

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF GLOBAL ENGLISH: DECONSTRUCTING THE HEGEMONIC CYCLE OF LINGUISTIC CAPITAL AND ECONOMIC POWER

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ABSTRACT

English is the most dominant subject all over the world, and this work takes a fascinating, wide-ranging interdisciplinary approach as it merges diverse economics, political science, and linguistics perspectives. We believe that English is an asset of human capital at the micro-level, a national competitive advantage at the meso-level, and a source of political and soft power at the macro-level. This work first in a long time revisits the traditional story of the economics of the English language by throwing open new windows through the amalgamation of the idea of linguistic imperialism from political theory. We get to see a qualitative meta-analysis of the literature and empirical studies which uncovers the economic benefits English has to be dependent on the political power structures that have been there historically and those which exist now. These benefits of English can be found in the wage premium, the increased foreign direct investment (FDI), and lighter trade. Our results point to a nuanced yet regular pattern of influence: the political and economic power of the core English-speaking countries is what makes English more usable which in turn makes their economic and political dominance even more solidified, most of the time this going against the trend of linguistic diversity and fairness. The paper here ends with the words that the good language policy has to be intentionally created in order to weaken such hegemonic characteristics. We bring forward suggestions that include the policy that is referred to the economic use of English that we would take while supporting multilingualism, allowing for the survival of the linguistic heritage, and advancing a fairer global knowledge economy.

Keywords: Economics of Language, Linguistic Imperialism, Human Capital, Soft Power, Globalization, Language Policy, FDI, Wage Premium.

INTRODUCTION

English is a world language that has gained an unprecedented prominence in the 21st century globalized world. It is the most widely used *lingua franca* of international trade, banking, diplomacy, and scholarly research. Although its necessity is recognized by everyone, academic knowledge of its importance is often separated by disciplinary

boundaries. Economists evaluate it as a skill of the labor force (Chiswick & Miller, 1995; Grin, 2003), political scientists analyze it as a means of consciousness-raising and domination of power (Nye, 2004; Phillipson, 1992), and linguists look at its influence on the language community's identity and the language's survival (Pennycook, 1994). This paper put

forth a point that the knowledge of the "global English phenomenon" is one that calls for the integration of these three views.

This article questions about the possible interrelation of economic and political aspects with regard to the role of English in the world language system and with further consequences on national and global policies.

The economic perspective is simple yet convincing to the point: the command of English is going to raise an individual's income; thus it will have a positive effect on the country's GDP. Many empirical works, mostly one by Chiswick and Miller (1995), have provided solid econometric evidence of the "wage premium" for bilinguals conversant in English, in all labor markets worldwide. On the level of nations, studies show that Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflow, participation in international trade, and technology transfer are all dependent on a country's aggregate English proficiency (Ku & Zussman, 2010). This implies that English is a neutral and pragmatic tool for maximizing advantage in a competitive global market.

In any case, the recognition of an economic story as the only one is to overlook the very deep political foundations of English as a world language. The advances in language are not the result of a chance event in history or a product of market efficiency only, but they are the result of the combination of British colonial imperialism and later on, American economic and cultural dominance in the 20th and 21st centuries (Phillipson, 1992). This political origin portrays English not only as an instrument but also as a carrier of a hegemonic ideological system, a phenomenon that has been critically reviewed through the concept of "linguistic imperialism." Besides, its status as the main language of the most powerful international organizations such as the IMF, World Bank, and UN Security Council, leads to an overbalance of power for the countries that are native English-speaking, which in turn allows them to influence global standards and policies in their favor (Nye, 2004).

This article attempts to merge the different disciplinary fields. Broadly speaking, the main idea put forward is that the economic worth of English is by and large just one of the effects of its political superpower and thus, through this

economic value, which is used to *confirm* the same one, a feedback loop is generated. To begin with, we went through a very detailed literature review to sketch the intellectual connections between the economics of language and the politics of linguistic hegemony. Next, we explained the qualitative research method that we employ, which is critical meta-analysis of the existing empirical studies and theoretical frameworks.

The next section, the dissection part, delves deeper into the intricate relationship between these three by showing the cause-effect chain with history being the main event - how the use of English was decided for the sake of the economy through political historical events, and later economic processes led to the political predominance of English with extensive influence on global inequality. Moreover, the conclusion also synthesizes these insights and provides some specific policy advice for the local and international authorities that are prepared to deal with the complex trade-offs between economic pragmatism, political sovereignty, and cultural preservation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Economic Paradigm:

English as Human Capital and Comparative Advantage Human capital theory, the chief notion of the economics of language, is the fundament of the whole discussion, thereby also being the case with Gary Becker. Language communicative abilities are seen as a form of capital, that "needs demand" (education and time) and "gives returns" (higher productivity and income). In their landmark paper, Chiswick and Miller (1995) showed that immigrants in English-speaking countries get a large rise of salary after they improve their English skills. The logic of this microeconomics has been expanded to the non-migrant situations, revealing that the English skills in the countries like India, the Philippines, and the rest of Europe, are worth a significant wage premium in the sectors that are open to the global economy.

At the macroeconomic level, the focus is on English as a source of national comparative advantage. One of the leading figures to be noted is François Grin (2003), who played a crucial role in organizing the research in this

field, by examining how language policies affect the economic results. Research shows a strong link between the English proficiency index of a country (like the EF English Proficiency Index) and the inflows of FDI. A shared language is the rationale that it lowers transaction costs, decreases the risk, and makes the transfer of the knowledge easier in MNCs (Ku & Zussman, 2010). In the same way, trade between countries is made easier by a common language, with English being the default medium, thus the "friction" in cross-border trade is minimized.

The main story told by the economic literature in question is that of the successful use of pragmatism and instrumentalism. The spread of English is portrayed as a market-driven result of the needs of globalization, which opens easy routes for both the individuals and the countries to rise.

2.2 The Political Paradigm: Hegemony, Soft Power, and Linguistic Imperialism

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the political and critical linguistic point of view disputes the impartiality of this economic storyline. The most energetic objection is from Robert Phillipson's (1992) concept of "linguistic imperialism." Phillipson alleges that the worldwide prevalence of English is not a naturally occurring or harmless phenomenon but rather a domination that is kept alive by the core English-speaking states (the "core") over the English non-speaking peripheral states (the "periphery"). This dominance is maintained both by the explicit and the implicit ideological assumptions that consider English as the language of modernity and progress besides the explicit policies (for instance, British Council and US Agency for International Development promoting English-medium education).

Besides, Joseph Nye (2004) referred to the concept of "soft power" - the ability to influence the wishes of others by attraction rather than force. The use of English in worldwide media, entertainment, education, and the internet is a significant source of soft power for the US and the UK. Not only does this make these countries leaders but also changes the modes of how global issues are talked about, and they may even get their ideas and values recognized as the new global standards of political and cultural spheres.

On examining through the political lens, it can be clearly seen that the worldwide linguistic landscape is a territory of power that is still being fought over. Choosing to make English the first language of the educational systems of different countries is definitely not only a matter of money but a political decision that can marginalize local languages, decrease the worth of the indigenous knowledge systems, and cause the internal social division of society into an English-proficient elite and a non-proficient populace.

2.3 The Interdisciplinary Gap and the Need for Synthesis

Both these literatures are well-developed, yet they are often at odds with each other. Economists are obsessed with measurable results and therefore tend to ignore the influence of the past power structures that have given English language its value. Although political scientists and critical linguists are good at dismantling power structures, they still may not recognize all the tangible, substantial benefits that the command of English language can bring to the individuals and to the economies of developing countries that are willing to break the cycle of poverty.

There are only a couple of academics who have resorted to the attempt of overcoming this discrepancy. One of the prominent examples is the idea of the global language system by Abram de Swaan (2001), which applies a political economy framework to explain languages in a hierarchical "world system." In the same manner, David Crystal (2003), while emphasizing the significance of English as a global language, also admits that the changes that occur in the linguistic diversity are the associated dangers. Nevertheless, a thorough and systematic treatment that recognizes the economic and political aspects as two different facets of the same phenomenon, which are deeply intertwined and in a mutually reinforcing relationship, is still lacking. The present article is an attempt to close that divide, contending that the foreign economic advantage of the United States is not only a reflection but also an engine of its political power.

3. Methodology

Due to the cross-disciplinary and conceptual characteristics of the research question, this study utilizes a qualitative meta-synthesis method. Such an approach is not about the creation of new primary data but, instead, it entails a systematic review, a critical assessment, and a combination of findings from existing empirical studies, theoretical frameworks, and academic literature of the three fields of economics, political science, and linguistics.

The research process was conducted in three stages:

1. Identification and Collection: Various academic databases such as JSTOR, EconLit, Google Scholar, and Project MUSE were extensively searched for relevant literature. Some of the main keywords that were used include "economics of language", "linguistic imperialism", "English as a global language", "soft power", "wage premium", "FDI and language", and "language policy". The search concentrated on the most influential books and journal articles from the last 30 years.

2.

3. Critical Analysis and Categorization:

The existing literature was reviewed to uncover main arguments, methods, and proofs. Research was organized by the main discipline that was used (economics, politics, linguistics) and the opinion of the authors (instrumentalist/pragmatic vs. critical/hegemonic).

4. Synthesis and Theory Building:

At this point, the researchers have gone beyond just categorizing the literature and have combined it with the insights. They were looking for places in the works of different authors where their ideas either matched or clashed. A scholarly work on economics was combined with an interpretation by Phillipson to explain the result not only as a market phenomenon but also as a residual imperial influence. The researchers thus not only came up with the main paper argument that there is a co-dependent interaction between the political and economic aspects of English but also sketched the core thesis.

This research method is suitable for this paper because it allows the development of a more detailed and subtler conceptual model, which

can efficiently represent the complexities of the phenomenon, even compared with those of single disciplinary and monomethod research.

4. Analysis: The Vicious Cycle of Linguistic Power and Profit

The section describes how the interaction between the political and economic features of the English language is of such a nature that they establish a system with no way out, which is self-reinforcing.

4.1 From Political History to Economic Utility

English is nowadays typically defined by its historical political-cultural background. The giant British Empire had already spread English all over the administration, law, and higher education in their colonies from India to Nigeria. It was not an accident, but a specific method to control and absorb their culture through the standardization of public institutions and the education system, which was centrally administered in English. Some of these nations became free, but still, the international political system was carried on in English, thus establishing a kind of political dependency. The local elite, who had been trained in English, maintained their power by making sure that the language still had its privileged place.

After World War II, the United States took over the baton of linguistic hegemony. As the US went on to become economically and militarily supreme at a global level, it also got to be the center of the world finance (Wall Street), technological innovation (Silicon Valley), and the academic research. The establishments belonging to the liberal order after the war (the Bretton Woods system (IMF, World Bank)) were mostly led by Americans and operated in English. Hence, in order to trade with the global market, the countries *had* to transact with these English-centric institutions. Thus, the "service" of English was not a natural market discovery but was structurally enforced by the geopolitical dominance of the Anglosphere.

4.2 The Economic Reinforcement of Political Hegemony

After a while, the economic benefit of English was being supported by its political supremacy, thus a powerful feedback loop was created.

- **The "Hegemony Premium":**

The English language wage premium is simply not a result of the skills that have been invested in the language, but, in part, it is an "advantage of hegemony" The stated premium compensates people who are in line with the language standards of the global power center. This makes a powerful system of incentives where the smartest brains in the periphery countries make a huge investment in getting the English language proficiency, thus, they often move away from their mother languages and local knowledge systems. As a result, the migration of talented people into English-medium domains thus, deepens the language's dominance.

- **Institutional Lock-In:**

The fact that English is the lingua franca of international bodies means that it is the source of a substantial democratic deficit. Those whose first language is not English even if they are experts are still conversely situated in delicate diplomatic negotiations or when they have to comprehend complicated legal and financial documents. As a result, they are given what is equivalent to a veto and a chance to influence the run of events of native English-speaking countries (Nye, 2004). A diplomat from the U.S. or the U.K. is always one step ahead as he/she works in his/her mother tongue, whereas a Japanese or Brazilian counterpart must use an acquired second language, a power imbalance which is inherent.

- **The Knowledge Economy and Epistemic Injustice:**

Over 80% of the scientific journals that are listed in the SCOPUS database are publications in the English language. In that case, if the research work of a scientist is to have "worldwide" influence, it must be in English. Such a custom lessens the viability of the research in different languages and may fence off those epistemologies and knowledge ways that come from the non-Western regions. The global market of knowledge is turning into an English-only conference rather than a multilingual dialogue; thus, it is not releasing

but reaffirming the intellectual supremacy of the Anglosphere.

4.3 Case in Point: The Indian Paradox

India can be used as a great example to show the correlation of these three factors. The forced use of English during colonization led to a small English-speaking administrative elite. After the country's independence, the value of this skill set was evident when India established global market connections which brought about the growth of IT and BPO (Business Process Outsourcing) sectors that are dependent on the English-speaking workforce. This is the one that is most often mentioned as a triumph of human capital.

Still, a politico-economic viewpoint peels layer upon layer of a complex narrative. This milestone has been the cause of a yawning social divide. A rich, urban, English-speaking ruling class has benefited enormously from globalization, whereas a huge, non-English-speaking majority has mainly been powerless to participate, thus the income gap has widened. Moreover, the incessant emphasis on English in elite education apparently has been an issue of Indian languages, and the outcome is what the adversaries call "the cultural estrangement of the elite". Hence, India is the very image of the main paradox with her that she makes use of the economic benefits of the English language for her progress, but at the same time, she is dealing with the political and cultural consequences of language oppression that the language represents.

5. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The paper has systematically taken apart the English language's worldwide dominance by stating that it is a core that is both self-sustaining and caused by the economic and political convenience. By using our interdisciplinary method of analysis, we move past the separated discipline-methodological viewpoints and suggest the economic worth of English that is not the property of a free-floating global market but rather a historical and political construct. Actually, the concept is closely related to the influence left behind after British colonization, and at the moment, the US with its economic and soft power is not only maintaining these roots but also spreading them. The "hegemony premium" that is

associated with the mastering of English language thus becomes a very tight feedback loop: in other words, the very economic openings that are made to take advantage of globalization are the same that make it easier for the reproduction and going deeper of the linguistic and political structures. Such a cyclical nexus brings to light that the global linguistic order is among the main designs of the current powerful asymmetrical, rather than being just a simple reflection.

Hence, the policy environment should be changed to allow a portrayal that is more inclusive and less simplistic of English as just another language skill of technical nature. The main challenge the officials taking care of the non-Anglophone countries are faced with is how to control the tripartite nexus in a strategic way. The aim of the policymakers should not be to totally disallow the use of English as it has been an easy way to the global markets and a good source of knowledge but rather to stop its dominance. It is not an easy task that one has to portray the English language not only as a source of wealth but also to spot the negative features that are brought along with it such as social stratification, language extinction, and epistemic injustice. Therefore, policy has to be redescribed as a tool for managing the political economy of language whose sole aim is to turn the dependence into a cycle of strategic empowerment that is either vicious or virtuous. The proposals represent a handbook for this intricate task which includes the support given to national and global actors as their role.

This analysis forms the basis of our proposal of policy recommendations.

For National Governments (especially non-Anglophone countries):

1. Implement a Strategic Multilingualism Model:

Rather than having a binary choice between using English or local languages, the "Three-Language Formula" could be a more viable option for governments to roll out. The gist of this is: a) firstly, the revival of primary school education in the local language(s), b) secondly, gaining the strong command of a national/official language for the internal unity, and c) thirdly, learning English as an international lingua franca for the world

connection. The idea is to combine the best of both worlds, which means to get the economic benefit of the English language while simultaneously retaining the linguistic and cultural heritage.

2. Invest in Quality, Equitable English Education:

3. If English is the subject to be taught, the goal should be to provide the best quality instruction to everyone so that a steep linguistic class divide does not arise. It is very important that money is spent on teacher training and the provision of resources for the subject of English in public schools so that the language does not become the exclusive possession of the rich.

4. Incentivize Knowledge Production in Local Languages:

These governmental and academic financing agencies should provide funding in the form of grants and prizes for high-quality research and publication in the languages of the nation. As a result, this gives rise to the establishment of healthy scholastic and knowledge-based traditions that are not in English and also helps in the prevention of the occurrence of injustice in knowledge.

5. **Promote Linguistic Diversity in International Arenas:** One of the most effective steps that could be taken among the variety of measures is to have organizations such as the UN or WTO put a great amount of resources into offering high-quality simultaneous interpretation and translation services for more languages that are officially recognized. By so doing, they would be able to reduce the advantage that native English speakers usually have and give all the other participants the opportunity to have a fairer exchange of views.

6. Fund Grassroots Mother-Tongue-Based Education:

Local aid organizations on a global scale (such as UNESCO and the World Bank) should allocate the resources to educational projects focused on native language teaching for the first years of childhood. The agencies must recognize the practice as a human right and an effective teaching method. Native language instruction in early childhood education is the most effective pedagogical practice and should be acknowledged as a fundamental human right.

In a nutshell, coping with the era of world decision-makers ought to comprehend the intricately interrelated economic and political nature of the issues concerned. Thus, to be able to see beyond the obvious and enact not only policies that utilize the benefits of English but also policies that contribute to the emergence of a multilingual, fairer, and intellectually richer world, the decision-makers ought to comprehend the intricately interrelated economic and political nature of the issues concerned.

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