



**COMPETÊNCIAS LINGÜÍSTICAS REQUERIDAS PELOS EMPREGADORES PORTUGUESES NOS ÚLTIMOS 40 ANOS: O CASO DOS PROFISSIONAIS DE SECRETARIADO**

**LINGUISTIC SKILLS REQUIRED BY PORTUGUESE EMPLOYERS IN THE PAST 40 YEARS: THE CASE OF OFFICE MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS**

**COMPETENCIAS LINGÜÍSTICAS REQUERIDAS POR LOS EMPLEADORES PORTUGUESES EN LOS ÚLTIMOS 40 AÑOS: EL CASO DE LOS PROFESIONALES DE SECRETARIADO**

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## RESUMO

**Introdução:** Com a internacionalização e a globalização, as competências em línguas são cada vez mais úteis no mercado laboral, sobretudo em funções com relações com outros mercados, como é o caso do secretariado/apoio à gestão.

**Objetivos:** Identificar e analisar as competências linguísticas solicitadas em anúncios de emprego para profissionais de secretariado/apoio à gestão.

**Métodos:** Estudo de 844 anúncios de emprego, para secretariado/apoio à gestão, publicados no *Jornal Expresso* (1978-2018), em março. Analisaram-se os eventuais requisitos relativos a competências linguísticas presentes em cada anúncio. Estudaram-se os dados globalmente e em termos de evolução temporal.

**Resultados:** 78,8% dos anúncios analisados têm requisitos de línguas, dominando aqueles em que se pedem duas línguas. As línguas estrangeiras mais requeridas são o Inglês e o Francês. Em 67,2% das referências há menção explícita à oralidade/escrita. Há grande diversidade de formulações referentes ao nível de proficiência procurado, prevalecendo os pedidos de “Domínio” para o Inglês, Francês e Alemão e de “Conhecimentos/conhecimentos satisfatórios” para o Espanhol.

**Conclusões:** As competências linguísticas são fundamentais para os profissionais de secretariado/apoio à gestão. Estes devem ter bons conhecimentos na língua materna e em pelo menos duas línguas estrangeiras, nas quais devem revelar bons níveis de proficiência.

**Palavras-chave:** Línguas; anúncios de emprego; competências; secretariado/apoio à gestão

## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** With internationalisation and globalisation, language skills are increasingly useful in today's labour market, especially in functions that require contacts with other markets, such as secretarial/management support positions.

**Objectives:** Identify and analyse the language skills required in job advertisements for secretarial/office management professionals.

**Methods:** Study of 844 job advertisements for secretarial/office management positions, published in the newspaper *Jornal Expresso* (1978-2018), in March. Possible requirements for language skills used in each advertisement were examined. The collected data were studied globally and in terms of temporal evolution.

**Results:** 78.8% of the analysed advertisements have language requirements, predominating those in which two languages are requested. The most requested foreign languages are English and French. In 67.2% of the references, there is an explicit mention of oral/written competencies. There is a great diversity of formulations referring to the level of proficiency sought, prevailing the requests for “mastery” in the cases of English, French and German, and “knowledge/satisfactory knowledge” for Spanish.

**Conclusions:** Language skills are essential for secretarial/office management professionals. They must have a good knowledge of their mother tongue, as well as of at least two foreign languages in which they must demonstrate good levels of proficiency.

**Keywords:** Languages; job advertisements; skills; secretarial/office management positions

## RESUMEN

**Introducción:** Con la internacionalización y la globalización, las competencias en lenguas son cada vez más útiles en el mercado laboral, sobre todo en funciones que implican contacto con otros mercados, como es el caso del secretariado/apoyo a la gestión.

**Objetivos:** Identificar y analizar las competencias lingüísticas solicitadas en anuncios de empleo para profesionales de secretariado/apoyo a la gestión.

**Métodos:** Estudio de 844 anuncios de empleo para secretariado/ apoyo a la gestión, publicados en el periódico *Jornal Expresso* (1978-2018), en marzo. Se analizaron los posibles requisitos relativos a las competencias lingüísticas utilizadas en cada anuncio. Se estudiaron los datos globalmente y en términos de evolución temporal.

**Resultados:** 78.8% de los anuncios analizados tienen requisitos de idiomas, dominando aquellos en que se solicitan dos lenguas. Las lenguas extranjeras más requeridas son el inglés y el francés. En el 67.2% de las referencias hay mención explícita a la oralidad/escritura. Hay una gran diversidad de formulaciones referentes al nivel de competencia buscado, prevaleciendo las solicitudes de “dominio” para el inglés, francés y alemán y de “conocimientos/conocimientos satisfactorios” para el español.

**Conclusiones:** Las competencias lingüísticas son fundamentales para los profesionales de secretariado y apoyo a la gestión. Estos deben tener buenos conocimientos en la lengua materna y, por lo menos, en dos lenguas extranjeras, en las que deben revelar buenos niveles de competencia.

**Palabras clave:** Lenguas; anuncios de empleo; competencias; secretariado/apoyo a la gestión

## INTRODUCTION

Over the last four and a half decades, there have been profound social changes in Portugal, with repercussions in practically all areas of activity and in all geographies. The transition to the democratic regime, in 1974, and the subsequent opening process were accompanied by significant changes, namely the access to education and a recharacterisation of the labour market. These developments include, on the one hand, higher enrolment rates and a universally accepted access to education and, on the other hand, the greater presence of women in the active productive structures, the growing outsourcing, computerisation and the ever-growing internationalisation of the Portuguese economy (Barreto, 2015). Joining the former European Economic Community (EEC) in 1986 was a crucial moment in the shift of the Portuguese society, with repercussions not only in the political and economic spheres but also at social and cultural levels (Rosa & Chitas, 2013).

Built on a mosaic of cultures, which ought to be maintained and protected, the European Union (EU) has developed policies that foster multilingualism with the aim of empowering citizens at the civic, cultural, political and professional levels, so as to ensure not only the European project but also to secure the increasing success of its economy. In this context, and with continuously more global and interdependent markets, in Portugal as well as throughout the EU, employers value these language skills more and more, favouring the hiring of multilingual individuals, capable of ensuring contacts with other markets.

Secretarial/office management professionals play a key role in the relationship established with the different organisational stakeholders, regardless of their geography, and language skills are therefore very often associated with their typical profile (Rankin & Shumack, 2017). To facilitate the training of future professionals in these areas, it is important to understand effectively what, in terms of language skills, Portuguese employers expect of these individuals.

With this premise in mind, and in order to have a more detailed notion – anchored in the Portuguese labour market – of the responsibilities of secretarial/office management professionals and the skillset required of them, a project was initiated in 2015 at the Higher School of Technology and Management of Águeda, University of Aveiro, with the aim of characterising the profile of the secretarial/office management professionals. The first results indicate that these professionals must have technical and transversal skills that allow them to perform a multiplicity of tasks, especially when it comes to interacting with foreign markets (Calvão, Simões, & Dimas, 2016; Ribeiro, Calvão, & Simões, 2018).

Due to these factors, and because, as mentioned before, our country has changed substantially over the course of the last decades, the present paper aims to analyse the evolution of the language requirements present in the job advertisements for secretarial/office management professionals published over the last 41 years. More specifically, with the goal of tracking how requirements in terms of language skills in seven professions (administrative assistant, correspondent, typist, clerk, secretary, executive secretary) evolved, the research group analysed secretarial/administrative-related job advertisements published in the weekly newspaper *Jornal Expresso*, each March, from 1978 to 2018. The main objective was to assess (i) the number of languages requested in each advertisement and (ii) which languages are most commonly requested, checking whether (iii) employers indicate these competences as mandatory or preferential requirements and if (iv) they give preference to oral or written skills and, finally, (v) to characterise how employers state their requirements, in particular as regards to the levels of proficiency.

## 1. FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE: FROM INTERNATIONAL POLICIES TO THE NEEDS OF SECRETARIAL PROFESSIONALS

Since the mid-sixties of the twentieth century, several scholars have focused on the relationship between languages and the economy. Regardless of the nature and scope of these studies, it has been confirmed that the command of foreign languages has advantages not only for individuals who have these competences, but also for companies and for the countries where they operate. Languages are therefore perceived as human capital, as a vehicle for the transmission of values and as an asset with geostrategic value (Reto *et al*, 2012).

Language skills are not only associated with the level of remuneration, they are also a factor that represents an easier access to employment, reduces possible periods of unemployment and decreases individuals' chances of being discharged from a job. Language skills are, thus, for various authors, understood as a profitable investment both for individuals as well as for companies (Dubois, LeBlanc & Beaudin, 2006).

Studies carried out in Europe in recent decades, e.g. the ELAN study – *Effects on the European Economy of Shortages of Foreign Language Skills in Enterprise*, published in 2006 (Hagen *et al.*, 2006), confirmed precisely that language barriers lead to business loss and that weaknesses in language skills may not only be detrimental to individuals, since they act as a barrier to their entry into the labour market, but also for companies, especially when they seek to sell their products/services in the global market.

Aware of the importance of languages, the EU has a clear advocacy of multilingualism, emphasising the importance of linguistic diversity promotion and the consolidation of citizens' language skills, since they facilitate the success of EU Member States' economy (European Commission, 2012; Council of the European Union, 2014).

In fact, almost two decades ago the EU has put together two important tools for enhancing citizens' language skills: The Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFRL) and the European Passport, launched in 2001. The CEFRL, which has been widely adopted by many EU Member States, has contributed to enhancing citizens' ability to master foreign languages (Broek & van den Ende, 2013).

In Portugal, according to data gathered by the Portuguese Statistics Institute (INE – Instituto Nacional de Estatística), the trajectory associated with foreign language skills seems to corroborate the effectiveness of EU's language policies implementation (Oliveira, Pacheco, Neves & Lima, 2017). Actually, according to the same source, significant progress has been made between 2007 and 2016, with an increase of 52% to 71.8% of adults (18-64 years old) stating they speak at least one foreign language.

In Portugal, language skills are increasingly valued by citizens and employers. For instance, in a study by Vieira and Marques (2014), they are among the 10 most valued competences (27.6% of the employers surveyed in this study value these skills, which are ranked 8<sup>th</sup> in a list of 21 skills).

With the aim of characterising the profile of secretarial professionals, recent studies highlight linguistic command as one of the most imperative challenges for these workers, especially as a result of globalisation and the subsequent need for international contacts (Tuorinsuo-Byman, 2008; Zarrága, Araluce, & Erviti, 2015).

Considering that office administration-related professions have undergone a clear evolution over the last decades, including the adoption of different designations (Borges, 2015; Moura, 2008), and taking into account all the political, economic and socio-cultural changes that occurred in the Portuguese society since the advent of democracy, particularly as a result of the integration in the EU and greater openness to foreign countries, it is important to understand whether, from the perspective of employers, the requirements associated with language mastery by secretarial/office management professionals have been perceived or not as a relevant.

## 2. METHODS

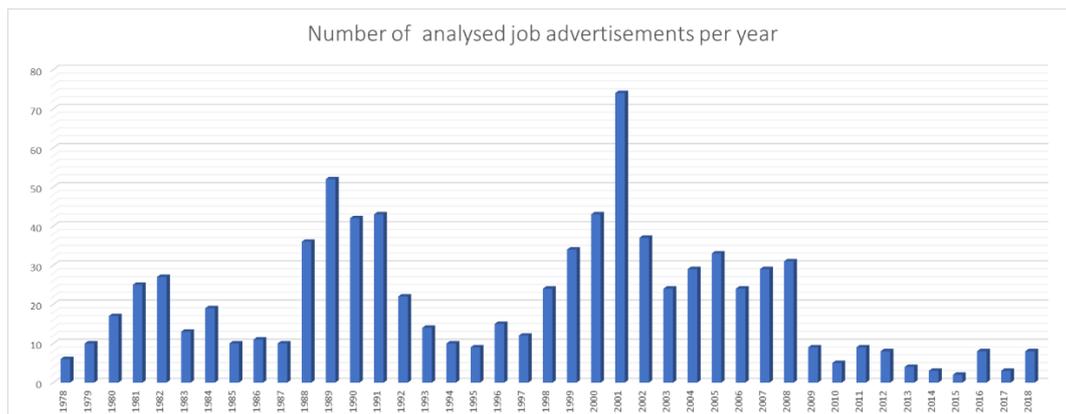
This work is anchored in the analysis of 844 job advertisements published in Portugal, in the weekly newspaper *Jornal Expresso*, between 1978 and 2018. The research group chose this media in particular, on the one hand, because its origin is very close, in temporal terms, to the beginning of the Portuguese democracy – allowing thus an overview of the country's evolution during the last four and a half decades; on the other hand, according to the *Yearbook of Communication 2014-2015* (Cardoso, Mendonça, & Paisana, 2016), this publication is the weekly newspaper with the largest market share in the country. Because it was only in 1978 that a specific job advertisements section was created, data collection for this work begins precisely in that year. For each year, the advertisements published in March were considered, since this is a period with important recruitment rates (Smith, 2013; Pôle-Emploi, 2018).

Job advertisements for seven secretarial/office management-related professions were collected: Administrative Assistant, Correspondent, Typist, Clerk, Receptionist, Secretary and Executive Secretary. Each job offer was analysed individually, always looking for possible requirements for language skills.

### 2.1 Sample

The sample consists of 844 job advertisements for secretarial/office management professionals published in March, in the years under review. Significant differences in the volume of job vacancies for this specific field have occurred, with less than 10 advertisements having been collected in 1978, 1995 and the years 2009 to 2018, and then other moments where there has been a significant number of advertisements. The most fruitful years were 2001 (74 offers), 1989 (52 offers) and 1991 and 2000 (43 offers) (see Graph 1).

Graph 1– Number of job advertisements analysed per year between 1978 and 2018

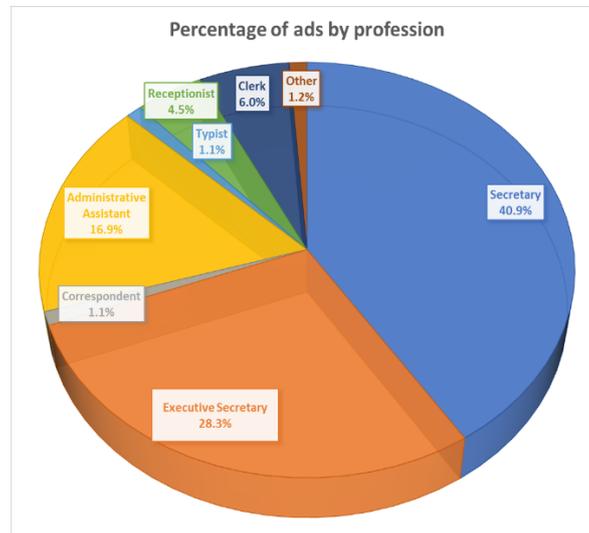


Because the research group only considered the advertisements published in the printed version of *Jornal Expresso*, excluding thus the many ads that were published on the online platform [www.ExpressoEmprego.pt](http://www.ExpressoEmprego.pt), in this study the years 2009-2018 present data that are less representative of the reality.

As mentioned before, these advertisements bring together job offers for seven distinct professions: Administrative Assistant, Correspondent, Typist, Clerk, Receptionist, Secretary and Executive Secretary. An "Other" class has also been created, with advertisements for professions which, although within the scope of secretarial/office management tasks and responsibilities, do not coincide with those categories mentioned above (e.g. "Second Class Technician", which is one of the formal job titles adopted by the Portuguese Public Administration to classify workers with clerking functions and responsibilities).

The most frequent vacancies are for "Secretary" (40.9%), followed by "Executive Secretary" (28.3%) and "Administrative Assistant" (16.9%), as shown in Graph 2.

**Graph 2 – Percentage of advertisements analysed by profession**



## 2.2 Procedures

The treatment of data focused on two distinct aspects: on the global analysis of requirements and on their temporal evolution. For each job advertisement, the research team gathered in tables the number of requests for language skills, the languages required, the (possible) distinction between oral and writing skills, the compulsory or preferential nature of these requests, as well as the formulations used to mention the levels of proficiency sought. Subsequently, and given the diversity of these formulations, it was decided to standardise them through the use of codes, as illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1 – Coding of formulations used by employers for proficiency levels**

| Used code                            | Found formulations  |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| C1                                   | Knowledge, satisfactory knowledge                           |
| C2                                   | Good, solid, strong knowledge                               |
| C3                                   | Very good, profound, great knowledge                        |
| C4                                   | Perfect mastery; exceptional knowledge                      |
| D1                                   | Command, good command                                       |
| D2                                   | Perfect, complete, secure mastery...                        |
| F1                                   | Fluence in / fluent in...                                   |
| F2                                   | Absolute / total mastery                                    |
| B                                    | Bilingual   |
| Concatenation of two codes. E.g. FD2 | Fluent and perfect mastery in...                            |
| R1                                   | Writing skills, good writing skills, ability to write       |
| R2                                   | Good ability to write; very good writing skills; Perfect... |
| 1                                    | Mention to a given language, without further information    |

As the number of job advertisements was not constant throughout the analysed period, relative frequencies are used to explain the obtained results.

### 3. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

In the analysis of the collected job offers, several variables were considered in order to understand the main trends regarding the linguistic requirements included in them. In the next sections, in which the results are presented, the aim is to characterise the required language skills for these professionals and analyse, whenever possible, their evolution over the period under consideration.

#### 3.1 Number of languages requested in each job advertisement

In 665 (78.8%) of the 844 examined ads, there are language requirements, and as a single advertisement may include more than one request, a total of 1171 references to language skills have been identified.

In the 844 analysed ads, almost half (45.9%) requests skills in two or more languages. There are 282 ads (33.4%) with requirements in two languages and 278 (32.9%) in which competences in a single language are required. There are 91 advertisements (10.8%) that request three languages. A residual number of ads (1.7%) presents requirements for four different languages.

The advertisements for “Secretary” and “Executive Secretary” are those in which two languages are requested more frequently (35.9% and 43.5%, respectively). The percentage of ads for “Secretary” where knowledge in a single language is required is quite similar (35.7%); in the case of Executive Secretaries, the percentage of advertisements that require only one language is much smaller (28.9%). In the advertisements for these two professions there are also requests for competences in three (“Secretary”: 11.0%, “Executive Secretary”: 14.2%) and in four languages (“Secretary”): 1.7%, “Executive Secretary”: 2.5%).

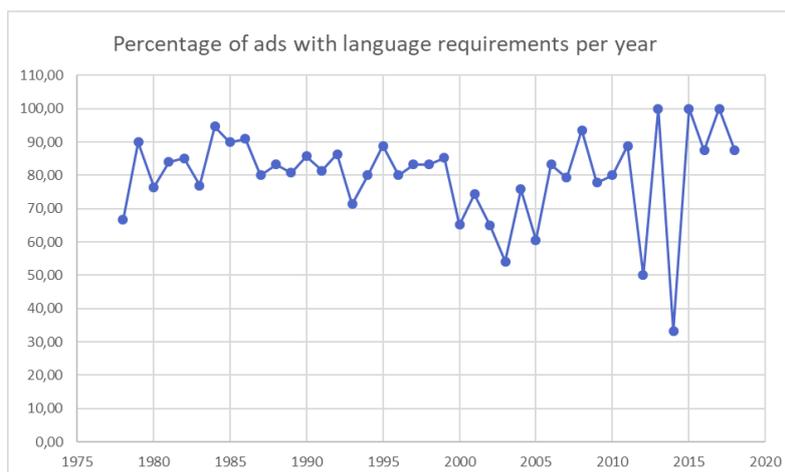
For “Administrative Assistant”, “Typist” and “Clerk”, the offers in which there are no requirements of language skills prevail. In the advertisements for “Receptionists”, there is a predominance of ads that request skills in one language. The position of “Correspondent”, which only presents offers in the first few years of this study, stands out because it is mostly associated with advertisements in which three languages are requested (66.7%) and because there are no ads with requests in less than two languages. Table 2 shows this information.

**Table 2 –** Number of languages required in each job advertisement, by profession, in percentage

| Position / Number of requested languages | 0     | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4    |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| Secretary                                | 15.7% | 35.7% | 35.9% | 11.0% | 1.7% |
| Executive Secretary                      | 10.9% | 28.9% | 43.5% | 14.2% | 2.5% |
| Correspondent                            | 0.0%  | 0.0%  | 33.3% | 66.7% | 0.0% |
| Administrative Assistant                 | 40.6% | 34.3% | 18.2% | 7.0%  | 0.0% |
| Typist                                   | 44.4% | 22.2% | 22.2% | 11.1% | 0.0% |
| Receptionist                             | 28.9% | 47.4% | 23.7% | 0.0%  | 0.0% |
| Clerk                                    | 47.1% | 33.3% | 19.6% | 0.0%  | 0.0% |

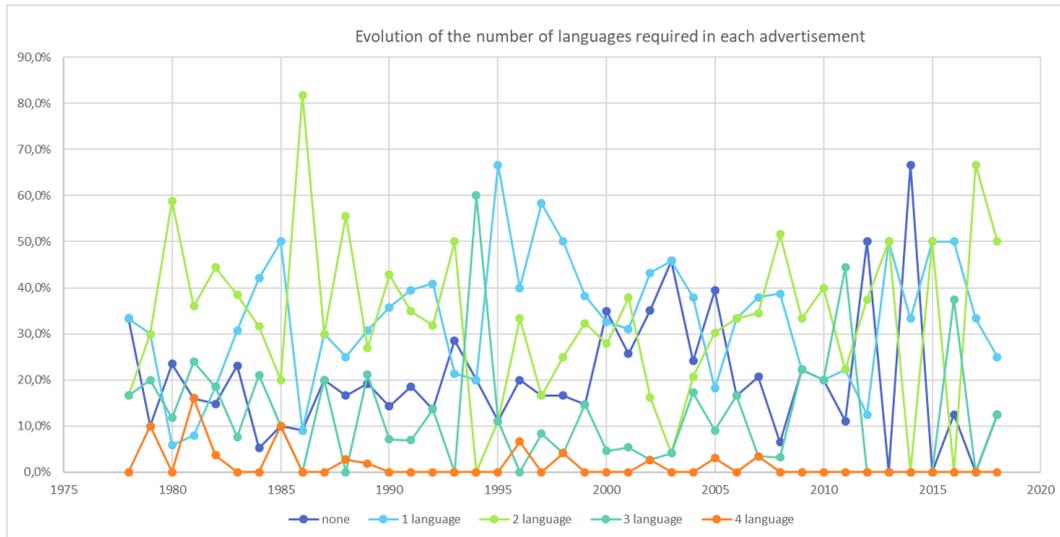
The requirements for language skills remain fairly stable throughout the period under review, with the exception of 2003, 2012 and 2014. In 27 of the 41 analysed years, language skills are sought in more than 80% of the offers (Chart 3).

**Graph 3 –** Percentage of advertisements requiring language proficiency over the reporting period



In 21 of the analysed years, there are 50% or more job advertisements requesting skills in two or more languages. In two years (1994 and 2011), the percentage of ads requesting three languages is the highest (60.0% and 44.4%, respectively). In Graph 4, the job offers analysed are organised by year, according to the number of languages requested.

**Graph 4 – Time evolution of the number of languages required in each advertisement, in percentage**

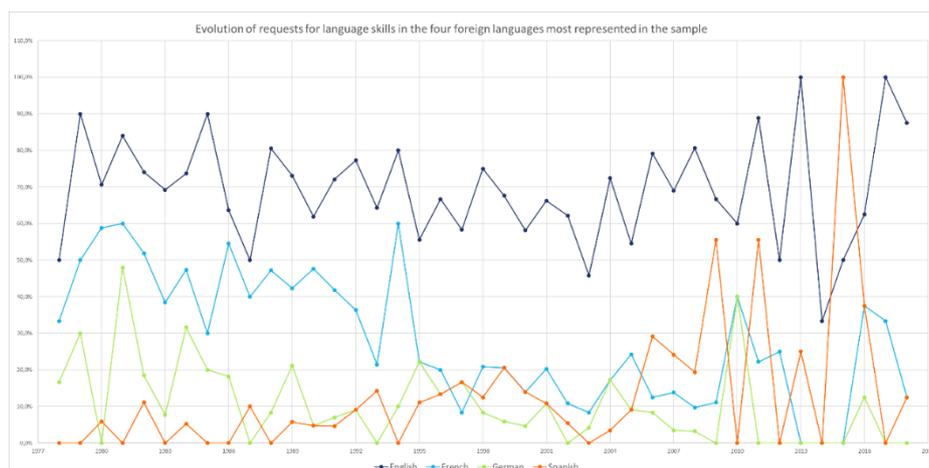


### 3.2 Most commonly requested languages

Of the 1171 identified requests for language skills, 90.4% are related to foreign languages and 9.6% are related to Portuguese. The requests for competences in Portuguese occur in 113 advertisements (13.4% of the total). The most requested foreign language is English, referred to in 69.1% of all advertisements, followed by French, which occurs in 29.3% of the ads. In 10.7% of the ads analysed there are requirements regarding German and in 10.5% there are requests for Spanish. Requests for Italian represent a residual number (1.5%). In 4.3% of the job offers, skills in foreign languages are requested but no language is explicitly mentioned.

As shown in Chart 5, English is the most requested language in practically every analysed year, thus revealing a stable trend throughout the period under consideration. The course of the French language is not so regular. Between 1978 and 1995, French was always the second most sought-after language, with far higher percentages when compared to German and, especially, to Spanish. However, since the mid-1990s, not only has there been a decline in requests for French language competences, but there has also been a rise in requests for competences in Spanish. The latter is the only foreign language whose requests show a clear upward trend, supplanting German in more recent years. The requests concerning the Portuguese language are irregular, although, overall, they also show a slight upward trend.

**Graph 5 - Evolution of requests for language skills in the four foreign languages: most represented in the sample**



### 3.3 Mandatory/preferential nature of the required language skills

Most requests for language skills are mandatory (1025 of the 1171 references to language requirements are presented as requirements).

The Portuguese language almost exclusively occurs as a mandatory requirement, with only one advertisement referring to it as preferential. 94.5% of requests for competences in English are mandatory. In the case of the French language, 89.5% of the requests define it as mandatory. As for the German and Spanish languages, no such substantial differences were observed.

Throughout the period under review, English proficiency requests are regularly presented as mandatory. For French, references to “Mandatory” are much more common in the first half of the studied period; as the language becomes less requested, the gap between the mandatory/preferential requirements seems to narrow. For the most part, German and Spanish show results where the difference between the mandatory vs. preferential requirements is not significant (see Figure 1).

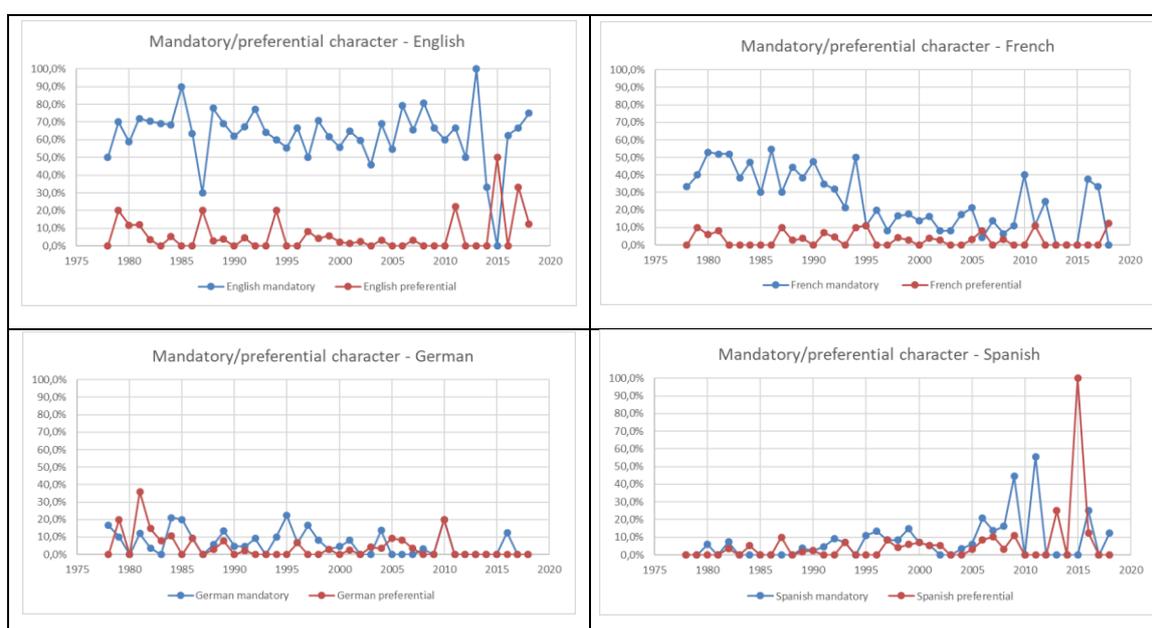


Figure 1 - Evolution of requests with a mandatory/preferential nature for the four most requested foreign languages, as a percentage

### 3.4 Requirements related to oral vs. written skills

Of the 1171 references to requests in terms of languages, there were 787 (67.2%) in which the employer detailed whether they required oral and/or written skills. Requests for writing skills are, overall, slightly higher than those referring to oral proficiency (399 and 388 references, respectively). Only in the requests concerning the Portuguese language there is a more noticeable difference between the requests for oral (41) and written (54) competences, values that result from the fact that, for this language in particular, there are several advertisements with requirements for writing competences. The research group has also verified that English and French are the languages for which these oral and written requirements are most frequently detailed (in relation to the total number of requests (1171), explicit references to oral/written English skills occur in 36% of the cases and, as for the French language, in 14%).

As far as Portuguese is concerned, whereas there is a concentration of requests for written skills in the first years included in this study, there were no oral requirements at that time (in 1978, 1980 and 1983, for example, advertisements with explicit references to writing skills correspond to 17%, 18% and 15% of the total number of advertisements published in those years, with no requests for oral competences). In subsequent years, the requests for oral/written competences in this language are quite balanced among themselves, without particularly expressive values.

The trend observed in English is also fairly regular at this level, with only four years in which there are no explicit requests for oral/written competences. In general, the percentage of advertisements in which, each year, there is a reference to oral skills and written skills coincides. The percentages of occurrence of these requests are always significant, reaching, predominantly, more than 20% of the published advertisements in each year.

Until 1993, requests for oral/written skills in French are always regular and, in some years (e.g. 1979, 1986), they exceed 35% of the published advertisements. From this date onwards, these requests decrease significantly in percentage terms, and in many instances, especially in the 21st century, when they do not occur at all.

The requests for oral/written skills in German and Spanish are never constant and tend to reach very insignificant percentages.

### 3.5 Formulations used by employers to present language proficiency requirements: contributions to the standardisation of required proficiency levels

How employers explicitly state language skills requirements varies substantially from ad to ad. There are very synthetic formulations, including only expressions such as “Languages” or “English”, with no indication of an expected level of proficiency (7%) and others where the employer characterises the intended profile slightly more (“Fluency”, “Command”, “Knowledge”), associated with an adjective that specifies the desired level (e.g. “good, perfect, excellent, solid, complete, total”). Given the diversity of formulations found, it was decided, as explained in the Methodology section, to define a framework that would allow grouping the formulations most used by employers for each language.

Even when applying this table, which is based on the confluence of dozens of different formulations into 17 generic designations, the multiplicity of enunciations is considerable. The requests for competences in Portuguese are based on 16 different formulations. For English, 13 different formulations were identified, 11 for French, 10 for German and 7 for Spanish.

The analysis of the adopted formulations allowed the research group to identify, although roughly, the levels of proficiency required by employers. Thus, with regard to the Portuguese language, there is a prevalence of job offers in which fluent professionals are sought. There are also some advertisements (18; 2%) in which the candidate is expected to be bilingual in Portuguese and another language.

As for the four most common foreign languages, and considering the offers with mandatory language requirements, the level of proficiency most often referred to for English, French and German is “Command of X”, where X is the concerned foreign language. For Spanish, “Knowledge/satisfactory knowledge” is requested more regularly. It was also verified that, whereas for English, German and Spanish the second most common formulation is “Good/solid knowledge”, for French it is “Satisfactory knowledge/knowledge”. It could be observed that for the English, French and German languages the most commonly used formulation (“X language command”) corresponds to a higher level of proficiency when compared to the level associated with the second most used formulation (“Good knowledge/knowledge”). For Spanish, however, the situation is inverted: whereas the most common formulation is “Satisfactory knowledge/knowledge”, the second most frequent is “Good/solid knowledge”.

It should also be noted that the more often used formulation in offers with preferential requirements is the same for the four foreign languages mentioned above: “Satisfactory knowledge/knowledge”. It was verified that when English, French and German appear as preferential requirements, they are associated with lower levels of proficiency. Spanish, once again, behaves somewhat differently, insofar as the most common formulation is the same (“Satisfactory knowledge/knowledge”) regardless of whether competences in this language arise as a mandatory or preferential requirement. Table 3 allows a detailed identification of the main results on the levels of proficiency mentioned for each of the analysed languages.

**Table 3** - Levels of proficiency requested by employers: main results

| Code | Portuguese |              | English   |              | French    |              | German    |              | Spanish   |              |
|------|------------|--------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|--------------|
|      | Mandatory  | Preferential | Mandatory | Preferential | Mandatory | Preferential | Mandatory | Preferential | Mandatory | Preferential |
| C1   | 1          | 0            | 81        | 18           | 44        | 13           | 5         | 20           | 17        | 20           |
| C2   | 16         | 0            | 107       | 5            | 36        | 7            | 7         | 3            | 15        | 5            |
| C3   | 4          | 0            | 22        | 1            | 7         | 0            | 4         | 3            | 3         | 0            |
| C4   | 7          | 0            | 13        | 1            | 4         | 0            | 1         | 1            | 1         | 1            |
| D1   | 15         | 0            | 150       | 1            | 54        | 1            | 14        | 5            | 11        | 2            |
| D2   | 6          | 0            | 18        | 0            | 8         | 0            | 5         | 0            | 0         | 0            |
| F1   | 21         | 0            | 103       | 3            | 38        | 4            | 5         | 1            | 5         | 1            |
| F2   | 1          | 0            | 7         | 0            | 0         | 0            | 0         | 0            | 0         | 0            |
| R1   | 9          | 0            | 1         | 0            | 1         | 0            | 0         | 1            | 0         | 0            |
| R2   | 2          | 0            | 0         | 0            | 0         | 0            | 0         | 0            | 0         | 0            |
| B    | 18         | 1            | 8         | 0            | 9         | 0            | 5         | 0            | 3         | 1            |

Contrary to what was initially expected, considering the transversal use of the CEFRL at the academic/formative level, no advertisement was identified in which employers use the levels defined by that framework of reference.

The examination of the development of formulations associated with proficiency levels does not allow an identification of regular or well-defined trends, either globally or in relation to a particular language.

## CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the study of the sample used in this work corroborates the importance that language skills have for secretarial/office management professionals. In fact, in 78.8% of the analysed advertisements, there are requirements (mainly of a mandatory nature) at this level, thus confirming that employers prefer to hire secretarial /office management professionals with a skillset that includes languages. The fact that almost half of the advertisements (45.9%) include requests for competences in two or more languages reinforces the need for these professionals to extend the range of languages in which they are proficient. At this level, the results obtained for the positions of “Secretary” and “Executive Secretary” are particularly noteworthy, since these are clearly professions where the command of languages is very important (for “Executive Secretary”, for example, there are 60.2% of ads requiring competences in 2 or more languages).

The study concludes that, according to the collected sample, the language mostly valued by employers is English, present on a regular basis throughout the analysed period and with an overall occurrence in almost 70% of the job offers. French has proved to be the second most sought after language by employers, although it has a less regular occurrence from the mid-1990s onwards when there was a significant drop in requests, though recovering slightly in recent years. The German language, which was the third most sought foreign language in the first half of the study, is not so present in the meantime (since the 1990s, it is rare that it is requested in more than 10% of the analysed job offers).

In contrast, Spanish, whose values at the beginning of the studied period were not relevant, has been more and more requested lately. Although the analysed job advertisements were published in Portugal, the Portuguese language has an interesting occurrence percentage (13.4% of the ads).

This study also showed that employers attach equal importance to oral and written skills, feeling the need to make explicit reference to them.

It was also observed that there is a great diversity in the way in which the employers express their requests regarding the levels of proficiency sought. Notwithstanding this multiplicity of formulations, it was concluded that English, French and German behave similarly in this respect, since, for these three languages, employers mostly look for candidates with a “Mastery” of languages. For Spanish, the most requested level is “Satisfactory knowledge/knowledge”. It was also noted that in the case of the first three mentioned languages, the second most common level (“Satisfactory knowledge/knowledge” or “Good/solid knowledge”) points to a degree of proficiency lower than what is requested with more regularity; in the case of Spanish, the situation reverses, pointing to the second most requested level (“Good/solid knowledge”) for a higher degree of proficiency.

In short, the analysis of these 844 job offers made it possible to understand that from employers’ perspective language skills have a mandatory and prominent place in the profile of secretarial/office management professionals.

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