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**A Comparative Study Of the Verbal Achievement Of Students Who Study Foreign Language And Those Who Do Not Study Foreign Language**

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A Comparative Study  
Of the Verbal Achievement  
Of Students Who Study Foreign Language  
And Those Who Do Not Study Foreign Language

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A Field Project  
Presented to the  
Department of Educational Administration  
and the  
Faculty of the Graduate College  
University of Nebraska

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Specialist in Secondary Administration  
University of Nebraska at Omaha

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By  
Rosemary Simpson

April 1987

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FIELD PROJECT ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College,  
University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Specialist in Educational  
Administration Degree, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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Date *April 22, 1987*

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

The history of foreign language training has emphasized a positive connection between learning another language and learning one's own (Schilling, 1895; Coleman, 1929). Educators believe that through concentration on individual words, grammar, and structure, foreign language heightens the student's awareness of verbal expression in general. Although children begin to speak English at an early age, progress is a result of informal repetition and mimicry. Many junior high students can speak reasonably well but are hard-pressed to distinguish nouns from verbs because they have not examined their own language closely. On the other hand, foreign language students frequently acknowledge greater understanding of English concepts because they have studied them in the second language class.

Theoretically second language learning does lead to improved English verbal skills. Some studies support that idea by showing that language students' scores on standardized tests are superior, particularly on vocabulary items (Bastain, 1979; Eddy, 1981; Lopato, 1963; Los Angeles, 1976; Offenbergl, 1971). Masciantonio (1977) reported supportive results from two Massachusetts studies which were designed to evaluate the effect of Latin on improving English skills. In the Worcester

study, the language students surpassed the control group by eight months in vocabulary scores and by over a year in reading comprehension. Other researchers believe that students of foreign language are better over-all students and that language study has little to do with better verbal skills (Jack, 1929; Palfrey, 1941). Certainly not all the data has been collected, and none of the studies has been overwhelmingly conclusive, but recent studies favor the possibility that learning a second language bolsters a student's verbal skills.

Support of foreign language study increased recently as a result of Presidentially sponsored studies of education which revealed weaknesses in the preparation of American students. The committees urge more foreign language study as a means to improve the education of the nation's youth. They claim that if students respond to that challenge, America will profit from more second-language speakers who can function in the political and business arenas outside the United States. No one can dispute the benefits that come from being able to communicate directly with one's partner or one's adversary. However, here in Middle America, for secondary students who focus on the near future, the possibility of face-to-face contact with non-English speaking people seems very remote. Most students still consider second

language learning only as something they must experience to "get into college."

In spite of somewhat limited public support for foreign language study, foreign language enrollment in the Omaha Public Schools has grown consistently. The district is now faced with a declining student population, funding restrictions imposed by the legislated lid bill, and publicity emphasizing the "basics." Those who urge returning to the basics are interested in eliminating "frills" such as foreign language in order to concentrate on what they consider fundamental courses.

Can foreign language study compliment and augment the English skills necessary for effective communication while, at the same time, help students prepare for an ever-expanding world?

#### Statement of the Problem

Is there a significant difference in the English Verbal Abilities test scores of tenth grade students who have taken Spanish, French or German in the eighth and ninth grade compared to tenth grade students who had similar English verbal abilities in the eighth grade but did not take a foreign language?

#### Statement of the Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the English Verbal Abilities test scores of tenth grade students who have taken Spanish, French or German in the eighth and



ninth grade compared to tenth grade students who had similar English verbal abilities in the eighth grade but did not take a foreign language.

#### Significance of the Study

The results of the investigation of English verbal abilities as influenced by studying a foreign language should be of interest to foreign language teachers, to English teachers, to current and prospective students of foreign language and their parents, to counselors, and to administrators.

#### Assumptions

There are eight assumptions related to this study.

Assumption 1. The population within this one junior high remains generally the same from year to year.

Assumption 2. There is no basic difference in the competencies of the foreign language teachers involved in this study.

Assumption 3. There is no basic difference in the competencies of the language arts teachers of all students in this study.

Assumption 4. The teaching methodologies of the foreign language teachers concentrate on word recognition and grammar skills which lead to vocabulary growth in that language.

Assumption 5. The various teaching methods of the language arts teachers generate similar vocabulary growth.

Assumption 6. The balance of students developed on the basis of the eighth grade CAT Verbal Abilities test scores will carry through to tenth grade.

Assumption 7. By virtue of the fact that students in foreign language as well as those not in foreign language are affected equally by busing, whatever affect that might be is not significant.

Assumption 8. The home lives and experiences of the students will be equally stimulating and supportive.

#### Limitations

There are four limitations related to this study.

Limitation 1. The study deals only with Verbal Abilities as indicated by the Composite Language Score on the California Achievement Tests. The scores incorporate punctuation as well as vocabulary and grammar items. Specific sub-test scores are not available.

Limitation 2. The study is limited to achievement of students measured in the eighth and tenth grade.

Limitation 3. The study is limited to students in a socio-economically above average suburban section of a large metropolitan area.

Limitation 4. The study is limited to students in the eleventh grade in 1986-1987 who were in the eighth grade in Beveridge Junior High School in 1983-1984.

Definition of Terms

Verbal abilities, as measured by the California Achievement Tests and indicated in the Composite Language Score, encompasses vocabulary, comprehension, language mechanics, and language expression.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of Related Literature

As is true in every situation the pendulum of educational philosophy swings back and forth from one extreme to the other. The permissiveness of the 1960s and 1970s, with the cafeteria attitude toward course selection, has given way to a back-to-the-basics movement. Frills have been eliminated as funding shortages develop and each department has been forced to justify its existence. Foreign language departments have recently experienced a certain increase in enrollment, perhaps as a reaction to the recommendations of the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1981) and its strong support of foreign language study. Language acquisition provides the necessary means for communication with other people and for understanding other cultures. But does such study directly benefit the vast majority of Americans who, in reality, have no future prospects involving other languages and other cultures?

Foreign language teachers have generally assumed that other language study helps students understand their own language better. When presented with a new grammar concept in English class, students often comment that they have studied that structure previously in a foreign language class. Those students who have dealt with the concept initially in foreign words grasp the idea quickly

in their native tongue. Concentration on individual words and the manipulation of words as one learns another language results in a greater awareness of language structure and syntax. At least this is the philosophy that a majority of foreign language educators would support.

Historically the assumed carry-over of skills learned in a foreign language classroom to use in English has been supported without much actual research. In 1895 Hugo K. Schilling stated categorically that "the value of study of foreign languages in leading the pupil to a better understanding and a more thorough mastery of his vernacular is universally recognized" (p. 385). Foreign language teachers were not alone in supporting this view. The National Council of Teachers of English in its first report of the National Committee on English Language Courses in Colleges and Universities, written in 1928, emphatically urged prospective English teachers to consider the study of at least one foreign language an indispensable part of their preparation. And in 1929 Algernon Coleman outlined sixteen goals for foreign language study, one of which was "the increased ability in the accurate and intelligent use of English" (p. 16).

Finally, in the 1920s and 1930s, researchers conducted several studies to test the theoretical connection between foreign language study and increased

English knowledge. One such project, which took place at the University of Pennsylvania, was prompted by college professors who felt that the students were too poorly prepared in English to succeed in other language classes. A group of 553 freshmen, all of whom had two or three entrance credits in French or Spanish, took tests in English and the foreign language. The tests were entirely separate and were not intended as companion measurements.

Comparison of the students' scores revealed what one might expect: those who did well in the foreign language test did far above the average for the whole group in English. [The data indicated a clear relationship between the ability to do well in English and knowledge and ability in a foreign language (Jack, 1929).] [The unanswerd question is whether English helps the foreign language or vice versa.] Do the test scores indicate foreign language success as the result of English skills or could it be that those who study foreign languages are superior students in the first place?

To establish the relationship more concretely, Jack approached the data from a different angle. He administered the same English grammar test to first-year language students and to second-year language students. Only 20.4 percent of the first-year students scored 65 percent or better while 59.6 percent of the second-year students scored 65 percent or better. Although the group

involved was too small to draw definite conclusions upon, Jack wrote, "This tabulation appears to point to the fact that students who have had one or more years of a foreign language are likely to be better in English grammar than those without such training" (p. 98).

One might wonder about the basis for an assumed connection between foreign language study and improved English skills. Of the several proposed theories, one revolves around the emphasis on words, grammar, and syntax that occurs in foreign language study. This is a more analytical, step-by-step, scientific approach to language. Dow (1930) described the average student's attitude toward language as anything but scientific. To him language is a mere tool

no more interesting in itself than the fork at his place at the table. He reaches for it, grips it, uses it constantly. It gets battered and marred and worn. It loses all semblance to silver, but it still serves, and after a sufficient period of time he becomes attached to it in all the familiarity of its defects (p.577).

Authorities suggest that foreign language study forces a person to examine this much abused lingual tool by taking him away from the forest so that he can see the trees. Often one speaks without much thought or concentration, without a conscious selection of words,

terms or syntax. But when one "examines the structure of a foreign language. . . he is outside, looking in, and seeing it objectively" (Wann, 1937, p. 169). When one stands back and is able to focus on words themselves, he becomes a more skillful wordsmith.

The advantage in being a skilled wordsmith is that more specific terminology leads to clearer thinking and clearer expression. Hawkins (1934, p. 395) suggested that "real translation from either language into the other inevitably trains us in using words to get at ideas." Translation can be handled with a relaxed approach, wherein the speaker understands the general drift of the phrase, or it can be considered a more exact science. Few words have only one, simple, direct translation. The connotations create images that require thought and careful consideration. A single word can imply much more than its exact translation allows.

If a teacher presents and promotes a philosophy that encourages the student to be aware of a word's total meaning, "the study of foreign vocabularies must almost inevitably increase not only the quantity but also the quality of the pupil's English vocabulary" (Rice, 1940, p. 371). On the other hand, Palfrey (1941) thinks that the aural-oral approach, which encourages the student to consider the language phrase by phrase and not to examine the individual words, must hinder the student's higher



learning of his own language. If careful translation leads to precision and comprehension, generalities may lead to vagueness and confusion.

The foreign language community is not alone in its support of language study as a means to improve English skills. Professor R. L. Ramsay wrote an appendix to the 1928 National Council of Teachers of English report on Language Courses in Colleges and Universities. He strongly urged that those preparing to teach English study at least one, if not two, foreign languages. Allen (1938, p. 486) quoted Ramsay as follows:

It would be better for the prospective teacher of English to omit the courses in the English language altogether, if absolutely necessary in order to take one of these essential foreign languages; for with them there is a chance that his language sense will be awakened anyway, and without them there is little hope that he will ever really understand what the study of the English language is all about.

Comments such as these certainly bolster the ego of the language teacher but reality forces the reviewer to look at other points of view. Not all the press has been positive. For example, in discussing the practical uses of foreign language, Rice refers to psychological problems with the transfer of training involved in learning English from the study of foreign

languages. He does not dispute the belief that learning techniques involved in mastering a second language are easily applied to learning a third language; however, he does state that "it is impossible . . . that training for the linguistic processes of Latin or French or Spanish or German can be carried over into any other language" (p. 370). Foreign language study can help one learn how to learn but one cannot necessarily apply what one learns to another situation.

Palfrey suggested that disservice to native language learning may result from poor English used during literal translation. His idea echoed those expressed by a German educator who, in 1919, claimed that "foreign language study actually sets up interference which exerts a harmful influence upon precision and clarity of thought in the vernacular" (Lentz, p. 411). Palfrey shot verbal holes in reports which tried to show support for the foreign language-English skills connection by pointing out that the high scores on college entrance exams in English correlate as closely with intelligence quotient as they do with foreign language studies. In fact he found that the research results are almost completely negative and fail to support a positive affect by foreign language study on English at all.

While Palfrey was working on his research, the Commission on Trends in Education of the Modern Language

Association of America was conducting its own study. Presented under the title "Language Study in American Education," their report was very supportive of foreign language programs. They wrote, "We believe that foreign language study can more effectively and more economically than any other activity arouse and develop an essential sensitiveness to the connotations of the linguistic materials of one's own language" (1940, p. 39-40). However, when Potthoff reviewed the report in 1942, he found so many discrepancies in their interpretations and so many unanswered questions that their main premise was weakened considerably (p. 674). In their enthusiasm to prove their point, they over-looked some pertinent information.

More important questions demanded the nation's attention for the next several years as World War II created upheaval. The United States quickly became aware of its position in world affairs. With that awareness came the realization that second language learning was instrumental to peaceful coexistence, both linguistically and culturally, with other countries. Modern language classes emphasized broadening man's horizons, and building linguistically supported bridges of communication, while developing a greater understanding of other cultures. Disregarding this change of focus, researchers continued to hail foreign language learning, with its concentration

on words, forms, and structure, as the best and quickest way to become conscious of one's own language (Gaither, 1955; Holzhauser, 1942; Parker, 1958).

During the 1960s high schools and colleges yielded to strong pressure and eliminated course requirements in many areas of the curriculum. Both modern and ancient languages experienced a plunge in popularity. America became even more linguistically poor and the lack of competent second language speakers resulted in many well-publicized embarrassing moments for government and businesses alike. (Simon, 1980). Finally, in 1979, President Carter's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies strongly urged the study of other languages as a means "of enhancing general linguistic and communications skills as well as international cultural awareness" (p. 7). Similar support for foreign language study was repeated in the College Board's Educational Equality Project (1983) and by President Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education (1981).

Although these agencies issued strongly supportive statements urging foreign language study, none of them presented any research that would convince foreign language skeptics. However, Peter A. Eddy reviewed the research that related to the influence of foreign language on one's native language and then conducted his own research. He presented his initial review in 1978 and

used that review as a beginning for a more complex study which he conducted in 1980-81. Research he reviewed on the elementary level was divided into two general categories: first, to suggest a positive connection between foreign language study and improved English knowledge, and, second, to show no detrimental effect on native language as a result of foreign language study or to suggest evidence of a negative connection between foreign language study and native ability. He found generally positive results.

Educators in Salt Lake City, Utah, conducted an extensive study involving 600 elementary students. During the three year program, the students were given one hour of Russian three times a week. A control group of equally superior students had no language training. Researchers reported "that the FLES group observed between the 4th and 6th grades performed better in science and social studies, while those observed between 5th and 7th grades performed better in arithmetic and spelling" (Gordon et al., 1963, p.18).

In a 1963 report, Lopato reviewed a study done in two separate elementary schools in New York City (Bayside, Queens) and on Long Island, New York (Valley Stream.) According to the study, the group of 114 third graders was controlled for grade placement, age, IQ, and socioeconomic status. The experimental group was given 15 minutes of

French instruction each day in the 1959-60 academic year. At the beginning of the year both groups took the Stanford Achievement Test, Elementary Battery, Form J and took Form K at the end of the year.

Lopato reported that at Bayside there was no significant difference between groups' scores in most areas, except that the experimental group had slightly higher mean gains in reading and language measures while the control group had a slightly better spelling mean gain. At Valley Stream the language students had higher means in reading and language and a significantly higher mean gain in spelling.

Although these results may indicate a positive impact of language study, two factors influence the interpretation of the scores. First, there may have been a Hawthorne effect resulting from the uniqueness of the program since neither school had a FLES program before. Secondly, the Valley Stream experimental group, which recorded the higher mean scores, appeared to have a significantly higher IQ as well.

Fourth grade FLES students in Champaign, Illinois, were given 100 minutes of language per week for a year. While these students studied Spanish, the control group had regular classes in social studies, arithmetic and language arts. The experimenters (Johnson et al., 1963) reported that the groups were comparable with respect to

age, IQ, and sex distribution. Pre-administration of subtests of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills seemed to indicate that the groups were comparable academically.

When the post-test, also subtests of the ITBS, was given, the scores reported slight mean gains for the experimental group, but there was no significant difference. Because the differences were so slight, Eddy cautioned that "it would seem prudent not to consider this study as solid evidence for the positive effect of foreign language study on English language arts performance" (1978, p. 12).

The fourth elementary study included here took place in the District of Columbia in 1971. The public school system reported significantly greater progress by French and Spanish FLES groups in vocabulary, comprehension and total reading on standardized tests. Difficulties arise, however, casting doubts on the acceptance of their claim. The report's authors were not able to ascertain that the groups were comparable. Personal bias may have played a part because the groups were formed by the principals of the elementary schools who selected the subjects for the programs. Furthermore, the FLES students already had experienced three years of foreign language instruction before the study was made. Who can be sure that the reported gains were attributable directly to the one year of study between the pre- and post-tests?

First of the studies that gave evidence that modern language study caused no detrimental effect on native language learning was reviewed by Leino in 1963. A three year study of fourth, fifth, and sixth graders was conducted in St. Paul, Minnesota. The experimental students were given 15 minutes of Spanish instruction daily, time taken from regular instruction. Their scores on the achievement test on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the Stanford Social Studies Tests showed no significant difference from the control group.

Another two-year Minnesota experiment involved 120 elementary students, 90 of whom were taken out of regular classes to study Spanish (Smith, 1966). A comparison of the scores from the pre- and post-program administration of the ITBS showed that the extra foreign language instruction did not have a negative influence on their achievement in their native language skills.

Eddy briefly mentioned two other studies in which researchers found no significant difference in scores of FLES students and non-FLES students on standardized achievement tests. One was conducted in a New York state laboratory school (Potts, 1976) and the other was in Dade County, Florida (Gaarder and Richardson, 1968).

Several studies have been carried out in Europe to test the effect of foreign language on the native tongue. Two are particularly interesting. Hilgendorf et al.



(1970) compared German students who studied English with those who did not. Basing his research on tests of spelling, reading, and arithmetic, he found that the English instruction had not affected normal progress in their native German.

In a much broader program, the British Pilot Scheme (1974) reached 125 schools where students were introduced to oral French at age eight and continued for five years. One of the questions raised was whether early introduction to a language had a significant effect on achievement, either in the language itself or in other areas of study. The two control groups were composed of students of the same age who started French three years later and of older students who had the same years of French exposure. Results indicated no decline in other subjects. The early beginners did not make substantial gains in achievement as compared with those who started later. Not surprisingly, the reviewers (Burstall et al., p. 246) found that "given the same amount of time studying language, the older pupils appear to be more efficient learners than the younger ones." Those studies mentioned above involved training in modern languages. A number of programs have been based on the goal of improving English language skills through the introduction of Latin. The Philadelphia program opened in 1970 with over 4,000 fourth, fifth and sixth graders in 85 elementary schools

studying Latin 15 to 20 minutes per day. Their curriculum was designed specifically to enhance word study skills. At the end of the first year, tests showed that the Latin students were performing a full year higher than the non-language students. Offenberg (1971) added that an informal indication of the success of the program is evident in the rapid expansion of the program. By 1976 14,000 pupils in 125 elementary schools were involved.

Less conclusive results came from a one year pilot program in Alexandria, Virginia. Although the experimental group did better than the control group on a standardized reading test, only one of four tests, there were no other statistically significant differences between the groups (Payne, 1973).

The Indianapolis Public Schools FLES Latin program began in the 1973-74 school year. Sixth graders received half an hour of instruction in Latin using especially designed materials. Sheridan (1976) reported that pre-testing established the intellectual comparability of the groups which researchers had chosen on the basis of economic, social and academic profiles. Sheridan and Masciantonio (1977) had different interpretations of the post-program test scores. Masciantonio reported various levels of gain over the control group while Sheridan stated that these gains were simply the net gains of the experimental group's scores. There were no figures

comparing the two groups during the first year of the study, but comparative data from the second and third years did provide grounds for slight optimism favoring the effect of FLES Latin programs.

One issue clouds the results of this study. The original experimental group of 400 had been inexplicably reduced to 300 by the time of the post-test. One cannot help but wonder who these students were and how their scores would have affected the group's results (Eddy, 1981).

Latin was the target language in a Los Angeles schools program known as the Language Transfer Project. The program began in 1975 in two schools and later expanded to 30 schools. Masciantonio (p. 380) reported that the study "was very successful in improving the reading, vocabulary, and comprehension scores of the experimental group by more than one month for each month of instruction."

In Easthampton, Massachusetts, 200 fifth and sixth graders participated in a program of daily 20 minute Latin classes. Comparing the pre-and post-test scores on the vocabulary section of the Stanford Achievement Test, Masciantonio found that the language students had improved noticeably over the previous sixth graders.

Finally, seventh graders in Worcester, Massachusetts, studied Latin daily. According to Masciantonio (p. 381),

"pilot-group pupils outstripped their counterparts in the control group by eight months in vocabulary scores and by thirteen months in reading comprehension scores."

While most pertinent studies dealt with elementary students, a few involved high school or college students. In 1958 Skelton studied 1947 college freshmen at the Alabama Polytechnic Institute, 953 of whom had had no foreign language although the others had at least one semester of language. Trying to counteract the assumption that foreign language students were more intelligent in the first place, the researcher administered a psychological examination to each student and divided the groups by intelligence level. All were given a battery of six tests, relative to vocabulary, grammar, expression of thought, and reading comprehension. Based on the comparison of scores, Skelton concluded that foreign language study has a definite, positive effect on a person's command of his own language.

Bastain conducted a study in 1979 using 238 randomly selected college-bound seniors from Boise, Idaho. He compared data from permanent record cards, from several standardized tests, including ACT scores, and cumulative GPAs. The study indicated that two or more years of high school foreign language study definitely had a positive effect on the student's achievement in English.

In a similar study of the effect of foreign language on ACT scores, Timpe (1979) attempted to distinguish between the effect of language study and the superior native intelligence of students. He concluded that, although foreign language had a positive effect on both groups, the lower students received the most benefit. Furthermore, he suggested that the amount of help is directly related to the length of study.

Two other studies focused on the effect of Latin in high school programs. Both reports, by Riley (1969), and Scanlan (1976), showed a very definite superiority of the Latin students over their non-Latin counterparts. Each study attributed their higher vocabulary scores to their study of Latin.

Eddy reviewed a number of studies involving bilingual programs. Because bilingual studies do not pertain directly to the present work, those reports will not be discussed in detail. However, it is relevant to emphasize that a wide variety of social, economic, and psychological factors influence second language learning. Any research pertaining to the effect of language study must attempt to account for these factors.

Eddy's own research, which was sponsored by the U.S. government, treated a group of 440 students in the Montgomery County (Maryland) Public Schools (1980). The group contained 220 male and 220 female seniors from three

different high schools. In an attempt to avoid contaminating data, he and his assistants collected the following information from permanent record cards: grade point average in all areas of study, cumulative GPA, foreign language grade point, what language the student had studied the longest, the highest number of years of study, the foreign language studied the second longest, and a measure of total experience which amounted to total years spent in foreign language study. They also collected a number of standardized test scores which ranged from 7th grade to 11th grade and included verbal, composition, math, reading, vocabulary and composite results.

The purpose of this study was to answer the following question: do students who study foreign language score higher on the SAT-Verbal tests than do students who have not studied foreign language? Several related questions were investigated as well. With students of matching verbal ability, do foreign language students score better than non-language students? Do students who have studied two languages do better than those who have studied only one? Does a longer period of study result in higher scores? Does the particular language studied have an effect?

Unfortunately for Eddy, his original plan to use analysis of covariance as the most appropriate statistical

tool was found to be impossible because only 52 of the 440 subjects had not studied a foreign language. Of that 52, 45 had not taken the SAT-Verbal test which was a vital part of the study. Further investigation revealed that these students were very much on the lower end of the entire sample. Conclusive comparisons of the language and non-language groups would have been nearly impossible.

As an alternate method of analysis, the researchers selected the multiple regression procedure. They began by "selecting the single independent variable which produces the highest. . . proportion of variance for the prediction of the dependent variable" (Eddy, 1981, p. 59). Because they had an extremely large number of variables, eliminating some of data was a painstaking, but necessary, step. Some of the data was determined to be non-significant to the study.

Analysis with this complex system had positive results for the foreign language community. Eddy found that "the length of time of foreign language study is a significant predictor of performance on the SAT-Verbal and various sub-tests" (p. 88). The evidence showed that no one language contributed to English skills more than another. And, although educators recognize the lack of consistency in teacher grades, there was some evidence that indicated that high achievers in foreign language

classes benefit more from this study, and as a result, do better on tests of verbal ability.

Information from these studies support the connection between foreign language study and improved native language skills, particularly in vocabulary related situations. It is encouraging news for foreign language teachers that they can legitimately claim to help improve the English skills of their students. Students who are aware of this information should see (and hopefully experience) the benefits of continuing their foreign language learning.



## CHAPTER THREE

### Design of the Study

This study was conducted to determine the effect that foreign language study had on eighth and ninth graders' verbal skills in English. The students were from Beveridge Junior High School from the Omaha Public School District. The school is integrated but its population is predominately from the upper middle socio-economic class. All students from that school are bussed as ninth graders to an inter-city school. In tenth grade they may attend any of several district high schools.

#### Selection of the Population

The students selected for the study were in the eighth grade in the 1983-1984 school year. During the spring of the eighth and the tenth grades, all students of the district are administered the California Achievement Tests (CAT). No tests are given in ninth grade. The basis of comparison for this study was the Verbal Ability Subscores of the students on their eighth and tenth grade tests. These scores, as well as the course registrations of each student up to the present, were made available through the district's central office computer system by permission of the central administration.

According to district policy, students may elect to study a foreign language (French, German, or Spanish) beginning in the eighth grade, or any year thereafter, and

continue through high school. Formation of the two groups chosen for the study was based initially on their participation in foreign language. The students in the first group, hereafter known as the language group, began a foreign language in eighth grade and continued in the same language in ninth grade. The second group, known as the non-language group, was comprised of students who did not take a foreign language in eighth or ninth grade. Whether any of the students were involved in foreign language study in tenth grade was not considered.

Of the 304 students in the class, 21 began and continued French, 7 began and continued German, and 64 began and continued Spanish. Of the remaining students, only 57 had no foreign language experience in eighth or ninth grade.

#### Treatment of the Data

Using information gathered through access to the central computer system about verbal ability, as expressed by the CAT test scores, matched groups of language and non-language students were chosen. A homogenized group of 30 students, comprised of 15 Spanish, 10 German, and 5 French language students, was formed. Based on the eighth grade CAT tests, the verbal ability score of each language student was matched with the verbal ability score of a non-language student. As a result, the means of the

initial groups were identical. The mean of the tenth grade scores of each group was the basis of comparison.

The means and standard deviations of the two groups were determined. A t-test was conducted to find out if there was a significant difference between the two groups.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## Presentation and Analysis of Data

The two groups: the language and non-language groups were similar in verbal abilities in the eighth grade CAT tests. The mean verbal score of the language group was 81.33 and the mean of the non-language group was 81.33.

The two groups remained similar through the tenth grade when they were retested in verbal abilities on the CAT test. The mean and standard deviation of the non-language group was 71.5 and 22.29 respectively. The mean and standard deviation of the language group was 83.5 and 14.56 respectively.

When subjected to a t-test to determine if there was a significant difference between the verbal achievements of the two groups, it was found that there was a significant difference. The t-test score was 2.469 with a degree of freedom of 58. This is significant at the .05 level of confidence. Results are found in Table 1.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Verbal Ability Scores

<u>Group</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>	
10th grade non-language	71.5	22.29	t-test score 2.469
10th grade language	83.5	14.56	p<.05

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

#### Restatement of the Problem

The study was conducted to find out if there was a significant difference in verbal ability scores of students who had two years of foreign language study and those who did not. The importance of the study is that it will encourage foreign language study as a means to increase a student's working knowledge of his own language.

The hypothesis tested was: there is no significant difference in the English Verbal Abilities test scores of tenth grade students who have taken Spanish, French, or German in the eighth and ninth grade as compared to tenth grade students who had similar English Verbal abilities in the eighth grade but did not take a foreign language.

#### Description of the Procedures

Two groups of students from the eighth grade class of a single junior high school were formed to compare the effect that foreign language study has on verbal abilities in English.

The school is in a large, urban, public school district. Although the school is integrated, the population is largely from the upper-middle socio-economic group.

The language and non-language groups were matched on the basis of their Verbal Abilities Scores on the CAT tests administered in eighth grade.

The mean of the Verbal Abilities Scores on the tenth grade test was determined for each group. The means for the non-language and language groups were 71.5 and 83.5, respectively. Then the standard deviations of the tenth grade means were determined. The standard deviations for the non-language and language groups were 22.29 and 14.56, respectively.

#### Principal Findings and Conclusions

A t-test was done on the results to see if there was a significant difference between the Verbal Abilities Scores of the language and non-language students. The t-test score of 2.469 confirmed that there was a significant difference at the  $p < .05$  level but not at the  $p < .01$  level. These results lead to the conclusion that two consecutive years of study of the same language do contribute to an increase in verbal ability in English, at least on the eighth and ninth grade level. Based on the procedures and analysis, the findings of this study could be generalized to similar populations.

### Recommendations for Further Research

Suggestions for implementation of the findings of this study include:

1. Urge students to study foreign language as a means to increase their verbal ability in English.

Ideas for additional research include:

1. Is the effect of Spanish different from that of French or of German in increasing verbal abilities in English?

2. Would the effect of foreign language study be different if the foreign language teacher was the same for both years?

3. Would the effect of foreign language study be different if the students stayed in the same school regardless of continuity of the foreign language teacher?

4. Would the effect on the English verbal ability increase in relationship to longer study of the foreign language?

5. Would the Verbal Abilities Scores of the students involved in this study who continued in a third year of foreign language, and thus had an additional six months of language experience before the test was given, be significantly different from those who had only two years of experience?

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