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**Globalization and Foreign Language Teaching
in the United States**

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It is a great honor for me to speak today to this gathering of distinguished colleagues who teach foreign languages and cultures in universities throughout China. While I now work in administration as the president of a university, I began my career as a faculty member within the academic discipline of Communication, specifically Intercultural Communication. Thus, the intellectual interests of those of you attending this symposium are very similar to my own. I have great respect, admiration, and appreciation for your hard work as faculty members who help to advance your universities' missions. We share a common belief in the importance of communicating across cultures. Those of you who teach foreign languages and cultures have a special role to play in this globalized world. Our world has been transformed by the rapid and profound changes brought about by economic integration, technology that makes possible rapid communication, and transportation that reduces the time that separates one nation and culture from another.

I speak to you today about “Globalization and Foreign Language Teaching in the United States.” More specifically, I will discuss the implications of globalization for foreign language teaching and learning in the U.S.

In order to set the stage for my thoughts on this important set of issues, I will begin by describing for you the characteristics of the city that my university is located in—Los Angeles, California—and then I will describe the university where I serve as president, California State University, Northridge. The characteristics of both the city and the university are critical to understanding my point of view. Then, I will briefly describe some implications of globalization for higher education in general, and, finally, the implications for foreign language teaching and learning in U.S. universities.

My university is located in the City of Los Angeles in the State of California. Los Angeles is a large city with some 4 million people spread over some 800 square miles. Comparable cosmopolitan cities in your country include Beijing and Shanghai. What is most interesting about Los Angeles from the perspective of the theme of this conference and this presentation is that Los Angeles is a city that has already been reshaped by the forces of globalization.

Los Angeles is one of the most diverse ethnic areas in the world. Reflecting its early native and Spanish colonial roots, nearly half of the population is Hispanic, 30 percent is of white/Caucasian/European descent, 10 percent Asian, and 11 percent African American. Even these broad

summary numbers mask the incredible racial, cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity that characterizes the city in which I live. For example, while almost half the population is Hispanic, that label subsumes large numbers of people from Mexico, Central America and South America. While speaking a common original language, Spanish, there are significant cultural differences swept up within this one broad linguistic label of “Hispanic.” In Los Angeles, and the city of Glendale, which is directly adjacent to Los Angeles, there is the largest concentration of Armenians outside of the nation of Armenia. In fact, Glendale is called Little Armenia. Los Angeles has a large concentration of Persians, as well as a China Town, a Japan Town, a Korea Town, and a Thai Town. In these areas, it is possible to find products, speak the native tongue and live virtually insulated in most significant ways from the larger environment of the city of Los Angeles and the United States.

According to the U.S. census conducted in the 2000, 41 percent of the people of Los Angeles speak a language other than English at home, and over 100 different languages are spoken. The Los Angeles Unified School district, the largest school district in the City of Los Angeles, serves more than 700,000 students. These students reflect the wide diversity of Los Angeles: according to the school district, 38 percent of the students need to learn English in order to succeed in school. While the majority of these

students' first language is Spanish, other languages represented among these students include Cantonese, Korean, Tagalog, and Armenian.

As an indication of the influence of the growing diversity of Los Angeles, there are numerous cable television channels and radio stations that cater to different languages and ethnic groups. Spanish-speaking radio and television shows have been known to receive higher audience ratings than English-language shows.

Anyone attending a public event like a sporting event or going to an open physical public space like a shopping mall will be sure to encounter and hear people speaking multiple languages. These experiences are an aural manifestation of Los Angeles as the microcosm of an increasingly global society.

California State University, Northridge is a large comprehensive university in the northwest part of Los Angeles in an area called the San Fernando Valley. The university is one of 23 universities in the California State University system. The California State University has over 450,000 students across the state and is considered the largest system of higher education in the United States. My university is the third largest in the system with almost 36,000 students. We offer 64 baccalaureate degrees and

53 masters level degrees in fields of study from the traditional arts and sciences, to professional fields such as business, various engineering and computer science fields, to nursing, health care administration, teacher preparation. We offer 3 undergraduate and graduate degrees in foreign languages and, in addition, offer minors or coursework in some 10 additional languages.

We are a university that describes its mission as being regionally focused. This regional focus is best understood by several important characteristics. First, the students who attend Cal State Northridge come primarily from Los Angeles County and several adjacent counties. Second, this regional mission also means that our degree programs have a practical character, as does the pedagogy that our faculty uses in their teaching.

Finally, a decision to add a new degree program or field of study is linked to whether there is an economic, workforce, or social imperative from within our region that offering the program satisfies. For example, we have added new courses and programs in recent years such as a master's in social work, an Armenian Studies Program, a concentration in our undergraduate music degree program on music industry studies, a master's degree in tax accountancy, and this fall we began offering the first baccalaureate degree in the United States in Central American Studies. In both the Armenian Studies

and Central American Studies programs, the offerings are directly linked to the large number of our students whose cultural heritage reflects those nations and parts of the world.

While we describe ourselves as a regionally-focused university, we are also already in many significant ways already a global university. Our students, while primarily citizens of the state of California, have family and linguistic backgrounds from all over the world.

The profile of Cal State Northridge's student body reflects the diverse family and linguistic backgrounds of California, including 32 percent who are white, 27 percent Mexican American and Latino, 12 percent Asian American and Pacific Islander, 8 percent who are African American, and 5 percent who are international students. And according to our enrollment figures for Fall 2007, almost one in five of our students—specifically 19 percent—indicated in their admission applications that they are immigrants. This figure is up from 11 percent in 2004. Similarly, a survey we conducted recently of our nearly 3000 incoming freshman students showed that though more than 90 percent of these students were citizens, 26 percent—more than a quarter—said that English was *not* their native language. This percentage is considerably higher than other four-year public colleges participating in the same survey, and it underscores the diversity of Cal State Northridge.

The State of California depends on the California State University campuses, including Cal State Northridge, to educate the workforce that California needs in order to stay globally competitive. This workforce may or may not work exclusively in California, but these California State University graduates will do work that, in the words of a recent CSU task force on internationalization, "...is cross-cultural, globally interconnected and interdependent, and one that demands advanced and versatile knowledge and conceptual abilities."¹

What then are the realities of globalization for U.S. higher education, in general, and, specifically, for my university, Cal State Northridge? Accepted within U.S. higher education, public policy, and governmental circles is the recognition that higher education must continue to pursue what in the United States is typically referred to as "internationalization." The term "internationalization" typically encompasses: 1) efforts to bring more students, faculty and staff from other countries or cultures to United States universities; 2) providing opportunities for U.S. students and faculty to pursue study and research in other cultures; 3) changing the nature of the curriculum in the university itself to reflect greater knowledge of other

¹ "CSU International Programs Planning Group Report," the California State University International Planning Group, 2008.

nations and cultures; and 4) pursuing research in a way that recognizes a global- not a U.S.-centric understanding of the research focus. Again, let me quote from that recent CSU systemwide task force: “A growing consensus names the internationalization of teaching, learning and research as fundamental to a 21st century university education.”²

What specifically, would a university such as Cal State Northridge undertake in response to these calls for greater internationalization? For my university, the impact of globalization has already created a multi-cultural, multi-linguistic, multi-racial, and multi-religious student body. The university, in the words of one of our local elected officials, already “looks like a United Nations.” The irony, however, is that our students do not easily pursue educational experiences in international or cultural settings outside of Los Angeles or Southern California. A substantial effort for Cal State Northridge’s response to globalization would be to have our students study or work outside of Los Angeles as part of their educational experience.

Efforts are underway in all fields of my university to respond to the forces of globalization by transforming the curriculum. From an undergraduate degree in business, which now includes coursework on international business, to a nursing program that stresses intercultural

² CSU International Programs Planning Group Report,” the California State University International Planning Group, 2008, Executive Summary, p. 1.

competencies, to those new academic programs that emphasize language and cultures of other regions of the world—the university responds to globalization *vis-a-vis* its curriculum.

Another predictable recommendation for accomplishing the objective of internationalizing our universities include extending the reach of our universities through the offering of courses and programs through distance learning channels to other parts of the globe. Our Tseng College of Extended Learning, for example, provides intensive programs exclusively for international students, and offers four full masters degree programs and a graduate credit certificate online in numerous areas ranging from Communications Disorders and Sciences to Public Policy. The college also is in the process of developing partnerships with institutions overseas to deliver programs and instruction outside the U.S.

One of the greatest challenges for universities in my country and across the world is to understand that globalization has created a premium on the high quality, talented worker. There is now global competition for high quality and creative employees. The economies of the future will depend on highly educated, highly talented individuals. Richard Florida, in his book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, talks about the essential ingredient

of “creativity” because that will determine the success of individuals and societies in the future.³

Higher education definitely plays a crucial role in the preparation of this pool of high talented people. An emphasis at the undergraduate level on the cherished outcomes of baccalaureate degrees—critical thinking, problem solving, communication skills—remain foundational. Globalization also suggests that graduate professional education becomes even more important. The structure of knowledge is changing with a premium now on interdisciplinary knowledge because to solve problems requires an ability to know and use information from multiple disciplinary frameworks. Therefore, more and more individuals will pursue two masters degrees, or even more, in order to meld intellectual and practical knowledge from different spheres in order to operate in the increasingly global and knowledge intensive world.

What then are the implications of globalization for foreign language teaching and learning in the United States?

I begin to answer this question with a belief that almost all of us here today share, and which is captured in a 2006 policy statement by the

³ Florida, Richard. *The Rise of the Creative Class*. Basic Books, 2004.

Committee for Economic Development (CED). The CED articulated the position that in order to respond to the multi-cultural challenge of an ethnically and linguistically diverse world, “the international studies and language education of our students must be strengthened to prepare today’s students to become tomorrow’s leaders.”⁴ More specifically, the CED, argues that “full participation in this new global economy will require not just competency in reading, mathematics, and science, but also proficiency in foreign languages and deeper knowledge of other countries and cultures.”⁵ Congruent with this rallying cry, the media in the United States periodically bemoans the paucity of linguistic expertise available to our government and business sectors.⁶ Similarly, higher education associations periodically summarize the status of internationalization within U.S. colleges and universities, and typically call for greater emphasis on second language learning among our students. Such an example is a recent report from the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) which advocates that students should be encouraged by telling

⁴ “Education for Global Leadership: The Importance of International Studies and Foreign Language Education for U.S. Economic and National Security,” Committee for Economic Development, Washington, DC.

⁵ “Education for Global Leadership,” the Committee for Economic Development, 2006, p. vii.

⁶ Freedman, Samuel G., “After Sputnik, it was Russian: After 9/11, should it be Arabic?” *New York Times*, June 16, 2004.

them that they “will enhance their future and gain insight into other people of the world by studying their languages and cultures.”⁷

Within the California State University system, there is a strategic language initiative, which my university participates in. This initiative involves five strategic languages— Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Persian, and Russian—and tries to build on first language competencies and include other majors and career goals, through an intensive summer language program, followed by a year of on campus language study, and then an additional study in the field.

While I do believe that universities will continue to play an important role in foreign language teaching and learning, it is also important to recognize that for many individuals, universities will not be the place or means by which they learn a foreign language. The availability of other methods to learn foreign languages through self-paced, more conveniently offered methods is an attractive and growing pathway to foreign language learning. One such example is the software program called Rosetta Stone, which provides intensive language instruction through computer based learning that is self-paced and practically focused.⁸ Many businesses and governmental agencies in the U.S. subscribe to such software packages to

⁷ “A National Action Agenda for Internationalizing Higher Education,” The NASULGC Commission on International Programs, October 2007, p.3.

⁸ See <http://www.rosettastone.com>

allow their employees to learn languages as part of their work with a convenience that university-based foreign language instruction has difficulty providing.

Part of the challenge for the person employed, working and living globally is the multiplicity of languages and cultures that are represented within the global centers of the world. Learning one additional foreign language, while helpful, may not be sufficient to address the multicultural and multilingual character of their worlds and the demands of their professional and personal lives. There is, of course, an increased need for skilled translators. Similarly, many global organizations are looking for individuals with multiple languages skills for key organizational positions. There has also been substantial pressure to use certain “key” languages (such as English, Spanish, and Chinese) in specific types of intercultural encounters (English is widely used, for example, among pilots and air traffic controllers at most international airports).

Given the dramatic gains in information technologies over the last years, it is also possible to imagine voice recognition software that theoretically offers a “solution” to this multilingual world in which people now work. Technology may continue to evolve to provide new, and previously unimaginable tools that allow people to “talk” across different

languages. Imagine, if you will, voice recognition software that translates automatically from the language of one speaker to that of another. This software is still in its infancy in terms of its ability to accurately and quickly (instantaneously) translate. Two major problems to date with software to translate speech have been 1) the ability of the software to infer the meaning of words and phrases in context (e.g., the sentences “Time flies like the wind” versus “Fruit flies like the garbage”) and 2) the processing speed necessary to accomplish translations in (essentially) real time. But the sophistication of the translation algorithms (software) is improving the first problem, and an increase in processing speed and complexity (hardware) is improving the second problem.

The core challenge to voice recognition and translation software lies in the axiom that learning to function in a language requires more than an understanding of syntax and semantics; it also requires an understanding of the pragmatics of language use. So the translation programs, however sophisticated they may become, are unlikely to be a complete and satisfactory alternative to the use of culturally-situated speech, as they can't provide an understanding of the culturally-appropriate ways to communicate. My co-author, Dr. Myron Lustig, will give a presentation later today on “Language, Culture, and Intercultural Communication” that will

address the influences of language pragmatics on intercultural communication. Translation programs then will be a very useful but not a complete substitute for humans, at least for the foreseeable future.

I am privileged to have been given the wonderful opportunity to visit with you and speak about the impact of a globalization and foreign language instruction in the United States. I do believe that foreign language teaching in U.S. universities will continue to be a viable and important part of the undergraduate curriculum because of globalization and because languages are the windows to cultures. My visit here today and the warm welcome I have received as we talk about this issue underscore how they are the key to ensuring peace, friendship and security in the coming years.