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THE POWER OF MULTILINGUALISM IN A GLOBALIZED ECONOMY

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Abstract

Language appreciation in trade and commerce is a strong determinant to the viability of goods and services in a corporate entity. The economic power of language transcends beyond the level of small businesses, to impact on large-scale national and international businesses. The awareness that economic returns ride on the wheels of language comprehension between the trader and his client has grown to a phenomenal proportion; while economic internationalisation and multilingualism have become two sides of the same coin. Moreover, the growth of early civilisations in Africa, Asia and Europe was facilitated by cross-cultural transactions, premised on the mutual understanding of the seller and buyer. Here, the economic power and market potential of multilingualism are advanced. The paper further argues that if monolingualism is propagated over linguistic heterogeneity, the economy will suffer. Furthermore, the paper posits that multilingualism can be exploited as a resource with exchange value in a globalized economy and advocates the incorporation of multilingual orientation in a programmatic form into global business policies.

Keywords: Power, multilingualism, economy, globalization.

Introduction

Kachru (1985) describes multilingualism as the "linguistic behaviour of the members of a speech community which alternately uses two, three or more language depending on the situation and function."

According to Wandruzka (1981), multilingualism has various dimensions, and can be defined in different ways. He x-rayed the different dimensions, starting from Individual multilingualism. 'Individual multilingualism' characterises people who are capable of

making themselves understood in more than one language, be they celebrities or people from everyday settings such as children from immigrant families, who use their original language at home, speak the national language at school and additionally learn at least one foreign language. Individual multilingualism is also called 'Pluralingualism' (Beacco and Byram 2000). Individual multilingualism should be isolated from 'multi-competence' which intends to place more emphasis on the relationships between one language and another. Individual multilingualism has been shown to function as a connected system rather than each language being a separate system in which the elements of the individual languages interact with and influence one another and together they comprise a single 'integrated competence' (Cook, 2008). Individual multilingualism therefore, emphasizes the ability of an individual to speak or communicate in more than two languages, irrespective of the mode of acquisition and proficiency. Thus, such individuals may not be multilingual from birth or 'perfectly multilingual'.

Wandruzka also describes 'Social multilingualism' as when languages share different functions in a society as is the case in Swiss Canton of Granbunden, where German, Romansh and Italian are official languages with theoretically equal states, yet Romansh and Italian are dominated in many situations by German, on account of the general bilingualism of the minorities. He also defines 'political multilingualism' as when areas are divided into more or less monolingual language zones, as is the case with Flemish, French and German in Belgium, while 'Institutional multilingualism' is described as a situation where institutions or organizations offer their services in different languages as do the United Nations (UN) and European Union (EU).

Paulston (1980) opines that Folk bilingualism is the result of the contact of ethnic groups who have to become bilingual involuntarily in order to survive; here they do not have a choice, they just have to learn the language of the setting where they live. Furthermore, 'Folk multilingualism' emphasizes a situation where an individual resides in a multilingual environment and acquires various languages in the same way a child in a monolingual environment acquires the language. This type of multilingualism is contrary to 'Elective multilingualism' where an individual who uses one language in everyday life takes foreign language classes to acquire more languages (Gogolin and Ludi, 2009).

Gogolin and Ludi (2009) also postulates that a multilingual repertoire is made up of a number of linguistic resources which are multimodal, having different sensory channels which are usually activated by the speakers to resolve problems relating to specific situations. This applies to multilingual teams at the work place where team members apply simultaneous use of different languages, images and gestures to achieve optimal communication.

Most of the World's population is bilingual or multilingual. Monolingualism is characteristic only of a minority of the world's peoples. According to Stavenliagen (1990), 5000-8000 different ethnic groups reside in approximately 160 nations and that over 5000

distinct languages are spoken in that same small number of nation states. Nations, whose work forces are multilingual, have demonstrated greater economic returns against those whose business frontiers are closed and opposed to foreign infiltration. The economic dominance and superiority of multilingual nations deserve to be emulated and systematically propagated in monolingual states. Globalization cannot be potentiated in a global linguistic framework; rather, there must be a conscious and programmatic endeavour by nations to invest in the development of the linguistic skills of their work force. Small and medium-sized entrepreneurs should invest in human capacity development in language acquisition.

If monolingual countries must be appropriately positioned to reap from the trends of global economy, their work force must acquire other languages apart from their mother tongue. Similar to other nations, the GDP of these nations can increase, if those who trade on goods and services obtain sufficient fluency and skill in languages, such as Chinese, German, Spanish and so on.

The prevailing economic realities in monolingual communities, where traders from these enclaves who travel outside their linguistic space are financially exploited for language interpretation, need to be addressed by a sensitization of the business class to the need for extra foreign language acquisition. Governments need to accept the responsibility of mobilizing their work forces to adopt multilingual skills as a resourceful economic paradigm. The political will must be engaged and sustained by these nations, while public awareness and targeted sensitization programs ought to be advanced to propagate the economic benefits of multilingualism. The nations can institutionalize inherent incentives, such as, import and export tax rebates, reduction of interest rates on business-specific loans and so on, to motivate her work force towards acquisition of extra languages.

The advantages of speaking more than one language transcend economic gains. It equally boosts the human mind, which is the world's greatest resource. Bialystok, Craik and Freedman (2007) studied 'Bilingualism as a protection against the symptoms of dementia', they examined the effect of lifelong bilingualism on maintaining cognitive functioning and delaying the onset of symptoms of dementia in old age. They selected their sample from the records of 228 patients referred to a memory clinic with cognitive complaints. Their findings showed that bilinguals expressed symptoms of dementia 4 years later than monolinguals.

Multilingualism has also been associated with a better ability to concentrate and process information. This was postulated by Thomas Bak, a psychologist at the University of Edinburgh, who suggested that the effects are strongest on people who were multilingual from a young age, but acquiring languages later still made a difference. He also showed that a one-week intensive language course improved attention and this effect remained stable nine months later, in those who practised five hours a week or more.

Definition and the concept of global economy:

Global economy is the economies of the world, cordoned together as one economic system. It is the way in which the countries' economies have been developing to operate collectively as one system. It can further be explained as the interconnectivity and interdependence of countries' economies in such a way that they seem like parts of one whole.

In other to understand the global economy, it is very important to know what 'economy' means. An economy is all the activity that is related to the production and consumption of goods and services in a specific area.

Therefore, Global economy refers to all the economic activities within each country and between countries around the world. This implies that when one country does well, other countries experience a boost in their economies. On the other hand, when one country does poorly, other countries can suffer because the countries of the world are inter-dependent.

The Concept of Linguanomics (The Economics of Language):

The concept of Linguanomics, as an emerging phenomenon in global economy is real, and the economic power of language should be popularized and entrenched in the commerce and trade systems of monolinguistic nations.

This emerging concept has been described as the effect of language skills on income and trade and the costs and benefits of language planning options, preservation of minority languages and so on. Language is the medium of business, an asset in itself and sometimes a barrier to trade (Coulturas, 1992). The relationship between economics and language is mainly rooted in how individuals acquire language. Languages are human economic resources that can be invested in by individuals or corporate organizations. When the usage of a language increases, naturally people will begin to invest in the language in order to maximise their gain.

However, the antagonists of linguanomics have in different settings; argued that the tendency of linguistic hegemony may become more apparent if linguistic communities, in the quest for economic benefits, relegate their aboriginal languages and mother tongue to the secondary position. They further opined that commerce and trade can be restricted to nations who share same international languages and that the preservation of the socio-cultural values of nations must take pre-eminence over economic benefits.

Although the arguments advanced by the anti-linguanomics appear plausible *prima facie*, they have been successfully debunked by the protagonists of linguanomics. The pro-linguanomics strongly argue that the tendency of linguistic hegemony should be premised on empiricism rather than social speculation. They provided real figures of individual and institutional economic growths derived from multilinguistic proficiency of the work force

and proved that such extra linguistic skills posed no danger to the local languages of those workers.

Furthermore, they argued that if linguistic restrictions exist in business, the economic prospects of the individuals, institutions and nations will be retarded. In their opinion, if nations, institutions and individuals must restrict trade to those who speak their languages, the under-developed and developing nations will regress into unimaginable poverty, sickness and high mortality rates and the co-lateral damages will be global.

The study therefore, corroborates the position of the pro-linguanomics and further asserts that multilingualism has tremendous economic power and should be propagated at all levels of commerce and trade. It further opines that the gains of language-driven globalization are too enormous to be ignored and calls on nations to create sustainable programs for the acquisition of extra linguistic skills by their work force.

It is opined that language has a specific value which is marked by economic variables and that the value of language includes the economic aspect-that language is like treasure, it cannot stand alone, in isolation, it is always a part of a broader social context (Boudieu,1991). According to Marschak (1965), language is the object of choice directed to achieving certain goals. He attributed the choice of language in communication or the choice to learn a certain language to standards of microeconomics and linked them in the same manner to all other economic decisions of the individual, from purchasing a product to investments, which always represents a result for the individual-the best choice in a given moment. In a multi-ethnic community, the linking of economic and language processes at both the micro and macro levels is expressed in the mutual acceptance or rejection of different language groups. He further opines that economic factors influence the ethno-linguistic vitality of communities and contributes to the evaluation of diversity and to the promotion of minority languages. In certain multicultural communities, the effect of economic activities is linked to the position of a minority, especially in the context of bilingualism as a value at the national and local levels and not at the wider international level. When Language is linked to the economy, it means that it has a commercial potential.

According to Cameron (2005), managing language means managing the user's language, communication and the economy. Managing goods and services without language does not really exist. Economy in the widest meaning, directly and indirectly, affects various language processes and language is linked to the individual and society while economy is part of the society. Therefore, the management of language at both the individual and societal levels affects the overall economic processes.

Multilingualism and the Economy

In an era of globalization, when all international boundaries are broken by economic activities, language proficiency becomes a major determinant of market breakthroughs.

More so, international organizations and companies are investing huge resources into human capacity development in the area of language acquisition. According to Hardach (2018), language matters on a largescale national level and also, at the level of smaller businesses. Moreover, successful exports, innovative work force and economic growth have been linked to linguistic diversity (Hardach, 2018). The founder of Facebook, Mark Zukerberg is learning Mandarin, not because his wife's family is Chinese, but because he has a market-driven incentive and his company has been trying to penetrate the Chinese market.

The economic power of language was further emphasized by Willie Brandt, the former Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany. According to him, 'If I'm selling to you, I speak your language, but if I'm buying, then you have to speak German'. His position underscores the power of language in individual and corporate transactions. It also highlights the need for the acquisition of extra linguistic skills for successful global marketing. Bradley (2008) reports that Switzerland attributes 10% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to its multilingual heritage. The country has four national languages: German, French, Italian and Romansh. He further stated that Switzerland's multilingual heritage gives it a competitive advantage worth SFr46 billion ($38.15 billion). According to him, this is the first time the economic value of linguistic skill has been calculated. Despite this huge linguistic resource, language has largely been ignored by economic analysts. (Grin, 2008).

In response to the economic value of linguistic skills in Switzerland, Grin (2008) postulated thus; 'I think we have a confirmation here, that language is a good investment from the perspective of the economy as a whole, rather than just for the individual or for the state'. Therefore, these observations corroborate the government's declarations about the attractiveness of Switzerland, as a place to do business, linked to the fact that people speak many languages. In Switzerland, people in organizations are able to speak three, four or even five languages and the capacity to do that certainly contributes to value creation and the comparative advantage of Switzerland. There is a convergence of the economic result and Switzerland's cultural, political and social concerns about multilingualism. Therefore, the idea that a state needs to preserve her national language, in addition to English, and possibly develop skills in other languages, is something that makes sense, not just politically and sociologically, but also economically. Despite the great economic potentials of a multilingual workforce, some organizations, companies and nations are yet to appreciate the true value of a multilingual working environment. In the UK, about 3.5% of its GDP are lost every year as a result of a loss of language skills in the workforce (Grin, 2008).

Furthermore, Habib (2011) showed that small and medium-sized companies in Sweden, Germany, Denmark and France, who invested more in languages, were able to

export more goods. German companies that invested heavily in multilingual staff added 10 export countries to their market.

Additionally, the English language does not suffice in economic returns, as many tenders are lost through lack of skills in local languages and SMEs are increasingly using the specific language of the country, to which they export, so as to gain grounds in emerging markets. The English language's role, as the sole language for World trade, is declining and other languages are being used to an increasing extent, for example, the Chinese language's importance for trade relations, has grown from 5% in 2000 to 20% in 2009. Meanwhile, the English language's importance has declined from 51% in 2000 to 29% in 2009 (Habib, 2011).

According to the University of Florida (2000), workers who speak both Spanish and English earn $7,000 per year more than those who speak only English. The study also observed that Florida Hispanics who are fluent in Spanish and English earn significantly higher incomes and are less likely to live in poverty than those who speak only English. It also found that for Hispanics, being bilingual, offers advantages throughout the state. In Miami, where the advantages were particularly pronounced, the study observed that fully bilingual Hispanics earn nearly $7,000 per year more than their English-only counterparts. The study also examined the income levels for bilingual and English-only Hispanics in 10 metropolitan areas nationwide, with high percentages of Hispanic immigrations. It was observed that in Miami, Jersey City, N.J and San Antonio, bilingual Hispanics earn more than those who communicate only in English. It also found that bilingualism had advantages for older employees in some of the other cities.

According to Christofides and Swindinsky (2010) in the University of Guelph study (2010), Bilingual employees earn more than their unilingual counterparts, even if they aren't using their language skills on the job.

Furthermore, the study discovered that bilingual men earn 3.6% and bilingual women earn 6.6% more than those who speak only English, but there was no additional financial reward for bilingual employees who actually speak French in the work place. Although the study explained the distinction between language knowledge and language use, the economic benefits of bilingualism over monolingualism is strongly emphasized. The attendant economic values of multilingualism seem to suggest that knowing a second or third language could be a sign of cognitive power, perseverance and a good education.

Conclusion

The benefits of multilingualism are numerous and enormous. Multilingualism, as an emerging concept, has been proven to accelerate the individual and collective economic spread of nations and also enhance the cognitive powers of multilinguals. At a time like this, when globalization is emphasised, it is expected that nations who desire to strengthen their economic power must re-orientate their work force to align with this linguistic trend.

Many advanced nations have collapsed all linguistic trade barriers and many more are doing so, in many instances, by encouraging the acquisition of extra linguistic skills, deliberately designed towards human capacity development. If the world must collectively cooperate in commerce, then linguistic barriers must be dismantled, global economic players must realize and quickly too, that trade and commerce cannot stand alone without language and that goods and services are transported on linguistic proficiency. The more the languages, the more goods and services that are marketed, hence, language and economy have become the flip sides of a global currency.

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