

## **Economy and Language: An Inter-Disciplinary Workshop**

**At the University of Chicago Center in Paris**

*6 Rue Thomas Mann, Paris 75013*

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Organized by:

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Societal multilingualism has interested linguists and economists in two strikingly different ways in recent years, with linguists celebrating the cultural diversity that languages as representational systems embody. Economists, on the other hand, see societal multilingualism as an obstacle to economic development, especially in countries of the developing world, which typically have numerous genetically related and unrelated languages and which have limited financial resources. To linguists, privileging one or a handful of languages for the sake of economic developing augurs “language endangerment,” which entails reduction of linguistic and cultural diversity in the world. For them, this evolution automatically disadvantages those populations that have to give up their heritage languages and must compete for jobs and other roles in their societies in a language that they are less fluent and competitive in, at least in the early stages of language shift. Economists have advocated investing the limited financial resources mostly in economic development and developing an education system that enable children whose ethnolinguistic backgrounds are different from that of the dominant language to learn the latter. Linguists, on the other hand, have argued that such a system disadvantages children that receive education in a language other than their own, as their graduation rate is lower than that of those for whom the dominant language is also their vernacular. Both groups of experts have talked to governments and advised them regarding the economic development or better school systems in their respective countries but seldom have they read each other, let alone spoken to each other, especially regarding their contradictory advice to government officials. The proposed workshop aims at ultimately changing this state of affairs, as explained below.

Linguists have also tied language endangerment, as observed today around the world, to the environmentalists’ concern with endangered species. Advocates of language revitalization have often developed a discourse that is very much inspired by that of environmentalists, worrying very little about whether their advocacy may contribute to further marginalizing economically the populations on whose behalf they write and/or speak. Part of the problem here is that such language advocates have tended to conceive of languages as cultural representational systems, which must be maintained (regardless of whether they are adaptive to the ambient socioeconomic ecologies), whereas economists have privileged the conception of languages as tools that help humans communicate about themselves and about their physical and socioeconomic ecologies in ways that are adaptive to these ecologies. They have hardly paid attention to the social status of languages as markers of social identity and the extent to which the strength of that identity may favor or disfavor the recommended economic development plans. Nonetheless, one cannot deny that language shift has not had only negative effects on the affected populations; it has often helped particular people adapt (better) to socioeconomic ecologies that would otherwise be disadvantageous to them. To be sure, linguists must

also learn that part of the problem in situations of language shift that have been disadvantageous to some “indigenous” people has had to do with ecological factors other than language, for instance when carriers of particular phenotypes are stigmatized simply because they look different. Social prejudice is another issue in itself.

This summary actually captures an important aspect of the history of mankind, marked by layers of migrations/population movements, of colonization, of population contacts, of competition for resources, of the domination of one group by another, and of consequent changes in the linguistic landscape of different parts of the world. This is obvious, for instance, in the Romance countries of Europe, where Latin-based languages have replaced Celtic languages; in the United Kingdom, which has become a predominantly Germanic country linguistically, while one should wonder what is the proportion of its population that is still purely Celtic; in North Africa, where various modern Arabic varieties have displaced Berber/Tuareg-like languages; etc. As concerns grow today over the demise of indigenous languages and cultures of the Americas and Australia in particular, little attention has been paid to the unique nature of the emergent American and Australian identities as distinct from the corresponding dominant European languages and cultures, or to the fact that, for instance, Native American casinos make more money in English than in an indigenous language. More complexity and inter-ecology variation arise when attention is also extended to Africa and parts of Asia, where language competition is not necessarily between indigenous and European languages but often among indigenous languages.

While linguists have been arguing for using heritage languages in education to increase students’ learning success, especially if the heritage language is also the mother tongue, they have said nothing about the kind of socioeconomic ecology that would sustain usage of the relevant languages as vernaculars. Advocates for empowering “indigenous populations” by enabling them to use their heritage languages in the economic system have said nothing about the kind of economic development and the specific economic sectors that would use these languages. Nor have they addressed the issue of the financial investment needed to implement such policies, and whether they are realistic and affordable, especially in polities where national economies have stagnated or deteriorated.

Eventually, linguists and economists alike are confronted with the issue of when languages count as assets or liabilities for the populations associated with them. Is multilingualism as a compromise between the representation-system and the communicative-tool conceptions of languages sustainable in all societies? Or should we treat the representation-system view as an ideal that is not always practical and the communicative-tool alternative as a satisficing practical solution to the competition between languages that arises from particular population structures and from interactional practices? Do policy makers always have the resources and/or the power to accommodate the wishes of linguists? Is it always wise to follow the recommendations of economists?

It is evidently high time linguists talked with economists concerned with pulling marginalized populations and most nations of the economic and political “South” from economic poverty or underdevelopment. Linguists should consider seriously the practical wisdom of a satisficing compromise that uses fewer languages in some cases, while economists should look into why linguists are so strong on treating languages as social identity markers and carriers of culture-specific world views. When can one

position be better than the other, assuming that there are no two socioeconomic ecologies that are identical? We have definitely come to a juncture where economists and linguists need to “educate” each other and find some common grounds of satisficing solutions, especially as politicians genuinely interested in improving the schooling and the socioeconomic conditions of their citizenry will increasingly be turning to “experts” for technical advice.

Thus, one must address the following questions among others: What is the point of being schooled in one’s heritage language when this is different from that of the lucrative modern economy, at a time when the overall national or regional population is becoming socioeconomically integrated? Why should anybody pretend to develop a country economically when its citizens are not equally competitive within the economic market and language disadvantages some of them? Do languages really have rights to education and economic systems in the same ways that citizens have rights to these institutions? Where are the resources going to come from to satisfy language rights?

We must also expose another embarrassing aspect of the scholarship on this “wicked problem”: the experts we read are typically people of European descent in the Developed World, though they have done field work and sometimes really lived in the Third World.<sup>1</sup> There should be more scholars from the latter part of the world, especially people who can also speak about “informal economy,” its sustainability, the language(s) in which it operates, and the competitiveness of its practitioners in relation to “formal economy” where the pace is set by the industrialized world.

We are hosting an exploratory workshop on this subject matter at the University of Chicago Center in Paris, which Salikoko S. Mufwene is directing during this 2013-2014 academic year. We have invited some economists and a sociologist interested in linguistic aspects of economic development, and some linguists interested in economic aspects of language policies, so that we can “educate each other” constructively. Below is a list of the scholars who have accepted to participate in the event.

**Barry R. Chiswick**, *economist*, George Washington University. His interests include “skill acquisition, the labor market adjustment and economic impact of immigrants and immigration policy, and the human capital and labor market behavior of racial, religious, and ethnic groups” as well as language practices among immigrants.

**Ana Deumert**, *scholar of language contact* and naturalized *South African*, University of Cape Town, has dealt with the economics of language practice in South Africa.

**Hubert Devonish**, *sociolinguist*, University of the West Indies at Mona, Jamaica, has spent the past two decades on advocating the empowerment of Jamaican Creole through its use in the Parliament, the white collar sector of the economy, and the education system.

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<sup>1</sup> Occasionally linguists have given a voice to representatives of the “indigenous people” (a term that also needs to be problematized, much to the shame of UNESCO and the United Nations!), but these are also people who reproduce the ideology they have learned from linguists/anthropologists and may not speak for the people they claim to represent. Views are often divided among the relevant people.

**Paulin Djité**, *applied linguist and Ivoirien*, University of Western Sydney, has published extensively on empowering “indigenous languages” in economic development, including *The sociolinguistics of development in Africa* (2008). Fortunately, we will fly him from his native Côte d’Ivoire, where he is spending the present academic year.

**Alexandre Duchêne**, *sociologist of language*, Institut de Plurilinguisme, University of Friburg, has worked on the empowerment of languages of some migrants at the work place.

**John Edwards**, *sociolinguist*, St. Francis Xavier University, Canada, has published extensively on multilingualism and the role of the socioeconomic ecology, author of *Challenges in the social life of language* (2011).

**Michele Gazzola**, *economist*, is a Marie Curie post-doc research fellow at the Institute of Public Economics, at Humboldt University in Berlin. His research interests include the economics of languages, language policy evaluation, public economics, policy analysis, multilingualism management, and language planning.

**Marina Gindelsky**, *economist*, is a PhD candidate at George Washington University, working on labor economics, including intergenerational mobility and language acquisition among children of immigrants.

**Victor Ginsburgh**, *economist*, European Center for Advanced Research in Economics and Statistics, Brussels, has co-authored *How many languages do we need? The economics of linguistic diversity* (2011).

**François Grin**, *economist*, University of Geneva, Director of the “Observatoire Economie-Langues-Formation,” focusing on the “economics of language policy.” He has also worked on “minority-majority relations in Europe,” dealing in part with managing linguistic diversity.

**Stephan Klasen**, *economist*, Georg-August-Universität, Göttingen, Germany, interested in ethnic/linguistic marginalization in economic development in Third World countries.

**Philipp Kolo**, *economist*, completed his PhD at the University of Göttingen, where he wrote a dissertation on linguistic aspects of economic development. His current research is on cultural diversity and economic development; on language and ethnic heterogeneity; and on civil war & conflict incidence.

**Brian Joseph, Ohio State University**, historical linguist at Ohio State University. His areas of specialization include the Balkans, and thus language contact. He is also interested in the impact of economy on language coexistence and competition.

**Sonja Novak Lukanovič**, *sociolinguist*, at the Institute for Ethnic Studies, University of Ljubljana. **She** has conducted extensive research on the interactions between language ideology and economic constraints in the maintenance of minority languages in Slovenia.

**Salikoko S. Mufwene**, *linguist*, University of Chicago, born *Congolese* (DRC). He works on language evolution from an ecological perspective, including globalization and language vitality; very much interested in how economic factors influence speakers' linguistic adaptations to their changing ecologies.

**François Nemo**, *linguist*, Laboratoire Ligérien de Linguistique, Université d'Orléans. Trained first in economics, he published some papers dealing with informational and interactional issues in price theory, now works on language coexistence and competition in French Guyana.

**Abram de Swaan**, *sociologist*, University of Amsterdam, author of *Words of the world* (2001), the first sociologist if not the only one to my knowledge who has posited a connection between world-wide globalization, language, and economic development.

**François Vaillancourt**, *economist*, University of Montreal, interested in how economic and geographical marginalization contributes to maintaining languages, whereas economic integration tends to foster competition among languages within the same economic system.

**Cécile B. Vigouroux**, *sociolinguist/ethnographer*, Simon Fraser University (fellow at the Collegium de Lyon this 2013-2014 academic year), has worked on language practices among sub-Saharan Black African migrants in South Africa and on the role of informal economy in sustaining minority/heritage languages.

**Bengt-Arne Wickström**, *economist*, Institute for Public Economics at the Humboldt-University, Berlin. His general research interests are in the area of welfare theory with a special emphasis on the economic theory of justice and the theory of politics as well as on social evolution, environmental economics and theory of age security. He participates in the "Mobility and Inclusion in Multilingual Europe" project, funded by the EU.

## Abstracts:

**Barry R. Chiswick & Marina Gindelsky**, George Washington University

*The determinants of bilingualism among children in the United States*

This paper is concerned with the determinants of bilingualism among children in a predominantly monolingual country. A model for bilingualism among these children is developed based on their exposure to languages other than the dominant one where they were born and live. The model is then tested for the United States using data from the American Community Survey, 2005-2011. The observations are for children age 18 and younger living at home. Bilingualism is defined as their speaking a language at home other than or in addition to English. The model generates hypotheses for the effects on bilingualism of child characteristics, family (especially parental) characteristics and local area characteristics. The analyses are performed for all children, native-born children, the 1.5 generation (foreign-born children who immigrated to the US at a very young age), as well as separately by racial/ethnic group.

**Ana Deumert**, University of Cape Town, South Africa

*The economics of language online: A site of struggle and opportunity.* Can digital technology – its historical English bias notwithstanding – become a tool for the political empowerment of hitherto marginalized languages and their speakers? She argues that the digital domain is an important site of struggle over questions of linguistic representation, authority, voice, and empowerment. She explores these issues through the discussion of a number of case studies in which she focuses on the interface between language and the global, increasingly digital, ‘knowledge economy’.

**Hubert Devonish**, University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica

*Language diversity and failure of the market*

Markets work best when true costs are known, because they are immediate and obvious. A community may choose to give up an indigenous language. This typically takes place in a situation where it decides to “buy” a language of wider communication. The “purchase” involves committing the economic resources or suffering the financial costs of providing its children access to this new language. The community may justify this decision based on the perceived cost of maintaining the heritage language, weighed against the economic benefit derived from the new one. The gains are balanced against the costs on investing in the adoption of the new language. Etc.

**Paulin Djité**, University of Western Sidney, Australia

*Language and the economy: A never-ending debate?*

The age of globalization has brought about significant changes that have considerably weakened many fallacies about the link between language and the economy, as it is becoming abundantly clear that there may not be a negative causal relationship between multilingualism and economic development. Yet, whilst equations such as “One Nation = One Language = One Currency” are no longer favored, others, such as “One Currency = Many Nations = Many Languages” are now being put forward. Among other things, the author will also re-examine notions such as “language capital” and “linguistic capital.”

**Alexandre Duchêne**, University of Friburg

*Multilingualism as an economic asset? Critical considerations from a sociolinguistic ethnographer.*

Drawing on an ethnographic study of workplaces and enterprises of the new economy in Switzerland, he will focus on two specific issues that correlate with the transformation of the very nature of work itself and of the correlated economicization of linguistic diversity. He will also explore the extent to which multilingualism is commodified in Swiss enterprises.

**John Edwards**, St. Francis Xavier University, Canada

*Language economics and language rights.* This presentation will attempt to illuminate the nature of “language rights” both *in esse* and *in posse*. It will range widely, over history and discipline, with the central aims of drawing a crucial distinction between *claims* and *rights* – a difference that is regularly ignored or inadequately understood in the existing literature – and of discussing the ramifications of that distinction.

**Victor Ginsburgh**, European Center for Advanced Research in Economics & Statistics, Brussels,

*Linguistic diversity, standardization, and disenfranchisement.* He will examine the notion of linguistic and other types of societal diversity that have become an important factor in evaluating economic,

political and societal progress. (...) The search for a compromise between efficiency and the sentiment of being disenfranchised represents a serious challenge for any multilingual country or union; he will examine this problem in the context of the European Union for which good data are available.

**Michele Gazzola**, Humboldt University; **François Grin**, U. of Geneva; & **François Vaillancourt**, University of Montreal

*Language policy, efficiency and redistribution: Towards effective policies.* Among other things, the authors will review the existing evidence on the costs of using the mother tongue of small groups in education; focus on the relationship between economic growth (GDP) and language policies (with regard to diversity); and assess the redistributive consequences of various financing mechanisms.

**Brian Joseph**, Ohio State University

*The socio-economics of language diversity in the Balkans.* The Balkan region is home to a considerable amount of language diversity, with multilingualism historically being the norm among most of the population throughout the region. Even when Turkish served as a lingua franca in urban centers, when the Balkans were part of the Ottoman Empire, it was still only one of several languages in play in the linguistic marketplace. Moreover, multilingualism was invested with social capital, as indicated by numerous proverbs in the various languages equating knowledge of several languages with wealth (e.g. Macedonian *Jazicite se bogatstvo* 'Languages are wealth'). Fast-forward to modern times, and the picture is somewhat different: a non-regional language, English, functions in much the way that Turkish did during Ottoman times (so Friedman 2012), and the multilingualism is of a different character and has a different socio-economic distribution. In urbanized areas, at least among the elites in the populace, multilingualism is more in line with the Western European model and more involves Balkan national languages and Western European languages than multiple indigenous languages. By contrast, the more traditional Ottoman-era-style multilingualism is still the norm outside of urban centers and among the underclasses. There is thus a socio-economic dimension to present-day multilingualism that has consequences on the global front, as urban elites are positioned globally while rural folk and the underclasses are positioned more locally and regionally. Moreover, on the ideological front, polarization in the region and the – dare I say it – Balkanization into a large number of small nation-states, with seven arising out of the former Yugoslavia in addition to the five others with longer (recent) histories, suggest that ideologies of unity through language that arose in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in an period of nation-building in the region are still very much alive, but still of questionable viability and success.

**Stephan Klasen**, Georg-August-Universität, Göttingen, Germany

*The economic costs and benefits of linguistic diversity.* Economists have assumed linguistic diversity to increase conflicts, reduce the provision of collective goods upon which economic progress of societies depends, and to reduce spatial and social mobility. This paper reassesses this traditional approach against new evidence.

**Philipp Kolo**, University of Munich

*A new approach in measuring diversity and assessing its implications on economic development*

In contrast to biodiversity, describing the multitude of different species and ecosystems, language or cultural diversity is not unanimously described as something positive or that deserves to be protected

and conserved. Economists often try to explain the failure of whole continents by its existence. This paper follows two streams. First, it proposes a new index that extends the concept of dissimilarity in language to ethno-racial characteristics and religion between groups. The resulting distance-adjusted ethno-linguistic fractionalization index (DELFI) is based on highly disaggregated data on the language, ethnic and religious composition of groups. Secondly, the index is subsequently applied by replicating some key studies on the effects of ethnic heterogeneity on economic outcomes. It shows that there is not necessarily a linear negative effect of (language) diversity but may even promote an economic development. Thus, (language) diversity becomes a good that may be worth protecting instead of claiming that it responsible for Africa's Growth Tragedy

**Sonja Novak Lukanovič**, University of Ljubljana

*The value of mastering languages in economy.* Some data on the interaction between economy and multilingualism from the research projects of the Institute for Ethnic Studies will be presented, especially the link between language proficiency, language use, and the success of economic activities of various businesses in Slovenia. She will articulate economic variables that bear on the choice and use of language at work, highlighting differences in public institutions and in different business enterprises.

**Sinfree Bullock Makoni**, Pennsylvania State University

*Subaltern and subversive economic and language practices: Keeping it in my "har drive"*

The primary objectives in this paper are to analyze the nature of economics and language practices in "shebeens", which are places where alcoholic beverages are sold and consumed (at times illegally) in Zimbabwe, South Africa, and more recently, Namibia. Shebeens are important sites in the social, political, and linguistic landscape of southern African social life and, thus, merit serious study when exploring the nature of the relationship among language, visuals, linguistic commodification, and economics. They are at the junction of the informal and formal economic sectors, thus providing unique opportunities to establish a dialogue between economics and social-linguists in institutions of central importance in African townships.

**Salikoko S. Mufwene**, University of Chicago

*Language and economy*

What is the relation of economy to language and vice versa? What are the issues that we face and why is inter-disciplinary collaboration useful?

**François Nemo**, Université d'Orléans

*Resources and languages in a North-Amazonian context: The Palikur experiment and its economics.*

Because the Palikur live both in French Guyana and Brazil and are associated with educational systems which either use their language in primary schools or almost completely ignore it, and also because language shift or language maintenance have both occurred in their different settlements in French Guyana, they allow for a contrastive study of the relation between linguistic choices and economic ones, in a context in which access to resources (money but also land for habitat or traditional activities) are conditioned by linguistic factors. Trained in development economics before becoming a linguist, I shall consider together their economic and linguistic strategies, and spell out all the reasons why: 1) choosing a "language mix" that maintain an indigenous minority language may prove economically



sound and make its tenants more successful than shifters: 2) “overshooting” as a non-choice may also take place, leading to the disappearance of a language (but not always to economic success) or to strong revitalization efforts (lead by the most successful and fluent speakers in the dominant language).

**Abram de Swaan**, University of Amsterdam

*The unequal exchange of texts.* He intends to focus on the predicament of the small language communities, but especially also on that of the larger language entities (such as the Francophonie and the Spanish-speaking countries) which are gradually losing their regional predominance and are less equipped than the smaller language communities to make the transition to English.

**Cécile B. Vigouroux**, Simon Fraser University & Collegium de Lyon

*Mobility, “integration” and language competence: the point of view of language users.* It has been generally assumed that migrants’ competence in the host language(s) is correlated with the degree of their socioeconomic integration in the host country. Drawing evidence from informal economy in Black Africa, the author disputes the accuracy of this generalization, which has typically been based on formal economy.

**Bengt-Arne Wickström**, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

*Long-run survival of multilingualism in the face of globalization.* If parents choose the language or languages in which their children are brought up, their choice of language community into which children are socialized depends both on the practical value of the language as a means of communication and on the prevailing linguistic environment determining the emotional attachment of the parents to the language as a carrier of cultural identity. The network-externality property of language as a means of communication leads to a slow but certain disappearance of minority languages, especially as a consequence of globalization. This tendency can be balanced by the emotional attachment to their language of the speakers of minority languages, which influences their propensity of transferring such languages to the next generation. This dynamic structure is formally modeled and dynamically stable monolingual and multilingual long-run equilibria are characterized in dependency of the prevailing linguistic environment. The linguistic environment in turn is (at least partially) determined by language policy.