

教育部语信司—南京大学中国语言战略研究中心主办

- 主 编：徐大明 王铁琨
- 副主编：李现乐 齐汝莹

中国语言战略

2015.1

Volume 2
Number 1 (2015)

**CHINA
LANGUAGE
STRATEGIES**



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《中国语言战略》以语言规划为主题,由教育部语信司指导,教育部语信司-南京大学中国语言战略研究中心主办。

语言关乎个人的发展、文化的传承以及社会的稳定。语言规划有助于引导语言生活向健康、和谐的方向发展,有助于保障个人或群体语言使用权益的充分实现,有助于促进国家统一、民族团结、社会稳定、经济发展和文化进步,对于像我国这样的多民族、多语言国家来说,意义尤其重大。我国语言规划的实践可以追溯到秦始皇的“书同文”政策,其后各朝各代在社会语言文字使用方面也不断进行着引导或干预。现代科学意义上的语言规划研究始于二次世界大战以后,我国学者紧跟时代步伐、顺应社会需要,开展了一系列具有划时代意义的语言文字工作。老一辈语言学家罗常培、王力、吕叔湘、周有光等,肩负起知识分子的历史使命和社会责任,在推动、促进文字改革,推广普通话和现代汉语规范化方面发挥了重要的作用,为我们树立了优秀的榜样。

语言规划学是一门学术性和政策性、理论性和应用性兼重的学科,它的研究融语言本体研究成果与国家、民族和社会的发展需要于一体,不仅进行理论研究,而且力图影响国家和政府的语言政策和语言文字工作。目前,国际上语言规划的研究已有重要的发展,也创办了一些有影响的专业学术出版物,如:1977年创办的《语言问题和语言规划》(*Language Problems and Language Planning*),2000年创办的《语言规划的当前问题》(*Current Issues in Language Planning*)和2002年创办的《语言政策》(*Language Policy*)等。随着中国社会的发展,以中国语言规划为主要研究对象、以中文读者为主要读者群的专业学术出版物的出版也成为迫切的需求,《中国语言战略》就是对这一需求作出的反应。

《中国语言战略》着重关注中国社会所面临的种种具体的语言问题,以及这些语言问题与政治、经济、教育、文化等的相互影响,关注中国社会所发生的剧烈变化所引起的语言使用、语言认同、语言教育、语言保护、语言规范等方面的一系列变化。《中国语言战略》提倡实地考察和个案研究,强调运用科学的方法,对中国社会复杂而丰富的语言生活及相关问题进行描写、分析和解释,鼓励引进和借鉴国外的理论和经验,同时以中国语言规划的研究和实践丰富语言规划学的理论和方法。《中国语言战略》将遵循中国语言战略研究中心的宗旨,积极推动语言规划和语言政策的理论研究,促进适应中国国情的语言规划理论和语言规划学科的产生。

《中国语言战略》2012年卷本由上海译文出版社出版,中国语言战略研究中心在此对上海译文出版社表示感谢。《中国语言战略》2015年卷本出版工作由南京大学出版社承担,在组稿和审稿过程中得到了海内外学者的热情支持和帮助,在此表示诚挚的谢意。中国语言战略研究中心希望能够聚合国内外学者的智慧和力量,通过《中国语言战略》为语言规划、语言政策的理论和实践研究提供一个新的交流平台,我们热切地邀请海内外的学界同仁一起投身于这项事业,让我们一起为建设中国和世界的语言新环境努力!

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On the Nexus of Language and Economy

Florian Coulmas

Abstract: Although language has been of interest to economists for a long time, the application of economic theories and methods to the study of language must be seen as a result of the economization of life in our age. There exist differences between linguists and economists on the value variance of languages and on the advantages of language standardization. Combining the perspectives of linguistics and economics is a promising approach to comprehending the full significance of language for the human existence. Policy makers are well-advised to take cultural, emotional, and political dimensions of language valuation into account when designing language policies, rather than submitting all decisions to the imperative of economic gain.

Key words: economic dimension of language policy, the principle of least effort, human capital, internal economy of language, external economy of language

Introduction

A decline in the number of people worldwide who speak French could cost France 120,000 jobs by 2020 and half a million by 2050 due to missed economic opportunities, a report by Jacques Attali said in August 2014 (L'Express 2014). The report was commissioned by French President Francois Hollande in order to assess the extent to which French has lost ground to English in recent decades and what the economic repercussions of this development might be. While the relative decline of French is a matter of regret to the French, the report points out that the right policies in education and industry could increase the number of French speakers from an estimated 230 million in 2014 to as many as 770 million by the middle of the century. However, negligence on the part of policy

makers could lead to further decline to less than 200 million speakers of French by 2050.

Two lessons can be drawn from this example. (1) Languages are evaluated in economic terms some of them having become substantial factors of their respective countries' economy. (2) It is considered a matter of course that policy interventions can influence the economic value of a language (in the event by deliberately increasing the number of speakers). Both of these notions are relatively new, testifying to the penetration of market mechanisms into ever more spheres of life. Although language has been of interest to economists for a long time, the application of economic theories and methods to the study of language must be seen as a result of the economization of life in our age. If we accept the common place that Adam Smith is the father of

economics as a scholarly discipline, it is worth noting that he himself had a profound interest in, and wrote about, language, although it was not the economic valuation of different languages which intrigued him. Rather, he directed his interest at the origin, make-up and functionality of language as such and its properties as an instrument of communication (Smith 1767). It is not too difficult to convince economists of the fact that language has characteristics that they can study, although economists who do research about language or languages are a marginal group in the field. Yet, linguists are much less inclined to accept that the economy is relevant for their proper field of inquiry, or that the tools of economics could be fruitfully applied to it.

Thus, notwithstanding several monograph-length studies (e.g., Coulmas 1992; Rubinstein 2000), dozens of scholarly journal articles, and a recent review of the literature that looks back on 50 years of economics in language policy (Grin 2014), the nexus of language and economy is still a research domain that comprises many topics yet to be explored. This is mainly due to the traditional boundaries that separate scientific disciplines. The ever more sophisticated theories both economists and linguists have produced in the course of the past half a century have not made it easier to engage in interdisciplinary discussions.

Questions of common interest

However, it seems obvious that in regard to language, discussions across disciplinary boundaries are not just warranted,

but needed. Language is central to human existence. As a symbolic means of expression and exchange, it is unmatched and irreplaceable by any other system and, therefore, pervasive in almost all human activities. At the same time, most human activities have an economic dimension in the sense that they serve or are thought to serve, directly or indirectly, the survival of the individual, group, or species or the improvement of living conditions. Given these two most general conditions of the human existence, it stands to reason that there are many questions at the interface of language and economy that are unlikely to be answered exhaustively by linguists or economists alone, but which call for a collaborative approach.

There are also questions that both economists and linguists might ask, but answer differently. Consider for example that general question of goodness:

(1) Are there good languages? That is, are some languages better than others?

To an economist, who considers language as tool, this would seem to be an obvious and answerable question, for any two things of the same kind can be compared if a standard of goodness is defined. Linguists, by contrast, have a different notion of language not limited to its instrumental function. Hence their response to this question would be different. They would point out that any language is primarily a manifestation of *Language*, where *Language* (with a capital L) is part of the evolution of the species. Every language is built on the same foundation and has the same potential

as any other, although at any historical moment different language may exhaust this potential not just differently, but to a greater or lesser extent. Because of this two-tier notion of language, the general question of goodness has a different character for linguists than for economists.

Or consider the question of a standard:

(2) Does language standardization have any advantages?

The economists' answer would be a clear "yes", for standards generate economic advantages by

—eliminating unwanted variability in process or product design (e.g., curricula, text books);

—facilitating the development of networks;

—improving the compatibility of products (e.g., reference works, style guides);

—enabling economies of scale (e.g., the markets of print products and software).

Linguists, by contrast, would point out that these and other advantages are external to language, which follows its own rules and is diverse and variable by nature. Its flexibility allows individual speakers and groups to express themselves for purposes of any conceivable kind, and to this end, they do not need an artificial standard. The essence of language is inexhaustible creativity. Without variability (which standards are intended to limit, if not eliminate), language could not evolve and adapt to changing circumstances. Thus, while economists would stress the advantage of

stability and homogeneity, linguists would emphasize the importance of flexibility and heterogeneity.

However, that economists and linguists would answer questions such as (1) and (2) among many others differently, does not mean that one is right and one is wrong. Language is a highly complex non-physical system as well as the most fundamental symbolic regularity in human interaction. As such, it is an object of scientific interest in various disciplines, but one—the system—does not exist in the absence of the other—the interaction. Combining the perspectives of linguistics and economics is a promising approach to comprehending the full significance of language for the human existence.

Internal and external economy of language

In the study of language, a distinction is commonly made between structure and function, or system and use. It corresponds, respectively, to the internal and external economy of language. The former has to do with code, the latter with practice.

1 The principle of least effort

As early as 1947, Zipf published a lengthy study relating certain characteristics of natural languages to an underlying economic principle at work in language evolution that he called "the principle of least effort". Its effects are summarily referred to as Zipf's Law, which states that in any text the highest-frequency expressions tend to be the lowest-complexity ones. Many

studies about various languages have since corroborated this law. If language use is conceived as work and every speech act as contributing to the production and reproduction of the language system, Zipf's law means that in their speech work people, on the whole, tend to minimize energy expenditure. To name but a few examples, word length is inversely related to frequency. Complex phonemes as measured in terms of number of articulatory features rank lower on a frequency scale than simpler ones, even where the differences are minute. Number of strokes of Chinese characters and character frequency relate in the same manner, the characters consisting of the smallest number of strokes being the most frequent. These consistent findings testify to the instrumental nature of language and to the fact that on an unconscious level speakers follow optimization strategies that strike a balance between ease of production and ease of comprehension.

Optimization of ends-means relations is what economics is all about. Zipf's finding that this principle is driving the evolution of language on a subconscious level is the most important discovery of the internal economics of language so far. Many linguists assume a principle of thrift, efficiency, economy of effort, or parsimony as basic to the development of language (Coulmas 1992: 221 ff.). Eventually, and trivially, this reflects the finality of human life, that is, the fact that we do not have all the time in the world to say what needs to be said.

The drive to make language a more

efficient instrument of communication has also been raised to the conscious level of deliberate intervention. For instance, spelling reform proposals regularly appeal to utility as the principal motivation of changing established practice. The Chinese character reform of the 1960s, for instance, was largely about limiting the number of characters in common use and reducing the number of composite strokes and thus improving the efficiency of the system. The German orthography reform of the 1990s likewise stressed simplification of rules and ease of learning (Coulmas 2013). The use of diacritics in preparing orthographies for hitherto unwritten or not alphabetically written languages is a related example (Wu 1987). Terminology formation, too, often aims at instrumental efficiency (Feng 1988). Although aesthetic and ideological (e.g., purism) considerations may come to bear here, utility is crucial. The ultimate rationale of all language planning can only be to raise aggregate welfare. Consciously and unconsciously speakers work to make their language optimally suitable to meet their needs. Catastrophic events in a speech community's environment, such as colonization or sudden contact with a language more suitable for modern pursuits may offset these efforts bringing about conditions where the internal and external economy of their language cannot be adjusted fast enough to stem its decline. The instrumental nature of language as tool of communication, information storage and cognition is at issue here. Today more than ever these functions concern utility and are intimately

linked to the external economy of language.

2 Human capital

Viewed as a hereditary trait, language is adaptive and has survival value. No matter what the origin of language and how it evolved, it made human life possible. Its general features are species-specific, but at the same time, the universal faculty of language has been put to use in, and adapted to, particular conditions. Every language is the product of collective labour under particular circumstances and has been produced and reproduced by its speakers to suit their needs. Prior to the invention of writing, the variety of individual languages that evolved reflected the diverse functional requirements that were relevant to their speakers, but must otherwise be assumed to be on a par in regards to expressive power. With the advent of writing and the conscious attitude to language it brought in its train, this changed. Today, linguistic diversity correlates with inequality, that is, social inequality within countries, as well as inequality of development and wealth across countries. It is in this context that human capital theory and its application to language was developed (Becker 1975; Bourdieu 1982). The core argument of the theory says that language is a skill that contributes to increasing productivity and has a positive effect on labour income.

Since human beings are born to speak and all normal children grow up acquiring the language of their environment, the fact that by so doing they build up their human capital is not so obvious. Learning a foreign language, by contrast, very clearly means

acquiring a marketable skill. Entire professions, such as editor, foreign language secretary, interpreter and translator, foreign language teacher, textbook writer, publisher, etc. depend on foreign language expertise. And many businesses engaging in cross border activities need foreign language skills. In this age of ever increasing global commerce, foreign language education has therefore become a veritable industry. The Internet has turned into a market place for foreign language training as well as the assessments of the economic value of language under titles such as “Languages your company should speak” (Kelly 2013), “Top business languages of the world” (Alexica 2013), “Economic powerhouse languages” (Schnoebelen 2013), etc. This literature is about the economic value of languages, but it is also about inequality. If there are any “economic powerhouse languages”, there must also be economic basket case languages, and clearly this is so. The vast majority of all languages of the world are never systematically taught as foreign languages and, therefore, add little or nothing to anyone’s human capital (except, perhaps, professional linguists’).

In a comprehensive study, Davis (2003) correlated languages with gross domestic product (GDP) and found that English and Chinese had the most purchasing power of all languages, followed by other languages used by major economies, such as Japanese, Spanish, German, French, and Russian.

A 2008 study by the International Monetary Fund using the concept of percentage of

Gross World Product (GWP) ranks the follows:
economically most valuable languages as

Table 1 Top languages by percentage of GWP

Rank	Language	GDP (in \$ US Billions)	% of GWP	Cumulative % of GWP
1	English	\$ 21,276	34.9%	34.9%
2	Japanese	\$ 4,911	8.1%	43.0%
3	Simplified Chinese	\$ 4,509	7.4%	50.4%
4	German	\$ 4,393	7.2%	57.6%
5	Spanish	\$ 4,170	6.8%	64.5%
6	French	\$ 3,951	6.5%	71.0%
7	Italian	\$ 2,481	4.1%	75.0%
8	Russian	\$ 2,245	3.7%	78.7%
9	Portuguese	\$ 1,915	3.1%	81.9%
10	Arabic	\$ 1,903	3.1%	85.0%
11	Dutch	\$ 1,386	2.3%	87.3%
12	Korean	\$ 929	1.5%	88.8%
13	Turkish	\$ 730	1.2%	90.0%
14	Traditional Chinese	\$ 607	1.0%	91.0%
15	Polish	\$ 528	0.9%	91.8%

(Source:IMF 2008)

These findings were not really surprising, but it is indicative of the economic importance of language that there is research of this kind, which gives rise to many further questions. Whether foreign language education should be reduced to follow the maxim of economic utility, is one.

The principal motivation for many national governments over the past several decades to expand English language education is economic. Similarly, it is economic rather than cultural motives, which fuel discussions about granting English official status in non-English speaking countries such as Japan, of using it as the principal

language in international organizations, and about introducing English as an additional medium of instruction at university level in the Netherlands, Germany, and the Scandinavian countries, among others.

In the case of English, economic wealth combines with military and political power of major English speaking countries, USA, Great Britain, Canada, and Australia, to determine the preeminent position of English in the world today. The size of the speech community is an additional factor, which, however, is not decisive. Spanish outranks English in terms of native speakers, but carries less weight economically

(as measured in terms of GDP per-capita, purchasing power of speakers, and size of language industry). An important difference that comes into play here is that between native (L1) speakers and second or foreign language (L2) speakers. According to estimates of the 2007 edition of *Nation- alencyklopedin*, native speakers of Mandarin account for 14.4% of the world population, as compared to 5.43% of native English speakers. Yet, many more students learn English as a foreign language than Chinese. In terms of foreign learners, many languages with speech communities of tens of millions of speakers, such as Bengali, Tagalog, and Vietnamese, account for nothing. Outside their proper territory, they do not serve any important functions. Foreign language education hence has a bearing on the de-territorialization of languages, which is an asset in the globalizing economy.

In sum, the ranking of languages for economic potential needs to take into account a variety of factors, such as the size of the L1 and L2 speech communities, GDP and/or per capita income of L1 communities, political and military power, transnational functionality (e.g., presence in international organizations), and size of foreign language industry. To these may be added extent of literature—especially in science and technology—available in a language, degree of its development in terms of information storage and retrieval technologies, and its use in business and trade, domestically and internationally.

Other indices will likely be added, as

economists have of late taken more interest in language than used to be the case formerly. This trend reflects the fact that in this age and day economic activity is more language-based than in the past. It should also be noted, however, that the commodification of language and the submission of foreign language education to market forces has sharpened the awareness that languages cannot be reduced to instruments of economic activity alone.

The Economics of Language needs to be supplemented by the Sociology of Language. One of the key questions investigated by the latter is how and driven by what forces the linguistic map of individual countries and that of the world at large changes. For change it does, and research in this field has shown repeatedly that, while economic forces are part of the equation, other forces, subsumed under such labels as “community”, “identity”, “emotional attachment”, “sentimental value”, are also at work. The multilingual regime of the European Union (Extra and Yağmur 2012) is a good example. Economic integration favours linguistic homogenization, but language policy at the union level and educational policies in the member states have been designed to counter this trend and strengthen the EU's national and, to some extent, minority languages in the face of the advance of English. All of these languages have quite a long literary tradition and have long enjoyed national recognition of one kind or another. These traditions are the most obvious, but not the only characteristics to demonstrate that, in addition to

being a human capital component that can be evaluated, languages are associated with non-tangible values that cannot be expressed in monetary terms. In the European context, it is therefore relatively easy to implement policies that seem to contravene economic rationality. Whether in other parts of the world similar policies can be designed and implemented is today's an important question at the interface of language and economy. In this connection, it is important to emphasize the need to further develop research tools such as and in particular, cost-benefit analysis to capture and assess intangible results of language policies, such as, promoting, discouraging, or proscribing a certain language. Intangibles may be of various kind, for example, educational progress or regression, satisfaction or dissatisfaction with life, social peace or tension. It is highly desirable to develop methods for assessing intangible values of languages in this way by supporting international comparative research.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have stated some basic assumptions linguists and economists make about language and have then outlined a number of research domains where interdisciplinary exchange between them is possible and desirable. I have further argued that the Sociology of Language can serve as arbitrator between them, for while language is, on the one hand, a general human capacity and, on the other hand, a marketable component of human capital, it is also the foundation of society, the arena

in which the intangible value of all things is negotiated. Market forces have entered many domains of life, but they have not eliminated the appreciation of intangible goods without any commercial value. Policy makers are, therefore, well-advised to take cultural, emotional, and political dimensions of language valuation into account when designing language policies, rather than submitting all decisions to the imperative of economic gain.

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Notes on contributors

Florian Coulmas (Email: florian.coulmas@uni-due.de), professor at University of Duisburg, Germany. His research interests include language planning and language policy, sociolinguistics, and Japanese society and culture.

论语言与经济的关系

弗洛里安·库尔马斯

德国杜伊斯堡大学社会科学学院

提 要:语言活动有一个经济学的维度,因此可以使用经济学理论和方法去研究语言。语言学家和经济学家对语言的价值及语言标准化的看法具有分歧。把语言学和经济学的方法结合起来有助于人们全面理解语言的重要性。本文建议语言政策制定者综合考虑语言的文化、感情和政治维度,而非仅以经济利益考量而做决定。

关键词:语言政策的经济维度 省力原则 人力资源 语言的内部经济 语言的外部经济

The Economic Status of Chinese and Japanese: An International Survey, Internet Searches and the Linguistic Landscape

Fumio Inoue

Abstract: The theoretical relations between language and economy are discussed on the basis of data from Japanese, Chinese and other languages. Three sets of data are used: (1) the linguistic landscape of Chinese and Japanese, (2) a worldwide survey on language learning, and (3) Google Internet searches of Japanese loan words. The three data sets show remarkable similarities in the distribution of language use.

Key words: linguistic landscape, language census, economic status of languages

Introduction: three investigations

Japanese is widely used overseas. However, this kind of global expansion is also observed for other languages. Multilingual signs are increasingly used all over the world, also in Japan and China. These movements can be interpreted as a mutual expansion of languages all over the world. Consequently, the future of Japanese should be predicted from such a wider viewpoint of international communication (Inoue 2000^①).

Recent changes in the status of Japanese and Chinese are notable (井上 2000, 2010, 2011). Several related phenomena can be observed in certain aspects of the linguistic landscape (Inoue 2005, 2012)

and through Internet search trends (井上 2012). The underlying mechanism of the rise and fall of the market value of languages is presumed to be economics (Inoue 1997, 1998, 2007). This discussion is related to status planning of language.

The maps below show that the Chinese language is special among world languages in not using so-called “loanwords”, or “borrowings”, for new words and concepts from abroad; Chinese utilizes translations like “电视” or loan-translations like “可口可乐”. This is in contrast with the Japanese language that tends to adopt foreign forms as loanwords like “terebi” (tv) or “koka koora” (coca cola). This phenomenon is related to corpus planning of language (Inoue 2000).

① Most of the English papers by F. Inoue are accessible through the Internet.
http://dictionary.sanseido-publ.co.jp/affil/person/inoue_fumio/doc/.
<http://www.urayasu.meikai.ac.jp/japanese/meikainihongo/18ex/achievements.xls>.