The economics of English in Europe

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Abstract
The economics of language studies the reciprocal influence between linguistic and economic processes. It has been an object of study for economists, albeit a relatively marginal one, since the 1960s. As the field has developed and branched out into the exploration of a broadening range of topics, a question that has emerged in recent years, against the backdrop of the set of processes commonly referred to as "globalization," is whether these patterns of reciprocal influence present particular features in the case of English.

Reference

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LANGUAGE POLICY AND POLITICAL ECONOMY

English in a Global Context

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Any authority that I might claim on the subjects dealt within this book is derived in large measure from my life experiences as a language learner and teacher in varied contexts. My first professional experience as a teacher of English as a second language (ESL) occurred at the Cardinal Cushing Center for the Spanish-Speaking in South Boston, Massachusetts, where I taught ESL in the early 1970s. It was there that I witnessed firsthand the dedication and commitment of a Cuban-born teacher who insisted that students lacking literacy in their first language (Spanish) should acquire Spanish literacy to aid their learning of English, a seemingly radical idea at the time. Decades later, this commonsense approach, validated many times over in empirical research, is still questioned and often resisted in countries around the world; yet, the intuitions and unswerving commitment of that teacher to help her students succeed influenced my thinking about the difference that one teacher can make in the lives of her students. I remember with fondness a group of talented and dedicated high school English teachers in Japan who I came to know in my role as professor and “teacher trainer” from 1989 to 1991; their love of and expertise in English and their dedication to teaching were awe-inspiring, despite the fact that their primary and expected role was to prepare their students for a high-stakes university English exam mandated and developed by the Ministry of Education, and to instill a love for Hemingway, Steinbeck, or Fitzgerald, authors they cherished and desperately wished to share with their students. More recently, I remember conversations with professors and graduate students in Santiago, Chile, in November 2012, who commented that in order to advance professionally they had to publish research in international English-language academic journals, even though the circulation of such journals was limited in Chile and they were more comfortable writing in Spanish. The contributions to knowledge that they, along with tens of thousands of Spanish-speaking colleagues around the world, could have made were lost, and we are all, in the end, diminished by that loss. Finally, my recent collaboration with refugees in Calgary has shown me the
1. Introduction

The economics of language studies the reciprocal influence between linguistic and economic processes. It has been an object of study for economists, albeit a relatively marginal one, since the 1960s. As the field has developed and branched out into the exploration of a broadening range of topics, a question that has emerged in recent years, against the backdrop of the set of processes commonly referred to as "globalization," is whether these patterns of reciprocal influence present particular features in the case of English.\(^1\)

The considerable and perhaps unprecedented weight of the English language internationally, at the turn of the twenty-first century, as well as the fact that this influence is occurring at a time of accelerated trade integration and development of information technology, leads us to consider the question from two different angles. First, we can assume that the interconnections between linguistic and economic processes are, in their essence, not vastly different for English than for other languages, and we would then mainly focus (data permitting) on the empirical estimation of the strength and magnitude of these interconnections. Second, starting out from the specific situation that the English language finds itself in, we can ask ourselves whether the study of the language–economics link requires, in this particular case, using or even developing specific concepts.

This chapter addresses both sets of issues and is organized as follows. Section 2 contains a general introduction to the economics of language (or language economics), providing an analytical perspective that serves, among other things, to distinguish between the economics of language in general, the economics of multilingualism (or linguistic diversity), and the economics of a particular language. Section 3 focuses on the economics of English in Europe from the perspective of resource allocation, whose pivotal concept