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September 20, 1995

The Honorable Richard C. Shelby
United States Senate

The Honorable William F. Clinger, Jr.
Chairman, Committee on Government
Reform and Oversight
House of Representatives

The Honorable Bill Emerson
House of Representatives

This letter responds to your request that we identify federal government documents (excluding documents of the Departments of Defense and State) that are published in languages other than English. We found that no single, comprehensive data source existed within the federal government that could identify and quantify the total number of foreign language publications and documents issued both internally and externally by federal government agencies and organizations. However, we were able to identify two computerized databases containing information on publicly available publications and documents issued by federal agencies and organizations. The databases we identified were (1) the Government Printing Office's (GPO) monthly catalog of publications and (2) the National Technical Information Service's (NTIS) bibliographic database. In total, for the 5-year period, 1990 through 1994, the two databases contained over 400,000 records pertaining to federal agencies' reports, studies, fact sheets, maps, handbooks, conference proceedings, etc.

Table 1 presents the results of our searching these two databases for the 5-year period, 1990 through 1994. We identified 265 federal foreign language documents in the databases. The table presents, by federal department or agency, the number and percentage of foreign language documents published and available for distribution from these two data sources. As indicated in table 1, the federal agency that issued the greatest number of federal documents printed in a foreign language was the Social Security Administration. We identified 50 documents, or 19 percent of the 265 foreign language documents, as issued by the Social Security Administration.

GAO/GGD-95-243R, Federal Foreign Language Documents

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Table 1: Foreign Language Documents Issued
by Federal Agencies, Calendar Years
1990 through 1994

<u>Federal department/agency</u>	<u>Number of documents</u>	<u>Percent of total documents</u>
Agriculture Department	8	3.0%
Bureau of the Census	9	3.4
Consumer Product Safety Commission	9	3.4
Customs Service	8	3.0
Education Department	16	6.0
Equal Employment Opportunity Commission	8	3.0
Energy Department	4	1.5
Environmental Protection Agency	4	1.5
Food and Drug Administration	19	7.2
Health and Human Services Department	26	9.8
Housing and Urban Development Department	4	1.5
Immigration and Naturalization Service	4	1.5
Inter-American Foundation	8	3.0
Internal Revenue Service	14	5.3
Justice Department	6	2.3
Labor Department	8	3.0
National Institutes of Health	14	5.3
Social Security Administration	50	18.9
Other ^a	<u>46</u>	<u>17.4</u>
Total	<u>265</u>	<u>100.0%</u>

^aA total of 30 federal departments and agencies are included in this category.

Source: GAO analysis of the GPO and NTIS document databases.

As one might expect, the foreign language documents issued by the various federal departments and agencies covered subject matter and topics related to their operating missions and functions. For example, the Social Security Administration foreign language documents addressed such topics as Medicare, the Supplemental Security Income program, disability insurance, workers compensation, and various taxation topics. The foreign language documents of the National Institutes of Health included such topics as cancer, asthma, tooth care, and radiation therapy.

Our database document search identified Spanish as the most widely used foreign language in documents issued by federal departments and agencies. As indicated in table 2, of the 265 foreign language documents we identified, 221, or 83 percent, were written in Spanish. The next most frequently used language was French, in which 12 documents, or 5 percent, were written.

Table 2: Breakout of Federal Documents
by Type of Foreign Language, Calendar
Years 1990 through 1994

<u>Foreign language</u>	<u>Number of documents</u>	<u>Percent of total documents</u>
Cambodian	1	0.4%
Chinese	2	0.8
French	12	4.5
German	1	0.4
Italian	1	0.4
Portuguese	3	1.1
Romanian	2	0.8
Russian	2	0.8
Samaritan	1	0.4
Spanish	221	83.4
Tagalog	1	0.4
Ukrainian	1	0.4
Multiple languages ^a	<u>17</u>	<u>6.4</u>
Total	265	100%^b

^aDocuments in this category include text that was printed in more than one language--e.g. Spanish and English.

^bTotal does not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: GAO analysis of the GPO and NTIS document databases.

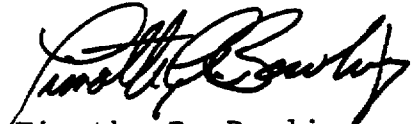
It should be noted that the above information was obtained from a computerized information query of the two databases cited. The documents identified in the search were not verified back to the published source document. Also, according to a GPO official, not all federal foreign language publications and documents may be included in the GPO monthly catalogue database. Apparently, federal departments and agencies have the discretion to print and distribute some documents that are not to be included in the GPO database. Thus, the 265 foreign language documents we identified should not be considered to be a total federal governmentwide (excluding the Departments of State and Defense) figure for the cited 5-year period.

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We are sending copies of this letter to the Chairman, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, and will make it available to others upon request.

We trust that this information satisfactorily responds to your request. Please call me on (202) 512-3511 if you have any further questions.



Timothy P. Bowling
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Workforce Issues

(966681)

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