

The World Is Yours: 7 Diverse Jobs That Only Language Majors Can Fill

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“So you’re gonna be... like a teacher or something?”

If you are or ever have been a language major, you’ve heard this line more times than you’ve probably cared to.

In the modern hyper-connected world, the benefits and opportunities of learning a second language go way beyond the two-year stint teaching overseas your classmates are picturing when you tell them you’re majoring in Spanish or Chinese.

Thirty years ago, most college students studying foreign languages went on to become translators, interpreters and, yes, foreign language teachers.

Today, language programs are different.

You’ll find graduates with degrees in everything from Modern Germanic Linguistics to French Literature filling crucial positions throughout our global economy, using their languages and the skills that go along with them to keep the world turning.

Nowadays it’s nearly impossible to do business without solid intercultural communication skills and an extra language or two. But the biggest thing making language majors so attractive on the job market isn’t that second or third language, but those skills that go along with having learned it.

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The Job-seeking Advantage That Outweighs Even Your Language Skills

You’re an Italian major. This semester you’re taking Advanced Italian Syntax, 20th Century Italian Cinema and Italian Renaissance Literature, and next semester you’ll be studying abroad in Florence, taking more language and history classes alongside your internship at the Museo dell’Opera del Duomo.

“But what are you gonna do with all that?”

If you just read that in the voice of a disapproving parent or holier-than-thou engineering major roommate, please send them this article immediately, and we'll explain it to them for you.

Here's what you're gonna do with all that:

First of all, you'll be bilingual (or even multilingual), which may be more than you can say for those telling you you're wasting time on a language degree.

Secondly, you'll develop a deep understanding of Italian culture and history. You'll probably understand things like the Italian Economic Miracle and how it affected film-making in post-WW2 Italy.

You might even be able to connect these cultural patterns to the emergence of different consumer spending habits in the North and South of present-day Italy.

Thirdly, if you studied abroad or spent substantial time with Italian immigrants or Italian exchange students, you'll be familiar with Italians' nuances of communication: is it too direct to tell someone their idea seems impractical in a business meeting? Do Italian consumers react better to advertisements addressing them in the familiar second person, or do they prefer the polite form?

All of this makes you, of course, pretty well cut out to work for a business expanding into the Italian market, or dealing with your company's Italy-based customers. But not much else, right?

Still wrong.

With this track record you might score a job at Gucci, or you might work on healthcare infrastructure development in rural Brazil or become a social worker assisting marginalized immigrant youths in inner-city neighborhoods.

The thing is, your "Italian" degree is only *partly* about the Italian language or the country it comes from. Four years' worth of research essays, language classes, film analyses and multimedia projects translates into a long list of in-demand professional skills: intercultural communication, critical thinking and reasoning, cultural adaptability, information and trend analysis, and the other skills that drive the global economy.

Nowadays, employers are looking for communicatively capable global citizens, and there's hardly a field more central to that global economy than language studies.

So forget the parents and the roommates and the endless refrain of "never gonna get a job," and start thinking about how your language skills and the other skills you're building along the way can land you a steady paycheck.

To get started, you might look at one of these seven fields that are desperate for employees with the skills of language majors.

1. Helping Others See the World: Travel and Tourism Jobs for Language Lovers

Can you think of a better combination? Spend a few years studying a country and its language, travel there and get to know the place, fall in love and then help others fall in love just like you did.

Jobs in hotels and hospitality are good ways to get your foot in the door, but the language major's employment opportunities in travel and tourism are only limited by the imagination.

Package tours require tour guides, event bookers, accountants and HR personnel. Cruise ships hire everything from entertainers and photographers to chefs and waiters. Airlines need flight attendants to staff their flights and social media managers to Tweet across languages. The list goes on forever.

In the travel and tourism industries, your language skills and your intimate knowledge of a country or region make you a shoo-in for the job. You can get started in the travel and tourism industry by looking for entry-level positions on cruise ships and in hotel chains, and keep branching out from there!

2. Helping Others Help Themselves: International Development and Aid Jobs for the Linguistically Talented

This probably wasn't on the top of your job prospects list when you signed up for French 101, right? That's too bad, because the world is desperate for people with the skills of language majors to help make it a better place for all its citizens.

When you hear inspiring stories about an impoverished community developing its own water purification system or community organizations providing small loans to female entrepreneurs, what you don't hear about is the work that went on behind the scenes.

Normally three or four or more different NGOs and aid organizations come together to implement a project like this, and these organizations *must* be staffed by people who understand the realities of what's going on on the ground in the communities they're working in. This requires a knowledge of both local language and culture.

You might start out as a volunteer or intern, or even something like the Country Program Officer for Mozambique in a smaller organization working in Southeast Africa. Later you could move on to head up a program working with internally-displaced peoples in Brazil with a big organization like the UN Development Program.

It's not only your Portuguese language skills that equipped you for these jobs. Your proven ability to work with people across cultures and socioeconomic barriers is what really gets the job done.

3. Getting the Word Out Across Languages: Marketing Jobs for Language Majors

Nowadays brands are international, and those who aren't yet are headed that way. The lifeblood of these global businesses is the multilingual marketers and writers who know just how to perfectly tailor their message to their audience.

Big brands like Apple and BMW aren't just throwing together a couple of advertisements and sending them out around the world. Talking a German into buying a car or a computer is a different deal than marketing those same products to Brits or Hong Kongers.

These companies can't survive without people who "speak the language" of their target customers, and language majors happen to both understand cultural value systems and purchasing behaviors *and* literally speak the language of the people they're marketing to.

From bloggers to community managers to heads of corporate communications, language majors are among the best-qualified candidates for the job.

You can search for [international marketing jobs](#), or just head to the Careers page of just about any company or brand that's got offices in multiple countries, and you're likely to come across some descriptions of an "ideal candidate" that sound a lot like you.

If language-related marketing, blogging, editing, translating and video content creation is up your ally, then working with FluentU might be for you!

FluentU hires paid freelancers to work on everything from writing blog posts (like the one you're reading right now) to setting up marketing automation and web push notifications.

The FluentU community is made of individuals from around the globe with all different language backgrounds and skills. Joining our team will give you the opportunity to maintain a completely flexible work schedule in a calm, supportive and collaborative environment.

Plus, working for FluentU is a great way to gain experience in the professional world of language-related careers.

Check our ["Jobs at FluentU"](#) page to see what positions we're currently hiring for.

4. Teaching, Designing, Developing and Policy-making: From Language Majors to Educators

Those condescending classmates who are always asking if you're going to be a teacher are actually onto something, even though they probably don't understand what. Education is more than a year teaching English abroad in Asia (although that's an awesome start!), and the world of education is one of the biggest employers of language majors.

Education isn't very educational when the educator doesn't understand the educated. That's why language majors make great educators. Those who have studied a foreign language and culture in depth are better prepared to understand the challenges faced by the communities they work with and what kind of education is needed to overcome those challenges.

Foreign language teachers are just the tip of the iceberg here: curriculum developers, policy makers and educational administrators need to analyze trends and learning outcomes in their social and cultural contexts, and this requires more than just a crash course in the local language.

Fresh graduates often get started with a year teaching abroad found on sites like Dave's ESL Cafe, and those with a bit more experience behind the podium can find administrative jobs on sites like TeachAway or with local governments and international organizations.

5. Reporting from the Ground: Journalism Jobs for Language Students

The daily news cycle relies on on-the-ground journalists engaging with locals and pulling trends and analysis out of what they see around them, and few professionals will be as prepared for these kinds of tasks as those who majored in a foreign language in university.

The entire field of journalism would collapse in on itself without reporters who speak the local languages of the areas they're covering, but as with the other fields listed here, that's only the beginning of the reason language majors do well in this field.

The real asset is the ability to understand and empathize the people they encounter, and no one can do this like multilinguals who have spent years studying and interacting with foreign cultures.

Many of us have dreamed of being the glamorous foreign correspondent, but don't forget that interpreters, informants, researchers and writers also all need to be well-informed and able to engage productively with communities.

Furthermore, the big media internationals like CNN and the BBC have entire departments with everything from production to editorial jobs being carried out by the linguistically talented and culturally sensitive.

6. Extending Services to the Linguistically Marginalized: Government Jobs for Multilinguals

Most of the countries that make up today's world map are multilingual, and most of them also have a dominant majority language. Even when there's a clear majority language like in the United States, the government is still obligated to work for all its citizens, and that's why people able to work with linguistically marginalized communities are becoming more and more important all the time.

From healthcare services, to community outreach, to youth employment programs, to immigrant and refugee support, governments need people who are sensitive to the needs and norms of their minority communities to make sure they receive the services they're entitled to.

Somalian or Kurdish may seem like odd languages to study, but the first is in desperate need for serving Minneapolis's large Somali refugee community, and the second could be a stepping stone to working in job training or health screening programs with Nashville's Little Kurdistan community.

7. Advancing Our Understanding of Language: Academic Jobs for Language Majors

If you really just love languages and learning about them, what makes them work, and how they're so inexorably intertwined with culture, you don't have to stop learning after graduation.

Most of what you learned during your degree program was the product of academics working in universities, think tanks, and other scientific institutes, and many or even most of them started out as curious language students like you.

For jobs like these you'll almost always need a PhD, which could cost you anywhere from three to seven years or more depending on what linguistic field you focus on and where you go to study it. The best part is that you can choose what you like and go with it.

If modern Russian literature is your thing, there's a degree program for that, and if sociolinguistics or dialectology grabs you, there's a program for that as well.

At the end of that long academic road you'll find a job as Professor of Linguistics, Research Fellow in Turkic Languages or any number of other titles at universities, think tanks and research institutes.

If you choose this career path, you'll be giving back to the language students of tomorrow, whose degrees will only open up more and more opportunities as the world continues to go global.

So, all in all, you language majors can rest assured that, in the global economy, there will always be jobs for you. And if you want to learn a language to forge a new path in your career, FluentU's customizable learning program is here for you.

FluentU takes real-world videos—like music videos, movie trailers, news and inspiring talks—and turns them into personalized language learning lessons.

The reasons language majors do so well in these seven fields (and just about every other one you can think of in the modern world) is their skillset: not just being multilingual, but having communication, critical thinking, analytical and cultural skills that make them the perfect employees in a world where everyone's speaking everyone else's language as we all try to get the job done together.

Languages aren't going away, and neither will language majors or the demand for their skills.

Next time you tell someone your major and they ask "what are you gonna do with that," just assure them that you don't have the time to list all the opportunities awaiting you at graduation, and make sure to get to that Advanced Grammar class on time!

Jakob is a full-time traveler, obsessive language learner, dedicated language teacher, and engaged global citizen. He writes about language, travel and the many places they meet on the road at his blog [Globalect](#).
