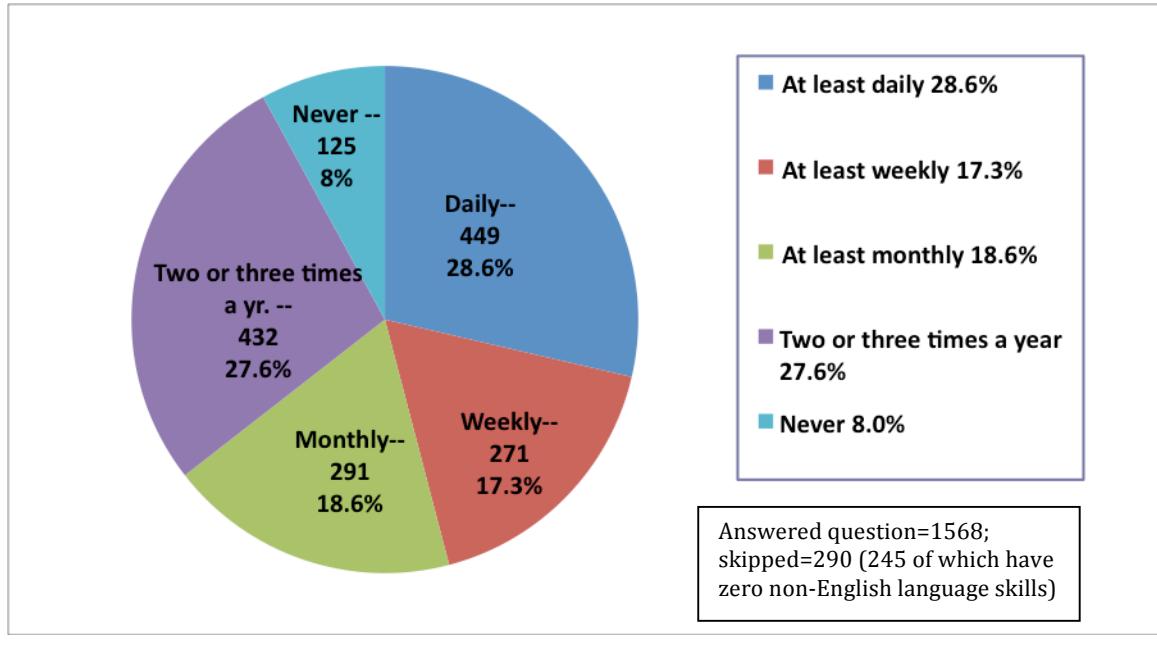
Who are the daily users?

Of the 449 respondents who noted daily use, 89.3 percent work at a research or university library (*n*=399), 3.1 percent at a four-year college library (*n*=14), and 3.1 percent at a community college library (*n*=14). In comparison, respondents who only use English (*n*=125) are somewhat more evenly distributed among the types of libraries with 65.6 percent at a university or research library (*n*=82), 19.2 percent at a four-year college library (*n*=24), and 14.4 percent at a community college library (*n*=18). Some differences in primary job responsibilities are noted between those who use foreign languages on a daily basis and those who only use English. 43.2 percent of daily users included cataloging as a responsibility (*n*=193) which was only the case for 8 percent of English-only users (*n*=10). With 55 percent (*n*=246), collection development is slightly more prevalent among daily users than among those who never use other languages

(*n*=53, 42.4%). In contrast, reference as a responsibility is more frequent among English-only users (*n*=69, 55.2%) compared to daily users of other languages (*n*=196, 43.8%). With 23.2 percent (*n*=29), library administration is more common among those who use only English than among those who use other languages on a daily basis (*n*=61, 13.6%). As one respondent notes in the free-text comment section of the survey, "because I am more an administrator than a daily doer of work, I rely mostly on other people's language skills. I wish more librarians and t.s. library staff had basic, or higher, language skills (both in my library and elsewhere, since we all share in the deficits and benefits)."

Frequency of Specific Language Skills -- Reading, Speaking, Writing

As shown below in Table 4, reading was rated as the most highly utilized foreign language skill, with 41.5 percent of respondents (*n*=643) noting that they use it "frequently" compared to 10.3 percent for speaking (*n*=153) and 8.4 percent for writing (*n*=126). The data also show that a significant number of librarians who use languages other than English use more than one of these skills in their daily work. Of the 643 respondents who selected "frequently" for reading, 24.1 percent (*n*=155) also rated speaking, writing, or both as "frequently" being employed. Likewise, of those who listed speaking as a "frequently" used skill, 87.6 percent (*n*=134) noted the same for at least one of the other skills. For those who chose "frequently" for writing, 100 percent also noted reading, speaking, or both in the "frequently" category.

					Total
Skill	**Frequently**	**Occasionally**	**Rarely**	**Not at all**	**Responses**
Reading	41.5% (*n=643*)	32.1% (*n=497*)	21.1% (*n=327*)	5.2% (*n=81*)	1,548
Speaking	10.3% (*n=153*)	22.3% (*n=333*)	31.5% (*n=469*)	35.9% (*n=536*)	1,491
Writing	8.4% (*n=126*)	18.4% (*n=275*)	33.5% (*n=501*)	39.7% (*n=595*)	1,497

TABLE 4

Frequency of Specific Language Skills

Frequency of language use was associated with several variables. The larger the institution, the greater frequency with which respondents reported using language skills ($r=.159$, $p<.0001$) and the more years of experience, the more frequently foreign languages were noted to be in use ($r=.104$, $p<.0001$). Likewise, these skills were used more in some types of libraries than in others ($F=20.30$, $p<.0001$), with the lowest levels of use in community college libraries and much higher use in research/university and "other" academic libraries. The frequency of use also differed according to the duties a librarian performed. The greatest difference was between catalogers (mean use = 6.45 on a 12 point scale) and non-catalogers (mean use = 5.55, ($F=28.19$, $p<.0001$). But librarians in acquisitions and collections also used foreign language skills more often than librarians who did not perform these functions.

Perceived Importance of Foreign Language Skills

We asked all survey participants a set of questions about their perception of the value of foreign language skills in their work life. When asked how often they desired better skills in languages other than English while pursuing their daily work, 34.5 percent of respondents answered "frequently," and 41.6 percent "occasionally" while only 6.6 percent stated "not at all." See Table 5 below.

TABLE 5				
Desire for Better Skills in Languages other than English, by Number of Languages Known				
Frequency of desire for better skills	**0 languages**	**1 to 2 languages**	**3 to 5 languages**	**Above 5 languages**	**All**
Frequently	14.5% (*n=35*)	30.5% (*n=242*)	44.1% (*n=227*)	47.0% (*n=111*)	34.5 % (*n=615*)
Occasionally	44.2% (*n=107*)	44.4 % (*n=352*)	37.9% (*n=195*)	37.2% (*n=88*)	41.6% (*n=742*)
Rarely	31.4% (*n=76*)	18.4% (*n=146*)	11.7% (*n=60*)	11.9% (*n=28*)	17.4% (*n=310*)
Not at All	9.9% (*n=24*)	6.7% (*n=53*)	6.2% (*n=32*)	3.8% (*n=9*)	6.6% (*n=118*)
	100% (*n=242*)	100% (*n=793*)	100% (*n=514*)	100% (*n=236*)	100% (*N=1,785*)

As evident in the table above, the number of languages known by respondents correlates positively with the desire for additional language skills ($r=.21$, $p<.0001$). Those who knew the most languages had the most desire to learn even more. The more research intensive the librarian's institution, the more often they reported a desire for language skills ($r=.08234$, $p=.0005$). Likewise, respondents at larger institutions indicated a wish for better language skills more often ($r=.10221$, $p<.0001$).

When asked whether the importance of non-English language knowledge has changed over the last ten years in their area of academic librarianship, the majority of participants felt the importance has not changed or grown for their daily work. See Table 6 below. A minority felt that a grasp of languages other than English has become less important over the last ten years.

TABLE 6		
Change of Importance of Languages Other than English for Your Area in Last 10 Years		
Perception of importance	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Significantly more important	19.5%	342
Somewhat more important	31.3%	547
Hasn't changed	39.5%	692
Somewhat less important	7.9%	138
Significantly less important	1.8%	31
		$N=1,750$

The survey also asked participants to think about a hypothetical job advertisement for their current position and whether skills in languages other than English would be included in this advertisement. 37.9 percent (*n*=678) of all participants, speculated that foreign languages skills would not be listed at all in a job advertisement for their position, whereas 33.8 percent (*n*=605) felt it would be a desired qualification and 28.4 percent (*n*=508) felt it would be a required qualification. As shown in Figure 2 below, the more research intensive the librarian's institution, the more likely non-English language skills would be listed as a requirement or preference (*r*=.245, *p*<.0001). From the subgroup of participants (*n*=240) who stated that they have no skills in languages other than English, 80.8 percent (*n*=194) thought that foreign language skills would not be mentioned in a hypothetical job ad for their current position, whereas 19.2 percent (*n*=46) felt they would be preferred.

FIGURE 2: If you were to write a job ad now for your own current position, skills in languages other than English would be
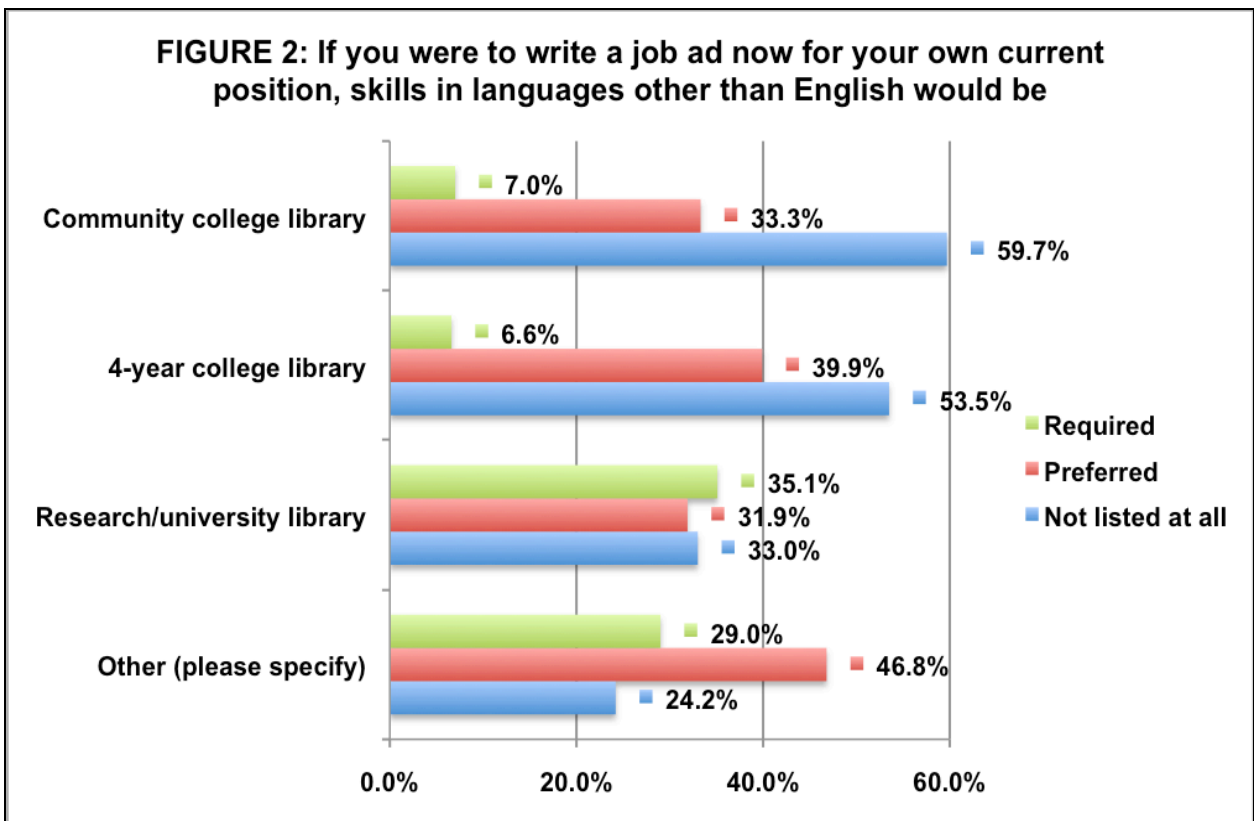
The data also indicated that job duties were associated with whether a librarian would list a language preference or requirement for their own position. Again, the largest differences were between catalogers and non-catalogers. Whereas catalogers would list a language as a preference (40.6%) or a requirement (42.7%) most of the time, non-catalogers would list it as a preference (30.9 %) or requirement (22.4%) much less frequently (χ^2 =154.34, *df*=2, *p*<.0001). Librarians with duties in acquisitions and collection development were also more likely to prefer or require additional language skills than those who did not perform those functions. In contrast, administrators, circulation librarians, and reference librarians were less likely than those who did not have those responsibilities to prefer or require additional language skills.

The participants were also asked to think about the role of non-English languages in academic libraries in general, and extent to which the importance of these languages has changed in the past ten years. More than half of all respondents felt that languages other than English have become more important over the last ten years: 19.5 percent (*n*=341) significantly more important and 43 percent (*n*=752) somewhat more important. 26.1 percent (*n*=456) of respondents had the opinion that the significance of foreign languages hasn't changed over the last ten years, and the minority of total respondents (11.5% or *n*=201) felt that foreign languages have become somewhat or significantly less important. Interestingly, of the subgroup of respondents with no skills in languages other than English, more than half, 68.1 percent (*n*=160) thought that these skills have become more important over the last ten years.

Finally, all participants were given the opportunity to express their opinions about the perceived value of skills in languages other than English to the library administration in their institution. Nearly half of all respondents, 46.4 percent (*n*=830) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that their library administration valued non-English skills. 33.9 percent (*n*=606) were neutral about this statement, and 19.7 percent (*n*=352) disagreed or disagreed strongly.

CONCLUSION

Our results demonstrate how languages other than English still play a pivotal role in the work lives of many academic librarians. We found a correlation between language knowledge and a number of factors, including job duties and type of library. Of particular note, roughly 25 percent of all respondents who catalog have basic skills in five or more languages. Over three-fourths of all respondents reported having used a language other than English to complete one or more library-related tasks, most predominantly collection development and cataloging. Over one-quarter of participants reported using a foreign language on a daily basis in their work, and over one-half reported at least monthly use. When asked about a hypothetical job advertisement for their position, one-third of respondents felt language skills would be a preferred qualification and over one-quarter a requirement. Over three-quarters of survey participants would like to have better skills in languages other than English; the desire for better language skills was particularly strong among participants who already know multiple languages. Nearly 90 percent of participants think foreign languages are just as or more important than they were 10 years ago, even as libraries move away from the bibliographer model to the selector model.[27] [28]

The argument that foreign languages remain an essential skill in academic libraries is supported by other library research that investigates what type of information is used by humanities scholars. Two recent citation analysis studies by Kellsey and Knievel, one longitudinal and one single-year study, demonstrate the continued importance of foreign languages in humanities scholarship, French and German in particular. [29] [30] Free-text comments in the survey suggest not a shift in the importance of language skills but rather the languages needed, most notably East Asian, Middle Eastern, and South Asian. Many respondents expressed a growing demand for Spanish skills in academic libraries, in particular for communicating with patrons, and one noted: "Hispanic students are thrilled when I can communicate with them in their

native language. They feel extremely comfortable with me in helping them with their research in Spanish."

The perceived high value placed on foreign language skills does not, however, hold across the board. Nearly 20 percent of survey respondents (*n*=352) indicated that their library's administration does not value such skills. In the free-text section a number of participants commented that administrators do not recognize the necessity of language skills in daily work and thus do not require any. Likewise, other respondents commented that with the predominance of English serves as the *lingua franca* in some disciplines, such as science and engineering, knowing any other language besides English is superfluous. These diverging impressions about language needs among various disciplines on the one hand and between librarians and administrators on the other require further detailed examination.

At many institutions of higher education, students are encouraged to study abroad and engage in cross-border collaborations and exchanges.[31] Many universities are instituting "study abroad at home" or foreign languages across the curriculum initiatives in order to foster an international experience on site at the home institution.[32] Foreign language materials play an important role in creating an international dimension in education and language acquisition at the home university or college, whether during, before, or after study abroad.[33] Furthermore, international students with varying degrees of English skills are coming in increasing numbers to North American colleges and universities; librarians need to effectively communicate with them. Languages can be useful not only for communication but also for building a rapport with such students.

In the open comments section of the survey, several participants commented that technical skills are becoming more and more important in academic libraries today. This is self-evident in the Internet age, as information technology enhances and changes how libraries deliver services and how their users approach research and learning. We

suggest, however, that this need not exclude traditional liberal arts values such as a working knowledge of at least one language other than English. Librarians need to keep knowledge of foreign languages as another essential tool in the librarian tool belt, one that broadens and enhances our abilities to serve our patrons. It not only helps us select and catalog a wider range of materials and perform reference but also effectively communicate with our linguistically diverse patrons.

Libraries might consider recruiting individuals with diverse language skills into the profession. Likewise, we hope that library administrators recognize the value in language skills and support librarians in acquiring new language skills. Schools of library and information science should encourage students to think ahead about which language they should learn and how languages could influence and change their career paths and trajectory. As one respondent noted, "[i]n our globalized world communication in general is more important [and one] need[s] both linguistic and technical skills to communicate."

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER STUDY

As with any convenience sample, this study is characterized by an inherit sampling bias. It is unclear to what degree the respondents are representative of the entire population of academic librarians in the US and Canada. Future random sampling studies could shed a different light on the authors' findings. In addition, more targeted studies could compare the differences in knowledge and use of languages among various disciplines, such as the sciences and humanities. Subsequent work could also examine language use among non-librarian staff which would assist in achieving a more comprehensive picture of language use in academic libraries.

NOTES

[1] Rajika Bhandari and Patricia Chow, *Open Doors 2008: Report on International Educational Exchange* (New York: Institute of International Education, 2008), 2-3.

[2] Charlene Kellsey, "Crisis in Foreign Language Expertise in Research Libraries: How do we Fill this Gap?" *College & Research Libraries News* 64, no. 6 (June 2003): 391.

[3] Further evidence for an awareness of the shortage of librarians with foreign language skills can be seen in the program, "Going Global! Finding Non-English Language Specialists," which was sponsored by the Association for Library Collections and Technical Services at the ALA Annual Conference in 2009. http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/alcts/confevents/upcoming/ala/programs.cfm#17

[4] For the latest comprehensive study, see: Li Zhang, "Foreign Language Skills and Academic Library Job Announcements: A Survey and Trends Analysis, 1966–2006," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship,* 34, no. 4 (July 2008): 322-331.

[5] Kenneth Furuta, "The Impact of Automation on Professional Catalogers," *Information Technology and Libraries* 9 (Sept. 1990): 250.

[6] Jeffrey Beall, "Describing the Foreign Language Skills of Catalogers in Academic Libraries," *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (1991): 42-43.

[7] Michael Towsey, "Nice Work if You can Get it? A Study of Patterns and Trends in Cataloguing Employment in the USA and the UK in the Mid-1990s," *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 24, no. 1-2 (1997): 70.

[8] David W. Reser and Anita P. Schuneman, "The Academic Library Job Market: A Content Analysis Comparing Public and Technical Services," *College & Research Libraries* 53 (Jan. 1992): 52.

[9] Penny M. Beile and Megan M. Adams, "Other Duties as Assigned: Emerging Trends in the Academic Library Job Market," *College & Research Libraries* 61, no. 4 (July 2000): 341.

[10] JoAnne Deeken and Deborah Thomas, "Technical Services Job Ads: Changes since 1995," *College & Research Libraries* 67, no. 2 (March 2006): 142.

[11] William C. Robinson, "Academic Library Collection Development and Management Positions: Announcements in *College & Research Libraries News* from 1980 to 1991," *Library Resources & Technical Services* 37, no. 2 (1993), 141.

[12] Starr, Joan. "A Measure of Change: Comparing Library Job Advertisements of 1983 and 2003" *LIBRES: Library and Information Science Research Electronic Journal* 14, no. 2 (September 2004), http://libres.curtin.edu.au/libres14n2/ (accessed Sept. 6, 2009).

[13] Zhang, "Foreign Language Skills and Academic Library Job Announcements: A Survey and Trends Analysis, 1966–2006," 324-325.

[14] Ibid., 326.

[15] Ibid., 328.

[16] Sylvia D. Hall-Ellis, "Descriptive Impressions of Entry-Level Cataloger Positions as Reflected in "American Libraries", AutoCAT, and the Colorado State Library Jobline, 2000-2003," *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (2005): 46.

[17] Sylvia D. Hall-Ellis, "Descriptive Impressions of Managerial and Supervisory Cataloger Positions as Reflected in "American Libraries", AutoCAT, and the Colorado State Library Jobline, 2000-2004: A Content Analysis of Education, Competencies, and Experience," *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (2006): 66.

[18] Sylvia D. Hall-Ellis, "Language Proficiencies among Catalogers and Technical Services Librarians," *Technical Services Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (2007): 41-43.

[19] Jesús Alonso-Regalado and Mary K. Van Ullen, "Librarian for Latin American and Caribbean Studies in U.S. Academic and Research Libraries: A Content Analysis of Position Announcements, 1970-2007," *Library Resources & Technical Services* 53, no. 3 (July 2009): 145-147.

[20] Denis Lacroix, "The Canadian Language Librarians' Blog," *Feliciter* 52, no. 3 (2006): 118-119.

[21] Kellsey, "Crisis in Foreign Language Expertise in Research Libraries: How do we Fill this Gap?" 391-2, 397.

[22] Judit H. Ward, "Acquisitions Globalized: The Foreign Language Acquisitions Experience in a Research Library," *Library Resources & Technical Services* 53, no. 2 (April 2009): 86-93.

[23] Hall-Ellis, "Language Proficiencies among Catalogers and Technical Services Librarians," 42.

[24] Zhang, "Foreign Language Skills and Academic Library Job Announcements: A Survey and Trends Analysis, 1966–2006," 328.

[25] Portuguese was not included in the list of languages. These numbers were extrapolated from languages included by respondents in the "Other" category.

[26] The Modern Language Association survey, *Enrollments in Languages Other Than English in United States Institutions of Higher Education, Fall 2006* (http://www.mla.org/2006_flenrollmentsurvey), reports that non-European languages other than English show the greatest growth in enrollments. For instance, enrollment in Arabic increased 126.5% between 2002 and 2006.

[27] Laura Dale Bischof and Thea Lindquist, "Improving Library-Related Subject Skills and Performance in German Studies Librarianship: An Analysis of the Impact of the WESS Study Tour on New German Studies Librarians," *Collection Management* 30, no. 2 (2005): 19-43.

[28] In the selector model, librarians are assigned selection, reference, and instruction in subject areas in which they have little or no academic training or library experience; and familiarity or expertise in a foreign language increases the number of fields a selector could potentially work with.

[29] Charlene Kellsey and Jennifer E. Knievel, "Global English in the Humanities? A Longitudinal Citation Study of Foreign-Language use by Humanities Scholars," *College & Research Libraries* 65, no. 3 (May 2004): 194-204.

[30] Jennifer E. Knievel and Charlene Kellsey, "Citation Analysis for Collection Development: A Comparative Study of Eight Humanities Fields," *The Library Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (April 2005): 142-168.

[31] Yvonne Turner and Sue Robson, *Internationalizing the University* (London: Continuum, 2008).

[32] See "Study Abroad at Home" a program at Eastern Washington University http://outreach.ewu.edu/studyabroadathome.xml and Carol A. Klee, "Internationalization and Foreign Languages: The Resurgence of Interest in Languages Across the Curriculum," *The Modern Language Journal* 93, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 618-621.

[33] For a recent overview of perspectives and research about internationalizing the university and foreign languages across the curriculum, see the series of commentaries published along with: Heidi Byrnes, "The Issue: Role of Foreign Languages Departments in Internationalizing the Curriculum" *The Modern Language Journal* 93, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 607-609.

Appendix A. Foreign languages & Academic Librarianship Survey

Preface

Many North American academic librarians have encountered or learned a foreign language at some time, from fulfilling an undergraduate language requirement to growing up in a bilingual household. We* would like to learn to what extent North American academic librarians know foreign languages and how they use them in their jobs and daily work. This survey also seeks out your perceptions about how much foreign language skills are valued and sought after in academic libraries.

Throughout the survey you will be asked about "basic skill[s]" in a foreign language. In this context "basic skill[s]" means some understanding of the components of a language (e.g. nouns, verbs) and the vocabulary needed to carry out library-related tasks (e.g. cataloging, selection).

All information provided by individual respondents will be kept strictly confidential; only composite results will be reported.

*We are members of the Recruitment to the Profession Committee of the Western European Studies Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries.

1. I have been employed as a librarian for

____ Fewer than 2 years

____ 2-5 years

____ Between 5-10 years

____ More than 10 years

2. My LIS education background is best described by the following:

_____ Completed an MLS (or equivalent) degree

_____ Enrolled in an MLS (or equivalent) program

_____ No MLS degree, nor enrolled in a program

3. My current position is at a

_____ Community college library

_____ 4-year college library

_____ Research/university library

_____ Other (please specify) _____

4. What is the approximate full time enrollment at your institution?

_____ Fewer than 5,000

_____ 5,000 to 9,999

_____ 10,000 to 19,999

_____ 20,000 and over

5. Select your primary job responsibility. If your position includes more than one, select all that are appropriate.

_____ Acquisitions

_____ Administration

_____ Cataloging

_____ Circulation/Access

_____ Collection Development

_____ Department Liaison

_____ Reference

_____ Systems

_____ Other (please specify) _____

6. Is English your first language or among your native languages?

_____ Yes

_____ No

7. In how many languages other than English do you have at least basic skills to carry out library-related tasks?

Basic skills are some understanding of the components of a language (e.g. nouns, verbs) and the vocabulary needed to carry out library-related tasks (e.g. cataloging, selection).

_____ 0 *

_____ 1 - 2

_____ 3 - 5

_____ Above 5

[Respondents who answer 0 skipped questions 8-13 and were brought to question 14.]*

8. In which language(s) other than English do you have at least basic skills? (Check all that apply or specify the language(s) if not noted.)

Basic skills are some understanding of the components of a language (e.g. nouns, verbs) and the vocabulary needed to carry out library-related tasks (e.g. cataloging, selection).

_____ Arabic

_____ Chinese

_____ French

_____ German

_____ Greek (Classical/Modern)

_____ Hebrew (Biblical/Modern)

_____ Italian

_____ Japanese

_____ Latin

_____ Russian

_____ Spanish

_____ Other (please specify) _____

[Portuguese was not included in the list of languages.]

9. Indicate the number of non-English languages in which you have at least basic skills and which you acquired or are acquiring during the following periods. Count a given language for all relevant periods.

Basic skills are some understanding of the components of a language (e.g. nouns, verbs) and the vocabulary needed to carry out library-related tasks (e.g. cataloging, selection).

	None	1 language	2 languages	3 languages	4 or more languages
As a native speaker					
While living abroad					
In high school					
As an undergraduate					
As a graduate student (other than MLS education)					
As an MLS-student					
After becoming a librarian?					

10. For the language other than English in which you are most proficient, indicate the highest level of education/training you have:

_____ Self-study

_____ High school study

_____ Coursework (no degree)

_____ Undergraduate degree

_____ Master's degree

_____ PhD

_____ Native speaker

11. For what purposes do you use languages other than English in your current position? (Check all that apply or specify if needed)

_____ N/A (only use English)

_____ Catalog materials

_____ Select and evaluate materials

_____ Communicate with patrons (e.g. answer reference questions)

_____ Communicate with vendors

_____ Other (please specify)

12. For all non-English languages, how frequently do you use or have you used the skills below in your current position?

	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Not at all
Reading				
Speaking				
Writing				

13. On average, how often do you use languages other than English in your current position?

_____ At least daily

_____ At least weekly

_____ At least monthly

_____ Two or three times a year

_____ Never

14. How often do you wish you had better skills in languages other than English to assist you in your job?

_____ Frequently

_____ Occasionally

_____ Rarely

_____ Not at all

15. Thinking of your own area in academic librarianship (e.g. cataloging, reference), how has the importance of languages other than English changed in the past ten years?

_____ Significantly more important

_____ Somewhat more important

_____ Hasn't changed

_____ Somewhat less important

_____ Significantly less important

16. If you were to write a job ad now for your own current position, skills in languages other than English would be

_____ Required

_____ Preferred

_____ Not listed at all

17. In at least one of the currently or recently open librarian positions at your institution, skills in languages other than English were

_____ Required

_____ Preferred

_____ Not listed

_____ Don't know

_____ N/A (no openings in the past two years)

18. Thinking of academic librarianship in general, how has the importance of languages other than English changed in the past ten years?

_____ Significantly more important

_____ Somewhat more important

_____ Hasn't changed

_____ Somewhat less important

_____ Significantly less important

19. Do you agree that your library's administration values language skills among its librarians?

_____ Agree strongly

_____ Agree

_____ Neutral

_____ Disagree

_____ Disagree strongly

20. Comments about language skills and librarianship (including your own position):

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this survey!

Questions about the survey can be directed to:

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On behalf of the WESS Recruitment to the Profession Committee (http://wess.lib.byu.edu/index.php/WESS_Recruitment_to_the_Profession_Committee]