Language as a tool for International Exchange and Cross border Business

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Abstract: The paper begins with the introduction to various approaches to language acquisition and proficiency offered by numerous linguists and there on gives the details of advantages of proficiency in a language that opens avenue for lucrative jobs in the market, other than traditional employment opportunities. The paper also discusses proficiency in a language can become a tool for international exchange and cross border business.

In today’s world of globalization with increased information super highways, and Multinational companies, language has become a tool for international exchange and cross border business. Foreign languages are finding good demand to increase global understanding, native language ability, to sharpen cognitive and life skills, to improve chances of getting employment and revenue in various fields leading to information, cultural and fiscal exchange.

Today, the need to learn Hindi, with 497 million speakers and ranking next to English, has become essential in developed countries as Indian market is being coveted by multinational companies. English speaking nations with 508 million speakers all over the World, too have faced a need to learn a foreign language for better employment opportunities. According to a recent study by the British Council, the Scottish economy is losing out on foreign trade and business. The state of foreign language teaching in Scotland was described as "a matter of concern". The 'Language Rich Europe' report examined how different European countries approached the teaching and use of regional, minority and foreign languages. India too requires a huge number of foreign language experts, particularly in Chinese, Japanese and Korean languages. Foreign language experts play a variety of roles depending upon their skills and experience as well as the job. To name a few of them are: Diplomatic Service Professional, Foreign Language Trainer, Translator for MNCs and Government Organizations, Research Associate, Interpreter, Tourist Guide, Air Hostess or Flight Steward, Public Relation Officer, etc.

Key Words: Globalization, Employment Opportunities, Proficiency, Exchange, MNCs, Revenue.

Introduction

It has been estimated that some 60 percent of today’s population is multilingual. ---today English is the world’s most widely studied foreign language. 500 years ago it was Latin, for it was the dominant language of education, commerce, religion, and government in the western world. In the 16 century, however, French, Italian, and English gained in importance as a result of political changes in Europe, and Latin gradually became displaced as a language of written and spoken communication. The decline of Latin language also brought with it a new justification for teaching Latin. Latin was said to develop intellectual abilities, and the study of Latin grammar became an end in itself.

As modern languages began to enter the curriculum of European schools in the 18 century, they were taught using the same basic procedures that were used for teaching Latin. Text books consisted of statements of abstract grammar rules, lists of vocabulary and sentences for translation. Speaking the foreign language was not the goal, and oral practice was limited to students reading aloud the sentences they had translated. These sentences were constructed to illustrate the grammatical system of real Communication. By the 19 century, this approach based on the study of Latin had become the standard way of studying foreign languages in schools. A typical textbook in the mid 19 century thus consisted of chapters of lessons organized around grammar points. Each grammar point was listed. Rules on its use were explained, and it was illustrated by sample sentences. This approach to foreign language teaching became known as The Grammar-Translation Method.

Theoretically speaking, when linguists and language specialists sought to improve the quality of language teaching in the 19th century, they often did so by referring to general principles and theories concerning how languages are learned and how knowledge of language is represented and organized in memory, or how language itself is structured. At least three different theoretical views of language and the nature of language proficiency explicitly or implicitly inform current approaches...
and methods in language teaching. (Jack Richards et al 2001)

The first and the most traditional of the three, is the **structural view**, the view that a language is a system of structurally related elements for coding of meaning. The target of language learning is seen to be the mastery of elements of this system, which are generally defined in terms of phonological units(e.g., phonemes), grammatical units(e.g. clauses, phrases, sentences), grammatical operations(e.g. adding shifting, joining, or transforming elements), and lexical items (e.g. function words and structure words) (Jack Richards et al 2001)

The second view of language is the **functional view**, the view that language is a vehicle for the expression of the meaning. The communicative movement in language teaching subscribes to this view of language. This theory emphasizes the semantic and communicative dimension rather than merely grammatical characteristics of language, and leads to a specification and organization of language teaching content by categories of meaning and function rather than by elements of structure and grammar. (Jack Richards et al 2001)

The third view of language can be called the **interactional view**. It sees language as vehicle for the realization of interpersonal relations and for the performance of social transactions between individuals. Language is seen as a tool for the creation and maintenance of the social relations. Areas of inquiry being drawn on in development of interactional approaches to language teaching includes interaction analysis, conversational analysis, and ethno methodology. Interactional theories focus on the patterns of moves, acts, negotiation, and interaction found in conversational exchanges. Language teaching content, according to this view, may be specified And organized by patterns of exchange and interaction or may be left unspecified, to be shaped by the inclinations of learners as interactors. (Jack Richards et al 2001)

Many linguists in 20th century contributed to the improvement of language skills and language acquisition and proficiency with innovative approaches to teaching languages. Some of the approaches are: Suggestopedia, Multiple intelligences, Neurolinguistic Programming, The Lexical Approach, Competency based Language teaching, Communicative Language Teaching. The natural Approach, Content-Based Instruction, and Task-Based Language Teaching. All these approaches emphasize on the necessity for the improvement of language skills and the advantages one can have with the proficiency in a language.

Late twentieth century made the term “globalization” a household term overnight. Consequently, English has turned the world into a “global village” and we all have become world citizens in the global village. Opening up of economies has resulted in **Multiplicity of the multinational companies and foreign universities** and has made the coming together of people from different countries much easier. It is precisely these reasons that language has become tool for International Exchange and cross border business. So learning foreign languages is not merely an advantage for all those who want to work abroad but also for those who want to grow in life. The great German poet, Johann Wolfgang Goethe said in 1827: “whoever is not acquainted with foreign languages knows nothing of his own.” Seen like that learning a language is almost comparable to a journey of discovery. The paper presents the need to learn a foreign language and its benefits in terms of job opportunities, revenue, market demand and supply, opening of foreign language schools, and also addresses the possible challenges.

It’s not only developing Asian countries but the developed western countries also have felt the need to learn foreign languages. An article “Lack of Language Skills damaging Scotland’s Export Trade” posted by Culture Vulture on 27 November, 2010 declares ‘According to a recent study by the British Council, the Scottish economy is losing out on foreign trade and business. The 'Language Rich Europe’ report examined how different European countries approached the teaching and use of regional, minority and foreign languages. The state of foreign language teaching in Scotland was described as "a matter of concern". In Neville Osborne Lecture at Bristol University on 25 November, 2003, Thomas Matussek, German Ambassador in London in his lecture on “the Importance of Learning Languages in Today’s World” says that young British need to learn foreign language because he says “English is not enough. Young people from the UK are at growing disadvantage in the recruitment market. The UK desperately needs more language teachers.”

With Indian companies emerging as global players and Indian market being eyed by multinational companies, it becomes essential that there is no dearth of professionals who can overcome language barriers and facilitate smooth communication for proper business transactions. Foreign language experts with a good understanding of cultures are in great demand in the corporate world. The scope of foreign languages as career is stupendous and candidates willing to explore it have multitude of job opportunities in various multinational companies and multilateral organizations. Moreover, language skills are essential attribute in most professions and help in the advancement of career.

Market for professional experts in foreign languages, particularly in European languages is expected to widen up in couple of decades. Evaluserve, an international research company claims that there would be a requirement of more
than 1, 60,000 foreign language professionals in various BPO, IT and KPO processes in India. Moreover, there is a strong requirement for skilled foreign language professionals who can effectively work in language-sensitive processes outsourced to India by companies located in the European countries. The research company concludes that the total addressable market for language-sensitive work is worth USD 14.4 billion. The demand is putting aside the English language experts which are in plenty in India.

A major issue with India’s foreign language professionals is that they are not efficient enough to work in language-sensitive processes because of their inefficient training. Numerous companies hire foreign professionals with proficiency in languages for outsourced work despite their heavy fees which, in fact, shows that Indian language professional can cash in, given right training is provided to them.

Whereas Indian MNCs require trained foreign language professionals to open their operations in foreign countries, foreign multinationals require such candidates at cheap salaries from India. The situation is so attractive for Indian foreign language professionals that language experts in Japanese, Chinese and Korean get jobs soon after their five year language course from various institutes. International job opportunities for foreign language experts from India are open in supranational bodies such as United Nations Organization and its other bodies, various projects of India’s Foreign Ministry and of course India’s spy agencies.

Job Prospects/Different Roles

Academic qualification and proficiency in foreign languages opens the gate for career in sectors such as tourism, embassies, diplomatic service, entertainment, public relations and mass communication, international organizations, publishing, interpretation and translation, etc. Additionally, various multinational corporate bodies require candidates possessing excellent language skills in French, German, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, Spanish, Korean, Portuguese, etc. Some new avenues such as online content writers, technical translators or decoders too have come up in a big way.

Foreign language experts don a variety of roles depending upon their skills and experience as well as the job. Here are some of the professions you can look for:

- Diplomatic Service Professional
- Foreign Language Trainer
- Translator for MNCs and Government Organizations
- Research Associate
- Interpreter
- Tourist Guide
- Air Hostess or Flight Steward
- Attendant at hotels
- Freelance Writer, Translator, Interpreter
- Public Relation Officer

Top Companies

Some of the top corporate companies that hire language experts are:

- Accenture (Global Management, Technology Services and Outsourcing Company)
- Evalueserve (Knowledge Process Outsourcing)
- Wipro (BPO)
- Feserv (Global Technology Provider)
- TCS (Tata Consultancy Services)
- TechMahindra (IT Services and Telecom Solutions)
- Infosys (Business Technology Consulting, IT services and Solutions.)
- Kuliza (An Interactive Agency)
- Scabbard (Scabbard Technology)

Pay Packet

Foreign language professionals earn attractive remuneration depending upon the work and the organization. Professionals working for PR or Marketing Department of any MNC can earn Rs 30,000 – 50,000 per month. Teachers can earn any salary in the range of Rs 15,000 to Rs 25,000 a month. Translators on the other hand receive Rs 250 to Rs 500 per page; compensation depends a lot upon the proficiency in the language. Similarly, an interpreter who is paid on an hourly basis can earn Rs 2000 to Rs 4000 per hour, again depending upon his caliber and work experience.

The MNCs in India bring crossover business and earn revenues. As the basic economic data suggests that after the liberalization in 1991, it has brought in hosts of foreign companies in India and the share of U.S. shows the highest. Top MNCs in India are IBM, Microsoft, Nokia Corporation, Pepsico, Ranbaxy Laboratories Limited, Reebok International Limited, Sony, Tata Consultancy Ltd, and Vodafone, Tata Motors Limited. The profit accounts to 37% of turnover from the top 20 countries in India.

The demand for a language depends a lot on the country and its economic prowess; therefore, it is important to take an informed decision while choosing a particular language as a field of study. One fine example is Russian language. When the Soviet Union was at the helm of international business and India’s biggest development partner, Russian experts were in high demand; however, after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, there is not much scope for Russian language professionals. Same is the situation with Persian language. Now it is China and Japan that offer attractive job prospects for Chinese and Japanese language professionals respectively.
Despite the fact that there are certain inherent risks in deciding upon a career in foreign languages, it is an interesting career. Nevertheless, the satisfaction of knowing a foreign language is worth taking the risk. And in any case, a well thought out decision taken after setting the priorities is certain to steer you in the right direction.

There is no shortcut to get a job as what matters is the skills and proficiency; therefore, the person should be genuinely skilled in the language so that his skills can be used by the employing company. However, there are some points which can help a candidate get hired which can be summarized in the following manner: a passion to learn language, desire to learn language from the scratch to construct one’s own sentences, a learning aptitude and zeal to excel, active interaction, and fluency and clarity.

**Market for language schools**

European languages like Spanish, French and German top the list with the Indian crowd. At the same time, East Asian languages like Mandarin-Chinese, Japanese and Korean are also picking up fast. Talking about Middle East and its importance to the business world, Arabic language finds a good number of prospective students and professionals.

Students, professionals, corporate houses, and professional degree-colleges seek services of foreign language schools on a regular and project basis. Knowing a foreign tongue can give you an edge over others while applying for a course overseas.

Indrani Basu in her article “Foreign Language can be your Passport” (TNN, Jan 31, 2012, 01:28 a.m. IST) says “Foreign language training in Delhi is not just about learning the language any more, but also a cultural experience, feel experts. "The world is flat and countries are economically, socially and politically dependent on one another. In this global era, travelling, exposure and socializing are a must so diversity of cultures has to be celebrated. We have exchange programmes with eight schools in France. Students must hear, learn and interact and not be restricted to classrooms. They must have an idea about the social and political life of other nations as well.”

The Need for Foreign Languages

According to Purnima Garg, Director of The Chinese Language Institute, Delhi, the economies of the world are integrating, which has increased leisure and business travel. This increased need demands the learning of foreign languages. Rachna Aggarwal, a Japanese interpreter, says tour operators have a specific demand for professionals who can cater to the needs of visitors coming from non-English countries, especially from Japan, China, and other East Asian countries.

Pushpa Sharma, Director-PR of Instituto Hispania, mentions that learning foreign language increases chances of getting admission to foreign universities, helps in making travel more feasible, in gaining a broad outlook of international culture and music, and sharpens cognitive skills. Translation, interpretation, teaching opportunities, and demand in BPO/KPO and IT industry are some areas where the need of foreign languages is tremendous.

Vaishali Karmarkar, head of marketing, intercultural and corporate courses trainer in Goethe Institute Mumbai, says that companies approach her from Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Liechtenstein to provide them professionals who are apt in German. The academic background is not considered because these companies are open to provide training and fit these professionals in some jobs. Compiling the inputs from these people, it is clear that the demand of foreign languages is growing and setting up a foreign language school could be a good idea.

Following is the list of institutions that offer The Certificate, Intensive Certificate, Advanced Diploma, and the Special Diploma, MA, M.Phil, Ph.D offered in foreign languages.

1) School of languages – Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi
2) Central Institute English and Foreign languages (CIEFL) Hyderabad: [www.ciefl.ac.in](http://www.ciefl.ac.in)
3) Benaras Hindu University – Varanasi
4) University of Delhi – New Delhi
5) Bharatiya Vidyabhaban, Jawaharlal Nehru Academy of Languages – New Delhi
6) Alliance Francaise – 15 branches across the country
7) Max Mueller Bhavan – Major Cities
8) Indo – Italian Chamber of Commerce – Mumbai
9) Japanese Information and culture – New Delhi
10) International Institute of Tamil Sciences – Chennai
11) Eastern Regional Languages Centre – Bhubaneswar
12) Ram Krishna Mission, Kolkata
13) Urdu’ Training and Research Centre, Lucknow
14) Western Regional Languages Centre Pune
15) Indo-Japan Chamber Commerce and Industry, Chennai.

Collaborating with a certified body or foreign institute is believed to be a good option because it increases the credibility of the school and also open more opportunities for the students getting that certificate. These institutions definitely enable people to use as a tool for lucrative job opportunities and enrichment of life as well.
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