

INVESTIGATING DIFFERENCES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN THE STATE
OF NORTH CAROLINA AND THE WALLONIA REGION OF BELGIUM

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand how foreign language education differs between the state of North Carolina and the Belgian region of Wallonia. The United States does not have an official language, but an Anglophonic hegemony that makes English the most important and valuable language to speak. Belgium has three official languages, and great emphasis is placed on learning foreign languages. Both countries take different approaches to foreign language education, and this impacts how individuals learn, practice, and master foreign languages. The aim is to understand how policies, social institutions, and cultural norms in the two countries interact to influence the motivation and language learning experience at the individual level. A total of 12 respondents were interviewed in-depth, with six respondents from Wallonia and six respondents from North Carolina, about their experiences learning and attitudes about languages. The two groups were compared by analyzing interviews for common and differing themes. These results reveal that Belgian individuals had more consistent school requirements for foreign language education, while the North Carolina students did not. This difference impacted their language proficiency level and usage of the foreign language. All individuals interviewed found importance in learning and using (a) foreign language(s), but the reasons why varied between the two countries. Future research could expand the North Carolina subset to those who did not choose to study (or continue with) a foreign language, to understand where their choice comes from, and how their attitudes differ from students who did choose to continue foreign language education.

Introduction

Learning more than one language is a fundamental way for people to expand their worldview, improve brain functions like multitasking and critical thinking (Poarch & Bialystok, 2015; Bahadir, 2022). Foreign language education refers to learning a language that you do not speak natively. For example, there are 24 official languages within European Union countries, and multilingualism has become synonymous with European cultural identity (Hocaoglu Bahadir, 2022). Belgium, a country in the European Union, has three official languages: French, Dutch, and German. In the French-speaking Wallonia region of Belgium, foreign language education is required for several years. There is a choice between learning English, Dutch, and German, but students must learn at least one foreign language (Mettewie & Van Messel, 2022).

The United States does not have a federally declared "official language"; however, English functions as the dominant and default language and culture (Harper, 2011). My state of residence, North Carolina, has no statewide graduation requirement for foreign language education. Studying foreign languages in high school is optional and counts as elective credit (NC State Board of Education, 2022). Institutions or districts can, however, make foreign language study mandatory. High schools in North Carolina offer language courses, and colleges offer majors and minors in languages.

The experience of learning a foreign language differs based on cultural beliefs, location, and school policy. Therefore, I want to investigate how educational policy, social institutions, and cultural norms influence a person's motivation to learn a foreign language in these two locations: Wallonia, Belgium and North Carolina, United States. Examining and further understanding differences in foreign language education policy and practice in the two locations and how these intersect with social institutions and cultural attitudes towards multilingualism

will lead to a greater understanding of students' motivations for pursuing learning a foreign language such as French in North Carolina or English in Wallonia, and why they continue to pursue further study in foreign language.

The research questions I hope to answer are the following:

1. What are the respective policies in North Carolina and the Wallonia region of Belgium that shape the type and implementation of foreign language programs?
2. How do policies, social institutions, and cultural norms influence an individual's motivation to learn (and persist in learning) additional languages?

Literature Review

Motivation and the Lens of Self-Determination

Learning a foreign language is something that interests many for various reasons. A foreign language could be pursued for more extrinsic (outside) motivators, such as travel purposes or a job, or more intrinsic (inside) motivators— such as simply wanting to speak and understand multiple languages (Ossipov, 2000; Krashen, 1981; Davis, 2020). Language learning and personal motivation were studied through the lens of self-determination theory (SDT), which looks toward the individual's basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness in terms of the development and growth of the self. It was found that those with higher intrinsic motivation will typically have higher rates of success in learning and mastering a language than those motivated by their external environment (Davis, 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

For American students, intrinsic motivation plays a more significant role in an individual language learning experience and proficiency development (Davis, 2020). When a student wants to learn a language, they will succeed. The theory of planned behavior looks at attitude, behavior control, and injunctive/descriptive norms to understand how intention becomes persistence.

Injunctive norms refer to how people think others should behave, and descriptive norms refer to people's actual behaviors. In this case, students must be engaged in what they are learning to persist and succeed. If they are just trying to fulfill a requirement, they may be less invested in learning and continuing with learning the language at hand (Poarch & Bialystok, 2015; Roland & Boudrenghien, 2018).

Speaking a foreign language allows for intercultural communication, broadening of a worldview, travel opportunities, and so much more. Fluency, travel, and cultural education are personal goals (as opposed to requirements) for students learning and persevering in a foreign language, such as French (Ossipov, 2000; Ramage, 1990; Duyck, 2013). Not only this, but a benefit to learning languages is tangible changes in neuroplasticity of the brain (Li, Legault & Litcofsky, 2014). There are executive function benefits and various cognitive advantages correlated with bilingualism— all of which differ on time and level of language learning, but exist nonetheless .

Integrative motivation refers to the interest in learning for the sake of learning (Duyck, 2013). For instance, American students often pick a foreign language so they can learn about the culture of the language itself and do not consider its utility (Ossipov, 2000). Instrumental motivation is learning with a purpose. Motivation can be instrumental for students, which consists of an interest in language for practical things like jobs and communication. Duyck (2013) found that secondary school children in Wallonia are motivated to learn a foreign language in both ways. Both types of motivation are important in the student's success in learning and retaining language education. Those with higher levels in both categories of motivation are also more likely to succeed in their language learning experience than those students who do not. It is similar in Belgium and the United States that personal motivators play

an important role in language learning success and persistence. Still, institutional requirements in Belgium may push the importance of acquiring a foreign language education and becoming bilingual more than in North Carolina.

Social Institutions and Environments

These motivational differences bring into focus the ways in which social institutions can impact the experience of learning a language. When it comes to learning a second or additional language, people start in various places. Whether by school requirements, with family at home, or studying independently, everybody has a unique path to mastering a language. Multiple social institutions impact language acquisition. The ones discussed in this research are schools/public education and policy, families, and employment.

In schools, students have the opportunity to learn languages. Educators have a large impact on the individual student's learning path in any subject (Vansteenkiste et al., 2004). The more motivating and supportive the educator is of their student's intrinsic goals, the more opportunity a student has to succeed. Autonomy-supportive environments are ones where the individual is given more freedom while still being supported (i.e., a choice in how they learn a subject, given constructive feedback for performance). Autonomy-supportive environments are particularly successful when presented in a school setting where students can choose their path and achieve success when learning a language in the classroom.

In North Carolina, no policies specifically require *all* high school students to take a foreign language. This does vary from district to district, but there is no state-wide requirement as of 2021-2022 (NC State Board of Education, 2022). For high school graduation requirements across the board in the United States, 12 out of 50 states (24%) require foreign language credits or mastery in addition to core credits. 16 out of 50 states (32%) require electives in addition to

core credits and offer foreign languages to fulfill these elective credits, including North Carolina. 3 out of 50 states (6%) note that their additional credit requirements vary on a district-to-district basis. Finally, the other 19 out of 50 states (38%) do not have an additional credit requirement for high school graduation apart from core classes (High School Graduation Requirements, 2023). Foreign languages are often a choice but are often less funded and developed than other academic disciplines (i.e. core subjects such as English, math, and science) (Campbell, 1971). This can have an impact on the education that students receive. The programs are less developed and will be less extensive with less funding.

As stated, Wallonia, Belgium has three official languages: Dutch, French, and German. French is the primary language of the Wallonia region. In primary school, students can choose what foreign language they want to learn. Typically, Dutch, English, German, and Spanish are offered as language options. However, their first foreign language (FL1) is often a choice between Dutch and English (Mettewie & Van Messel, 2020). In place of Dutch, English is becoming increasingly popular as a language choice for students in their first years of school. There are requirements for foreign language education up through high school in Wallonia, Belgium, although it depends on the school that they are in and the exact requirements. Interestingly, the Brussels region requires Dutch as FL1– so the region defines the language learning experience for the individual (Mettewie & Van Messel, 2020). Also, Belgian higher education has an emergence of “Full-English” Master’s programs. This continues the English and foreign language education requirements that emerged in earlier years of education (Marchal, 2015).

Cultural Attitudes

It is important to note that language plays a vastly different role across countries, cultures, and societies. In the United States, there is no official language— just an “anglophonic hegemony” causing the default language of the country to be English (Harper, 2011). There is also the aspect of “Americanization” in school education programs, which aims to preserve an “American identity” that places the English language as the cultural norm. The United States, however, began as a multilingual society. It was not until public figures like Benjamin Franklin and Theodore Roosevelt pushed for the purity of English speaking and insisted on “Anglifying” society and for the consistent speaking of English only. This happened in public, as well as in schools, including in the Native American boarding schools where the children were stripped of their culture, including their language, to make them more “American.” The “Anglification” of America is synonymous with the Anglophonic hegemony, and the beginnings of American Exceptionalism, which emphasizes that America has no equal (Bonvillian, 2020; Dunn, 2013). With most public and private education classes only taught in English, it is enforced as the essential language to learn to participate in American society (Dunn, 2013; Gleason, 1992). This, again, explains in part the different attitudes that American people have towards learning languages.

The European Union supports multilingualism (Hocaoglu Bahadir, 2022). The idea of linguistic diversity has become intertwined with the very existence of the European Union. With so many countries with different languages in such close proximity, multilingual education is more prevalent and developed than in the United States. In Belgium, for example, there are three official languages: Dutch, French, and German (Mettewie & Van Messel, 2020). The country’s languages have an impact not only on communication but on education and employment. To

break down the linguistic distribution of Belgium, Flemish Dutch is spoken by 56% of the country, French is spoken by 40% of the country, and German is spoken by 1% of the country. This distribution reflects the three official languages of Belgium. In addition, 55% of the country speaks English, which is more than two of the country's official languages (Frolla, 2017). Belgium is ranked as the 7th most proficient country in speaking non-native English. Belgians use English as a common ground language (*lingua franca*) between the Dutch speaking North and the French speaking South. Brussels is a multilingual city, with French and Dutch both being widely spoken (Whitehead, 2023). Speaking multiple languages allows greater communication across countries and cultures (Hocaoglu Bahadir, 2022).

The United States, however, does not have an official language but informally insists that all individuals learn the English language to participate in social life to the point that it is the societal norm (Harper, 2011). American society places high value on the use of and proficiency in the English language, and it is common for individuals in the United States to be monolingual. American exceptionalism, as mentioned previously, pushes the idea that America has no equals. There is a magnetic appeal of American life and society that is somehow more impactful and important than that of other countries (Dunn, 2013; Midgley, Tracy & Livermore, 2000). With this, every person in The United States can create their path and destiny. Due to this phenomenon, American citizens tend to gravitate away from learning foreign languages since English is the only language necessary to function in American society and has become a cultural standard for conducting business worldwide. Exceptionalism does not prompt American individuals to look down on others, rather it holds them to a higher standard of excellence and the expectation that everyone will speak English, locally and globally. This does perpetuate a focus on the importance of knowing American history and cultural aspects of the country. This

subconsciously can lead the individual to, even inadvertently, view the US as superior to other nations (Dunn, 2013; Kildis, 2021).

Altogether, an emphasis is placed on only learning English, which should be the dominant language used in everyday and institutional interactions. Education in world systems theory explores how social structures create opportunities, power, and status in societies (Chew & Knottnerus, 2002). As the value and prevalence of speaking English grows ever so powerful in the United States and throughout the world, being able to speak English becomes a status marker and plays a vital role in reinforcing the ideology of American exceptionalism. The American way of life or “American Dream” has become a global economic regulator, perpetuating people’s desire to speak the English language (Grewal, 2005). With this in mind, those who speak English can communicate internationally and do things like reading scientific articles (many of which are published in English).

Based on the information and research reviewed, it would be beneficial to investigate the differences and similarities between the foreign language education programs in Belgium (a country in the European Union) and the United States. Discovering the respective individual, societal, and institutional motivators behind learning a language within the two societies could begin to uncover why there is a stark difference in the linguistic culture of the two countries.

Methods - Data Collection and Analysis

For this research, I utilized a two-pronged approach to investigate the differences in foreign language education between Wallonia and North Carolina. The methods I chose were a comparative policy analysis and in-depth interviews. Foreign language education policy gives insight into the set requirements and goals of the state and region that each individual will follow. Policies shape the education system and set the standard at an institutional level.

Comparing these policies represents a way to see the differences and similarities between what formal education systems in Wallonia and North Carolina require when it comes to foreign language education.

I used in-depth interviews to understand the cultural and individual perspectives about language learning in the two countries. The best way to understand what education is like for individuals is to talk to them, so I decided to speak with an equal amount of respondents from each country to get more information. The interviews allowed me to ask respondents to elaborate on their ideas instead of in a survey where respondents would simply mark an answer or write a short response. Together, these approaches gave me a good understanding of the education systems in the two countries.

I first compared policies surrounding second and additional language education programs. Then, I conducted in-depth interviews. For the comparative policy analysis, I searched the Internet for foreign language education policies in North Carolina and the Wallonia region of Belgium. After gathering information from government websites, in conjunction with published sources about educational programs and mandates, I conducted a content analysis of the policies. Data analysis was conducted through a tabular comparison of requirements of language programs to demonstrate the similarities and differences in these policies and programs in two different locations: Wallonia and North Carolina. The sources utilized for this policy analysis were those from Education USA (2023), Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles (n.d.), French Toast Language Centre (n.d.), High School Graduation Requirements (2023), Moniteur Belge (1963), NC State Board of Education sources (2006 & 2022), Public Schools of North Carolina (n.d.), Secrétariat Général (2023), and Mettewie & Van Messel (2020).

For the interviews, I spoke with individuals who had focused on learning French or English while attending school. The target population was American students who majored or minored in French at Appalachian State University. These individuals also attended high school in North Carolina. The other set of interviews were with Belgian students who speak French as their first language and have learned English in primary and secondary public school. The interview participants' ages ranged from 18 to 26. I interviewed 12 respondents– 6 from each location. Interviews were semi-structured, consisting of several topic questions and varying amounts of probing questions to elicit more responses. I used an interview guide for each interview to ensure reliability and validity across responses (See Appendix A). However, probing questions differed depending on the respondents' answers to previous questions. I used the *Zoom* online conferencing platform and I recorded each interview, and *Zoom* provided transcripts, apart from one hand-transcribed in-person interview.

Respondents A, B, C, D, E and F were from Wallonia, and Respondents G, H, I, J, K and M were from North Carolina. Before each interview, I presented respondents with the choice of speaking in French or English. 4 out of 6 Belgian respondents and 6 out of 6 American respondents elected to have the interview in English. One American respondent was raised with French as their native language, learned English in schools growing up, and typically speaks English on a regular basis. The two interviews I conducted in French were translated partially automatically and partially by hand to English. I analyzed and qualitatively coded the interviews for common themes.

To collect a comparative sample, I used a snowball sampling technique. The research flier advertisement was sent out via email by a French professor to some students majoring in French and posted onto a variety of student discussion pages to recruit American participants. This

sampling method allowed me to identify individuals who have studied French within the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures at Appalachian State University within the last two years. After identifying some initial respondents, I asked them for suggestions for other students who studied French while at App State. There were some issues initially finding all participants to be simply French majors, so I expanded the American respondent pool to include French minors.

For the Belgian participants, I contacted individuals who I had met through assigned groups in an Intermediate French II course at Appalachian State to obtain the sample. These are people with whom I had weekly *Zoom* meetings, scheduled through the course, in the Spring of 2021. I have since visited Belgium two times and met friends of the two initial *Zoom* peers. These individuals grew up in Wallonia and are all at varying levels in their English education. The Wallonia subset was made up of three men and three women, and the North Carolina subset was made up of two men and four women.

I considered the ethics of social research, especially when interviewing participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained in the study through the use of pseudonyms, and not collecting any identifying personal information such as telephone numbers, email addresses, or residence addresses. I provided a consent form to all participants that described the purpose of this research and its potential benefits and risks, written in both French and English (See Appendix B). For each interview, I ensured that all participants understood that their responses would be a part of a larger dataset and that the results and analysis would be aggregated to demonstrate similarities and differences based on the locations and not the individuals.

Results/Analysis

Comparative Policy Review

Figure 1. North Carolina and Wallonia School Policy Comparison

	Year Language Education Begins	Years Required	Languages Offered	Goals of FL Learning	Proficiency Exams (national)
Wallonia	5th year primary OR 1st year primary*	All of primary (year 1-6) minimum of 2 hours education for years 5-6	Choice between Dutch, English, and German as FL1	Skill level B1/B2 on proficiency tests	TOEFL & IELTS
North Carolina	As early as elementary school*, choice in middle/high school	Elementary school-potential for requirement; no middle/high school state requirement; many UNC schools have 2 FL credit requirements	Varies by district (variety of modern languages)	Focus on intercultural communications, lifelong language learnings. Note* proficiency <i>can</i> be measured formatively	ACTFL & FLPA

The foreign language education programs in Wallonia are fairly structured. This program begins in either the 5th year of primary school or the 1st year of primary school (*depending on the region). The choice is between the other national languages of Belgium, Dutch and German, or French. It is notable that Dutch is compulsory in the Brussels region from year 3 of primary school, but is a choice in the Wallonia region.

However, in North Carolina, the school program is less consistent and structured. Language education can begin as early as kindergarten or early elementary school, and continue throughout the course of education. In middle and high school, it typically becomes a choice. Foreign language programs in North Carolina vary widely across districts. Foreign language education is not required in North Carolina. For high school graduation, there is no statewide

foreign language requirement for graduation. Certain school districts can offer or require foreign language credits, but the state does not require students to take a foreign language. Many students take it because of the University of North Carolina System college admissions requirement of two foreign language credits. The choice between languages also varies between school districts. The languages offered are typically a variety of modern languages (ASL, Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Mandarin Chinese, Russian, or Spanish).

In Wallonia, the goal of the foreign language program is for students to become proficient in their “chosen” foreign language. There are tests, such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), that will determine what level of proficiency a student has reached. The goal is for students to reach a B1 or B2 level of language proficiency, which reaches into the “Independent User” level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL) scale (see Figure 2). These levels of language proficiency is assessed by the ability to discuss unfamiliar topics and continue a conversation, to utilize more complex vocabulary and express thoughts in a substantial way, to understand television programs and extended speech, to write clearly about various topics, and to understand feelings and expressions while reading, all done in the target language.

In North Carolina, schools teach students intending to further the ability for intercultural communication and lifelong language learning. The state asserts that proficiency tests can be used to measure proficiency formally, but proficiency is typically measured through communication. The proficiency test used in North Carolina is through the American Council on

the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) or newer modes of testing such as LinguaFolio. The ACTFL scale is similar to the CEFRL scale, but follows a different pattern (see Figure 3).

Figure 2. CEFRL Scale

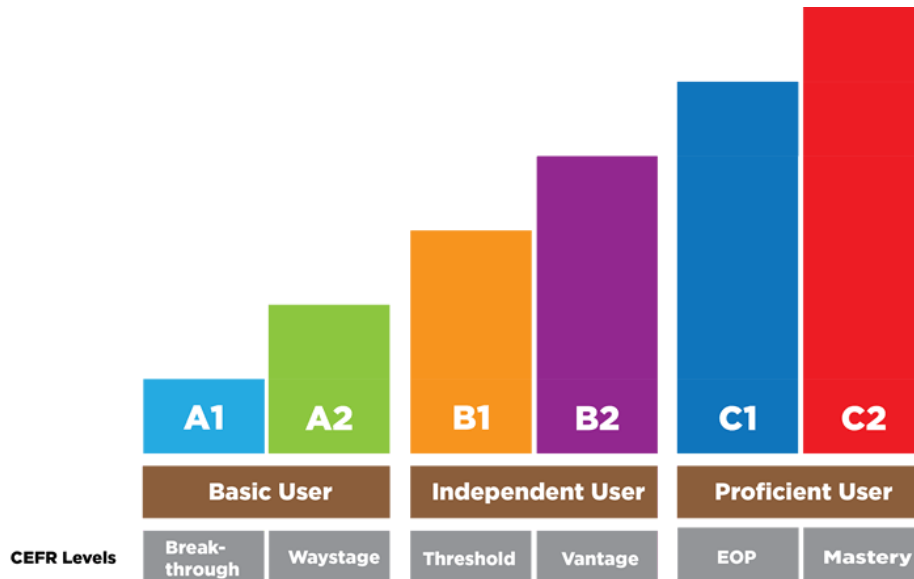
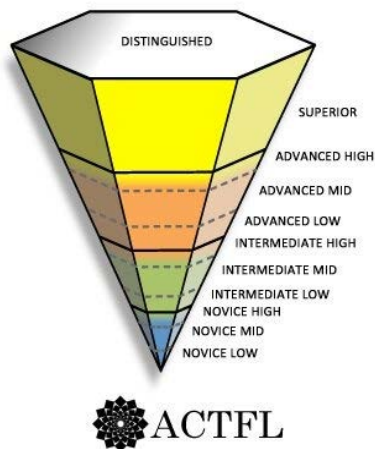


Figure 3. ACTFL Scale



In both North Carolina and Wallonia, students have the option for different language education paths, such as immersion schooling opportunities. However, the standard path of study is notably consistent in Wallonia but varies in North Carolina, about requirements and languages offered across school districts. These policies shape the structure of language learning in

Wallonia and North Carolina, henceforth impacting the attitudes around learning foreign languages.

In-Depth Interviews

Personal Motivations

Personal motivations fall in line with the micro level of influence. These influences have impacts on a person-to-person basis. The majority of interviewees across both countries stated that they chose to learn their foreign language (English or French) based on their own personal interest in learning languages and were motivated to continue learning due to their desire to communicate across different cultures. However, the deeper reasoning behind this choice varies between the Belgian and American respondents.

Respondents from Wallonia took English due to vast English-learning requirements across their years of schooling, a necessity of speaking English in order to reach career-oriented goals, social norms of bi- or multilingualism in Europe, and travel. 6 out of 6 respondents shared that they strongly believe that knowing English will help them and 4 out of 6 noted that it already has in their life, career or field.

“On nous disait pour trouver du travail à Bruxelles il faut savoir parler, néerlandais, et français, mais je pense que de plus en plus l'anglais prime sur le Néerlandais”

[Translated: “We’re told that to find work in Brussels, you have to know how to speak Dutch and French, but I think that more and more, English takes precedence over Dutch.”] (Respondent C).

Respondent A, studying journalism, noted that many large news outlets in Europe produce their news in English (Respondent A), and Respondent D discussed how a lot of the academic and medical papers are written in English (Respondent D), making the English language an even more vital part of success in Belgium for certain common work fields.

Respondents from North Carolina took French in lieu of other language choices with more specific goals related to languages. The reasons included careers in linguistics, working

with French speaking countries or artists, connecting with their own or another culture, or a personal interest in French or in knowing a language other than English.

“I think it enables me to, like, better work with people of French origin or francophone origin, whilst also, like making myself more, I don't know if marketable is the best word...yeah, it enables me to like, be a better team player, or a more useful part of an overall business machine, to be able to communicate effectively with, say, partners abroad or customers or things like that” (Respondent J).

French acts as an additive feature for some of these individuals, giving them something that will make them stand out from the crowd. 3 out of 6 of the American individuals noted that they are sure that knowing French will definitely help them in their career/life, while the other 3 out of 6 shared that they think that it may be a help to them. The American attitude leans much more towards a desire to speak a language due to interest, rather than a feeling of necessity like the Belgians.

Cultural Attitudes

Cultural attitudes fall into the category of meso level influences. At the meso level, influence comes from both the societal and individual level, including social norms. The biggest difference in attitudes between the Belgian and American respondents is how they view and use the foreign language they are learning: seeing the language as essential to getting a job, using it as something extra to add to their knowledge, using it in their daily life, or not using it on a regular basis.

The majority (5/6) of Belgian respondents noted that it is important in the European vision to speak more than one language due to opportunities for work and travel and more importantly, the existence of various languages across the continent that individuals face. This multilingualism in Europe emphasizes the importance of and need for a more comprehensive, consistent foreign language education system.

“So basically to find a job, it's very important. Because again, nowadays, I feel like 90% of the people my age. They. They speak English, at least it's the bare minimum. So ...if you cannot speak English... you won't find any job here in Belgium, I think, because we are, Belgium is actually, I don't know how to say it in English, but *polyglot* country.” (Respondent E).

It is built into the Wallonia society to be used for learning multiple languages, and the importance of English specifically is emphasized. There are three official languages in Belgium across the different regions, and English also plays an important role in the society, so residents are accustomed to learning languages other than their native language. In line with this, English is emphasized as necessary to learn in order to work, which will be discussed in a further section. Respondent F, when asked about their experience learning languages in school, remarked: “*Well, as you know, English is the most important language in the world*” (Respondent F). This sentiment encapsulates the very nature of English usage and education in Wallonia. It is promoted as important, necessary, and beneficial.

The choice to learn French was often based on a personal interest related to career goals or expansion of worldview. French is seen as something that can be an additive to their education, and not something that they must know in order to succeed in American society. Apart from two respondents: one studying abroad in France at the time of the study and one who was born in France, came to the United States when they were young, and speaks French with family members, respondents from North Carolina did not report using French in their daily life. In the United States, English is really the only language that is necessary for people to speak, which calls back to the concept of American exceptionalism. French functions as a passion, something that they are interested in and invest time in.

“I think right now it's definitely just kind of like a hobby of mine...I encounter a lot of people who speak Spanish in my job, but I never have met anybody who speaks French, or who I need to like, use French with. It's just not as common here.” (Respondent K).

It is important to the North Carolina respondents to keep learning the foreign language, even if the United States monolingual agenda is pushed in education, work, and society. American attitudes in this study also fell along the lines of wanting to expand away from speaking English.

Respondent K also expressed,

“I think it'll also...be helpful to know any language besides English... I feel like sometimes that's like, kind of the universal language. And I feel like it's kind of almost taken over in a lot of ways. I think there's a big importance in...knowing another one. And...realizing that that's important too.”

The pattern appears that individuals in North Carolina who opt to learn languages are typically looking to expand their worldview, moving away from simply falling into the pattern of the Anglophonic hegemony. In the United States, a monolingual society, it proves difficult to keep up with language progression outside of education, as opposed to in Belgium, where the language is all around them.

English has even become a common language in Belgium between the Dutch-speaking North and the French-speaking South, according to Respondent C. English functions as a *lingua franca*, which is a common language across geographical regions.

“Les néerlandophones ne veulent plus nous parler français parce qu'on ne fait pas d'efforts à parler nous néerlandais et du coup en fait même à Bruxelles maintenant les néerlandophones ne parlent plus français pour nous pour s'adresser à nous mais parle l'anglais” [Translated: “Dutch speakers no longer want to speak French to us because we don't make an effort to speak Dutch. And so, in fact, even in Brussels now Dutch speakers no longer speak French for us to address us but speak English”] (Respondent C). Since Wallonia residents are hesitant to learn Dutch, and the Flanders residents are hesitant to learn French, English serves as a common middle ground. This even further propels the use of and importance of English in Belgian culture. It is not only used for work and speaking to people in other countries, but for speaking to people in their own country. Regardless of the reasoning, 100% of respondents did recognize the importance of expanding their worldview, communication and/or cultural knowledge. It is evident that individuals from both North

Carolina and Wallonia value communication across different cultures, and that attitudes can be similar even if causes and reasonings are vastly different.

Education

The impact of education, a social institution, falls into the macro level of influence. This means that it is on a larger-scale, having more of a societal impact. Looking at some statistics For the American respondents, 3 out of 6 chose to only take French in high school, 1 out of 6 took French and Spanish, and the other 2/6 took a different language other than French. The choice was based on interest in the language or a lack of interest in other languages. Also, it is notable that a respondent was unable to take French in high school due to scheduling conflicts.

“In high school, we were offered French, German, Spanish and online Latin. Um, and you got to pick, but a lot of the 4-year North Carolina universities required you to do at least 2 semesters of a language... I actually originally wanted to do French but the schedule conflict didn't work, so I ended up taking German when I was in high school.” (Respondent I).

Scheduling conflicts for a foreign language exist in North Carolina schools but not in the schools in Wallonia, because foreign language education (specifically English) is required in Belgium. There is a choice present in the Belgian schools initially– between Dutch and English (sometimes also German and Spanish), as 2 out of 6 elected to learn Dutch first. However, the students who took Dutch were also required to begin English as their second foreign language, starting in their third year of secondary school. So, to reiterate, though it was a choice initially, learning English becomes a requirement for Belgian students as they continue through secondary school.

The Anglophonic hegemony and the widely accepted attitude that English is a universal language shape the American culture of language learning. People do not receive consistent, required language instruction in any set language because it is seen as more of an optional entity; whereas, in Belgium, learning English is seen as vital and is pushed as a requirement for school.

The educators had their own impact on the individual choice to continue learning the language, as well. Respondent C noted

“Mais clairement...les professeurs à l'école nous ont toujours dit que c'était très important l'anglais qu'il fallait toujours l'apprendre et qu'il ne fallait pas seulement attendre d'apprendre l'anglais pendant nos cours, mais qu'en dehors des cours à la maison...” [translated: “But frankly, the teachers at school always told us that English was very important that we always needed to learn it and that we did not only need to wait to learn english in our classes, but when we are outside of class—at home...”].

Belgian educators expressly encourage their students to study English, while emphasizing its relevance and usefulness to the students. The foreign language education system in Wallonia looks towards the ultimate goal of fluency in languages, as reflected in quotes like these, as well as language education policy.

For North Carolina, it proves to be much more of a rare and difficult experience to learn a foreign language, namely French, due to the lack of rigor and quality of language education in primary and secondary schools. The American values place emphasis on core subjects such as history, math, science, and English, rather than foreign languages. Often, in America, the pattern appears that there is light Spanish education in primary, or elementary, school, and then in middle or high school, foreign language education becomes a choice between a few languages. It is not typically a requirement in every high school but is often a requirement for North Carolina four-year university admission. This coincides with American Exceptionalism, rendering the learning of another language more of an option than a requirement, as well as pushing it to the backburner.

One limitation that may skew this result is the fact that they chose to participate in these interviews. This could be an explanation for why they are all on the same page about the importance of languages. If they did not find language learning important or interesting, they would not have elected to interview to talk about their experiences. And, for the North Carolina

respondents, they would not have chosen French as their major or minor in college if language was not a value. These could skew the data, but it is noteworthy that respondents from both countries are in agreement about the importance of languages. Regardless of language level and quality of the education, it is considered to be of high importance and value to be able to speak– or at least work on learning– another language.

Proficiency

I did not assess respondents' level of language proficiency in this study. However, the respondents' choice of language for the interview suggest that the Wallonia respondents are at a higher level than the North Carolina respondents. As mentioned, individuals were presented with the choice to partake in the interview in French or English; consequently, 4 out of 6 Belgian respondents and 6 out of 6 American respondents elected to be interviewed in English. Apart from the respondent who grew up speaking French until she learned English in school, it is notable that all of the American respondents elected to interview in their native language of English, and only two of the Belgian respondents elected to interview in their native language of French. Belgian respondents were at a level of English that allowed them to express themselves as clearly as if they were speaking French. American respondents were not at this level of French speaking proficiency.

It is evident that the rigor and requirements of English education in Wallonia contributed heavily to the respondents' choices to have the interview conducted in English. Respondents from Wallonia indicated they felt equally proficient in French (their L1) and English (an additional language) , or wanted to interview in English to practice. One decided to interview in English, noting that they would speak in French if they could not find the English word they were looking for. The North Carolina respondents expressed not being comfortable with

conducting the interview in French because they felt they would not be able to express themselves. It should be recognized that their level of proficiency and choice of interview language does not reflect the individuals' respective efforts in learning the languages; rather the outcome of the combination of the cultural attitudes of the society around them and the policies put in place.

Conclusion

In investigating the differences between foreign language education between Wallonia and North Carolina, it is evident that these differences stem from the countries' respective views about language and multilingualism, education policies, and geographical location. The policy analysis revealed that foreign language education in Wallonia is focused on the development of language proficiency, while foreign language education in North Carolina is more geared towards an introduction to international culture. Students in Wallonia are required to take language courses and to learn English in both primary and secondary school. Students in North Carolina are able to choose a foreign language based on what their school offers, and there is no state or federal requirement for which languages must be offered and how long they must be studied.

The in-depth interviews revealed how learning and mastering a foreign language varies by the individual. On an individual level, motivation is related to professional goals, personal interests, and cultural exploration. This study produced results consistent with findings from previous research. Individual motivation has proven to be one of the defining factors of success in studying a foreign language. Respondents studied a foreign language to further their career opportunities, expand their worldview, and explore a language and culture they were interested in.

Education policy, often reflecting the society's ideals about multilingualism, sets up the context for an individual to study a foreign language. Mandatory foreign language education and well-developed programs such as those that exist in Wallonia result in courses of study that are more rigorous and comprehensive compared to optional foreign language learning. In North Carolina, foreign language programs are less consistent and underdeveloped, making it more difficult for an individual to effectively learn a language. The Wallonia respondents and the North Carolina respondents both value language education, but have had vastly different experiences. Opportunities to use and practice additional languages vary between the two countries. In North Carolina, speaking a foreign language like French is optional; while, in Wallonia, speaking English is almost necessary. Notably, the Belgian students are all bi- or multilingual with all being proficient in English. The multilingual attitude present in Europe persists through the research that was conducted. This attitude and social norm is present due to the proximity of the European countries, in conjunction with the different languages that each country speaks. American exceptionalism plays a large role in the importance of the English language in American society, and in the lack of a consistent, required foreign language education system.

Future research could explore those in North Carolina who did not pursue education in a foreign language past high school, as to understand what their attitudes are and how they differ from those of European attitudes. This could expand beyond people like those in the present study who already find value in other languages, as evidenced by their educational and vocational choices. The results of the study suggest, however, that European and American values and education have very strong impacts on the personal life of different individuals. The lack, or presence, of a foreign language requirement in schools (statewide/region-wide) have

strong implications for how an individual will succeed or fall short in learning a foreign language. Governmental policies and national values appear to be on a larger scale, but they have a strong hold and impact on the life of the individual person.

It is evident that the experience of learning a foreign language differs greatly between Wallonia and North Carolina. The Belgian experience is shaped predominantly by the macro and meso influences of education and cultural attitudes. Institutional requirements began the English learning experience for the respondents in Wallonia. Brussels, another region of Belgium, is particularly interesting because it houses many embassies, governmental institutions, and serves as capital of the European Union. The multilingual culture of Belgium, and the opportunities for work in the multilingual city of Brussels, pushed those in Wallonia to persevere in their studies and gain proficiency in English. The American experience is shaped by individual motivation. Respondents from North Carolina chose to learn and persist in French due to a personal interest in the language and a desire to continue learning. An individual's experience choosing, learning, and persisting in a foreign language is impacted by societal and cultural attitudes, policies, and individual motivations. It is my hope that, with time, the United States will develop more consistent and comprehensive language policies and foreign language education programs. This would uncover a stronger value placed on multilingualism, promoting cross-cultural communication and lessening the impact of American Exceptionalism as it relates to the anglophonic hegemony in the United States.

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Appendix A

1. Where are you from?
2. Did you attend college? What did you study?
3. What was the second language education program of your primary school like?
 - a. Did you have a choice in what language you learned?
4. Did you start learning [English/French] in school or on your own terms?
5. Why do you study [English/French]?
6. Was there a point where you had a choice to continue with your study of [English/French]?
 - a. Or is it mandatory?
7. What motivated you to keep learning [English/French]?
8. Do you use [English/French] mostly in a professional or casual setting?
9. Do you feel as though knowing [English/French] will help you?

A few more questions...

10. Do people in your family speak languages other than [French/English]?
11. Do your friends speak languages other than [French/English]? Do you speak other languages with them?
12. Do you think it is important to be able to speak more than one language?
 - a. Why or why not?

Pre-interview in french disclaimer: Je ferai cette interview en français. si je ne vous comprends pas, je peux vous demander de répéter quelque chose, ou, puisqu'il y a un enregistrement, je peux y revenir plus tard ! Si vous ne me comprenez pas, demandez-moi de répéter les questions autant de fois que nécessaire ! Je pense que je vais parler plus lentement que vous, et j'espère que ça va!

1. D'où venez-vous?
2. Êtes-vous allé à l'université? Qu'avez-vous étudié là-bas?
3. Comment était le programme de seconde langue à votre école primaire?
 - a. Aviez-vous le choix de la langue dans laquelle vous appreniez?
4. Avez-vous commencé à étudier l'anglais à l'école ou par vous-même?
5. Pourquoi étudiez-vous l'anglais?
6. Y a-t-il eu un moment où étudier l'anglais est devenu un choix?
 - a. Ou c'est obligatoire?
7. Qu'est-ce qui vous a motivé à continuer à apprendre l'anglais?
8. Utilisez-vous l'anglais principalement dans un cadre professionnel ou occasionnel?
9. Pensez-vous que parler anglais vous aidera? Comment?

Encore quelques questions...

10. Est-ce que des personnes dans votre famille parlent d'autres langues que le français?
11. Vos amis parlent-ils d'autres langues que le français? Parlez-vous d'autres langues avec eux?
12. Pensez-vous qu'il est important de parler plus d'une langue?
 - a. Pourquoi ou pourquoi pas?

Appendix B

Cher participant,

Merci d'avoir participé à mes recherches sur les différences dans l'enseignement des langues secondes dans la région wallonne de Belgique et dans l'État de Caroline du Nord. L'espoir est, qu'avec cette recherche, nous puissions comprendre certaines choses. Premièrement, nous voulons comprendre les différences qui existent entre les politiques physiques de la Wallonie et de la Caroline du Nord concernant l'enseignement de la langue seconde. Aussi, nous espérons mieux comprendre comment les institutions sociales, les normes culturelles et les politiques interagissent pour influencer la décision d'un individu d'apprendre et de persister dans l'apprentissage d'une deuxième langue ou d'une langue supplémentaire.

Les entretiens Zoom et ceux en physique sont enregistrés pour créer une transcription pour l'analyse du thème, mais cela ne sera vu par personne, sauf par les chercheurs. Aucune information personnelle ne sera partagée. Des pseudonymes seront utilisés pour garantir le maintien de l'anonymat dans la rédaction finale et la présentation de cette recherche. Je veux vous assurer, à nouveau, que vos réponses personnelles feront partie d'un ensemble de données plus vaste, et que les résultats et l'analyse contiendront les réponses de tous les participants. Je recherche des thèmes généraux, des similitudes et des différences en fonction des lieux, et non des participants individuels.

Avec respect,

Jordan Kelley

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking part in my research regarding the differences in second language education in the Wallonia region of Belgium and the state of North Carolina. The hope is that, with this research, we can understand a few things. First, we want to understand the differences that exist in the physical policies of Wallonia and North Carolina regarding second language education. In addition to this, we hope to gain a better understanding of how social institutions, cultural norms and policy interact to influence an individual's decision to learn and persist in learning a second or additional language.

Zoom interviews and in-person interviews are recorded to provide a transcript for analysis of themes, but this will not be seen by anyone except for the researchers. No personal information will be shared, and pseudonyms will be used to ensure that anonymity is maintained in the final write-up and presentation of this research. I want to again assure you that your personal responses will be part of a larger dataset, and the results and analysis will contain responses from all participants. I am looking for general themes, similarities and differences based on the locations, not the individual participants.

Respectfully,

Jordan Kelley