A concise bibliography of language economics

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Abstract

The following pages are devoted to a bibliography which, though not exhaustive, provides an extensive set of references to several categories of literature in language economics. It consolidates the respective literature lists used by the authors over the years in their research and teaching. The bibliography is structured according to a “mental map” developed by Grin. The four highest levels of this structure are reproduced at the beginning of the essay.

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## STRUCTURE OF THE “MENTAL MAP”

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INTRODUCTION

Preparing a bibliography on “Language Economics” or “The Economics of Language” confronts scholars with several challenges, conceptual or other. As a label describing a field of study, whatever combines “economics” and “language” is decidedly marginal. By contrast, if we consider sociolinguistics and applied linguistics, together with work on language issues produced in specialties from other disciplines in the social sciences (in particular sociology and political science), we face a body of literature that easily runs into thousands of entries. Among them, quite a few mention the role of economic factors, even if few do so in any detail. This raises the question of what to include and what to leave out when putting together a bibliography of language economics – that is, where to draw the line. One aspect to be borne in mind when weighing this question is that in this a priori “non-economic” literature, many contributions provide important inspirations for the economic analysis of language. No economist seriously interested in language and its intersection (or interface) with economics can deny a conceptual debt to authors such as Ferguson, Haugen, Fishman, Jernudd, or Labov, to quote but a few classic names. Also, there are no general references to language and linguistics, although, of course, such general knowledge is extremely important to anyone seriously interested in language economics.

We cannot embark on a survey of the sociolinguistic sources we consider relevant for the economist engaging in language economics work (this would constitute a different project altogether), but we nonetheless recommend every economist interested in language to get acquainted with one of the many handbooks in sociolinguistics or language policy, such as HELLENGER and PAUWELS (2007), FISHMAN and GARCÍA (2010), SPOLSKY (2012), BAYLEY, CAMERON, and LUCAS (2013), RICENTO (2006), RICENTO (2015), or SHOHAMY (2006). Let us, however, emphasize that these few references are actually restrictive. Analytic boundaries between the disciplines are porous, meaning that there is an abundance of interesting sociolinguistic work that raises genuinely important economic questions, but that could not be included here lest the bibliography lose its focus on language economics. Nevertheless, some strands of research in the language disciplines deserve to be singled out in this introduction.

We stress that the following gives a very brief overview of areas of research that are not included in the main bibliography. What is included and what in our opinion is the core of language economics, is not commented upon here, but in the bibliography itself.

First, a number of linguists (who may be said to represent structural linguistics, as opposed to sociolinguistics) describe the structure of language as a system, thereby arguing economically, but often without realizing it. For example, an economically inspired analysis of language structure goes back at least to MARTINET
(1955); essentially economic analyses of language change and structure can also be found in CHEN (1972), ESau (1973), or KELLER (1994). They were apparently unaware of the economic relevance of their analysis, and neither these authors nor their many successors are included in this bibliography, although economists could learn a lot from them.

Second, some sociolinguists deploy certain types of argument without recognizing how deeply economic such lines of argument ultimately are. As examples of this, we mention HARSHAV (1993) and COOPER (1989). HARSHAV (1993) shows most beautifully that the concept of a (relative) “critical mass” (resulting from the attempted, and partially successful, expulsion of the Jews from Palestine by the British) accounts for the victory of Ivrit in then Palestine. Similarly, the analysis of language policy put forward by COOPER (1989) could easily be reinterpreted in terms of economics. However, since these and many other authors are not aware of their economically relevant methods, they are not included in the list below.

Third, a recurring theme in language economics is that of “linguistic rights” and “linguistic justice”. It may be viewed as addressing fairly straightforward cases of distributive analysis, but most of the work in this area originates in political theory, and some in sociolinguistics (see, for instance, HEES (2013), KONTRA, PHILLIPSON, SKUTNABB-KANGAS, and VÁRADY (1999), MAY (2012), VAN PARIJS (2011), PATTEN (2009), SKUTNABB-KANGAS and PHILLIPSON (1995), SKUTNABB-KANGAS, PHILLIPSON, MOHANTY, and PANDA (2009), PELED, IVES, and RICENTO (2014) and other articles in the same issue. The same applies to May’s chapter in this book, MAY (2016) ). Because their main inspiration is not economic – despite their direct relevance to an economic perspective on language policy – these and similar contributions are not included in our list; this also goes for more philosophically oriented contributions that examine the nature of linguistic justice (for instance DE SCHUTTER and YPI (2012)).

Fourth, the sociolinguistic literature on language policy also displays fundamental connections with economics (see, for instance, FISHMAN (1991), SPOLSKY (2004), or SPOLSKY (2009)), since language policy in general, being concerned with the choice of a public policy, is undoubtedly relevant to the economic analysis of language. As explained in the introduction to this book, in this category we also find the contributions ROMAINE (2016), SONNTAG (2016), and ZENTZ (2016) in this book. Here again, in order to preserve the “language economics” focus of our bibliography, we have abstained from including such contributions in it.

Summing up, we have tried to come up with a very limited list, reducing it – in the main, though not rigidly so – to economics (some might say “hard-core economics”, although we do cast the net a little wider than that).

In spite of this relatively restrictive interpretation of “economics of language”, this bibliography is fairly long. We have tried to assign the different contributions to the heading in the mental map that to us appears most relevant. Many papers,
however, straddle the distinctions made for establishing the mental map. The implication is that while some contributions fit very comfortably in one and only one category of the mental map, others could arguably be assigned to a category different than the one we have opted for. In such cases, our criterion has been the main thrust of the paper concerned. This is not always fully satisfactory, but it serves to ensure that no entry appears more than once. The fact of the matter remains that the various language economics questions identified in the mental map are closely interconnected. Therefore, the reader searching for contributions on a given topic is advised to look up related themes as well, and to refer back to the mental map in the preceding chapter.

The list has greatly benefited from suggestions made by the contributors to this book as well as one of the anonymous referees, and we would like to express our deep gratitude to all those who have helped us improve the final result.

Let us in closing note that the number of contributions by Gazzola, Grin, and Wickström might appear somewhat exaggerated. This is, of course, a reflection of the simple fact that we know ourselves best. However, we have included these contributions, because just as all the other contributions by other authors listed in this chapter, we consider them to be, if not important, at least relevant. We do apologize to all other authors, however, if some of their interesting publications have, despite our best efforts, escaped our notice and are missing from the list. We can only blame this on the limitations of our knowledge. We have tried to include every relevant piece of work known to us. We appeal to all scholars of language economics who find (some of) their contributions missing to help us correct any errors and omissions; and we shall be most grateful for any suggestions of additional key references to this bibliography, which attempts to capture the essence and spirit of the fascinating field of language economics.

REFERENCES TO THE INTRODUCTION


THE BIBLIOGRAPHY

A SURVEYS AND META-LEVEL ANALYSES

Section A is devoted to survey of language economics, whether general and integrative (sub-section A.1) or more descriptive and sectorial (sub-section A.2).

A.1 GENERAL/INTEGRATIVE

The contributions listed here offer panoramas of language economics as a whole, intended to encompass all the subdivisions of language economics research.


A.2 DESCRIPTIVE/SECTORIAL

This category lists contributions offering a broad vista of language economics, without, however, providing a general review of the specialty; they usually address a somewhat more specific topic, such as language and earnings, but they situate this topic within language economics as a whole.


B ECONOMICS OF LANGUAGE CORPUS

Section B brings together contributions that focus on the analysis of language as such, as opposed to the issues that arise as a result of the joint presence of two or more languages. Therefore, it can address, for example, the evolution (sub-section B.1) of a language or its morpho-syntactical structure (sub-section B.2).

B.1 EVOLUTION OF LANGUAGE CORPUS

Publications in subsection B.1 use economic reasoning and formal modeling to explain changes over time in the corpus of a language. This sub-section is distinct from that on language dynamics (C.2.2.3) that is devoted to papers on the evolution of language status.


**B.2 Structure of language corpus**

Publications in subsection B.2 use economic reasoning and formal modeling to explain the structural features of language in general – as opposed to specific languages (in the plural).


C.1 Influence of linguistic variables on economic variables (\(\{L\} \rightarrow \{E\}\))

In this broad subsection, we consider all the contributions whose main focus is on explaining the values taken by economic variables given the influence, among others, of linguistic variables.

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1 Note that in the early literature, the word “status” mainly referred to the legal position of a language (e.g., official status or not, etc.). In more recent work, as here, “status” is used in a broader sense.
C.1.1  LPP-unregulated determination of economic variables

Papers in this category consider the influence of linguistic variables on economic ones in the absence of explicit language policy intervention; they may be seen as focusing on the effect of market forces in channeling this influence.


C.1.1.1  Value of diversity

These contributions examine the effects of linguistic diversity as such. This includes the value of diversity in general terms, the effects of language spread, as well as the impact of language on creativity and innovation.


MITCHELL, REBECCA and STEPHEN NICHOLAS (2006). “Knowledge creation in groups: The value of cognitive diversity, transactive memory and open-


**C.1.1.2 “Macro-level-oriented” analyses**

In this category, we list contributions that address the effects of linguistics variables on an aspect or another of economic activity at a larger scale, which is why we refer not to macroeconomics proper, but to “macro-level-oriented” work. This includes the effects of linguistic attributes on investment behavior, GDP, trade patterns, and social capital. We include here a specific strand of research that explores, through the notion of “linguistic intensity” the presence of language as a factor in input-output matrices (but see also the related category **C.1.1.5** on “Language skills and production”).


C.1.1.3 Sector- and industry-level analyses

In this category, we place a relatively heterogeneous collection of contributions that tend towards meso-level issues and would not fit comfortably into any of the other categories of sub-section C.1.1. It includes topics such as “ethnic businesses”, the language needs of businesses, the role of language skills in employability, as well as the fledgling literature on the “language sector” (such as publishing).


This category has particular importance in language economics, of which it probably constitutes the single most important one, if only by dint of the sheer number of contributions. It focuses on the effect of agents’ linguistic attributes: a per-
son’s mother tongue, usually his or her “L1”, and a person’s skills in other languages (“L2”, “L3”, etc.). Note, however, that several of the papers listed here are not strictly focused on the determination of earnings, but also address related questions such as language use as well as the indirect implications, on the labor market, of some language policy measures. For practical purposes the category has been divided into three parts, which do not exactly match the break-down proposed in the mental map of the preceding chapter: the general contributions are listed under the main heading and contributions mainly dealing with indigenous and migrant labor, respectively, are found in two subcategories.


Bartz, Kevin and Nicola Fuchs-Schündeln (2012). “The role of borders, languages, and currencies as obstacles to labor market integration”. In: European Economic Review 56: 1148–1163.


C.1.1.4.1 Indigenous labor


BAKER, MICHAEL and GILLIAN HAMILTON (2000). “Écarts salariaux entre francophones et anglophones à Montréal au 19e siècle”. In: *L’Actualité économique* **76**: 75–111.


NADEAU, SERGE (2010). “Another look at the francophone wage gap in Canada: Public and private sectors, Quebec and outside Quebec”. In: Canadian Public Policy / Analyse de Politiques 36: 159–179.


C.1.1.4.2 Migrant labor


C.1.1.5 Language skills and production

Contributions listed here examines the production process and the how it may be affected by language skills and patterns of language use, particularly in multilingual settings. Some revisit core production theory, while others address issues such as matching between a worker and a job and the related recruiting strategies.


C.1.2 Economic impact of LPP

This sub-section is devoted to contributions that assess the economic consequences of policies that specifically target languages (as distinct from policies with other aims, but that may nonetheless have economic impacts through language; some such cases turn up in C.1.1).


C.1.2.1 Language and nationalism

Some language policies are connected to a political stance that may be viewed
as nationalist. Such policies can carry economic consequences, which are often discussed but rarely addressed – as in the papers mentioned here.


C.1.2.2 Social rates of return to national and foreign language teaching

A few papers investigate the returns to society as a whole of imparting certain language skills. Although only a few entries appear here, this question is also addressed in some of the contributions that already appear elsewhere in this bibliography, in particular C.1.1.4


**C.1.2.3 Costs, benefits, and distributive effects of LPP**

*Each set of language-policy measures entails costs and benefits, both symbolic and material; different policies therefore display different net values (benefit minus cost); not everyone benefits from them in equal measure. The papers listed here address these questions of identification and measurement, as well as the resulting distributive implications.*


C.1.2.4 Optimization of language regimes

Countries and organizations use certain languages but not others: the (formal) set of official languages and the corresponding patterns of use are known as language regimes. The papers listed here look at the quest for the best possible regime in allocation and distribution terms.


C.1.2.5 Regional and minority language promotion and regional economics

Papers in this category examine how language policies in favor of small languages impact on regional economic activity.


C.2 **INFLUENCE OF ECONOMIC VARIABLES ON LINGUISTIC VARIABLES (\{E\} → \{L\}), INCLUDING ECONOMICALLY BASED EXPLANATIONS OF LANGUAGE PROCESSES**

This section contains a large number of extremely varied contributions whose common trait is that they use economics as a mode of reasoning and/or economic variables as independent variables in order to account for the value or evolution of linguistic variables. Some C.2.1 highlight the workings of language policies, while others C.2.2 investigate these processes in an unregulated context – that is, in the absence of policies explicitly targeting language.

C.2.1 **Effectiveness of LPP**

These contributions evaluate the outcomes of language policies in terms of the practical policy objectives. Their focus is primarily technical and they can feed into the policy evaluation approaches that characterize entries in C.1.2. By contrast with papers listed above under C.1.2, which are concerned with the costs and benefits of language policies (also in a broad sense), those listed here address the extent to which different language policies are effective in terms of linguistic indicators.

C.2.1.1 **Regional and minority language promotion**

These contributions focus on the effectiveness of alternative language policy measures in terms of the degree of revitalization of minority languages that they help achieve.


C.2.1.2 Language learning

These contributions focus on the effectiveness of alternative language policy measures in terms of the languages skills acquired.


C.2.1.3 Effectiveness of language regimes

The contributions in this section focus on whether proposed measures, or set of measures making up a full-fledged language regime, are “effective” in the sense of having an effect at all – or changing the linguistic environment in the direction desired. These contributions, however, generally do not consider cost-effectiveness, let alone efficiency in the economic sense.


C.2.2  LPP-unregulated determination of linguistic variables

These contributions focus on explaining linguistic variables independently of explicit policies targeting language.

C.2.2.1  Language learning

The papers listed in this category focus on (foreign or second) language learning decisions and processes. The economic dimension may reside in the implicit or explicit constrained maximization approach used to explain these decisions and processes, or in the nature of the explanatory variables considered – or both.


C.2.2.2 Language use

The type of approach found in the papers that belong to this category is very similar to what is found in C.2.2.1, except that the dependent variable is language use, rather than language learning; some also provide more descriptive accounts of the patterns of language use that emerge in work contexts.


C.2.2.3 Language dynamics

As in the two preceding categories (C.2.2.1 and C.2.2.2), the contributions listed here use economic reasoning and/or economic variables in their explanation of a linguistic process – in this case, the dynamics of language decline and language spread over time.


Wickström, Bengt-Arne (2014). “Nachhaltiges Überleben von Minderheitensprachen: eine Übersicht einiger Modelle”. In: *Dogma und Evolution: Beiträge*
C.2.2.4 Economics of translation

There are surprisingly few papers about the economics of translation. The contributions listed here assess the economic importance of the “language sector”, of which translation is a key component, and explore the role of different variables in the determination of supply, demand, and equilibrium on the market for translations.


GAZZOLA, GRIN, and WICKSTRÖM
