The Economics of Multilingualism: Overview of the Literature and Analytical Framework

GRIN, François, VAILLANCOU RT, François

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MULTILINGUALISM

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William Grabe

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This seventeenth volume of the *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, like the preceding volumes which were published beginning in 1981, is respectfully dedicated to the many professional Applied Linguists who were involved in helping to launch and sustain this publication; to those who have helped to formulate the framework for this and the previous volumes; to those who have generally contributed to the series, and to all Applied Linguists and their students who, hopefully, will reap some benefit from its existence.
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FOREWORD

William Grabe

ARAL XVII RATIONALE

Despite the best efforts of some politicians in several English-speaking countries to emphasize English monolingualism, the nations of the world are overwhelmingly multilingual, and are likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. In fact, aside from the English-speaking countries of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United States, and the United Kingdom, countries of the world recognize multilingualism as a means to compete economically in world markets; access a range of scientific, technical, and social sciences information; and provide equitable services to its citizens. Thus, a volume exploring foundations of multilingualism, and selected countries/regions with important implications for policies, is both relevant and timely.

Volume 17 of ARAL returns directly to the issue of multilingualism for the first time since Volume 6 (1986). In the earlier volume on multilingualism, articles covered bilingual processing, bilingual creativity, and bilingual education, as well as country and regional profiles of Australia, Canada, Ghana, Philippines, South Asia, South East Asia, The United Kingdom, and The United States. Since that early volume, ARAL has reported on issues related to multilingualism and bilingual education, and multilingualism and language policy in Volumes 13 and 14, respectively.

The present volume continues the general organization of the earlier volume on multilingualism, though emphasizing different foundational issues and surveying different countries and regions. In the present volume the foundations section comprises five chapters; the first three address multilingualism and language contact, language minority rights, and language maintenance, three issues that might be anticipated in such a volume. The final two chapters of this section, however, represent fairly innovative views on multilingualism. The chapters on language and economics and world Englishes both describe major forces contributing significantly to multilingualism. These chapters can also provide corrective to general discussions that sometimes offer sweeping policy suggestions.

The second section of the volume presents country and regional profiles of multilingualism. Aside from the expected chapters on Australia, Canada, The United Kingdom, and The United States, the surveys include two complementary reports on the countries of the ex-Soviet Union, the first overviews of this vast geographical


Marshall, D. 1986. The question of an official language: Language rights and the English Language Amendment. International Journal of the Sociology of Language. 60.7–75. [See also the comments on Marshall's paper by eighteen authors that complete this number of IJSL.]


THE ECONOMICS OF MULTILINGUALISM: OVERVIEW AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

François Grin and François Vaillancourt

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to introduce noneconomists to the economics of multilingualism. This area of research is relatively little known among economists, and until recent years, few of its methods and results had been published in the journals usually read by language specialists, although sociolinguists and applied linguists had for many years been pointing out the importance of economic dimensions in their research field. It is therefore useful to begin with a brief review of the literature which, owing to limitations of space, does not report specific results, but lists the major issues that have been examined to date. More extensive surveys are available in Vaillancourt (1985a) and Grin (1994c; 1996e).

In the second part of this paper, we present an analytical framework in which the market and non-market benefits and costs, both private and social, associated with multilingualism can be integrated. This analysis paves the way for a discussion of the economic rationale of language-policy measures required by, and affecting, multilingualism. The main points of the paper are summarized in a closing section in which we discuss some of the strengths and limitations of the economic perspective on language issues.

OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

While the title of this paper refers to the economics of multilingualism, it is appropriate to note that economists describe this area (as part of the economics of human resources) as the "economics of language" and both theoretical and empirical work in general focus more on bilingualism rather than multilingualism. The economics of language can be defined as the study of the relationships between linguistic and economic variables; in addition, it includes the study of language-related issues where economic variables have little or no part, but which can nevertheless be examined with the concepts and methods of neo-classical economics. A more formal elaboration of this definition, along with its main theoretical