LINGUISTIC DIGLOSSIA AND PAROCHIALISM IN AMERICAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: THE MISSING HALF OF GUERREIRO RAMOS’S REDUÇÃO SOCIOLÓGICA

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ABSTRACT

Diglossia refers to a situation in which there are two varieties of a single language used in different social contexts and in which one has higher prestige than the other. American academic public administration suffers from a reverse diglossia. Rather than being privileged by knowledge of the dominant global language, monolingual Americans are stuck in an academic provincialism brought on by their inability to engage other cultures. This case is made both conceptually and empirically, and suggestions for remedying the situation are offered. In closing, it is argued that language competence has to be seen as a personal ethical challenge for the American internationalist.

The obvious and urgent need for additional linguistic preparation is perhaps on balance the least formidable among the difficulties of data-gathering.

Dankwart Rustow (1957, p. 532).

It is, of course, important to our foreign policy that Americans . . . attempt to learn indigenous languages. In the sense that it reflects an interest in a society and its culture, some language facility is important even if it is only the learning of phrases, a basic vocabulary, and some understanding of sentence structure.

James Stenius Roberts (1969, p. 261)

The linguistic concept of diglossia was first suggested in a 1959 article by Charles Ferguson. In this original formulation, diglossia referred to a situation in which there were two varieties of a single language used in different social contexts (p. 325) and in which one had higher prestige than the other. The power relationship inherent in diglossia was evident in the use of the high prestige form in most contexts in news media, business, higher education and especially government (p. 329); and in that mastery of the high prestige form reposed in a small elite (p. 338).
Candler

Ferguson closed his 1959 article with an appeal for further study of the concept (p. 340). As indicated by the 1,092 entries on the subject listed in Hudson’s (1992) bibliography, this appeal generated a response. For the purposes of this paper, a number of important extensions of the concept have been introduced since Ferguson’s initial formulation. Ferguson originally meant the concept to describe the use of different varieties of a single language, and to describe situations when the dominant variety itself is not a common dialect used by people in everyday life, for example the court languages of Japan or the Ottomans; yet Ferguson acknowledged that in many societies a second language could serve this function, such as French as the language of government in otherwise Arabic and Berber colonial Algeria (pp. 336-337). The concept of diglossia has since been extended to include any number of other applications of the fundamental logic of Ferguson’s original observation, including situations of two or more distinct languages in which both a dominant and subordinate language are apparent. Fishman, for instance, offers Spanish and Guaraní in Paraguay as an example (1970, pp. 75-77).

This paper argues that the monolingualism that characterizes much of the North American public administration community ironically functions as a sort of reverse diglossia. English is the unquestioned dominant language in both “the global village” and in international intellectual discourse. Yet rather than a dominant elite, monolingual English speakers are impoverished by their knowledge of only this language, trapped in an intellectual provincialism of their own making. Similarly for public administration: to the extent that few researchers are able or willing to cross language barriers and to bring the lessons of others into the discipline, American public administration is collectively impoverished. Worse, development assistance from the United States will continue to offer inappropriate or maladjusted administrative technologies in an ethical vacuum.

The paper begins by making both a conceptual and an empirical case for the importance of language in both public administration education and scholarship. After a brief discussion of some challenges facing multilingual public affairs education, in closing the paper extends the discussion more broadly to comment on the importance of language competence as an ethical imperative in teaching, scholarship, and international consulting.
LANGUAGE IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS EDUCATION–THE CASE CONCEPTUALLY

It is easy to criticize the United States for being too parochial. No less an authority than Woodrow Wilson lamented the woeful insularity of Americans. In his classic, 1887 article, he argued

It is the more necessary to insist upon thus putting away all prejudices against looking anywhere in the world but at home for suggestions in this study, because nowhere else in the world of politics, it would seem, can we make use of the historical, comparative method more safely than in this province of administration. (p. 219)

As the public administration discipline developed, unhappily Wilson’s call for “putting away of all prejudices” has gone largely unheeded. So parochial has the U.S. discipline been that a brief upsurge of ostensibly comparative activity in the 1950s and 1960s has been worthy of note, despite Nicholas Henry’s conclusion that the movement was in part the result of Cold War, anti-communist funding practices (2001, pp. 37-39). Fred Riggs (1998) has argued that ASPA’s early comparativists were often ethnocentric and culturally insensitive, seeing the Third World as “backward,” “traditional,” and assuming that “progressive,” “modern,” “developed” American models would lead to improvement (see also Huddleston, 1999, p. 148). Ironically, they probably could have, though not necessarily automatically. Riggs implies the lack of an interactive process of the Americans engaging the local reality—not to mention having a mature, comparatively informed understanding of the peculiarities of the American model—so as to better critically assimilate that which works from the American model, into the society into which it was to be imported. Beyond Henry and Riggs, numerous scholars in the field have noted the parochialism that characterizes the American public administration discipline (see Boyacigiller & Adler, 1991; Candler, 2002; Dwivedi, 1990, p. 92; Farazmand, 1999, pp. 518-519; Klingner & Washington, 2000, p. 36; Tummala, 1998; Ventriss, 1991).

Language has been identified as one component of this ethnocentrism. On the one hand, language may have importance beyond the facilitation of communication in an increasingly inter-related world. Survey research by Grant and Wren, for instance, found that ethnocentrism and monolingualism are highly correlated (1993, p. 14). On the other hand, overcoming this linguistic deficit has long been considered one of the easier challenges faced by those seeking to combat American
provincialism, as suggested by the two quotes—Rustow writing in 1957, Roberts in 1969—that open this paper. Yet decades later, Boyacigiller and Adler reported that foreign language requirements were in free-fall in American universities (1991, p. 268), and Ph.D. programs in organization science “fail in training researchers both to understand international issues and to develop the tools, such as foreign language skills, to conduct research” (p. 269).

Note that the problem addressed in this paper is more fundamental than a hermeneutic effort to identify subtle shades of difference through “clarifying the meaning of texts” (Balfour & Messaros, 1994, p. 560); more fundamental than the impact of language on understanding, say in terms of Mel Dubnick’s oft-cited example of the lack of a direct translation for the word “accountability” in the major romance languages (2002, p. 4); and more fundamental than cultural competence. The monolingual American working in a non-English society is unable both to read texts and to understand; and as Kellar suggests, “languages are the front door to another culture” (2005, p. 8).

An illustrative example of the extent of this American monolingualism leading to cultural misunderstanding can be found in a recent issue of Revista de Administração Pública (RAP), the flagship journal of the public administration discipline in Brazil. RAP has recently published a series of short articles celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of EBAP, the Brazilian School of Public Administration. Frank Sherwood contributed one of these short notes (in English), which was duly published in 2002. Among the ruminations regarding his part in the development of EBAP, he notes his relationship with Alberto Guerreiro Ramos. Prof. Sherwood first met Ramos after the 1964 coup, because during his earlier visit:

[Ramos] was a leftist member of the Labor Party and also sat in the Brazilian Parliament. The ideological lines were so drawn that people like Ramos were unwilling to have any dealings with people like me. I have to say that I respected the demarcation and found myself more comfortable with less ideological people. (Sherwood, 2002, p. 826)

He goes on to note that he finally did meet Ramos after the coup, and that they got on well enough. Yet Prof. Sherwood’s account is wrong in almost every respect, and in every respect it is easy to credit this to his linguistic inability to engage the Brazilian reality.

For instance, Guerreiro Ramos could in no way be considered a leftist ideologue, having fought the Brazilian left in a number of high profile, public battles (see Ventriss & Candler, 2005, pp. 350-352), and
years later was to implicitly blame the coup on the (leftist) ideological excesses of the government (Guerreiro Ramos, 1978a, 1978b). Further, Prof. Sherwood ironically represented that which Ramos lamented in what many argue was Ramos’s most influential work: his 1958 *A Redução Sociológica*. In this seminal text Ramos advocated the development of a Brazilian sociology (and by extension, a Brazilian version of all social sciences) through the “critical assimilation of the foreign sociological patrimony” (1965, pp. 14-15; see also Ventriss & Candler, 2005, pp. 349-352). The approach was a rejection of the development models of both the dependentista left and, more important, that of the United States.

Again ironically, as Riggs (1998) and others were trying to apply the square peg of American administrative methods into what were turning out to be round holes of Brazilian realities, Ramos had argued that “critical assimilation” of this experience into the host country reality was necessary. Because of the language gap, the American development “missionaries” were unaware of this conceptual insight and, given the ethnocentricity to which the major practitioners admit above, they were no doubt equally unlikely to accept this message if translated for them orally.

Prof. Sherwood notes, for instance, that language barriers were a problem in coordinating the U.S.C. technical assistance program on the late 1950s appointment of an EBAP director who spoke no English, and “While it should have been expected that U.S. faculty would have command of Portuguese, such people could not be found in the U.S.” (2002, p. 821). A couple of years later, he is able to report “I had been working on my Portuguese, but it was not good enough to engage . . . in any direct manner” (p. 823). He also comments on 1960 as “not a period when the U.S. was popular” (p. 820), and he “had the uneasy feeling” that his Brazilian counterpart “did not think that I quite measured up to my responsibility” (p. 821). Finally, prior to concluding he notes:

As I have noted, the ideological lines were tightly drawn. Whether they were leftists or communists, I don’t know; but it was quite clear that the EBAP student body had little love for the U.S. That isn’t to say that students were uninterested in North America; but affection for the U.S. was another matter. That reality, plus the fact that none of U.S. was sufficiently fluent in Portuguese to have a real classroom interaction, meant that we had virtually no association with EBAP students. (p. 827)

For the purposes of this paper, the point is that the assumption that Ramos and his Brazilian colleagues were unenthusiastic about Prof.
Sherwood’s presence was not a result of Brazilian ideological narrowness. Rather, the coolness was probably based more in the Americans unwittingly representing much that many Brazilians thought was wrong with American development assistance: the idea that helpful insights can come from someone unwilling to develop the linguistic skills necessary to either engage the Brazilian reality or to communicate with Brazilians.

Frank Sherwood’s experience in Brazil was not unique. An analysis of all articles (ninety) published by Americans in Revista de Serviço Público and Revista de Administração Pública from the mid-1950s through the mid-1980s found only a handful that had more than a couple of Brazilian sources; the large majority of these articles published by Americans in Brazil neither cited Brazilian sources nor referred to Brazil in the paper. In essence, the nature of the advice being offered reflected the other end of the “development assistance” pipeline that Alberto Guerreiro Ramos criticized nearly 50 years ago in his A Redução Sociológica. While one way to improve this process was certainly for Brazilians to reject bad ideas, another way to improve the process was for Americans to learn enough about Brazil that they would be less likely to offer bad ideas, and offer appropriate administrative technologies instead.

Sadly, little has changed in the forty years since American public administrators first visited Brazil. Barbara Wallraff (2000), for instance, opens a recent Atlantic Monthly article by repeating the belief (no doubt of many monolingual Americans unable to determine otherwise) that English is now, and is only increasingly becoming, the global lingua franca. On the contrary, Wallraff notes that every day the number of native English speakers is reduced as a percentage of world population, simply by virtue of differences in birth rates around the world. Moreover, although it is true that a greater percentage of the world’s population every year will be using English as a second or third language, the quality of that proficiency will not be sufficient to allow American business people, lawyers, aid workers, and such to rely on English. Indeed, one study found that as few as three percent of people in many major European countries had excellent English skills (Walraff, 2000, p. 56). Note too that while English may be “the de facto working language of 98 percent of German research physicists” (p. 52), for the public administrator German remains the de facto working language of German society.

Swift (2001) also notes other reasons that Americans cite for remaining monolingual, including time constraints, lack of confidence in lin-
guistic abilities, and a belief that translators can overcome language barriers. This latter is an especially imperfect solution. The translator’s client only hears what the translator actually translates, a problem in itself but especially acute in fast-paced, free flowing conversations with multiple participants. Translation is also limited by the translator’s competence, a problem compounded in fields with a specialized vocabulary like administration. Translators are also typically not there to help with travel arrangements, order food, and carry out other mundane daily tasks (pp. 39-40). Perhaps more important for the academic researcher, the translator cannot help to develop the “relationships that inform communities of understanding” (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2005, p. 78) that come from daily reading of newspapers, from engaging government documents and academic research published in that country’s language, from informal social interactions, and such. Even faculty exchanges, or sabbaticals abroad, may not give the monolingual academic adequate insights into the cultural realities of a society, given the typically privileged class origins of both foreign (Rustow, 1957, p. 533) and American (Kahlenburg, 2000; Oldfield & Conant, 2001) academics. Finally, as a recent article bemoaning the lack of Arabic language skills in the U.S. State Department noted:

The lack of proficient Arabic speakers has limited the United States’ ability to spread its message and participate in debate in the Arab world. The State Department “is desperate to have diplomats to perform at the very highest levels on Arabic media. . .how can you do Crossfire on Al-Arabiya without those language skills”? (Ivey, 2005, p. 12)

**LANGUAGE IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS EDUCATION AND SCHOLARSHIP–THE CASE EMPIRICALLY**

Having presented a conceptual case for the importance of language in public administration, the discussion now turns to a more quantitative approach to the issue. A first set of indicators provide a contemporary snapshot of internationalization and language in NASPAA member graduate public affairs (hereafter MPA) programs, and were derived from a survey\(^3\) resulting in a response rate of 77 out of some 250 sent out. These are presented in Table 1.
Respondents reported a total of nearly 600 full-time faculty in these MPA programs, of whom 12% were “professional bilingual,” by which is meant they do research in a language other than English; and 16% reported doing research on non-U.S. topics. Though 17% of programs report advertising an international concentration or focus, only ten percent of programs had a required core course with an international focus, while nearly two-thirds of programs offered at least one elective with an international focus (though less than 25% offered as many as three international electives). Only 12% of programs report more than ten percent of students taking a course with an international focus. About 26% of programs offer an overseas study option to students, though only 5% of programs reported that more than 10% of their students made use of this option. Only one program requires a second language. It is also worth noting that only a bare majority even of U.S. members and affiliates of the Association of Professional Schools of International Affairs have language requirements for their graduates. As should be clear, there is at best weak evidence of an international engagement among U.S. MPA programs.

A second set of indicators regarding the linguistic profile of public administration in the United States was derived through content analysis of the list of references in articles published in 2001-2 in three top American public administration and two top public policy journals. Table 2 presents the linguistic profile of articles in these journals.
As can be seen, of 331 articles published in these journals over the two year period, only 27, or barely 8%, featured at least one non-English reference. The situation is even worse when the few articles with an international, or comparative focus on a non-English speaking country, are removed from the analysis. Of the 27 articles featuring at least one non-English citation, 23 are on international topics or case studies based in non-English countries. Of the remaining four articles on U.S. case studies or broader conceptual/theoretical themes, only one has at least 5% non-English references, and this is by a Dutch-based scholar (Rutgers 2001).

Before moving on, it is also worth noting that even among the few comparative and international/global articles, multi-lingualism is far from the norm. This is reflected in Table 3.

### Table 3
Language and scholarship in comparative/international articles in U.S. public administration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>Non-English references</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total 0 1-5% 6-15% 16-50% 51%+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Administration Review</strong></td>
<td>13 5 3 0 4 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Administration &amp; Society</strong></td>
<td>10 4 3 1 2 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>American Review of Public Administration</strong></td>
<td>2 2 0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Journal of Policy Analysis and Management</strong></td>
<td>4 0 1 1 2 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy Studies Journal</strong></td>
<td>13 8 0 1 4 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>42 19 7 3 12 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Monolingualism is again evident, as some 60% of articles with an international, or non-English comparative focus have less than 5% non-English references. Only one comparative case study on a non-English speaking country has a majority of sources drawn from the host country language (Candler, 2002). To sum up the above: American public administration fails to draw on non-English sources when dealing with U.S. case studies or with broader conceptual/theoretical issues. Even when writing about the broader world or about non-English speaking countries, drawing on sources published in the language(s) of this broader world (or of the country studied) is not considered necessary.

One might legitimately respond: so what? The skeptical, monolingual American might respond, echoing the concept of diglossia presented above, that English is the international “high prestige” language and so all, or surely an adequately overwhelming portion of, important information is available in this language. Another explanation for this American monolingualism might, of course, be that Americans, unable to read what is written outside of their own language, are unaware of what they are missing.

A good test of these two hypotheses might be constructed by seeing what sources are drawn on by public administration scholars whose perspectives are not restricted by monolingualism. This is presented in Table 4, which repeats the analysis above for two non-English public administration journals: Revista de Administração Públia (RAP – Brazil, published in Portuguese) and Revue Francaise d'Administration Publique (RFAP — France).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>Non-native language references</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revista de Administração Públia</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revue Francaise d'Administration Públique</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>140</td>
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</table>

The greater linguistic engagement of the two journals is evident. In the Brazilian journal 84% of articles feature greater than 5% non-Portuguese sources; while in the French journal 42% feature greater than 5% non-French sources. Again, this might simply reflect the dominant status of English, as Brazilian scholars, unable to find quality, cutting
edge theoretical discussions in Portuguese, turn to English for this. Table 5 below casts doubt on this explanation.

### Table 5
**Non-Portuguese languages of references in Revista de Administração Pública**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1-5%</th>
<th>6-15%</th>
<th>16-50%</th>
<th>51%+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1-5%</th>
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<th>51%+</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 others</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen, while Brazilian scholars have seen work worth referencing from English language sources, with an overwhelming, 82% of articles featuring at least one English language reference, 33% of articles in *RAP* include references in Spanish, and 25% in French. Both of these figures are much larger than the U.S. figure for total non-English references. Similarly for the French: while 39% of articles in *RFAP* include at least one English language reference, 11% feature at least one Spanish reference, and 17% references in any of eight other languages.

A final blow to the “English as dominant language” excuse for English monolingualism in American public administration results from an analysis of languages used by French and Brazilian public administration scholars when they study societies that speak languages other than their own. This is reflected in Table 6. The table presents the number of articles on either international topics or on non-French/Portuguese speaking countries, which include references in languages other than their own and English.
As can be seen, while some 60% of American articles on international/comparative themes feature less than 5% references in languages other than English; less than 20% of French and Brazilian international/comparative articles feature less than 5% references in languages other than their own and English. So given that multi-lingual Brazilian and French scholars have found work worth referencing outside of both their own, and of the dominant language; that Americans rarely cite anything not written in English would appear to be a result of monolingualism—the failure to develop linguistic research tools critical for cross-cultural research—rather than the lack of relevant work in other languages.

It should also be noted that the greater international, especially English language, engagement of Brazilian and especially French scholars can hardly be attributed to an inferiority complex among scholars in these two countries. French language nationalism is well appreciated, both in the French (Ministère, 2003) and Québecois contexts (see Gosselin, 1963; and Perrone-Moisés, 2001). In the Brazilian context, the discussion above referred to Guerreiro Ramos’s cautions about the unthinking application to the Brazilian context of lessons drawn from elsewhere, Candler (2002) addresses the issue of Brazilian “administrative nationalism” more broadly, and Florestan Fernandes has made the case specifically with reference to language (1990). So given that these non-Anglos are engaging English and other non-native sources despite a residual linguistic nationalism, the comparative linguistic insularity of the American literature therefore becomes that much more striking. Hence “reverse diglossia”: to the extent that few Americans are able or willing to cross language barriers and to bring the lessons of others into the discipline, the U.S. public administration discipline will be collectively impoverished.
CHALLENGES FOR MULTI-LINGUAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION EDUCATION

Multilingual public administration education faces a number of challenges. For the rare program seeking to offer instruction or require substantive work in second languages, the problem of forty years ago remains: though the survey presented in Table 1 suggests as many as 12% of faculty in public affairs programs in the U.S. are professionally bilingual, too few U.S. faculty have the requisite language skills (and far fewer than 12% appear to bring this “professional bilingualism” to bear in their published work in major journals).

A first problem faced by the scholar seeking to develop linguistic skills is that language faculty in Arts and Sciences are often little help, as there is a poor match between these and the language needs of professional schools (Morgan, 2004; Noaro, 1983, pp. 162-164). A second problem relates to the “time constraint” excuse referred to earlier. Even for the internationalist who insists on investing the time in developing a working knowledge of another language, especially one in which s/he has obtained a long term consulting contract, a large investment of time is undoubtedly required to achieve this competence. This time could otherwise be invested in more immediate research, teaching, or service activities rewarded through the academic promotion and tenure process. More important, an element of risk applies. Learning some languages can be an investment expected to yield adequate rewards, as both grant proposals and research output on German, Russian, Japanese, Chinese, and now Arabic topics are likely to remain popular. Languages like Spanish and French that offer access to multiple societies are also more likely to yield adequate returns on this investment, and less likely to result in civil or political unrest in a single country making field research impossible. But the overwhelming majority of languages are spoken in areas marginalized both by the global economy and by the at-best Eurocentric (Welch & Wong, 1998, p. 40) and at-worst provincial American (Boyacigiller & Adler, 1991, pp. 267-270; Cunha, 1981) management sciences. In other words, developing linguistic skills represents a risky investment for the internationalist, over and above the reality that “even if prepared, international research is more difficult to conduct than its domestic counterpart, given the complexity of the multinational environment and the higher monetary and time costs involved in multicountry studies” (p. 269).

Still, public affairs faculty can develop language skills by auditing two or three undergraduate language classes, then making a personal commitment to regularly read the language. Through this sort of part-
time but consistent commitment, working competence—the ability to scan newspapers, government and academic sources for relevant material, and read these, even if laboriously—can be obtained in a couple of years.

The question of breaking the monolingual trap of U.S. public affairs education can also be addressed from the student side of the podium. A first problem concerns the already full curricula in professional school programs, and the long queue of other subjects jostling for a place on these. As indicated above, a number of the more overtly international programs—a slim majority of members and affiliates of the Association of Professional Schools of International Affairs—have a second language competency requirement for graduation, typically without provision for inclusion of language courses in required coursework. It is up to the student to develop this proficiency on her/his own. There is a case to be made, therefore, for equating language with statistics as an appropriate tool skill that students might obtain through elective courses. In the absence of this, programs are indicating that they consider counting people an appropriate research method, but talking to them (or reading what they have to say among themselves) is not. A second problem again concerns the often poor match between university language faculty in Arts and Sciences. As a result, language instruction often features a heavy literary focus, while the professional student has both different substantive interests and a need to develop a specialized professional vocabulary.

Students who express international interests, but lack language skills might also be encouraged to defer matriculation for a year, or be offered a deferred acceptance, while they develop these skills. Other creative options include service programs like the U.S. Peace Corps’ Masters International program, which allows students to sandwich a two year tour as a Peace Corps volunteer into a Masters program (Morgan, 2004; see also “Educational Benefits,” 2003).

AN ETHICAL IMPERATIVE?

Given the often one-way nature of the “development assistance” experience of the 1950s and 1960s, Alberto Guerreiro Ramos’s *A Redução Sociológica* represented a rare, and fascinating example of a robust critique from the south of the development experience of the period. It sought to decolonize the process, and empower Brazilians in the face of the contemporary development challenge in much the same way that his Parenthetical Man sought to promote the self-actualization of humanity in the face of modern organizations (see Azevêdo & Albernaz,
in this volume). By avoiding the trap of accepting inappropriate technology from the developed core, Ramos’s sociological reduction represented the application of the principles of appropriate technology in the south. Unfortunately, the record of the application of the principles of sociological reduction in the developed north have lagged. This is especially evident in this paper, as the simplest problem, that of linguistic competence advocated by Rustow and Roberts, remains unaddressed. Ironically then, while recipients of American technical assistance have improved in terms of critically assessing the quality of help offered by Americans, at the very fundamental level of language it appears that Americans have not done their part by critically assessing the quality of advice offered!

Frank Sherwood also represents what the ethical scholar can eventually achieve. Whatever his early lack of understanding of the Brazilian context, he was by no means wholly unaware of what was happening in Brazil. He was instrumental in facilitating Ramos’s 1966 employment at the University of Southern California. As a hardline, extremely repressive faction assumed control of the military government shortly after Ramos’s departure, this may have saved Ramos’s life (see Guerreiro Ramos, 1981, p. xii; Ventriss & Candler, 2005). Sherwood also eventually developed enough Portuguese language facility to have published his 1967 *Institutionalizing the Grass Roots in Brazil: A Study in Comparative Local Government*, which features a number of Portuguese language sources.

Beyond its reflection of “an interest in a society and its culture” (Roberts, 1969, p. 261), the importance of language in effective technical assistance contains a second important ethical component. Elio Gaspari, in a widely lauded, four volume history of the 1964-85 military government in Brazil, notes that while the U.S. was not responsible for the 1964 coup it was aware that it was likely to take place (Gaspari, 2002a, pp. 62-64), encouraged it rather than tried to stop it, and certainly supported the subsequent military government (pp. 97-102, 115-116; 2002b, pp. 283-286, 329-334; 2003, pp. 542-546). According to Gaspari, “press censorship and torture of political prisoners” (2002a, p. 36; see also 2004, pp. 371-337) were pillars of this regime that exiled Alberto Guerreiro Ramos. Despite this, American public administrators continued to work on technical assistance projects in the country.

Writing in the immediate aftermath of the 1979 collapse of the similarly U.S.-backed, and similarly repressive government of Iran, Seitz warned that:
Unless the U.S. learns from the Iranian experience, it is likely to make mistakes in the future similar to those it made in Iran in the past—a new Shah and a new SAVAK will be created and the U.S. will incur the enmity of Third World peoples for both. (1980b, p. 433)

The lesson that Seitz would have had Americans learn was that American public administration technical assistance in Iran contributed to the development of a regime also characterized by press censorship and torture of political prisoners, especially by a secret police force “known for its brutality. With hindsight it is now clear that the Americans’ general ignorance of Iran when they initiated major assistance in public administration, made it most likely that the assistance would not be successful” (p. 441), in no small part because public administration technical advisers had not received “adequate training in Iranian culture, language, history, economics, and politics before coming to Iran” (1980a, p. 411; see also “It’s Time,” 2001).

Rather than learn this lesson, the indefensible assumption that meaningful “technical assistance” can result from a one-way communication process remains. Just as a lack of Arabic language skills has been widely cited as a cause of American intelligence failures in Iraq (Conway, 2005; “Know Thine Enemy,” 2005; Ivey, 2005), so intelligent development assistance in Iraq, Iran, Brazil, Central Asia, Eastern Europe or beyond is unlikely to result from a process unable to engage the local reality. In short, the 1957 and 1969 calls by Rustow and Roberts have gone unheeded (see Jreisat, 2002, p. 56).

SAVORING SONGS

The anti-communist comparative public administration boom years, of which Frank Sherwood’s Brazilian experiences were a part, have been replaced by a post-Communist, then an anti-terrorist boom since the collapse of the Soviet empire. Numerous U.S. faculty have since been engaged in long term projects throughout Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. It is likely that few had the requisite language skills on entering these projects, and few more have since developed these skills, even years into a contract. The demand for people able to work internationally therefore outstrips the supply of people adequately qualified, especially in a linguistic sense, so it is very common for the monolingual American faculty member to do international consulting work.

If the argument presented above is correct, though, the mere receipt of an international consulting contract does not make this consistent with the admonition in the ASPA Code of Ethics to “Maintain truthful-
ness and honesty and to not compromise them for advancement, honor, or personal gain.” In the end, linguistic competence has to be seen in terms of a personal ethical commitment of both faculty and students. Though it is often said that children learn languages more readily than adults, this should not be used as an excuse for the faculty member not to develop linguistic skills, especially when engaged on a long term consulting project in a non-English speaking country. The language one invests in may not be the only linguistic area in which one works during the course of a lifetime. But that too is to some extent a choice, a third language is far easier to learn than a second, and “exposure to language study creates the potential for a passion that will serve one forever—whether one commits to a place and people in a continuous or an intermittent or episodic fashion” (E. P. Morgan, personal communication, 2004).

Still, it is probable that if the linguistic “reverse diglossia” that characterizes American public administration is going to be broken, the change will be a generational one. Public affairs programs might facilitate this process by insisting that the current generation of students develop communication skills appropriate to their areas of interests, to ensure that they are able to facilitate the process of critical assimilation of the lessons of success of the developed world. Faculty might also contribute to the improvement of U.S. technical assistance programs by refraining from applying for contracts for which they are neither linguistically qualified, nor intend to develop linguistic competence. As a result, American-funded programs might be forced to turn to better qualified foreign contractors, perhaps like the French and Brazilian scholars studied in this paper (see for instance Huddleston, 1999, pp. 154-155).

Fred Riggs argued that “not to be comparative is to be naively parochial” (1998, p. 23), and one might add that to be monolingual is to be naively comparative. As Nelson Mandela eloquently put it,

> Without language, one cannot talk to people and understand them; one cannot share their hopes and aspirations, grasp their history, appreciate their poetry, or savor their songs. (1995, p. 84)

NOTES

1. However, the importance of this can be over-stated. Portuguese is one of the major Romance languages identified by Dubnick as suffering from this linguistic inability to distinguish between accountability and responsibility. Yet Brazilians have long had no problem conceptualizing accountability, indeed
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have long bemoaned its absence in Brazilian society! See Leal, 1948, p. 23-4; Prado, 1928; Sodre, 1944, p. 99; Torres, 1914, p. 23.

2. Johnson (1975), Klees (1981), Malloy (1976), and Tyler (1970, 1973); an article by Frank Sherwood (1968) does cite three Portuguese language sources.

3. The author would like to thank Bridgewater State College MPA student Michael Gold for his help in both gathering and analyzing this data.

4. The journals were selected more or less randomly (according to local availability) from among the top ranked journals in each field (see Forrester & Watson, 1994), and include Public Administration Review (PAR), Administration & Society (A&S), American Review of Public Administration (ARPA), Journal of Policy Analysis and Management (JPAM), and Policy Studies Journal (PSJ).

5. The analysis in RAP is the same as that for the U.S. journals, referring to the percentage of citations listed among the ‘Referências bibliográficas’ following each article. RFAP uses a footnoting system, so the data for this journal refers to the percentage of footnotes containing references in a language other than French. Note that this underestimates the percentage of such references, as a number of footnotes are often explanatory in nature, rather than for citation purposes. The analysis of RFAP also omits 16 articles that were commentaries, typically by practitioners, and which contain no citations, and omits volume 93, which is devoted to a retrospective of the work of Vincent Wright, a scholar from England who studied French public administration.

6. A number of other prominent intellectuals also suffered at the hands of the military government. Sixty-five professors were fired, including Caio Prado Junior, and future president Fernando Henrique Cardoso (Gaspari, 2002b, p. 229). University students were also a special target of the military police.

7. It is well appreciated that Iran and Brazil were not alone as societies in which the United States exported repression, rather than freedom. Within the public administration literature see, for instance, Farazmand (1999, p. 513). For a sampling of numerous other sources on this, see Forsythe (2002, pp. 507-509, 516-518), and Hitchens (2001).

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