The Competitive Advantage of Foreign Languages and Cultural Knowledge

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This study presents the results of an electronic survey of 2,500 randomly selected alumni from the graduating classes of 1970 through 2002 of Thunderbird, The Garvin School of International Management. Of the 2,500 alumni, 581 responded. Thunderbird required a minimum of 4 semesters of foreign language for graduation. The survey concerned whether or not the alumni had received a competitive advantage in their careers from their foreign language skills and cultural knowledge. The vast majority of the respondents acknowledged that both foreign language skills and cultural knowledge had benefited them in their professional lives. Slightly more of them reported receiving an edge from their cultural skills (89%) than from their foreign language abilities (82%). The research results provide empirical data on how members of the U.S. and international business communities perceive the value of foreign language and cultural knowledge to their work.

IS ENGLISH ENOUGH FOR DOING INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS TODAY? Do proficiency in foreign languages and understanding of different cultures give business people an edge in the global economy? The term global economy implies a business environment where competition among companies regularly crosses national borders. In a world where many believe that English is the language of international business, what advantages have executives gained by knowing foreign languages? This research reports the results of an Internet-based survey on the competitive advantage of foreign language and cultural competence for graduates of Thunderbird, The Garvin School of International Management, a business school.

The survey asked 2,500 alumni whether their foreign language skills and cultural knowledge had given them a competitive advantage at work. Of the 581 respondents, 82% gained a competitive advantage in business from their foreign language skills. Even more, 89%, received an edge from their knowledge of other cultures. Although competitive advantage is difficult to quantify, many Thunderbird alumni defined in specific terms the edge that foreign languages and cultures have given them in their careers.

The alumni who participated in the study all graduated from Thunderbird between 1970 and 2002 with a master’s degree in business administration (MBA)/international management. In 2002, Thunderbird was ranked first among graduate schools in international business in the United States by U.S. News and World Report (April 15, 2002) and first worldwide by the Wall Street Journal (September 9, 2002). For over 50 years, all graduates have been required to take a minimum of 4 semesters of foreign language or demonstrate equivalent proficiency. Recently, in 2002, Thunderbird instituted a controversial nonlanguage track to accommodate students who choose not to study a second language. However, most of the 1,100 graduate students currently attending Thunderbird are enrolled in the language track.

Thunderbird’s foreign language requirement is rare among graduate business schools, whose administrators generally are reluctant to require subjects that are not directly related to business. Thunderbird has also earned recognition for its
unusual tripartite curriculum, which requires coursework in international business, foreign languages, and international studies.

BACKGROUND FOR THE STUDY

The impetus for this research came in response to a comment overheard at Thunderbird that, “English is the language of international business today. Foreign languages aren’t necessary anymore.” How true is this statement? Would monolingual or marginally bilingual people know what they were missing by not knowing a foreign language or culture? Clearly, the question needed to be addressed by people who had second language and cultural skills as well as business experience.

An opportunity to pursue the research came in February, 2002, when a small seminar on research priorities in business language education was held at The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Russ Campbell, then Professor Emeritus of Applied Linguistics and Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) at UCLA, organized the conference with the sponsorship of the Center for International Business Education Research (CIBER), which is funded by Title VI of the U.S. Department of Education. He invited 10 business language faculty, primarily from universities with CIBERs, to identify and discuss the most pressing research issues in business languages (Campbell, 2002; Grosse, 2002).

The author offered the following research question to the group: Do foreign language skills and cultural knowledge give business executives a competitive advantage in their careers? The participants expressed interest in the project, made suggestions, and gave encouragement. A month later, the author received a research grant from the Thunderbird Research Center to study the issue.

Other studies have shown the positive attitudes of students toward foreign language study (Roberts, 1992) and the relationship between foreign language study and interest in international business careers (Robbins, Abramson, & Hollingshead, 1998). Prior research has also shown that companies have a demand for employees with foreign language and cultural skills (Grosse, 1998; Hedderich, 1997; Kenny & Sheikh, 2000; Schorr, 2000; Vande Berg, 1997). In the American business press, a number of articles have focused on the need for U.S. business people to learn other languages (Frook, 2000; Griffith & Ferguson, 2000; Josefak, 2000; Peterson, 2002; Stokely, 2000). The same theme has appeared in the British press concerning the dearth of language skills among U.K. business people (Coleman, 2000, 2002; “Foreign Language Skills,” 2002; Hancock, 1999; “Parlez-vous anglais?” 2000; Pickard, 1999; Whettingsteel, 1999).

Rationale for the Study

To date, no empirical study has investigated whether foreign language and cultural knowledge give business executives an advantage in the workplace. The related benefits could be somewhat intangible and difficult to quantify. Previous studies have looked into recruiter demand for foreign language skills (Grosse, 1998; Kumayama & Makita-Discekici, 1999), the economic utility of foreign languages (Grosse, Critz, & Tuman, 1998), American and European perspectives on Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP; Grosse & Kingscott, 1991), and the evolution of LSP (Grosse & Voght, 1991). Several books have focused on issues in business languages, particularly those edited by Fryer and Guntermann (1997), Loughrin-Sacco and Abrate (1998), and Schorr (2002).

Most MBA programs do not require foreign language study for entry or exit. Of the 109 MBA programs that Koch (1997) surveyed, only 29% had foreign languages available to their students. None of the programs required foreign language proficiency for entry or exit. Out of the 20 MBA programs that offered foreign languages, 19 had a master’s degree in international business or an international business concentration.

Robert Grosse, Thunderbird CIBER director, conducted an email survey of the directors of the 29 CIBER institutions in July, 2003. He asked, “Does your MBA program, or any sub-component of it, have a foreign language requirement for program entry or exit? If yes, would you please describe the requirement?” Of the 29 business schools, 17 responded to the survey. Only 4 had a foreign language exit requirement for subcomponents of the MBA that are related to international business: the University of Memphis, the University of Hawai‘i (whose Japan- and China-focused MBA programs include language training but do not have a specific competency requirement), the University of Colorado at Denver (the Master of Science in International Business [MSIB] and joint MBA/MSIB programs require intermediate level proficiency), and Thunderbird (Track 1 program). Florida International University was planning an exit foreign language requirement. In general, CIBER insti-
tutions provide instruction in critical foreign languages needed to promote understanding of the cultures and customs of U.S. trading partners. CIBER programs include interdisciplinary programs that incorporate foreign language training into the business curriculum and intensive language programs designed to enhance the international skills of the business community.

Thunderbird has had a foreign language requirement for many years. Since it opened in 1946, its graduates have left the school with the requisite 4-semester minimum of foreign language courses or their equivalents. As a result, the alumni in the sample possess a certain level of foreign language proficiency and cultural knowledge. In addition, most of the respondents work in business-related areas. A few of them are employed in the public sector, as well as in education. Thunderbird alumni make good subjects for the research, given their foreign language and cultural competence, master’s degrees in international business, and typical employment in business-related fields. Presumably, many of these alumni have direct personal knowledge of whether foreign language and cultural knowledge have added value to their careers.

Research Questions

In the business world, competitive advantage refers to the edge that a company or individual has over competitors. It can mean lower costs of goods and services, higher quality, better service, improved production methods, faster distribution systems, more efficient information exchange, and so forth. In terms of language and cultural knowledge, competitive advantage refers to the perceived and real benefits that set apart people who possess them. What experiences, opportunities, rewards, recognition, and personal satisfaction come to people as a result of their foreign language proficiency and cultural understanding? To find out, the research addressed the following questions.

1. What languages do Thunderbird graduates speak, and how did the alumni acquire their foreign language skills and cultural competence?
2. What competitive advantage do foreign language skills and cultural competence give executives at work?
3. How have companies recognized and rewarded foreign language and cultural competence of alumni?
4. How do alumni use their foreign language skills and knowledge of other cultures at work?
5. What are the future plans of alumni for foreign language and cultural study?

METHODOLOGY

The Survey

The survey instrument was developed in the winter of 2002 and piloted in January, 2003, by the school’s North American and European Alumni Councils. From the two councils, 15 members offered comments and suggestions, many of which the author incorporated into the final version of the survey. Dr. Anne Stringfellow, assistant professor of global business, recommended Surveypro.com as the Internet-based software program to handle survey development, delivery, and data reports.

The total alumni population from the first graduating class of 1947 through the class of 2002 was 33,053. The 2,500 member target group was randomly selected from Thunderbird graduates of the classes of 1970 through 2002, with an even percentage taken from each class. With the support of Anne-Marie Nelson, Vice President of Alumni Relations, the Office of Alumni Relations provided the email addresses of these 2,500 alumni. On February 7, 2003, the author sent an email message to the alumni inviting them to participate in the survey. To take the survey, the respondent clicked on a link within the email that led to a Web site on the Internet. The responses were anonymous and could not be traced back to an email address. (For survey and responses, see the Appendix.)

Within 5 days of sending out the email link to the survey, almost 500 alumni had completed it. Surveypro.com automatically tabulated the results and produced detailed reports and charts as the responses came in. By the end of the 10-day response period, 581 alumni had completed the survey. Of those respondents, 246 wrote additional comments. After subtracting the 157 incorrect email addresses from the 2,500 sent, the 581 completed surveys represented a response rate of 24.8%.

Demographics of the Sample

The demographics of the 2,500 person sample matched those of the general alumni population well. The gender distribution of the 581 respondents mirrored that of the entire sample, with 71% male and 29% female. The distribution of the respondents’ ages fell into a bell curve, with about half (47%) in the 35 to 44 age group, and
about one fourth each (23% to 24%) in the 25 to 34 and 45 to 64 age ranges. Fewer than one tenth (6%) of the respondents were 55 to 64 years old. None was under 25 or over 65 (see Appendix).

Every class from 1970 through 2002 was represented in the survey, with participation ranging from a low of 0.7% of total participants from the classes of 1971, 1978, and 1989, to a high of 7% from the 1991 and 1993 classes.

Most respondents (70%) were natives of the United States, with others coming from Europe (11%), Latin America (9%), and Asia (7%). Correspondingly, 70% of the respondents counted English as their native language, whereas 9% claimed Spanish as their mother tongue.

Where are the alumni based? About 66% of them work in the United States, whereas 17% are based in Europe. Fewer than one tenth each work in Asia (8%) and Latin America (7%). The Thunderbird alumni office did not have addresses for 18% of the alumni. (See Figure 1.)

This job distribution of the respondents parallels that of the total alumni group: North America (62%); Europe, Middle East, Africa (7%); Asia/Pacific (6%); and Latin America (4%).

With respect to income, slightly over one fifth of the respondents had annual incomes in both the $75,000 to $99,999 ($n = 125) and $100,000 to $149,999 ($n = 135) ranges. About 15% of the respondents ($n = 84) earned $50,000 to $74,999 per year. Just over 10% of them ($n = 60) had annual earnings of $200,000 and over. Slightly fewer than 10% of the respondents ($n = 54) reported income in the under $50,000 range or the $150,000 to $199,999 range ($n = 53).

The respondents worked in firms of all sizes. About one third worked in large companies with over $1 billion in annual sales, whereas another third was engaged in small businesses with annual sales of under $10 million. One fifth of the respondents were employed in businesses with $10 to $100 million in sales. Slightly under one fifth of the respondents worked for medium-sized companies with sales between $100 million and $1 billion. A few worked in education and the government/nonprofit sector.

In terms of job title, the alumni held positions as manager (23%), director (15%), entrepreneur/business owner (12%), vice president (11%), president/CEO (7%), supervisor (3%),
and assistant manager (3%). About one fourth had other positions that were not listed in the survey.

The respondents worked in many different industries, with the largest representation in banking/financial services (19%), technology (11%), consulting (11%), industrial products/manufacturing (8%), consumer products (7%), health care/pharmaceutical industry (7%), government/nonprofit (6%), and telecommunications (4%).

With respect to job function, the distribution of respondents was spread out among 20 functional areas. The largest groups of alumni worked in general management (13%), marketing/brand management (12%), sales/sales management (11%), business development (8%), financial/investment management (7%), corporate finance (6%), consulting (6%), project management (6%), and account/relationship management (4%). The lists of industries and job functions used in the survey were obtained from Thunderbird’s Career Management Center.

The majority (89%) of the respondents studied a language while they earned their master’s degrees at Thunderbird. The rest were able to waive the language requirement due to prior knowledge or study. Four semesters or the equivalent in foreign language were required at Thunderbird from 1948 through 2002. The curriculum at Thunderbird focused on teaching business language from beginning to advanced levels. The courses were designed to help students develop oral and written communication skills, business vocabulary, and cultural knowledge. For teaching materials, the faculty used business language texts, case studies, videos, business news articles, the Internet, and corporate Web sites.

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

Research Question 1

What languages do Thunderbird graduates speak, and how did the alumni acquire their foreign language skills and cultural competence?

Many graduates of Thunderbird are multilingual. On the survey, they were asked to indicate all foreign languages that they spoke. Survey choices were limited to the languages that were taught for years at Thunderbird: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. An “Other” category allowed respondents to write in languages that were not on the list. Results show that the greatest percentage of the respondents speak Spanish (50%), followed by French (37%), German (25%), Portuguese (14%), Japanese (11%), Chinese (9%), Russian (2%), and Arabic (1%). Most respondents speak several languages: one foreign language (38%), two (31%), three (18%), four (9%), or five or more (3%). A higher percentage, 54%, of nonnative speakers of English (NNSE) speak three or more foreign languages compared with 21.3% of native speakers of English (NSE; see Appendix).

The respondents identified the three most important sources for acquiring the one foreign language that was most helpful to them at work. Most alumni, over 70%, identified living abroad as the most valuable source for learning a foreign language. Next in importance were other school or classroom setting, Thunderbird, travel, and family or friends. A comparison the responses of NSEs and NNSEs reveals that about the same percentage (over 70%) indicated that living abroad helped them learn their foreign languages. A higher percentage of NSEs than NNSEs named Thunderbird as a place where they learned foreign languages (see Figure 2).

In their comments, several respondents emphasized the importance of study abroad components in a university’s language program.

I believe that any Japanese language program must include a 1- or 2-month stay in the country after the first 3 months of training.

I think you have to live in the country to really learn the language.

Languages are learned in the country, in the culture... if this type of environment can be created in the educational system then learning of the language is strengthened.

Research Question 2

What competitive advantage do foreign language skills and cultural competence give executives at work?

The majority of those surveyed responded that foreign language skills (82%) and cultural knowledge (89%) gave them a competitive advantage in the workplace. Over half of them (53%) claimed a significant advantage from their language skills. Another 28% believed they gained some competitive edge, whereas 18% said they received none. These figures give strong evidence of the value of foreign languages and cultural competence in the workplace. In their comments, the alumni gave examples of how foreign languages and cultural knowledge had benefited them and their careers. Two respondents said:
Language skills and the ability to adjust to multiple cultures raise the level of effectiveness significantly. It becomes much easier to "get things done," and lowers the stress level associated with being an expat to manageable proportions.

Language and cultural skills are mandatory for local acceptance and setting one apart in a foreign setting. Those that do not make an attempt to learn the language are looked down upon not only by the locals, but also by the expatriate community that has taken the time to learn the language and with it, the culture.

Data analysis suggested that the better an alumnus knew a foreign language, the more likely it was to be helpful at work. A large percentage (64%) of the respondents self-reported a high level of proficiency in these languages. One fourth of them self-described their language competence as *like a native*, while 40% rated themselves as *fluent in most business and social situations*. Over one fourth *communicate fairly well* in the second language. Only 8% reported a *basic survival level*, and 2% could say only a few words or phrases.

A comparison of the the foreign language proficiency of NSEs and NNSEs reveals that both groups have about the same percentage of people who reported being *fluent in most business and social situations*. However, 48% of the NNSEs reported *like a native* in proficiency compared to just 14% of the NSEs. In addition, higher percentages of NSEs than NNSEs had self-reported proficiency at the lower three levels (see Table 1).

An analysis of the survey results finds a strong relationship between reported language proficiency and competitive advantage ($\chi^2 = 158.587$, $df = 8$, $p < .01$). Many people who reported proficiency at the two higher levels, *like a native* and *fluent in most business and social situations*, reported that their foreign language skills have given them a significant competitive advantage at work. A number of people with language skills at the lower three levels, *can communicate fairly well* in the second language.
well, basic survival level, and a few words or phrases, reported no competitive advantage from foreign languages. The data suggest that the better one believes he or she knows a foreign language, the more likely the language is to be helpful on the job. In addition, they suggest that the lower the reported proficiency level, the less likely a person is to derive a competitive advantage from the foreign language skills. See Table 2 for a comparison of foreign language proficiency and competitive advantage.

Several executives mentioned this relationship in their comments:

I have found that language skills are not as important in business unless one is truly fluent in the language. My language skills have never been good enough to negotiate in, but they gave me an understanding of the people I was negotiating with, and even a few words of the language gave the people I was doing business with some comfort that I was interested in them and their way of business.

I don’t speak Spanish well enough for there to have been any value or different opportunities for me.

According to other comments received, the languages studied at Thunderbird did not always prove relevant to the business career. Realizing that it was impossible to predict where their careers would take them, some alumni wrote about the disconnect between the language they studied at Thunderbird and the language they needed in the workplace. For example, one respondent stated: “The reason my Thunderbird language skills were not of use during my career is because the language studied, Spanish, had no relevance to my assignments in the Middle East, Asia, and the UK.”

TABLE 1
Foreign Language Proficiency of Native and Nonnative Speakers of English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Native Speaker of English</th>
<th>Nonnative Speaker of English</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Like a Native</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>135</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(13.7%)</td>
<td>(47.9%)</td>
<td>(23.7%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluent in Most Business and Social Situations</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>227</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(39.6%)</td>
<td>(40.7%)</td>
<td>(39.9%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can Communicate Fairly Well</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>149</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(33.6%)</td>
<td>(8.4%)</td>
<td>(26.2%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Survival</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10.9%)</td>
<td>(2.4%)</td>
<td>(8.4%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Few Words/Phrases</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2.2%)</td>
<td>(0.6%)</td>
<td>(1.8%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>569</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(100.0%)</td>
<td>(100.0%)</td>
<td>(100.0%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 2
Comparison of Foreign Language Proficiency and Competitive Advantage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Competitive Advantage of Foreign Languages</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like a Native</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(34.0%)</td>
<td>(11.0%)</td>
<td>(13.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluent in Most Business and Social Situations</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(49.0%)</td>
<td>(35.0%)</td>
<td>(18.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can Communicate Fairly Well</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(15.0%)</td>
<td>(41.0%)</td>
<td>(38.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Survival</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(.01%)</td>
<td>(13.0%)</td>
<td>(24.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Few Words/Phrases</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(.01%)</td>
<td>(.07%)</td>
<td>(.07%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Respondents</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(100.0%)</td>
<td>(100.0%)</td>
<td>(100.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Concerning which foreign language was most helpful to alumni at work, Spanish (31%) and English (30%) got the most votes, followed by Other (10%), German (9%), French (8%), Japanese (5%), Chinese (3%), Portuguese (3%), Russian (1%), and Arabic (<1%). For 80% of the NNSEs, English was the most helpful foreign language at work, followed by Spanish (10%), French (2%), and German (2%; see Figure 3).

Although the language they studied at Thunderbird was not always the most useful one later on in their careers, most respondents reported that their Thunderbird language studies had been of great (17%), significant (22%), or some (29%) value. Other respondents found their studies of little value (13%), no value (9%) or they did not study a foreign language at Thunderbird (11%). The comments included criticism of and praise for their graduate school language experience. Criticism generally related to a specific professor or language class taken at Thunderbird. One typical comment reflecting praise of the program was “The language classes were probably the most beneficial out of all the courses I took at Thunderbird.”

It is generally believed that language study provides culture knowledge as well as language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Native Speakers of English</th>
<th>Nonnative Speakers of English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spanish/Latin American</td>
<td>237 (57.4%)</td>
<td>62 (36.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American/English</td>
<td>57 (13.8%)</td>
<td>155 (92.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>118 (28.6%)</td>
<td>34 (20.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>139 (33.7%)</td>
<td>38 (22.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>132 (32.0%)</td>
<td>54 (32.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>97 (23.5%)</td>
<td>29 (17.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>81 (19.6%)</td>
<td>29 (17.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese/Brazilian</td>
<td>67 (16.2%)</td>
<td>25 (14.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>21 (5.1%)</td>
<td>10 (6.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>27 (6.5%)</td>
<td>12 (7.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Respondents</td>
<td>413 (100.0%)</td>
<td>168 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
proficiency. In the survey, the alumni respondents indicated cultures other than their own with which they were familiar (see Table 3). The largest percentage of them (52%) reported having an understanding of Spanish or Latin American cultures. Other respondents were familiar with the following cultures: American or English (37%), French (32%), German (31%), Japanese (22%), Chinese (19%), Portuguese (16%), Arabic (7%), and Russian (5%). See Figure 4 for a comparison of languages and cultures that are familiar to the respondents. Approximately equal percentages of NSEs and NNSEs (about 32%) are familiar with two cultures other than their own.

The respondents identified which cultural knowledge helped them the most at work. About a third of the NNSEs cited American or English culture, whereas over one fourth considered a knowledge of Spanish or Latin American culture to be the most valuable. The rest benefited most from their understanding of cultures related to German (9%), Japanese (8%), Chinese (8%), other cultures (8%), French (6%), Japanese (5%), Chinese (3%), Portuguese/Brazilian (1%), Arabic (1%), and Russian (1%). The majority of the respondents checked more than one culture.

Most of the alumni (84%) reported a high degree of familiarity with the one culture that helped them the most at work. They considered their level of familiarity with these cultures to be: like a native (28%), very familiar (56%), and somewhat familiar (14%). Only 1% responded a little familiar and 0.18% were barely familiar with the culture.

The majority of the respondents (89%) received a significant or some competitive advantage at work from their cultural competence. Almost half (48%) of them gained a significant competitive edge, whereas 41% of them acknowledged receiving some competitive advantage. Only 11% of the participants derived no competitive advantage from cultural understanding. (See Figure 5.) One respondent made the following comment on the importance of cultural understanding to business: “Cultural understanding, and the enhanced cultural understanding that language studies provide, is vital to success in the international business community.”

An interesting relationship exists between income and competitive advantage realized from cultural knowledge ($\chi^2 = 32.107, df = 12, p < .01$). Many of the respondents whose annual income places them in the highest categories of income are those who reported a high degree of familiarity with the one culture that helped them the most at work.
over $200,000 (10%) and $150,000 to $200,000 (9%) reported a significant competitive advantage from their cultural knowledge. In contrast, many of those who earn $50,000 to $75,000 per year (15%) reported no competitive advantage from their cultural knowledge.

Another relationship worthy of note occurs between job title and competitive advantage from cultural knowledge ($\chi^2 = 51.880, df = 14, p < .01$). Many respondents who hold positions as president/CEO (7%), vice president (11%), and business owner/entrepreneur (12%) report a significant competitive advantage rather than some or none, due to their cultural knowledge.

**When in a Career Is Language Most Helpful?** The alumni indicated when in their professional lives foreign languages have been most important, checking all responses that applied. The results show little difference in the time period when languages are most helpful. The responses were as follows: when I was hired (40%), early years (44%), mid career (33%), and currently in my career (46%). Several people commented on how their language skills helped them to get their first job:

*Without my language and cultural skills, I would not have been hired for the job I have now!*  
*Without a foreign language it would have been almost impossible for me to start a career on continental Europe. My first job was with PriceWaterhouseCoopers in Prague, which hired me primarily because of my language skills. The ability to speak three languages is very uncommon for an American, but not so in other countries.*

In their comments, several alumni reported receiving value from languages early in their careers, even though they no longer use them:

*My language skills truly helped me early in my career when I was working in International Banking. I have been out of the international workplace for the past 5 years and have been involved exclusively in a domestic real estate development business. Language skills were of great value in the early part of my career. For the past 12 years, I have not used foreign languages in my career.*

**Time Spent in International Business.** Given the high percentage of alumni who acknowledged that language and cultural skills have given them a competitive advantage at work, one would expect most alumni to spend a majority of their time on international business (IB). The respondents did not indicate this distribution of their time: About half of them spend 50% or more of their time on IB, and half spend less than 50%. Specifically, one third of them devote most their time (75% to 100%) on IB, while another third spend little time (0% to 25%) on it.

A significant relationship exists between the time spent in IB and competitive advantage from language skills ($\chi^2 = 119.022, df = 6, p < .01$) and time spent in IB and competitive advantage from cultural knowledge ($\chi^2 = 100.673, df = 6, p < .01$). Many of those respondents who dedi-
cate most of their time (75% to 100%) to IB reported a significant competitive advantage from their language and cultural skills. Conversely, many who spend only 0% to 25% of their time working in IB reported that they receive no competitive advantage from language and cultural skills (see Table 4).

Another relationship exists between job location and time spent in IB ($\chi^2 = 46.010, df = 3, p < .01$). A number of respondents whose jobs are based in the United States spend 0% to 25% of their time on IB. Quite a few people whose jobs are located outside the United States dedicate 75% to 100%, or 50% to 74% of their time on IB. Higher percentages of alumni with non-U.S.-based jobs spend 50% to 100% of their time in IB than alumni whose jobs are based in the United States (see Table 5).

One respondent commented: "Speaking Spanish and studying and living in Latin America have made my chances of business success increase by 50%. In Latin America, it is a relationship-based business environment." Another wrote, "Speaking Spanish is a MUST while living in Miami. I use it at work to speak with my co-workers in the office and with co-workers and customers internationally."

### Research Question 3

**How have companies recognized and rewarded foreign language and cultural competence of alumni?**

How do companies value and reward employees’ foreign language skills and cultural knowledge? Thunderbird alumni reported that companies reward their foreign language skills in a variety of ways. Over half of the respondents (302) checked more than one way that their companies valued their skills, 108 checked two ways, and 70 respondents marked three ways. Fewer than one third (31%) of the respondents reported that their companies make no acknowledgment of value of their foreign language expertise.

The alumni indicated that they received the following corporate rewards and recognition for their foreign language skills: travel opportunities (41%), overseas assignments (33%), written or oral recognition (30%), promotion (18%), and raise (14%).

The following comment shows how one individual’s company took advantage of his language skills.

I studied Arabic at Thunderbird. I waived the language requirement because of fluency in French and already spoke Italian. I know my language skills helped me in job interviews with banks and getting me a higher salary. I went to work for Chase Manhattan Bank in New York and was quickly assigned to French West Africa and the Italian correspondent banking area because of my language skills in addition to my credit skills.

Another respondent took a dim view of how U.S. companies ignore the value of languages and cultures: "I believe American firms continue to

### TABLE 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Spent in International Business</th>
<th>Competitive Advantage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75%–100%</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50%–74%</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%–49%</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0%–25%</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Respondents</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Location</th>
<th>Time Spent in International Business</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75%–100%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(26.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50%–74%</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(12.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%–49%</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(12.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0%–25%</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(48.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Respondents</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(100.0%) (100.0%) (100.0%)
disregard the value of foreign language study and cultural studies, and I believe American firms will continue to do so at their peril and loss.”

According to the alumni responses, corporate rewards for cultural competence followed patterns similar to those for foreign language skills. The most common form of corporate reward for an executive’s cultural knowledge was travel opportunities (39%). Other corporate forms of recognition included: overseas assignments (32%), written or oral recognition (32%), promotion (18%), and raise (12%). Similar to the responses obtained in the foreign language question, over half of the respondents (314) checked just one way in which the company rewarded cultural skills, and 109 checked two. About 32% of the alumni’s companies give no acknowledgment of value for cultural competence, a percentage that is close to the percentage of companies that place no value on foreign language competence (see Figure 6). One individual had this comment concerning how companies value cultural knowledge:

Generally find that cultural awareness is critical—but is not valued by most organizations directly. It impacts by enabling one to be more effective, but this is more of an intangible benefit that is hard to quantify and directly associate with promotions/progression.

Many alumni described the benefits that they have derived from their knowledge of foreign language and cultures. Their additional comments expressed how they feel about the importance of language and culture.

The benefits, though primarily intangible, of speaking a foreign language and understanding other cultures are not rated highly enough. I once gained the trust of a Swedish executive by speaking Spanish with him. He had spent his youth in Argentina and was more comfortable speaking Spanish than English. I had a similar experience with a Japanese exec. The decision to study Japanese at Thunderbird profoundly changed my life, creating invaluable opportunities both commercially and socially.

Many alumni reiterated the importance of knowing another language in their comments. Some examples appear below.

Speaking more than one language is a must in today’s world, regardless of country of origin or field of endeavor.

FIGURE 6
Comparison of How Company Rewards Foreign Language Proficiency versus Cultural Knowledge
Learning a foreign language is extremely helpful to learning further languages as it changes or trains one’s mind set to be more open and flexible.

Foreign language skills are more than understanding another language—they train the mind to deal with imprecise and often vague communication and information.

A strong correlation existed between an individual’s self-reported degree of proficiency in the foreign language or knowledge of a culture and a company’s recognition value of these skills ($\chi^2 = 70.639, df = 4, p < .01$). For example, many employers reward and recognize the skill of respondents who reported that they speak a foreign language like a native or are fluent in most business and social situations. A number of employers of people who rated themselves at the three lower levels of proficiency (can communicate fairly well, basic survival level, a few words or phrases) did not acknowledge the value of these skills.

A very strong relationship existed between companies that reward their employees’ foreign language skills and employees who reported a competitive advantage from these skills ($\chi^2 = 249.253, df = 2, p < .01$). Statistical results showed a similar relationship between the respondents whose companies value cultural knowledge and the respondents who realize a competitive advantage from their cultural knowledge ($\chi^2 = 155.381, df = 2, p < .01$).

Although the study focused on professional competitive advantage, for many alumni, the personal advantages mattered as much, if not more. In their comments on the survey, several individuals expressed the personal enrichment that they have derived from foreign languages and cultural understanding. This satisfaction is reflected in the following comments.

Foreign languages are a labor of love and what they can return to someone is truly priceless.

While I value this knowledge in my business life, I feel that the study of language has added an incredible richness to all facets of my life. There is so much of the world’s beauty that I would miss without even knowing, had I not studied language from an early age. It literally opened up entire new worlds for me.

Language and cultural studies have significantly enriched my career as well as personally and spiritually.

Knowing another language is equal to gaining another soul in the richness and depth it adds to my life.

Their language learning and cultural understanding made an important difference in their lives, not just in their professional careers. Although this study focused on the competitive advantage of foreign language and cultural knowledge in business, many alumni perceived benefits in other aspects of their lives as well.

**Research Question 4**

*How do alumni use their foreign language skills and knowledge of other cultures at work?*

The survey respondents use their language at work for different purposes including: *conversation* (81%), *meetings* (62%), *email* (59%), *presentations* (52%), *negotiations* (47%) and *reports* (37%). Many respondents (171) checked all six items, whereas 137 of them checked only one item. Only 14% of the respondents *don’t use foreign language at work*.

Most alumni also indicated ways in which their cultural knowledge has helped them at work, checking the multiple ways that applied: (a) feel comfortable with people and culture (86%), (b) understand the business environment (77%), (c) gain respect and credibility (65%), (d) function better in country (66%), (e) reduce chance for misunderstanding (68%), (f) work on multinational teams (56%), and (g) enhance negotiation success (53%). About 30% of the respondents (177) checked all seven ways. Only 5.5% responded that their cultural knowledge has not helped them at work.

There is considerable variation in how often the respondents use their foreign language skills at work. Slightly over half use their skills *daily* (38%) or *frequently* (13%), whereas slightly fewer than half work with foreign language *occasionally* (15%), *seldom* (21%), or *never* (13%). In their comments, several alumni explained that their responses to the survey did not reflect accurately how much they valued their languages. For example, although they replied to survey questions that they did not use a foreign language or cultural knowledge often at work, if at all, they stated that they still valued these skills, as seen in the following comments.

Though I don’t often use my language skills currently, at work they know I can, and that sets me apart. Actually, it makes me part of the club, because many of us here have knowledge of other languages and cultures.

Although I have not directly used my Chinese in my career, it does not diminish the value I place on it or the value of understanding culture and language along with business.

I believe that language skills are very valuable and will become only more so. It has not affected my ca-
My language skills are extremely valuable to me personally. Unfortunately, I have not had an opportunity to utilize them in my career. That does not mean, however, that I don’t believe language skills are important. I would study more if I could.

Although I don’t frequently use my Spanish language skills, the knowledge of another language greatly enhances my credibility with all foreign counterparts and clients.

Foreign language skills do not play a large role in my CURRENT daily job responsibilities. However, language and cultural skills have and will increase my chances for rapid advancement as my company looks for senior management candidates.

In contrast to the application of language skills, how often do the Thunderbird alumni use their cultural knowledge? Most alumni reported regular use: either daily (44%) or frequently (26%). Another 17% said they apply it only occasionally. The minority apply their cultural knowledge seldom (8%) or never (4%) on the job. According to these results, the respondents tend to use cultural knowledge more often than foreign language skills at work.

Unless you work abroad, U.S. companies do not value foreign language skills. Even then they expect everyone else to speak English. Having said that, I still value that I speak and understand other cultures.

I would say that language skills are most useful in a career overseas. Language skills are not appreciated as much in the U.S. In my career, when I was working in the U.S., my ability to speak Japanese was treated as an interesting skill, but it was a very rare situation where it actually made a difference in my job. Within U.S. companies, I have never seen ability to speak a foreign language result in better pay.

See Figure 7 for a comparison of frequency of use of foreign languages and cultural knowledge at work.

Research Question 5

What are the future plans of alumni for foreign language and cultural study?

Almost half the respondents (47%) had no

![Figure 7: Frequency of Use of Foreign Languages and Cultural Knowledge](image-url)
plans to study another foreign language or to improve their existing skills over the next 12 months. In contrast, 29% of them planned on studying another language, while 24% were considering doing so. Job location had no significant relationship to their plans to study another foreign language ($\chi^2 = 4.056, df = 2, p > .01$). Some alumni commented on the reasons behind their plans.

It will be next to impossible in the next decade to use the opportunities arising in markets such as China, without thorough preparation and immersion in the language and culture.

I personally feel language is the most important of the skill set enhanced at Thunderbird. I am currently studying Italian intensely for my current job.

Which language would these alumni study next for business purposes if they had time? Chinese received the most votes (25%), followed by Spanish (20%). Other participants would prefer to study French (9%), German (8%), Portuguese (8%), Japanese (8%), Russian (4.5%), and Arabic (4.5%). Only 9% of the respondents selected none. The responses of the NSE and NNSE groups followed much the same patterns. Similar percentages of NSEs and NNSEs preferred to study Chinese, Spanish, French, Japanese, Russian, and Arabic (see Table 6).

When asked which culture they would study for business if they had the time, the alumni made similar choices. Again, the most popular selections were Chinese (30%), and Spanish/Latin American (17%). Others preferred to study Japanese (10%), Portuguese/Brazilian (7%), Arabic (6%), French (6%), Russian (5%), and German (3%). About 12% of the alumni responded none, indicating that they would not study another culture. Similar percentages of NSEs and NNSEs indicated that they would study Chinese, French, Portuguese/Brazilian, and Russian if they had time (see Table 7).

FUTURE RESEARCH

The present survey could be replicated with the alumni of other institutions to compare results. Additional questions for future research might include: What types of preparation did alumni find most useful in their lives after gradu-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 6</th>
<th>Foreign Languages that Respondents Would Like to Learn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native Region of Respondent</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>98 (24.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>80 (20.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>36 (9.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>25 (6.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>31 (7.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>35 (8.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>19 (4.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>17 (4.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>37 (9.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>23 (5.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Respondents</td>
<td>401 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 7</th>
<th>Cultures that Respondents Would Like to Learn About</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native Region of Respondent</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish/Latin American</td>
<td>62 (15.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>32 (8.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese/Brazilian</td>
<td>29 (7.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>23 (5.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>28 (7.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>20 (5.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>8 (2.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>55 (13.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>20 (5.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Respondents</td>
<td>395 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One could also conduct a survey among managers working in different cultures in a variety of areas such as sales, finance, marketing, logistics, and brand management in order to gain specific examples of language use at different levels. How do people in business use their foreign languages? What tasks do they perform with native speakers or others who speak the language? How does speaking a foreign language in a business culture affect one’s ability to network socially in the target language?

WAKE–UP CALL FOR U.S. BUSINESS

A number of alumni comments pointed out the blind spots of U.S. companies toward the competitive advantages of foreign language and cultural knowledge. Their remarks issue a wake-up call for business.

Despite U.S. companies saying they are global or indicating they want to move to be global, most management does not fully appreciate and/or value the importance of “understanding other cultures to be truly successful.” Many managers give lip service to wanting to understand other cultures, because that is the thing to say, but that is not a true interest. Companies thus sub-optimize without really knowing it.

The greater part of my professional career was in Europe, where language skills are not an advantage, but a requirement for anyone attempting to pursue a business career. My experience in the U.S. Corporate world is that language skills are a benefit at the time of hire, but play very little part in decisions regarding promotions and surprisingly little in obtaining foreign assignments. Of the 50 or so U.S. expats working in a European headquarters where I was employed, NONE spoke any European language (except English) at a functional level.

I have found that, unfortunately, U.S. companies would prefer to send a non foreign language-speaking, non cross-culturally trained employee who was perceived as either knowing the business or who was politically connected WITHIN the company, than send someone trained for an international position. I watched this take place again and again with my clients. Then they would wonder why they did not get the results they expected. In my opinion, this lack of regard for cultural and linguistic understanding really underscores the arrogance of most U.S. businesses that “hey, they want to do business with us, then . . . they better learn to speak English!”

Given the tightness of the job market and the state of the global economy, the competitive advantage of foreign languages and cultural knowledge could help MBA students and others in their careers. More graduate and undergraduate business programs should consider adding foreign language and cultural studies to the curriculum, in addition to sending students abroad for study or internships.

And contrary to the belief that “all you need is English to do international business,” the findings here indicate that business people derive professional benefits from knowing another language and culture. The majority of the 581 Thunderbird alumni attested to the competitive advantage that they received from their language and cross-cultural skills. Many of them also mentioned personal advantages that they gained from their knowledge. The results applied to men and women working in the United States and overseas, at all stages of their careers.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the Thunderbird alumni spoke out on the value of language and cultural knowledge in business.

Having specialized in consumer marketing, it is absurd to believe that one can competently lead and/or consult without an in-depth understanding of the language and culture in which communications are being crafted!

At senior international business levels, English is spoken by everyone, but the knowledge of a second language—especially by an American—adds credibility when working at an international level.

While I do not use a foreign language to communicate while at work, the learning of another language and culture has helped me to communicate with people of various cultures, nationalities, and even disparate scientific disciplines at work, which I do on a daily basis.

Over 80% of the respondents to this survey indicated that their foreign language skills and cultural knowledge have benefited them in their careers. Half of them acknowledged that their knowledge of foreign languages and cultures has given them a significant competitive advantage in business. Only 18% derived no competitive advantage from their foreign language skills. Even fewer (11%) of them gained no advantage from their cultural competence.

In this survey, proficiency levels in foreign language and degree of familiarity with culture are related to perceived competitive advantage. The
more proficient, the more likely the respondent is to have received a competitive advantage. The same relationship exists between proficiency level and how much the company values the foreign language and cultural knowledge. The better the employee knows the language and culture, the more likely the company is to recognize and reward those skills.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author thanks Anne-Marie Nelson, Vice President of the Office of Alumni Affairs at Thunderbird, for her support and encouragement throughout this project. The author also appreciates the assistance of the North American and European Alumni Council members who piloted the survey and gave valuable feedback. Special thanks go to the 581 alumni who took the survey and to the 246 people who wrote in additional comments. Allan Lin, Thunderbird research assistant, generously provided invaluable assistance throughout this project. The author gratefully acknowledges the advice of Anne Stringfellow, Robert Grosse, and Adrian Tschoegl on survey design and surveypro.com. Special thanks to Georgia Lessard, Graphics Design Specialist, for assistance with document design. Finally, the author appreciates the help of graduate assistants Svetla Novoselska and Lade Dada. The author also thanks the Thunderbird Research Center for financial support of the project.

REFERENCES


Dear Thunderbird Alumnus:

You have been selected to participate in a Thunderbird-sponsored research project on the competitive advantage of foreign language and cultural knowledge in international business. This study is sponsored by the Thunderbird Research Center and the Office of Alumni Relations. The survey asks how your knowledge of foreign language and other cultures has affected your business career.

We are surveying a random sample of Thunderbird alumni from the classes of 1970–2002. No previous study has looked at the effect of language and cultural knowledge on business careers. Your responses are very important.

Survey results will be presented at the CIBER (Center for International Business Education Research) Conference in Miami in April 2003, and submitted for publication in a leading academic journal.

Please click on the link http://www.surveypro.com/akira/TakeSurvey?id=5713 to fill out the survey. Your responses are strictly anonymous, and cannot be linked to you or your email address. It should take just 5–10 minutes to complete. Please respond by February 17, 2003.

Thank you for your participation in this study. The survey results will be posted on MTB.

Survey

1. What is your native language?
   - Arabic 6 1.02%
   - Chinese 9 1.53%
   - English 413 70.36%
   - French 16 2.73%
   - German 16 2.73%
   - Japanese 8 1.36%
   - Portuguese 9 1.53%
   - Russian 4 0.68%
   - Spanish 53 9.03%
   - Other 53 9.03%

2. I am a native of
   - United States 406 70.36%
   - Africa 2 0.35%
   - Asia 38 6.59%
   - Australia/New Zealand 1 0.17%
   - Canada 5 0.87%
   - Europe 64 11.09%
   - Latin America 52 9.01%
   - Middle East 9 1.56%

3. What foreign language(s) do you speak? Check all that apply.
   - Arabic 13 1.07%
   - Chinese 50 4.12%
   - English 188 15.49%
   - French 215 17.71%
   - German 146 12.03%
   - Japanese 62 5.11%
   - Portuguese 80 6.59%
   - Russian 29 2.39%
   - Spanish 288 23.72%
   - Other 143 11.78%

4. Which foreign language has helped you the most at work?
   - Arabic 3 0.54%
   - Chinese 18 3.23%
   - English 166 29.80%
   - French 42 7.54%
   - German 50 8.98%
   - Japanese 30 5.39%
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>30.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>9.87%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. How well do you speak this foreign language?
   - Like a native: 135 (23.73%)
   - Fluent in most business & social situations: 227 (39.89%)
   - Can communicate fairly well: 149 (26.19%)
   - Basic survival level: 48 (8.44%)
   - A few words or phrases: 10 (1.76%)

6. At what point(s) in your career was this foreign language most helpful to you?
   - When I was hired: 232 (24.55%)
   - Early years: 258 (27.30%)
   - Mid career: 190 (20.11%)
   - Currently in my career: 265 (28.04%)

7. How did you learn the foreign language? Check the 3 most important sources.
   - Family: 88 (6.14%)
   - Friends: 83 (5.79%)
   - Thunderbird: 270 (18.83%)
   - Other school or classroom setting: 341 (23.78%)
   - Travel: 166 (11.58%)
   - Living abroad: 412 (28.73%)
   - Other: 74 (5.16%)

8. What culture(s) other than your own are you very familiar with? Check all that apply.
   - American/English: 212 (14.87%)
   - Arabic: 39 (2.73%)
   - Chinese: 110 (7.71%)
   - French: 186 (13.04%)
   - German: 177 (12.41%)
   - Japanese: 126 (8.84%)
   - Portuguese/Brazilian: 92 (6.45%)
   - Russian: 31 (2.17%)
   - Spanish/Latin American: 299 (20.97%)
   - Other: 154 (10.80%)

9. Of all the cultures that you are familiar with, which one has been the most valuable in your career?
   - American/English: 179 (32.02%)
   - Arabic: 6 (1.07%)
   - Chinese: 43 (7.69%)
   - French: 31 (5.55%)
   - German: 51 (9.12%)
   - Japanese: 45 (8.05%)
   - Portuguese/Brazilian: 7 (1.25%)
   - Russian: 5 (0.89%)
   - Spanish/Latin American: 148 (26.48%)
   - Other: 44 (7.87%)

10. How familiar are you with this culture?
    - Like a native: 158 (28.42%)
    - Very familiar: 311 (55.94%)
    - Somewhat familiar: 80 (14.39%)
    - A little familiar: 6 (1.08%)
    - Barely familiar: 1 (0.18%)

11. My job is based in
    - United States: 381 (66.61%)
    - Africa: 4 (0.70%)
    - Asia: 47 (8.22%)
    - Australia/New Zealand: 3 (0.52%)
    - Canada: 3 (0.52%)
    - Europe: 95 (16.61%)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>6.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. How often do you use your foreign language skills at work?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>38.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>14.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>20.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>12.98%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. How often do you use your understanding of other culture(s) at work?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>44.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>26.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>17.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>8.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.83%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. How much of a competitive advantage have your foreign language skills given you on the job?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>53.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>28.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>18.15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. How have you used your foreign language skills at work? Check all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conversation</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>22.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentations</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>14.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>16.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>17.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reports</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>10.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiations</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>13.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t use</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>3.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1.97%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16. How has the company valued your foreign language skills? Check all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recognition</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written or oral recognition</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>17.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raise</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>8.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>10.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel opportunities</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>23.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas assignment</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>18.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No acknowledgment of value</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>17.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>5.18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17. How has your knowledge of other culture(s) helped you at work? Check all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Help</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feel comfortable with people and culture</td>
<td>501</td>
<td>18.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand business environment</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>16.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on multinational teams</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>11.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain respect and credibility</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>13.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Function better in country</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>13.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce chance for misunderstanding</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>14.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhance negotiation success</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>11.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has not helped</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18. How has the company valued your cultural knowledge? Check all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recognition</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written or oral recognition</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>18.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raise</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>7.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>10.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel opportunities</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>22.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas assignment</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>18.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No acknowledgment of value</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>18.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>4.10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19. How much competitive advantage has your cultural knowledge given you in your career?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>48.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>41.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>10.59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20. If I had time to learn another language for business, it would be

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>24.74%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
21. Do you plan to study another foreign language, or improve your existing skills within
the next 12 months?
Yes 167 29.20%
No 270 47.20%
Possibly 135 23.60%

22. If I had time to learn about another culture for business purposes, it would be
Arabic 35 6.19%
Chinese 171 30.27%
French 35 6.19%
German 16 2.83%
Japanese 54 9.56%
Portuguese/Brazilian 39 6.90%
Russian 27 4.78%
Spanish/Latin American 98 17.35%
None 67 11.86%
Other 23 4.07%

23. How much of your time do you spend on international business?
75%–100% 189 33.04%
50%–74% 88 15.38%
25%–49% 74 12.94%
0–25% 221 38.64%

24. I am
Male 408 70.71%
Female 169 29.29%

25. My age is
18–24 0 0.00%
25–34 140 24.22%
35–44 269 46.54%
45–54 135 23.36%
55–64 34 5.88%
65 and over 0 0.00%

26. My approximate yearly income before taxes is
Under $50,000 54 9.39%
$50,000–$74,999 84 14.61%
$75,000–$99,999 125 21.74%
$100,000–$149,999 134 23.30%
$150,000–$199,999 53 9.22%
$200,000 and over 60 10.43%
No comment 65 11.30%

27. My job title is
President/CEO 42 7.37%
Vice president 64 11.23%
Business owner/Entrepreneur 68 11.93%
Director 89 15.61%
Supervisor 15 2.63%
Manager 131 22.98%
Assistant manager 13 2.28%
Other 148 25.96%

28. My company has annual sales of
Under $10 million 161 30.49%
Between $10 million and $100 million 105 19.89%
Between $100 million and $1 billion 91 17.23%
Over $1 billion 171 32.39%
29. The industry I work in is
   - Automotive: 13 (2.28%)
   - Banking/Financial services: 108 (18.98%)
   - Consulting: 60 (10.54%)
   - Consumer products: 42 (7.38%)
   - Diversified: 7 (1.23%)
   - Energy: 14 (2.46%)
   - Government/Non-profit: 33 (5.80%)
   - Health care/Pharmaceutical: 38 (6.68%)
   - Industrial products/Manufacturing: 46 (8.08%)
   - Marketing services: 18 (3.16%)
   - Technology: 64 (11.25%)
   - Telecommunications: 24 (4.22%)
   - Transportation: 18 (3.16%)
   - Other: 84 (14.76%)

30. My functional area is
   - Account/Relationship Management: 24 (4.36%)
   - Accounting: 13 (2.36%)
   - Advertising/Public Relations: 8 (1.45%)
   - Business Development: 42 (7.62%)
   - Consulting: 32 (5.81%)
   - Corporate Finance: 35 (6.35%)
   - Engineering: 4 (0.73%)
   - Financial/Investment Management: 38 (6.90%)
   - General Management: 72 (13.07%)
   - Human Resources: 7 (1.27%)
   - Import/Export Trade: 10 (1.81%)
   - Information Technology: 16 (2.90%)
   - Internal Auditing: 4 (0.73%)
   - Market Research: 8 (1.45%)
   - Marketing/Brand Management: 68 (12.34%)
   - Operations Management: 14 (2.54%)
   - Project Management: 33 (5.99%)
   - Sales/Sales Management: 60 (10.89%)
   - Supply Chain Management: 7 (1.27%)
   - Other: 56 (10.16%)

31. I graduated from Thunderbird in
   - 2002: 9 (1.67%)
   - 2001: 26 (4.81%)
   - 2000: 32 (5.93%)
   - 1999: 19 (3.52%)
   - 1998: 23 (4.26%)
   - 1997: 28 (5.19%)
   - 1996: 22 (4.07%)
   - 1995: 23 (4.26%)
   - 1994: 21 (3.89%)
   - 1993: 39 (7.22%)
   - 1992: 7 (1.30%)
   - 1991: 41 (7.59%)
   - 1990: 16 (2.96%)
   - 1989: 4 (0.74%)
   - 1988: 17 (3.15%)
   - 1987: 10 (1.85%)
   - 1986: 31 (5.74%)
   - 1985: 11 (2.04%)
   - 1984: 14 (2.59%)
   - 1983: 15 (2.78%)
   - 1982: 18 (3.33%)
   - 1981: 17 (3.15%)
   - 1980: 10 (1.85%)
   - 1979: 10 (1.85%)
32. Of what value have the language skills you gained at Thunderbird been to your career?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Great value</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>17.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant value</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>21.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some value</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>28.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little value</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>12.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No value</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>8.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not study a foreign language at Thunderbird</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>10.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments:</td>
<td>null</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Please note that not all of the 581 respondents answered every question. Therefore not all totals are 581.

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*MLJ* 88, 4, 2004

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