Expert Language Professionals
How did they attain their high-level foreign language skills?

Objective
To investigate how very high-functioning foreign language professionals (FLPs) acquire, maintain, and effectively use their foreign language skills, and to identify the factors that contribute to their success.

Definition
High-functioning FLPs have attained at least an Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Level 4 proficiency score in one or more foreign language skills (listening, speaking, or reading). These FLPs are able to perform their job tasks in the foreign language nearly to the same ability as a native speaker.

Findings
Conclusions from recent CASL studies suggest that the following factors contribute to the attainment of high-level foreign language skills:
- Time on task
- Language practice dedicated to speaking skills
- Immersion experience

Further, findings from a study on FBI interpreters in particular suggest that these additional factors contribute to interpreting success:
- Specialized skills (experience, training)
- Specialized vocabulary
- Subject matter expertise
- Extroversion
- Attention to detail
- Good memory
- Dedication to the mission

All the groups studied share a high motivation to succeed in their given professions.

Relevance
Achieving high-level foreign language skills as an adult learner is a daunting challenge. With the U.S. Government’s growing need for highly proficient FLPs, it is important to understand how to identify and develop potential for success in effective and efficient ways.

This CASL research may be used to
- Identify effective methods for recruiting, selecting, and training FLPs, and enabling them to operate at the highest levels of job performance, and
- Improve foreign language pedagogy to address the FLPs’ language needs on the job.

Reports
- Pathways to success: Comparison of language histories and learning experiences (April 2009)
- Literature review on expertise in interpreting (January 2009)
- Becoming an expert FBI interpreter: Preliminary research reveals common factors among the most successful interpreters (September 2008)

For More Information
For more information about this project or for a copy of the reports, contact us:

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