



# USING LANGUAGES IN NATIONAL SECURITY

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** In this issue of *The Language Educator*, we begin a new series of articles focusing on different career opportunities available to language professionals and exploring how students might prepare for these jobs. Here we look at different careers in the field of national security. In future articles, we will explore language-related careers in other important industries, including health care, hospitality, law enforcement, and more.

BY PATTI KONING

The largest employer for language professionals in this country is the U.S. Department of Defense—a fact that might surprise many people. In fact, national security is a fast-growing and exciting career area for those with strong foreign language skills, offering a wide variety of opportunities that stretch beyond translation and interpretation. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and National Security Agency (NSA) all hire hundreds of foreign language professionals each year to work as agents, linguists, and language analysts.

## CAREERS IN GOVERNMENT Federal Bureau of Investigation



“Studying a foreign language can open up so many doors in the intelligence community and law enforcement field,” says Margaret Gulotta, chief of the Language Services Section for the FBI. When hiring special agents, the FBI considers foreign language proficiency a critical skill, just like accounting, computer science, engineering, and intelligence.

The FBI hired approximately 175 language analysts and contract linguists last year, many of whom are former language teachers. The agency regularly recruits at the ACTFL Annual Convention.

“Becoming a linguist is a wonderful second career. While there is an age cutoff for agents, you can become a linguist at any age. We hire people in their 40s, 50s, 60s, and beyond,” says Gulotta.

She explains that FBI linguists are not simply translators. “We call them language analysts because they do a significant amount of language and cultural analysis in addition to translation and interpretation. Our linguists are the foreign language and cultural experts for the Bureau,” she says.

Linguists are hired through the FBI’s field offices and then placed around the country. Every applicant must take a comprehensive language test battery to qualify. Language skills may factor into where a new hire is placed.

A linguist’s day-to-day work might include interpretation, translation, monitoring and summarizing audio materials, analysis, and serving as a subject matter expert on cultural issues. Gulotta describes the position as “every kind of foreign language job rolled into one.”

Linguists develop reports on the material they analyze that are then accessed by agents across the country with the need to know this information. They also may be called upon to do verbatim translations and testify if a case in which they are involved goes to court.

The FBI has offices all over the world, so the agency needs proficiency in every major language. “We routinely deal with over 100 languages. Of those, Spanish is always in demand,” says Gulotta. “The FBI is probably one of the largest consumers of Spanish in the government.”

In addition to foreign bureaus in Spanish-speaking countries, the FBI needs Spanish speakers to conduct its regular business in many cities within the United States. “You can’t do a thorough investigation in many U.S. cities without speaking Spanish. You can’t develop sources, gather evidence, or perform many of an agent’s basic tasks,” says Gulotta.

That holds true for many other areas across the country, and with many other languages such as Chinese, Japanese, and Russian. There is no distinction between agents with foreign language skills and those without, but as with linguists, language skills can determine where an agent is placed, as is the case with computer science, accounting, and other specialized skills.

## Central Intelligence Agency



The CIA clearly has a major focus on the understanding of other countries, cultures, and people, according to a senior language analyst at the organization. "Language skills are a huge piece of our ability to do that," the analyst explains. "We place a high premium on language capability in the officers we are looking to hire."

She continues, "We're really jacks of all trades. We pride ourselves on being nimble and able to draw upon our people to respond to a crisis."

At the CIA, the most important languages are those spoken in countries in which nuclear proliferation is a concern and within war zone regions. But that does not exclude languages that fall outside of those criteria.

"A candidate with a language skill can assume we are interested because we are global. What isn't a crisis today could be a crisis tomorrow. We put a high premium on building our 'bench' strength," says the CIA spokesperson.

The CIA offers a hiring bonus as high as \$35,000 for language capabilities for certain positions. The CIA also incentivizes language skills regardless of occupation by providing bonuses for staff officers who maintain their language skills.

Specific jobs available for those with language skills include National Clandestine Service (NCS) language officers who, in addition to having expert language skills, must provide in-depth cultural insight to high-quality translation, interpretation, and language-related support for a variety of clandestine operations. Language officers also work closely with officers in other NCS disciplines, particularly field collectors, to support the overall mission of intelligence acquisition.

The CIA also hires open source officers, which serve as the intelligence community's foreign media experts. These individuals use foreign language and area knowledge to review and assess foreign open media sources, including Internet sites, newspapers, press agencies, television, radio and specialized publications, collecting intelligence from these media to deliver high-impact products to the U.S. foreign affairs community. They may also translate text, audio, and video information and select materials from the media for translation by independent contract translators.

## National Security Agency



NSA describes its foreign language team as part of the country's first line of defense against potential threats. Due to the need for this critical skill, the NSA offers recruitment incentives, milestone awards, and Foreign Language Incentive Pay (FLIP) like the U.S. military. Language analysts hired by the NSA are eligible to receive up to a \$7,500

recruitment incentive. The Army also offers a critical language incentive of up to \$3,000 per academic year for new ROTC cadets who sign a contract to study Arabic, Pashto, Chinese-Mandarin, Korean, Persian-Farsi, Persian-Dari, Urdu, Indonesian, Swahili, or Hausa.

"We hire foreign language specialists as language analysts to work on translation, transcription, research, and analysis," says Stephanie Gilmore, a language recruiter for the NSA. "Language specialists are also hired as intelligence analysts to conduct research and analysis for specific geographical areas in which they have expertise."

The NSA's job description states in part that "Working directly with the original written or spoken language, the language analyst is the first person to determine the relevance of, to analyze, and to put into context the intelligence collected. It's a tremendous responsibility, but one which is extremely satisfying."

NSA language analysts have the responsibility of providing the most complete and accurate signals intelligence picture to U.S. policymakers, military commanders, and intelligence community members. Signals intelligence is simply intelligence-gathering by interception of signals, whether between people, between machines, or mixtures of the two.

The list of in-demand languages by the nation's intelligence agencies is constantly in flux as the world situation changes. Currently, all three agencies—FBI, CIA, and NSA—consider Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, Pashto, Russian, and Urdu as critical, but national security needs are certainly not limited to these languages. French, for example, remains important because of the many African nations that speak the language, as does Spanish for Central and South America.

The NSA's current stated needs are in particular for Middle Eastern, African, and Asian languages such as Pashto, Urdu, Chinese, and Russian. "However," says Gilmore, "our requirements do change and I encourage applicants to check our website for updates."

## State Department



Foreign service officers advocate American foreign policy, protect American citizens, and promote American business interests throughout the world. These officers staff U.S. embassies, consulates, and other diplomatic missions devoted to strengthening peace, stability, and prosperity.

According to the State Department website, "Their perceptiveness, dedication, and creativity drive the formulation and achievement of American foreign policy objectives." There are currently over 265 embassies, consulates, and missions in The Americas, Africa, Europe and Eurasia, East Asia and Pacific, Middle East and North Africa, and South Asia.

Foreign service officers are expected to take assignments that can involve extremely difficult work, hardship, and even danger. Knowledge of a foreign language is not required to become a foreign service officer, but proficiency in one or more languages will enhance a candidate's competitiveness for selection, according to the State Department.

## LANGUAGE TEACHING OPPORTUNITIES

There are many jobs for language teachers who wish to work in the area of national security. The NSA hires instructors to teach languages, dialects, and cultural knowledge at its National Cryptologic



School, the agency's own educational institution at which employees study cryptology, information assurance, language, and leadership.

The CIA also seeks out former language teachers for its language instruction program. "Language instructors are always in demand. We have high standards for who we hire as language instructors, so we look for candidates who are proven teachers, especially with adult education experience. Advanced degrees are good, but not required," says the spokesperson for the CIA.

The Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) provides another path for language specialists to serve their country. DoDEA runs schools that serve the children of military service employees and Defense Department civilian employees throughout the world. Today DoDEA operates 192 schools in 12 foreign countries, seven states, Guam, and Puerto Rico. DoDEA offers Arabic, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, and some less commonly taught languages in regions where those languages are spoken.

The Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) in Monterey, CA, operates much like a university with faculty and tenure even though only military personnel can attend the school.

"There is a misconception that what is taught in Monterey is military language only. To get students to required levels of proficiency—keep in mind these students are often starting from zero—requires content areas comparable with any good academic program at an American university," says Scott McGinnis, an academic advisor and professor at the DLI's Washington (DLI-W) office. "Other than the uniforms, it looks and feels like any other college campus."

The mission of the DLIFLC is to provide culturally based foreign language education, training, evaluation, and sustainment for Defense Department personnel in order to ensure the success of the Defense Language Program and enhance the security of the nation. All four branches of the military use the DLIFLC and 23 different languages are taught at the Monterey campus. Instruction in about 40 less commonly taught languages is administered out of DLI-W, in partnership with universities and language schools.

The DLIFLC program continues to grow. Ground was recently broken on new classrooms, and Hindi and Urdu have been added to the program. DLIFLC employs over 1,100 civilian language instructors, most of whom are native speakers of the language they teach.

Rick Crow teaches Spanish at DLIFLC and has the distinction of also having once been a student at the school. As an army reservist, he studied Romanian in Monterey and went onto work as a civilian translator for the government.

Crow was an elementary school Spanish teacher when he spoke with a DLIFLC recruiter at the 2005 ACTFL Convention in Baltimore, MD. Even though Spanish was not being actively recruited at the time, he applied and was hired less than a year later.

Teaching at DLIFLC differs in many ways from traditional classrooms—the students are completely dedicated to learning the lan-

guage with no other distractions and the pace moves very quickly. For a language like Spanish, students typically take a six-month course. More difficult languages like Arabic and Chinese are taught over the course of one year.

"If you enjoy shaping the final product, taking a student from absolute beginner to advanced, then this job would be extremely rewarding," says Crow. "The teacher has a lot of freedom to help the students become the best they can be."

Kazuki Arita, assistant professor of Japanese at DLI, says that the wide variety of abilities and backgrounds of his students is a big challenge. "In a class there may be students who are high officers in their late 30s or older, who have had long military careers, more education, and some experience learning foreign languages," he explains. "In the same class there are also younger students who are fairly new to the military and have a different learning style and acquisition speed."

He adds that achieving the goals at the DLI is also a challenge. In a 63-week Japanese course, students must reach a level 2+ on the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale. By the end of the course, the students should be able to live and work in the target country, using the target language. "In week one, the students don't know a single character," says Arita.

The hard work is worth it, according to Arita, who taught English in Japan for 18 years and Japanese at a community college in Hawaii prior to joining DLI. "I feel satisfied that my teaching makes a contribution to this country and foreign affairs between the United States and Japan. This is the biggest difference between teaching at K-12 and at DLI. When I was a high school teacher, I taught a language only for my students. But now I teach for the students' career and future, this country, and the world at large," he says.

Whether one works as a language analyst or in a similar position for an agency, or as a foreign language instructor in a military or government language school or program—a common thread among these career paths is that they provide the opportunity to use foreign language abilities and cultural expertise to serve our nation, as well as to promote better understanding of and relationships with other countries. As has been demonstrated time and time again over the years, clear communication is the first step to resolving international conflicts. Individuals with foreign language skills and cultural knowledge clearly have a special role to play in this very important endeavor.

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# PREPARING FOR A CAREER IN NATIONAL SECURITY

## SCHOOLS, SCHOLARSHIPS, AND OTHER RESOURCES

**F**oreign language specialists ready to step into jobs in the national security field do not simply appear out of thin air. Since 9/11, the federal government has ramped up its efforts to foster and support foreign language education. Most national security careers with federal agencies are only open to U.S. citizens, so there is a need for a strong domestic program.

Federal support for language studies has moved well beyond the Department of Education; the Department of Defense and intelligence community also provide substantial funding for many programs. One such effort is the National Security Education Program (NSEP). Funded by the Defense Department, NSEP has five initiatives: David L. Boren scholarships; David L. Boren fellowships; The Language Flagship; English for Heritage Language Speakers; and the National Language Service Corps [see article on p. 38 for more about the NLSC]. While these initiatives cover a broad spectrum of language resources, they share a common goal of providing individuals with language and cultural skills to prepare them for government service.

"This program was created with great foresight in 1991 to address the needs of the national government in national security," says NSEP Executive Director Robert Slater. "That mission has expanded over the last four or five years. The original strategy was to identify really smart people and give them funding to facilitate their entry into the federal government. The Language Flagship seeks to broaden the pool of people with these skills."

### **BOREN SCHOLARSHIPS AND FELLOWSHIPS**

The David L. Boren scholarship is awarded to undergraduates and provides up to \$20,000 for one academic year. Recipients go abroad to a critical country to study its language and culture and commit to work for the U.S. government for at least one year.

Graduate students who develop independent overseas projects that combine language and culture study with professional practical experiences are eligible for the Boren Fellowship. Recipients receive up to \$30,000 for two academic years and also commit to work for the U.S. government for at least one year. A key component of these programs, says Slater, is that they draw on students from all disciplines. Language experience is not necessary to apply for either the scholarship or fellowship, but language study is a requirement of both programs.

While most Boren recipients go on to positions in the Departments of State or Defense, program alumni also fill roles in agencies and departments as varied as the Department of Agriculture, Department of Justice, U.S. Congress, and the Peace Corps.

"This clearly distinguishes our program. Because we are drawing students from many different majors, they find their way into a range of positions," says Slater.

### **THE LANGUAGE FLAGSHIP**

A more recently developed NSEP program is The Language Flagship. Established in 2000 as a pilot project to develop advanced language programs at the university level, the Flagship program now has 13 domestic institutions, six partner programs, three K-12 programs, and nine overseas centers. Flagship funding is targeted at the institution, not the student.

"We're changing the way universities teach language and, as we grow the numbers of students with language skills, the government is interested in hiring them," explains Michael Nugent, NSEP deputy director and director of The Language Flagship.

Like the Boren awards, university Flagship programs bring language education into all fields of study. Typically, students start with an intensive language program the summer before their freshman year. During the course of their college studies, they take content-based language courses for their specific field.

Flagship programs require an articulated overseas experience. Nugent explains that students do not go to just any overseas experience, rather they take part in one that is designed for their level of proficiency and their subject area. Many students go overseas more than once.

While Flagship students have no requirement for government service, many program alumni do go on to national security careers. The combination of professional-level language skills, overseas experience, and often a dual major opens career paths in government, business, and the nonprofit world.

Some may be concerned that when agencies such as the Defense Department fund language programs, the content of those programs may bend to the agency agenda. "There is a worry that language becomes a service unit," says Slater. "If anything, the opposite is true. Flagship programs bring more students into language programs."

J. David Edwards, executive director of the Joint National Committee for Languages and the National Council for Languages and International Studies (JNCL-NCLIS), agrees that such concerns are misplaced. "It makes sense for the Defense Department and the intelligence community to fund language programs, since they are such large consumers of the graduates," he explains. "This has been described as a sheep in wolf's clothing, which I think is accurate. Defense may be providing the funding, but everyone benefits from these programs."

## OTHER ACADEMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Language students interested in national security careers have access to many scholarships and internship programs, such as the NSEP's Boren scholarships and fellowships. Some other options:

- The Air Force offers scholarships of up to \$15,000 per academic year plus \$900 for books to students of languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Russian, and Vietnamese.
- The FBI has two internship programs that target Middle Eastern language students. The FBI Middle Eastern Foreign Language Honors Internship Program is open to undergraduates between their junior and senior years and graduate students between their first and second years.
- The CIA has co-op programs for motivated students pursuing undergraduate degrees in a variety of liberal arts degree programs, or graduate students pursuing an area study specialty, international relations, or journalism, to work as open source officers studying foreign media. Undergraduates work on an alternating semester or quarterly basis and are expected to spend a minimum of three semesters or four quarters working at the CIA prior to graduation.
- The National Security Internship Program at George Washington University (GWU) is a joint program between the FBI and Department of Homeland Security for Arabic speakers. In the program, students spend half of each day at GWU studying Arabic and national security and the other half on the job at Homeland Security or the FBI. The goal of both programs is to build Arabic language capability and introduce students to career opportunities in national security.
- NSA offers a Summer Language Program in which undergraduates serve as apprentices to senior NSA language analysts and gain intensive experience exploiting communications for vital intelligence missions. The program also offers a unique opportunity for multidimensional and cross-disciplinary growth in analytical skills. The Summer Language Program is a two-year program that lasts for 12 weeks each summer. Applicants must have taken at least one course per semester in Arabic, Chinese, Russian, Urdu, or Persian Farsi. The program begins the summer after a student's sophomore year and continues the following summer. At the end of the second summer, some students are given conditional job offers to join NSA after graduation.
- The NSA's Intelligence Analysis Summer Program is an intensive 12-week program for students entering their final year of undergraduate studies. Applicants must have at least a 3.0 grade point average and be majoring in political science, international affairs, intelligence/security studies, anthropology, or regional studies. The program consists of formal classroom instruction, workshops, and on- and off-site facilities tours, designed to build knowledge and skills about NSA, the signals intelligence process, and the U.S. intelligence community. This training is combined with an apprenticeship with senior NSA analysts for intensive, in-depth development work on exploiting communications for vital strategic intelligence targets and preparing intelligence reports.
- The NSA's Stokes Educational Scholarship Program covers full tuition and mandatory college fees, textbook reimbursement, a year-round salary, and continued employment with the NSA after graduation. The program is open to college sophomores majoring in Farsi or Russian, mathematics, or intelligence analysis, and to high school seniors planning to major in computer science or computer/electrical engineering. Stokes Scholarship recipients work for 12 weeks each summer at NSA. After graduation, recipients must work 1.5 times the length of study for the NSA (i.e., six years for a four-year degree program).

Professor Mahmoud Al-Batal, who directs the Arabic Language Flagship at the University of Texas, says the program is having a positive effect on the university's entire Arabic program. Flagship funding enabled UT to reduce class sizes and offer more sections and contact hours to students in its Arabic program.

"The Flagship program raises the bar for the kind of training we offer in Arabic," he says. "The most important curricular change is content-based courses in Arabic offered to students after their third year. These are graduate seminar type classes in which they might study modern culture, politics, social issues, or literature."

The Chinese Language Flagship at Ohio State University (OSU) has had a similar effect. "It has allowed us to concentrate a lot of effort on advanced level classes," says Professor Galal Walker, who directs OSU's program. "In the past, advanced level teaching happened on a case-by-case basis. We've normalized the expectation of high proficiency."

Students in OSU's Flagship program must double-major in Chinese and another area. By graduation, students are working proficiently in Chinese within the other major. To accomplish this, each Flagship program is paired with a mentor specializing in the other area of study.

"The idea is that you aren't just developing language skills, you are learning to do something in that language at a high level," says

Walker. “We joke that our job is to train the students to appear to be intelligent in Chinese.”

Both Walker and Al-Batal say the Flagship has improved the quality of all language programs at their universities. “This has raised the expectations in all language programs,” says Walker.

This spring, the first graduates of UT’s Flagship will depart the program, which was started in 2006. Of those four students, Al-Batal says that one plans to continue studying Arabic, one plans to work with a non-governmental agency in the Middle East, and two intend to work for the government in the foreign service.

For others who may be interested in working as foreign service officers, the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) is the federal government’s primary training institution for officers and support personnel of the U.S. foreign affairs community, preparing American diplomats and other professionals to advance U.S. foreign affairs interests overseas and in Washington. At the George P. Shultz National Foreign Affairs Training Center in Arlington, VA, the FSI provides more than 450 courses—including some 70 foreign languages—to more than 50,000 enrollees a year from the State Department and more than 40 other government agencies and the military service branches.

## NATIONAL SECURITY LANGUAGE INITIATIVE

In 2006, President Bush launched the National Security Language Initiative (NSLI), which brought together the Departments of Education, State, Defense, and Homeland Security. The NSLI laid out an ambitious program that expands many existing programs, such as The Language Flagship and the Education Department’s Foreign Language Assistance Program (FLAP) grants.

J. David Edwards explains that NSLI did not create many new programs, but it provided a unifying vision and clear support from the President and four federal agencies.

“NSLI gave those programs an umbrella with more of a national security twist, a direct result of 9/11,” he adds. “The fact that Defense and the intelligence community are providing substantial funding does not mean these aren’t quality education programs with ramifications going far beyond national security.”

One new program created by NSLI—and familiar to many language educators—is STARTALK, a Department of National Intelligence initiative to provide summer student and teacher immersion experiences, academic courses and curricula, and other resources for foreign language education in less commonly taught languages. STARTALK is a concerted effort to reach younger students and their teachers, and to build a knowledge base in critical languages.

In the two years since STARTALK began, 3,500 students and 1,500 teachers have participated in programs in Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Persian, and Urdu. In 2008, there were 81 STARTALK programs in 31 states, which drew participants from 44 states. An eventual goal is to provide programs in all 50 states.

Edwards is confident that programs such as The Language Flagship and STARTALK will continue to grow as a result of strong government

support. He thinks that Rep. Rush Holt’s International Education Leadership Act of 2008 (HR 5179), which was not acted upon by the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, has a good chance of passage in the new Congress. HR 5179 would establish an Assistant Secretary for International and Foreign Language Education and an Office of International and Foreign Language Education.

“The key is to build upon existing programs, which The Language Flagship and STARTALK have done,” he says. “For example, you could take an existing French K–6 program and add Arabic starting in middle school, and you are training students who could potentially work in French West Africa. We have to plan for future crises by building on what we have.”

## LEARN MORE ONLINE

**Air Force ROTC**  
[www.afrotc.com](http://www.afrotc.com)

**Central Intelligence Agency**  
[www.cia.gov](http://www.cia.gov)  
[www.cia.gov/careers/jobs/language-positions](http://www.cia.gov/careers/jobs/language-positions)

**Defense Language Institute**  
[www.dliflc.edu](http://www.dliflc.edu)

**Department of Defense Education Activity**  
[www.dodea.edu](http://www.dodea.edu)

**Federal Bureau of Investigation**  
[www.fbi.gov](http://www.fbi.gov)  
[www.fbijobs.gov](http://www.fbijobs.gov)

**Foreign Service Institute**  
[www.state.gov/m/fsi](http://www.state.gov/m/fsi)

**JNCL-NCLIS**  
[www.languagepolicy.org](http://www.languagepolicy.org)

**Language Flagship**  
[www.thelanguageflagship.org](http://www.thelanguageflagship.org)

**National Security Agency**  
[www.nsa.gov](http://www.nsa.gov)  
[www.nsa.gov/careers](http://www.nsa.gov/careers)  
[www.nsa.gov/careers/students.cfm](http://www.nsa.gov/careers/students.cfm)

**National Security Education Program**  
[www.nsep.gov](http://www.nsep.gov)

**National Security Internship at  
The George Washington University**  
[www.nationalsecurityinternship.com](http://www.nationalsecurityinternship.com)

Check out the ACTFL Career Center at [jobcentral.actfl.org](http://jobcentral.actfl.org) to browse position listings in a variety of language-related careers, including those in national security.