

What languages do undergraduates study, and why?

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Abstract. Language attitudes and motivations are among the most important factors in language acquisition that condition the language learning outcomes. College students enrolled in first-semester and second-semester courses of Chinese, Japanese, and Spanish at a Midwest American university completed a survey eliciting instrumental motivations, integrative motivations, and language attitudes. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions the learners of that language(s) held and how their language attitudes and motivations correlate with specific world languages. There was strong interest in using Chinese and Spanish for careers, while participants in Japanese were more interested in using the language for personal enjoyment. American-raised participants take Spanish and Asian-raised students take Chinese and Japanese for much the same reasons, in that they perceive the languages to be easy. Implications for world language programs recruitment are discussed, along with what world language educators can do to take advantage of these pre-existing attitudes and motivations to deliver high quality instruction beyond simply grammar.

Keywords. Chinese; Japanese; language attitudes; motivations; Spanish

1. Introduction. Language attitudes and motivations are important to study because the decisions to study a world language in college may be affected by students' perceptions of the languages and cultures they represent. A large number of L2 motivation research has focused on English as a foreign language (cf. Boo, Dörnyei & Ryan 2015); more research is needed that compares the language attitudes and motivations among learners of various world languages.

While motivation is defined in terms of learner's goal, orientation, and attitudes to pursue learning a language, attitudes are defined as a social factor affected by various motivational factors (Gardner & Lambert 1972, Schumann 1978, Gardner 1979, Noels, Vargas Lascano & Saumure 2019). Gardner and Lambert (1972) proposed two different language learning motivations: instrumental and integrative motivation. Instrumental motivation was used to refer to “the practical value and advantages of learning a new language” (Lambert 1974: 98) while integrative motivation was defined as “the willingness to be like valued members of the language community” (Gardner & Lambert 1959: 271). This framework has been broadened and modified over the years (e.g., McGroarty 2001, Noels 2001, Dörnyei & Ushioda 2013, Dörnyei, MacIntyre & Henry 2015).

Gardner (1985: 41) predicted that there would be a correlation between attitudes towards learning a particular language (for example, French) and achievement in the language. He assumed that students who had more positive attitudes would be more attentive in class, take the work seriously, and find it more rewarding. In a study of language attitudes of heritage language students, Hudgens Henderson, Wilson, and Woods (2020) found that students enrolled in higher-level courses had attitudes that correlated with a stronger likelihood of maintenance of the heritage language than peers in lower-level courses. The higher proficiency one had in a second language, the more positive attitudes one had towards it, along with a stronger motivation to continue learning the language. If students enrolled in

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lower-level courses have less favorable attitudes overall, what draws them to the languages they study in the first place?

The following research questions guided the study: (1) What attitudes do college students have towards the language they are currently studying? and (2) What motivates college students to learn the language they are currently studying? This study focused on the language attitudes and motivations of college students enrolled in first-year language courses at a Midwest university in the U.S. Results from this study may inform recruitment practices of world language programs at colleges and universities, and the program decisions of K-12 schools that offer world languages. While this study investigated the attitudes and motivations of students enrolled in beginning-level courses of Chinese, Japanese, and Spanish, educators of other languages may find commonalities in the types of students they find enrolled in their courses and the attitudes and motivations that drive student enrollment.

2. Methods.

2.1. PARTICIPANTS. Participants were recruited from first semester and second-semester language courses of Chinese, Japanese, and Spanish. The participants enrolled in Chinese courses made up approximately 13% (N = 24), participants enrolled in Japanese courses made up approximately 25% (N = 49), and participants enrolled in Spanish courses made up approximately 61% (N = 114) of the total. This distribution reflects the availability of language courses at the university; one beginning course in both Chinese and Japanese is offered each semester (either 101 or 102), while six to ten sections of first and second-semester Spanish courses are offered each semester (see Table 1).

More female participants than males were enrolled in the courses of all three languages, although the participants in the Japanese courses were closer to an equal distribution (55% female, N = 27; 45% male, N = 22). Participants in Chinese courses were approximately one-third male (33%, N = 8) and two-thirds female (66%, N = 16), while participants in the Spanish courses were three-quarters female (76%, N = 86), about one-fifth male (22%, N = 26), with a small percentage (2%, N = 2) participants identifying as non-binary. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 70, with the median age of 19.

| | Chinese | | Japanese | | Spanish | |
|----------|---------|-----|----------|-----|---------|-----|
| | 101 | 102 | 101 | 102 | 101 | 102 |
| Phase I | -- | 7 | -- | 24 | 28 | 23 |
| Phase II | 17 | -- | 25 | -- | 63 | -- |
| Subtotal | 17 | 7 | 25 | 24 | 91 | 23 |
| Total | N = 24 | | N = 49 | | N = 114 | |

Table 1. Participants recruited from language courses

More international students were studying Chinese or Japanese than Spanish; (see Table 2). The majority of participants enrolled in Japanese courses had grown up outside the U.S. (64%, N = 30), while almost a third of participants enrolled in Chinese courses were international students (29%, N = 7). In contrast, only four participants enrolled in Spanish had grown up outside the U.S. Reflecting this large proportion of internationally-raised students, the Japanese courses had the largest proportion of participants who did not speak English as a native language (almost three-quarters; see Table 3). A little less than half of the

participants in the Chinese courses were native speakers of languages other than English (45%). The Spanish courses were overwhelmingly filled with native English speakers (92%, N = 105), and the vast majority of participants in Spanish had studied the language before coming to the university (90%, N = 103). Almost a third of participants enrolled in Japanese had studied it in high school/secondary school (29%, N = 14), while almost half of the participants enrolled in Chinese had studied it in high school/secondary school (46%, N = 11).

| | Chinese | | Japanese | | Spanish | |
|---|---------|----------|----------|----------|---------|----------|
| | Phase I | Phase II | Phase I | Phase II | Phase I | Phase II |
| Midwest US (MN, WI, IA, IL) | 6 | 9 | 5 | 11 | 47 | 59 |
| Other US states | -- | 2 | 1 | -- | -- | 3 |
| Mainland China | -- | -- | 9 | 6 | 2 | 1 |
| Taiwan | -- | -- | 7 | 7 | -- | -- |
| Japan | 1 | 2 | -- | -- | 1 | -- |
| Korea | -- | 2 | 1 | 1 | -- | -- |
| Other areas (Mexico, Thailand, "Asian") | -- | 2 | 1 | -- | -- | -- |
| Total | 24 | | 49 | | 114 | |

Table 2. Place of youth or where participants grew up

| | Chinese | Japanese | Spanish |
|--|----------|----------|-----------|
| English language | 13 (54%) | 13 (27%) | 105 (92%) |
| Chinese language (Mandarin, Cantonese, and Taiwanese) | 0% | 29 (59%) | 3 (3%) |
| Japanese language | 3 (12%) | 0% | 1 (1%) |
| Spanish language | 2 (8%) | 0% | 1 (1%) |
| Other Asian languages (Hmong, Korean, Urdu and Vietnamese) | 6 (25%) | 7 (14%) | 3 (3%) |
| Other language (Tagalog) | 0% | 0% | 1 (1%) |

Table 3. Native languages of participants

A demographic portrait of participants studying each language emerges from the data presented in Tables 1-3. A large proportion of international students enrolled in both Chinese and Japanese courses. Many international students in the Japanese courses were from mainland China or Taiwan and spoke Chinese or Taiwanese as a native language, and almost a third had studied the language before. While the Chinese classes had a higher proportion of

American-raised participants, these courses still had more international participants (from Japan, Korea, and Thailand), and almost half had already studied the language. The Spanish courses were virtually all native English-speakers raised in the U.S., with very few international students enrolled (N = 4), and a large majority (90%) had studied the language before. These demographic patterns are important to consider when it comes to language attitudes and motivations to study a particular language; the survey results reported below suggest that many students favored studying languages that were either familiar to them from previous experiences or linguistically similar (in one way or another) to their native languages.

2.2. DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES. Data was collected at two different time-points: in mid-semester of Spring 2019 (Phase I) and in mid-semester of Fall 2019 (Phase II). Participants were surveyed at mid-semester for both phases in order to ensure comparability between the two data sets; that is, it was assumed that students' language attitudes and motivations could be different at the start of a semester, at mid-point, or at the end of a semester. Phase I collected data from participants enrolled in first-semester and second-semester courses. After the Phase I data were analyzed, slight modifications were made to the survey instrument in terms of question order, wording of the questions, and two additional questions were added. Phase II collected data only from first-semester participants to avoid doubling of participants who may have continued on from 101 to 102.

2.3. INSTRUMENT. The data collection instrument was an anonymous electronic survey composed of questions that collected demographic information (age, gender, origin, native language, major) and experience with the language of study (language studying experiences, other languages studied). The survey questions had forced-choice options and/or an open text box for students to type answers. The survey included questions designed to elicit students' integrative motivations, instrumental motivations, and language attitudes. After the Phase I data was collected, two new questions were added (ethnic/racial identity and interest in the culture(s) of the language speakers, not discussed here) bringing the total questions to 20.

3. Results. This study investigates the language attitudes of undergraduates enrolled in beginning-level Chinese, Japanese, and Spanish courses and their motivations to study those languages. Descriptive statistics and a thematic evaluation of the qualitative data provide a preliminary comparative analysis of the integrative and instrumental motivations and language attitudes of college students studying the three languages.

3.1. INTEGRATIVE MOTIVATIONS. Integrative motivations were investigated via questions that asked whether or not participants had family members who spoke the language, whether or not participants had friends who spoke the language, and whether or not participants had travelled to a country/place where the target language was spoken.¹ College students who are heritage language learners may be motivated to learn the language of their families (Kagan 2012). This question regarding family members gauged how many heritage language learners were enrolled in the beginning level classes, and to what extent they were motivated by the desire to speak the heritage language with their families.

The majority of participants enrolled in all three languages did not have family members who spoke the languages; in general, the participants of this study did not represent a traditional heritage language learner population. Of the 30 participants in Spanish who reported having family members who spoke Spanish, at least 10 of those were referring to family members who had learned Spanish as a second language. For example, one participant

¹ An additional question added in Phase II asked participants if they were interested in the culture(s) that the language represents; the results of this question are not considered here for comparability purposes between Phase I and Phase II participants.

reported that she would like to be able to speak Spanish with her sister, who had already learned Spanish as a second language. Another student reported that her family spoke Spanish because they were missionaries in Honduras. Of the one-quarter of participants in Chinese who reported having a family member who spoke Chinese, only one of those expressed interest in speaking the language with them (it was the native language of the participant's wife and her family). Of the eight participants in Japanese who reported having a family member who spoke the language, three mentioned either their fathers or both parents as speakers (all three were native Chinese speakers). These three students did not wish to speak Japanese to their parents, with one person writing, "I am afraid to talk". In contrast to the participants in Chinese and Japanese, participants in Spanish did express interest in speaking with family members. One participant said, "I would like to visit my family in Puerto Rico and it would be nice to communicate in their native language".

More participants in Chinese had friends who spoke the target language (83%, N = 20), although more than half of the participants in Japanese (55%, N = 27) and Spanish (64%, N = 73) also had target-language-speaking friends. However, the participants in Chinese seemed to be more shy about speaking the target language to their friends than the participants in Japanese; some did not speak Chinese with their friends because of their limited language skills and confidence ("no, because i don't know how to, nor do i understand them"). Many of the participants in Japanese were willing to speak to improve their language skills as well as learn about the culture ("...they can help me with the language and I can also learn more [about their] culture..."). Participants in Spanish were interested in speaking Spanish to the friend's family members: "I dont have a need to speak [sic] their language because we have always communicated in english but it would be nice to be able to talk to their parents."

In general, participants exhibited positive attitudes toward traveling to use the languages as well as to experience the cultures, and those who had not yet travelled to a place where the language was spoken showed high interest in doing so. A third of the participants in Chinese reported traveling to or living in a place where Chinese was spoken (33.33%, N=8). They had been to places like Beijing, Hong Kong, and Taiwan: "I went to Beijing, China for two weeks. It was an excellent experience for learning more about the people and the culture." About half of the participants expressed a desire to travel to a place where Chinese was spoken (50%, N = 12). Most wanted to practice their language and immerse themselves in the culture: "Yes. For the full immersion and cultural experience". About a third of the participants enrolled in Japanese reported traveling to Japan (31%, N = 15), and most of these travelers were international students originally from Taiwan. They traveled to Japan for several days to two-week vacations: "The environment in Japan is very good and the service attitude is very good." Of the 34 participants who had not traveled to Japan, 29 of them showed a desire to visit or live in Japan: "I would actually like to teach English in Japan. so I think that it would be nice to have experience living in the country before actually getting a job there." Just under half of the participants who studied Spanish reported traveling to or living in a place where Spanish was spoken (46%, N = 53).^{2,3} Most of these trips abroad were short vacations: "I went to Cancun for 3 weeks and that's what really made me want to take Spanish. I felt bad that I didn't even know enough to hold a five minute conversation and I want to change that." Of the 61 participants who had not traveled to a Spanish-speaking country, all but 6 expressed a desire to travel or live in a Spanish-speaking country: "I would

² In Phase I, the question asked about a country where the language was spoken; in Phase II, the question was modified to "a place" where the language was spoken.

³ The U.S. is second only to Mexico in number of Spanish speakers; we acknowledge that the U.S. could be considered "a Spanish-speaking country". In fact, one participant from Phase I listed Florida, the Carolinas, and Arkansas as the Spanish-speaking countries he visited.

like to. I enjoy seeing how others live and do things and learn more about it not just in a classroom.”

3.2. INSTRUMENTAL MOTIVATIONS. Three questions probed for possible instrumental motivations for studying a language: meeting a university general studies requirement,⁴ plans to major or minor in the language, and any plans to use the language in a future career.

Taking a language class to fulfill a university requirement was a strong motivating factor for participants in Spanish and to some extent Chinese, but much less so for participants in Japanese. A large proportion of participants studying Spanish were taking it to fulfill a university requirement (74%, N = 84), while over half the participants in Chinese (58%, N = 14) were taking the course to fulfill the requirement. Of the participants not taking Chinese for a requirement, some were non-degree students from the local high school or the community. In Japanese, only about a third of participants were taking the class to fulfill a requirement (37%, N=18), while nearly half of the participants (45%, N = 22) were not. Participants in Japanese who responded “unsure” (18%, N = 9) were one-year exchange students who did not have to satisfy this requirement. Even among the American-raised participants studying Japanese, only half of them reported taking it to fulfill a requirement. Of the three languages studied here, more students in Japanese seemed to be learning it for personal interest or enjoyment.

When it came to majoring or minoring in the language of study, few participants in any language planned to continue. In Chinese, only three participants (13%) planned to continue, while a slightly larger portion of participants in Japanese (18%, N = 9) reported that they would minor. In both Chinese and Japanese, about one-third did not plan to continue (33%, N = 8; 39%, N = 19 respectively), while just over half were unsure (54%, N = 13; 43%, N = 21 respectively). The large proportion of participants who were uncertain about continuing for a major or minor provides evidence the beginning level courses could be important sites of recruitment for Chinese and Japanese language programs.⁵ Likewise, few participants planned to major or minor in Spanish (10%, N = 11). More than half did not plan to major or minor in the language (59%, N = 67),⁶ and about a third were unsure (31%, N = 36). Recruitment for Spanish language programs could also occur in the beginning-level programs, although it looks less promising considering the larger proportion of students who answered “unsure.” Considering that few students reported any plans to major or minor in the languages they were studying, it was surprising to find robust interest in using the language(s) in future careers. Almost half of the participants in Chinese courses planned to use Chinese in a future career (46%, N = 11). The interest in using Japanese in a future career was a slightly smaller proportion of students (39%, N = 10) than Chinese: “My current major is nursing, and I believe that knowing Japanese will help me be closer with my Japanese patients. I also would like to teach English in Japan one day.” A small portion of the participants responded negatively (16%, N = 8) but these participants showed their interest in learning Japanese for pleasure: “I just plan to travel to Japan.” Nearly half of the participants were unsure about the idea of using Japanese in their future career (45%, N = 22), indicating the uncertainty of their career path or life in general: “I’m still ultimately trying to find out what I want from life”. Like Chinese, there was strong interest in using Spanish in future careers (54%, N = 62). These participants mentioned careers like nursing, teaching, and criminal justice: “Yes, I want to go into some kind of healthcare and it will be necessary to be able to communicate with patients and coworkers.” One participant majoring in Elementary Education and Special

⁴ The beginning-level language courses were among many options that students had at this university to fulfill certain general education requirements for undergraduates.

⁵ At the time of data collection, the university offered a minor in Chinese and a minor in Japanese, but not a major in either language.

⁶ At the time of data collection, the university offered both a major and a minor in Spanish.

Education did not plan to major or minor in the language, but acknowledged she would be working with Spanish-speakers: “I could possible [sic] use this in my future career because my students or their families could speak Spanish better than English”. Considering that many students recognized the important role Spanish would play in their careers, it was perplexing that so few of them planned to continue learning the language.

To further investigate motivations, participants were asked to explain why they chose the particular language they were studying as opposed to the other languages offered at the university (including French and German). A sizable number of participants in the Chinese courses reported that they believed the language was important and they planned to use it in their future careers: “English is necessary now and Chinese will be necessary in the future.” They saw the value of learning Chinese for their futures: “because China is the most populous nation in the world, and knowing the language can give me a competitive advantage.” International students from China’s neighboring countries (such as Japan, Korea, and Thailand) felt a strong presence of Chinese economy as an indicator of their future opportunity: “Many Chinese are visiting Japan recently so...I want to work at the airport or hotel.” Some participants had personal reasons to learn Chinese such as family members: “My mom’s side of the family is Chinese and I’m always around them so it would be nice to understand and talk back to them in their language.” One non-degree learner explained: “My daughter-in-law is of Taiwanese heritage. Though she is a fluent English speaker, I want to be able to communicate with her family in a deeper way. Any grandchildren will probably be bi-lingual, and I want to be part of their lives. Plus, I love learning a language. I love the possibility of deeper communication. I love the way it demands a wider way of thinking. And it’s fun to figure out the code.” Other participants wanted a deeper connection for themselves personally: “I wanted to get in touch with my Chinese side that I never was really immersed in.” One student stated: “I picked Chinese because I am Chinese and don’t know how to speak the language so I am very interested in learning it. I always wish I knew it or my high school had taught it because it is something I am very interested in.”

Many participants in Japanese indicated that they had already been exposed to some aspects of Japanese culture such as Anime, online/video games (with an online friend connection) and Japanese food. Native English-speaking participants who grew up in the United States mentioned that they chose to study Japanese because they were attracted to the culture: “I watch Japanese anime and think it is a cool language to learn since I listen to it a lot”. International participants from Asian countries took slightly different motivations behind the decision. Like American participants, the international participants did show interest in cultural components but also mentioned the easiness or approachability of the language: “Japanese is a little closer to Chinese, maybe easier for me”. For those participants from Asian countries, a sense of closeness, inclusive of the easiness or familiarity of the language, was an important factor to make the choice to take Japanese: “because Japan is [an] Asian country.” Further, many of them indicated that they had Japanese friends or their friends/family members studying Japanese abroad: “My good friend goes to school in Japan and I want to travel with her.” While international participants’ motivation for taking Japanese lied in cultural/linguistic/geographical closeness, or something “familiar” to them, American participants showed a willingness to learn something “new” (“I had already taken Spanish and Spanish is sort of boring because it’s pretty similar to English...I’d rather go someplace new...”).

Participants in the Spanish courses mentioned both their previous experience with Spanish in high school and also the prevalence of Spanish in the United States as reasons they chose to study it in college (“I already had some experience from it in High School and I feel like it is one of the most common spoken languages besides English”). The ubiquity of Spanish in the United States paired with its familiarity made the language a top choice when

choosing a language course to fulfill a university requirement. For many participants in Spanish, there was a fear of studying a language that was unfamiliar: "I had the most experience in this language and didn't want to go out of my comfort zone by trying to take French or Chinese. Spanish just comes easier to me." Some participants mentioned that Spanish could be useful to them: "I learned Spanish in high school and it was interesting. In addition, it is one of the most widely spoken language in the world and I think learning Spanish can be an advantage to my future career." Besides these reasons, Spanish was also the "easiest" language the university offered for many participants: "I chose spanish because i had taken spanish classes in the past and knew it would be an easier A than other languages." The perceptions of Spanish as "easy" helped many participants choose to study this language in college.

3.3. ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE LANGUAGES. In contrast to motivation, attitudes are an "evaluative reaction to some referent or attitude object, inferred on the basis of the individual's beliefs or opinions about the referent" (Gardner 1985: 9). Two questions asked participants if they considered the language they were studying to be "an 'easy' language to learn" or "a 'hard' language to learn" and to explain their answers.

Although Chinese is rated as one of the most difficult languages to learn for English speakers, many American-raised students rated Chinese to be only "sometimes" hard. In all, more than half of the participants in the Chinese courses believed that Chinese was sometimes easy (58%, N=14), and less than half of the participants believed that Chinese was not easy (42%, N=10). For those who believed that Chinese was sometimes easy, many either had previous Chinese learning experiences ("I've already learn some of these and my mom speaks Chinese to me sometimes") or they were international students with a cultural proximity to China (we using [sic] kanji in Japan, so it's easy to understand those meanings"). However, even for some American-raised beginners, Chinese was sometimes easy:

"I do consider certain elements of Chinese to be easy. For example, the grammar is similar to English in many ways -- and sometimes it's even easier than English (e.g. no conjugation and no tenses). Also, after learning certain characters or components of characters, you can more easily recognize the meaning of new characters and words (and sometimes even the pronunciation)."

For those who believed that Chinese was not easy, the linguistic distance between Chinese and their own native language was mentioned: "No, because it is very different than english". For some, learning Chinese takes a lot of effort: "I learn through lots of repetition and have spent on average 3 hours a day during the week working on learning this language and on weekends. I spend at least 8 hours. This is more work than when I was taking 16 credits as a student." Interestingly, even some international-raised participants who were culturally close to China found Chinese difficult:

"I consider Chinese an extremely difficult language to learn. Certain sounds (e.g. j, q, x, and ü) aren't really present in English, and tones aren't used in English, either. On top of all that, writing Chinese characters can be a daunting experiences for beginners. In a sense, the difficulty is what makes it more interesting. You know that people who picked it up as a second language and use it at an advanced level put a lot of time and effort into learning it. Of course, even though it's challenging, it's also extremely interesting and fun to learn."

Similar to international-raised participants in Chinese, native Chinese- and Korean-speaking participants in Japanese mentioned the easiness or familiarity of the language,

pointing out some similarities with their native languages: “because some words are introduced from Chinese characters.” More than a third of the participants in the Japanese courses indicated that Japanese was easy (41%, N = 20). Ten participants (20%) reported that Japanese was sometimes/somewhat easy, including native English-speakers who found it “easier” to learn the grammar rules once they noticed grammatical/structural regularity: “it has a more ‘regular structure’ than English”. When participants were asked if Japanese was “hard,” their responses were divided equally (33%, N=16, for ‘yes/no/sometimes’, with one no response). Participants who considered Japanese a hard language mentioned its writing system: “The foreign characters make writing a lot harder than speaking”. A few participants posited the difficulty of Japanese in a more analytical and objective way: “I would consider this as a hard language for people who are not from Asia since there are a lot of different things with western languages.” Those who mentioned that Japanese was not hard were speakers from Asian countries: “it has some words similar to Chinese.” This is aligned with findings from their perception of the “easiness” of Japanese. Once again, those participants felt that Japanese was “not hard” due to linguistic/cultural/geographical closeness to them: “Taiwan is close to Japan, therefore, we have many chance[s] to know this language.”

Participants studying Spanish were evenly divided in their perceptions of “easiness” or “hardness” of the language, although a slightly larger proportion said that Spanish was sometimes easy (39%, N = 45) and sometimes hard (35%, N = 40). Some participants mentioned that no language was easy to learn, but having prior experience helped. The fast pace of college classes made it more challenging: “What is easy is that it is easier to pick up on for reading/listening/writing. But that may be because I have 2 years of prior spanish. It is difficult to remember all the vocab and words in such a short amount of time.” Almost a third of participants enrolled in Spanish reported that the language was not easy (30%, N = 34) and a quarter said that it was hard (25%, N = 28). For these participants, the grammar and the pronunciation were the most difficult aspects: “There is [sic] many different forms of words and conjugating to be correct. Also lots of words are the same but pronounced differently and mean completely different things.” However, even the students who acknowledged the difficulty of learning Spanish, they still believed Spanish to be an easy language compared to others: “no i dont think any language is easy to learn although it may be easier then [sic] other options.” Almost a third of participants enrolled in Spanish reported that the language was easy (30%, N = 34) or that it was not hard (36%, N = 41). For these participants, Spanish was “simple”, “easier”, and “similar to English”. Again, Spanish was an easy language compared to other languages: “yes, there are way harder languages to learn and i feel i catch on pretty fast”.

4. Discussion. This study investigated college students’ language attitudes and motivations to study Chinese, Japanese, or Spanish. The study found that overall, participants reported strong integrative motivations for all three languages (measured here via using the language with family or friends or traveling to a place where the language is spoken). Although the participants’ interests in the culture of the languages was not explicitly investigated here, more participants in Japanese courses and to a lesser extent, Chinese courses mentioned personal enjoyment of the culture or people to be a reason to study the language. More participants in Spanish had instrumental motivations and planned to use the language in a career (and to a lesser extent, participants in Chinese). Fewer participants in Japanese (and to some extent, Chinese) were studying the language to fulfill a requirement than participants in Spanish. These results confirm previous research that languages perceived to be compulsory (i.e., Spanish for the American-raised participants) align more with instrumental motivations, while languages perceived to be less immediately useful (in this context, Japanese or Chinese for the Americans) align more with integrative motivations (e.g., Humphreys & Spratt 2008).

However, this finding could be due to the higher proportion of international students enrolled in Chinese and Japanese who did not need to fulfill that requirement.

A surprising find was that although few participants in all three languages desired to major or minor in the language, there was a strong interest in using the languages in future careers. It seems contradictory to want to use a language professionally when one does not plan to study it. The fewer participants who planned to use Japanese in a career aligns with what was found in terms of studying Japanese for enjoyment rather than instrumental motivations. The large proportion of students studying Chinese and Spanish who wanted it for a career but did not want to continue learning it was baffling. What made so many participants believe that one to two semesters of Chinese or Spanish would be sufficient to communicate with patients, parents, students, and clients regarding complex matters such as healthcare, legal matters, and educational attainment? Considering that by the time these participants began working in their careers, three to four years would have passed and most of what they had learned in a beginning language class would certainly be lost to memory. It could be that at the beginning levels, students are still exploring their career options and they have not yet decided how the language(s) will fit. Future studies may investigate college students' perceptions of necessary language proficiency a person needs in order to function in a L2 professionally. Indeed, one participant in Spanish seemed to have an unrealistic expectation of how long it takes to learn a language: "If I focused more on [learning] the language I believe I could be fluent in a year or two."

It is important to note that most of the international and American participants in the Chinese and Japanese courses were studying their third or fourth languages. The American multilingual learners were native English-speakers and had already studied Spanish in high school; these multilingual language learners had different attitudes and motivations than participants who were only on their second language. They were studying Chinese or Japanese to give themselves a challenge. In contrast, the international students in Chinese or Japanese were taking those classes to give themselves an easier class while studying abroad in the U.S., they are too learning a third or fourth language. The international students studying Chinese or Japanese had much of the same motivations and language attitudes towards these two languages as the Americans in the Spanish classes: they wanted an easier class with a language they were already familiar with. For Chinese- or Taiwanese-speaking students in a Japanese class, the writing system similarities and cultural closeness made it an appealing choice. For the Americans in all three language courses, Spanish was perceived to be an easy language while Chinese and Japanese were perceived to be more difficult languages to learn. The international students may have avoided Spanish because it was perceived to be difficult and unfamiliar, or because they perceived Chinese or Japanese being more important and useful for them when they returned home. Future research may investigate more deeply via focus groups why exactly international students avoid Spanish.

In this study, the students in Chinese and Japanese courses were a mixed-motivations group. Teachers of Chinese and Japanese may have highly motivated Americans mixed with some international students who just want an easy grade. Educators could harness the multilinguality of their students by purposefully mixing student groups and having students interview each other regarding their language-learning journeys. Having students share their interests in the target languages and target cultures could further reinforce the commonalities among the students.

As for the vast majority of the American participants in Spanish courses, these classes (besides their high school experiences) were their only experiences studying a language and culture other than their own. This finding points to the important responsibility that language educators have towards teaching more than just grammar to their beginning-level students. Considering that a majority of them do not continue studying a language to the intermediate

or advanced level, that they have no desire to study languages and cultures unfamiliar to them, and that the first- and second-semester courses may be the last language course these students ever take, it is imperative that language educators take every opportunity they have to incorporate cultural aspects into their teaching that can promote intercultural understanding. As one participant noted, studying languages “opens a new perspective” to learners that they may not get from their traditional classes.

An important finding of this study is that many participants chose to study languages they were already familiar with, either through prior study, travel, or relationships with native speakers. The analogy of going out to eat at a new restaurant may help to understand why students choose to study familiar languages. Many people may choose menu items that they have eaten elsewhere out of fear of picking something they may not like. The customers who play it safe are like the Americans who study Spanish or the international students who study Chinese or Japanese because it is familiar--they have had it before, and they know what they are getting. The bolder clients may choose something unfamiliar because they have already had the standard menu options, and they are ready for an adventure. They step out of their comfort zone and take a risk.

If students are afraid to try new things, what can educators and policy-makers do to help them broaden their horizons? First, offering a wider variety of language options at the K-12 level would help college students feel less trepidation towards other languages and cultures. For many of the American participants, Spanish was the only option offered at their high schools, and it was their default language option at college. Second, harnessing the beginning-level classes to meet students’ interests (such as Anime, food, or holidays) is important beyond just recruitment for language programs. Language educators can take advantage of cultural stereotypes students may bring to the classroom to give students a deeper understanding of what otherwise would remain a superficial understanding of the speakers and their cultures. For example, a unit on food in a Spanish class could complicate American students’ notions of “Mexican food” to discuss the differences in ingredients and preparation of tacos. The beginning-level classes are important sites to dismantle cultural stereotypes, a process that could impact students long after they have left their language classrooms. World language educators can play an important role in making language learning a fun and rewarding experience for all students.

Another important finding of this study was the perceptions American and international participants had towards the “easiness” or the “hardness” of the languages they were studying. The Foreign Service Institute categorizes both Chinese and Japanese as Category IV languages: “‘Super-hard languages’ – Languages which are exceptionally difficult for native English speakers”, while Spanish is listed as a Category I language: “Languages more similar to English”. However, the grammar of Chinese is similar to English grammar in many ways (Liang 2014), unlike that of Spanish, which has a complex system of verbal morphology; native English-speaking students who start Chinese might discover Chinese is not as hard as they originally thought. Cultural familiarity may have had a lot to do with these perceptions of easiness or hardness. Although the writing systems for Chinese and Japanese are similar, Japanese grammar is generally regarded as more complex than Chinese or even Spanish grammar. In some ways, Chinese could be considered an “easy” language for English-speakers, and Spanish a “hard” language. Yet, more American-raised participants studied Japanese for pleasure than Chinese or Spanish; in fact, many participants enrolled in Spanish seemed to think it was an obligation. Future studies may investigate college students’ beliefs of what makes a language “hard” or “easy”. The data analyzed here provides evidence that the perceptions of a language as “hard” or “easy” could encourage one student and simultaneously discourage another from studying the language. More insight is needed on the origin of linguistic stereotypes among college students.

5. Conclusion. This investigation presented a preliminary analysis that compared the language attitudes and motivations of college students enrolled in Chinese, Japanese, and Spanish. Future analyses could include a quantitative statistical analysis (such as regression) to further examine the role that the independent variables (such as gender, native language, and origin) had on language attitudes and motivations. The data from this study represent the language attitudes and motivations of undergraduates enrolled at a small Midwestern university in the U.S. It should be expected that undergraduates in different locations, or undergraduates of different origins and backgrounds, may have different language attitudes and motivations to study languages; the results presented here are not necessarily generalizable to other contexts. College students who have more K-12 experiences with world languages may also hold different language attitudes; for the majority of these American-raised participants, Spanish was the only non-English language they had formal exposure to before college.

In addition, this study investigated the language attitudes and motivations towards only three languages: Chinese, Japanese, and Spanish. Students enrolled in different language courses (such as American Sign Language, Haitian Creole, or Korean) may have different attitudes and motivations towards those languages. Nevertheless, the results discussed here are indicative of the general perceptions towards Chinese, Japanese, and Spanish from American-raised and (Asian-origin) international undergraduate students. For American participants, Spanish was perceived to be an easy language while Chinese and Japanese were perceived to be challenging. For the international students, the opposite was true: Chinese and Japanese were the easier languages. The results of this study suggest that it is not only linguistic proximity that leads to perceptions of “easiness” or “hardness” of a language, but also perceived cultural proximity, familiarity and importance of a language.

World language educators should consider students’ attitudes and motivations when planning curricula for their beginning-level students; for many students, the first-semester and second-semester courses will be the last language class they ever take. While these courses can be important sites for recruitment, they are also spaces to dismantle harmful cultural stereotypes. Taking the time to teach more than just grammar can give students a deeper understanding of the speakers to whom they may never speak.

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