

《研究》

Language and Communication Policies of Nations and Companies in Asia

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Abstract

This paper discusses the importance of global business communication in optimizing economic activity. The study adopts a ‘cost-effectiveness’ perspective in arguing that the investment of resources in an effective language policy is beneficial to companies and nations alike. The paper assesses the role of English as a global language from the historical, multicultural, and economic perspectives before advocating acceptance of the reality that English is a modern ‘lingua franca’ that facilitates communication and economic success. It is the contention of this study that acceptance of this reality, and the consequent investment of resources in English-language education for citizens and employees, can co-exist with the desire to preserve the integrity of local cultures and languages. The contrasting policies of Malaysia and Singapore are presented as examples of how linguistic policies can be crucial to national cohesion and economic success in the modern globalized economy.

Introduction

It has been apparent for some time that Asian companies must become global if they are to rank with Western companies in economic power. However, companies from certain Asian countries are doing better than those of others in this regard. For example, although the Japanese automobile industry, represented by such companies as Toyota and Honda, is doing well compared with its counterparts in the West, companies in other Japanese industries are lagging behind those of neighbouring nations such as South Korea (highly developed in information technology), China (a newly industrialized giant), and India (continuing to grow at an impressive rate). The main reason for Japan’s relative lack of success is that many Japanese companies have not been able to adapt to the dynamic environment of globalization and the information technology (IT) revolution.

The communication problems faced by Japanese companies in the modern global economy typify the general theme of this paper—that success in the modern global economy is inextricably bound to a realistic assessment of the importance of language and the need to factor in the ‘cost of language’ as a legitimate cost of conducting business. In other words, the com-

panies and nations that do best in the modern global economy are those that recognize that language must be managed in a realistic and cost-effective manner to provide communication links and thus maximize economic returns. This requires a realistic recognition of the role of English as a modern-day 'lingua franca' that facilitates international business communication. Companies and nations that come to terms with this reality, and make allowance for it in their cost structures and strategic planning, will do well in the modern world of global communications; those that do not will lag behind. Like it or not, this is the reality of the modern world.

With this background, the present paper discusses global business communication and its importance in optimizing economic activity. The paper adopts a 'cost-effectiveness' perspective in advancing the argument that the investment of resources in an effective language policy is beneficial to both individual companies and nations alike. In this context, the paper advocates the acceptance of the reality of the English language as a modern lingua franca that facilitates communication links and economic benefits. In particular, the paper discusses the role that English plays as a lingua franca in establishing a language policy, the importance of English as a common language, and the economic costs and benefits associated with such a policy.

Globalization and IT

IT developments and traditional Japanese business culture

In the modern global economy it is common for the parties to a contractual arrangement to have never met each other. Nevertheless, the two parties negotiate, sign contracts, conduct the business, and make payments using telephone calls, e-mails, and websites. Global transactions such as these are conducted daily among large and small businesses alike. Modern global business is, indeed, borderless. The following two examples illustrate this phenomenon.

- * In the book-publishing industry, it is common for the development, editing, and proofreading of books to be conducted across international borders without the participants in the enterprise ever meeting each other at all.
- * Draft designs of products are often created by computer-aided design (CAD) before being sent to an outsourcing manufacturing company in another country; then, the manufacturing outsourcing company uses computer-aided manufacturing (CAM) to produce the product and export it to a finished-goods manufacturing company in yet another country.

In both of these examples, the advances in modern IT have made it possible to create such networks of international cooperation in which goods and services are supplied in 'modules'. However, in many of these business models, it is essential for businesspeople to com-

municate effectively with overseas partners who use different languages and have different cultures. Many Japanese companies have not had to engage in such forms of communication, since within Japan the relationship between component manufacturers and finished-goods manufacturers has been vertically integrated, stable, and long-term. Under these arrangements, it was sufficient for the parties to understand each other with a typical Japanese 'silent agreement'.

It is unlikely that this kind of communication will be sufficient in the future as an increasing number of goods and services become 'modularized'. Manufacturers now tend to specialize in assembling certain modules in which they have particular expertise, while outsourcing work on component modules in which they have less expertise. In an increasing number of industries, the development of international networks is becoming standard practice in the global economy, and cost-effective communication across international boundaries is crucial among such modular businesses. From the perspective of a cost/benefit analysis, the economic significance of global business communication lies in the minimization of communication costs and the maximization of the potential benefits of a modular system.

Despite these modern realities, many Japanese companies attempt to maintain their traditional, long-term, stable relationships with employees and various business parties, including banks. In addition, they continue to conduct business with 'silent' agreements. The author doubts whether the introduction of modern information technology can actually facilitate the development of effective global business communications in companies that maintain such a traditional Japanese business culture.

IT developments and language usage

Information technology in general, and the Internet in particular, have been associated with significant changes in local and global communications. In 1997, it was estimated that more than three-quarters of the information recorded in the world's computers was based on English (Graddol 1997). This was in accordance with the fact that the overwhelming majority of the world's connected computers and the majority of website host computers were located in English-speaking countries at that time (Graddol 1997). In that same year, the second most-used language on the Internet was German, and the third was Japanese; however, both of these languages lagged far behind English (Graddol 1997).

However, since 1997 it would seem that the dominant position of English on the Internet has declined. According to the Japan Information Transaction Development Association (JITDA 2005), the variety of languages used on the Internet has increased while the usage of

English has correspondingly declined. By 2007 (as of June 30, 2007) English is still the most commonly used language (365.9 million people), but it now accounted for only 31.2% of total Internet usage. Chinese-language users numbered 184 million people (15.7%), making Chinese the second most common Internet language, followed by Spanish-language users at 101.5 million people (8.7%) and Japanese-language users at 86.3 million people (7.4%); French-speaking and German-speaking users were next (World Internet Usage Statistics Top Languages).

Although English remains the dominant language on the Internet, this does not necessarily mean that the English language should always be used to conduct business in the modern 'modularized' global economy. Rather, each individual business needs to decide which language is most appropriate to its needs in connecting widely scattered locations. To make such a decision, a company needs to conduct a thorough cost-effectiveness analysis. As Coulmas (1993, p. 176) has noted :

Economy cannot be thought of without communication, and the communication is costly because the world consists of many different languages. Because many languages are being used in the world and each market has its own peculiar language environment, there should be a communicative capability most ideal to economic actions in such a peculiar environment.

In addition, Coulmas (1993) has pointed out that a particular language might be more convenient inside a company and another between companies ; in these circumstances, it is important for managers to decide which language should be employed, and how it should be employed. For example, a Japanese company might be dealing with business connections located in Vietnam, Thailand, China, Korea, and the USA. The communication process in these circumstances might be variously managed by the Japanese company in accordance with one or more of the following four models :

- * Using translators who can translate to and from Japanese and the different languages used by the international contacts ;
- * Having a business counterpart in an overseas country who can understand the Japanese language ;
- * Having Japanese speakers who can understand the language used by their overseas counterparts ; or
- * Using a third language (or 'lingua franca') that both sides can understand.

Each of these four models has its advantages and disadvantages from a cost/benefit perspective. If the information exchange is conducted through the Internet, the time-consuming option of using translators is not feasible, and communication should be conducted directly with the other party using one of the other three options.

If the message sender is not proficient in the recipient's native language but has no

choice but to send the message in that language, the sender incurs costs (in terms of time and trouble) in carrying out this task effectively. Alternatively, if the sender spends little time and energy in ensuring that the communication is reasonably well expressed in the recipient's native language, the effectiveness of the communication will be compromised. Moreover, if the sender's communication is deficient, the recipient of the message must spend time and effort in understanding the intention of the communication. In this case, the sender effectively forces the recipient to incur costs (in terms of time and effort), thus diminishing the economic effect of the communication. However, if there is a common language (a 'lingua franca') that both the sender and recipient can easily understand, the costs incurred by both sides are reduced, thus providing economic benefits to sender and recipient alike.

The origin of the term 'lingua franca' can be traced back to the common use of a mixture of French, Greek, Arabic, Turkish, and Spanish languages to facilitate trade in the eastern Mediterranean during the 14th and 15th centuries. The emergence of this common language to overcome language difficulties in trade is analogous to the modern Internet communication problems described above.

English as the global common language

Despite the decreasing preponderance of the English language on the Internet, there is no doubt that English has effectively become the 'lingua franca' of the modern global economy. There are several reasons for this development—the far-flung reach of the British Empire during the 18th and 19th centuries, the global economic power of the United States in the 20th century (especially since World War II), and, as discussed above, the preponderance of English-language websites and users during the period when the Internet and modern IT began to transform modern global communications. Although some people have expressed concern about the 'imperial' implications of the position of English as the 'common language' of the modern world, it is important to recognize that there is a distinction between the historical notion of 'English' as the national language of the English people and the present reality of the language known as 'English' as a common global language.

The reality for many nations and companies, whether they like it or not, is that a mastery of international English is essential if they are to optimize their potential benefits from the global economy. Although there is continuing concern in many countries that a focus on English might have an adverse effect on their own national traditions and cultures, leaders are increasingly aware that the economic and political interests of their countries are best served by enhancing English-language skills among their people. This phenomenon is apparent even in

countries that have traditionally been somewhat hostile to Western influence.

According to the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper (January 25, 2002, p. 27), English-language instruction has been introduced in the classrooms of primary and secondary schools in the Palestinian territories since 2000. A high-ranking Palestinian official was quoted by the newspaper as asserting that :

In order to make the people in the world aware of the issues that Palestinians have, we have to send out the messages in English . . . So we need to learn English. But we also must pay attention not to become culturally westernized.

Similarly, it has been reported by *Asahi Shimbun* (September 19, 2004, p. 6) that the Arabic satellite television station *al-Jazeera* intends to begin an English-language broadcast service to complement its existing distribution of English news articles in written form via the Internet. The reason for this development was reported to be the desire of *al-Jazeera* to ensure that an Arabic viewpoint was made available to the world in spoken English.

In both these instances, it is apparent that the reality of English as a world language has led to a hard-headed political decision to utilize the communication power of the modern ‘lingua franca’ to promote the interests of countries and political causes—even causes that might be considered inimical to Western influence.

Apart from the political value of recognizing the reality of English as a world language (as noted above), there are also advantages in terms of English being a modern ‘lingua franca’ that has the potential to unite otherwise disparate peoples. Graddol (1997, p. 11) has noted that a large proportion of the world’s population once perceived English to be the “language for dominion”. However, Crystal (1997, p. 60) has stressed the point that, as a legacy of the far-flung British Empire, 75 countries continue to maintain the English language in an official capacity of one sort or another, and that the combined population of these countries represents about one-third of the world’s population. Graddol (1997) has noted that the only point of similarity among many of these 75 countries is that they used to be colonies of Britain. It is of significance that, within and between these post-colonial countries, English continues to play an important role as a ‘link’ language among peoples of varying cultures and languages. For example, the population of Singapore consists of a mix of people from many ethnic backgrounds, including Chinese, Malay, and Tamil. Each of these ethnic groupings has its own language, and among the people of Chinese extraction, no less than seven different Chinese dialects are spoken in the country. English is the ‘link language’ for these otherwise disparate people. Similarly, in Nigeria, various people speak Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo, and other local languages. Again, the ‘link language’ for these peoples is English.

IT developments and Japan's position in global business

According to the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (ECOM/NTT 2005), Japan's electronic commerce (e-commerce) transactions in 2004 exceeded 100 trillion yen and accounted for more than 20% of Japanese GDP. The breakdown was as follows :

- * *Business-to-business (B 2 B)* : about 102.7 trillion yen (a 33% increase on the previous year) ;
- * *Business-to-consumers (B 2 C)* : about 5.6 trillion yen (a 28% increase) ; and
- * *Consumer-to-consumer (C 2 C)* : about 780 billion yen (in the form of auctions conducted on the Internet).

These are impressive numbers. In addition, in September 2004, Japan ranked third among Internet users by nation. The USA was ranked first with 203.3 million users, China was second with 87 million users, and Japan was third with 66 million users ; these were followed by Germany and South Korea (JITDA 2005, p. 4).

Taken in isolation, these numbers give the impression that Japan is a developed nation in modern IT ; however, other statistics reveal that the neighboring nation of South Korea has a huge lead in utilizing IT for economic benefit.

- * First, if e-commerce is expressed as a share of GDP (rather than as an absolute number), South Korea is in first place among comparable countries, with e-commerce accounting for 32.6% of South Korean GDP ; Japan is second, with e-commerce accounting for 17.8% of GDP ; and the USA is third, with e-commerce accounting for 11.1% of GDP (JITDA 2005, p. 23).
- * Second, in terms of Internet diffusion, Sweden is the leading nation in the world (with 76.8% of homes having access to the Internet), followed by the USA (69.0%) and Australia (67.1%) ; these are followed by Holland, Ireland, Canada, Hong Kong, and Denmark. In ninth place is South Korea (62%), with Japan in fifteenth place (with only 51.5%) (JITDA 2005, p. 3).

It is apparent that the state of development of IT in a given country cannot be explained only by the information technology that the nation possesses. If the contents of the messages that are sent and received are of insufficient quality, and if they do not contribute to the development of the nation, the status of the technology is meaningless. In this sense, it would seem that South Korea is superior to other countries in the use of e-commerce for the generation of positive financial results. Indeed, the government of South Korea has put a significant effort into enhancing the effectiveness of IT all over the nation. This proactive attitude with respect to globalization has made a significant difference in establishing South Korea as a developed IT nation.

The progress of South Korea in this regard was evident at an international summit meeting in Manila, The Philippines in 2000. According to a news report (*Nihon Keizai Shimbun* 2000, January 12, p. 3), this meeting in Manila was the first summit meeting in history to have included Japan, China, and South Korea (among other countries). After the many bilateral meetings between South Korea and Japan that were held during the course of this summit, the written English-language briefings to the Western media from the Korean president's office were invariably excellent. Indeed, the speed and contents of the English-language briefings were such that many correspondents from Western and Southeast Asian countries who did not have access to their own countries' briefings wrote their articles entirely on the basis of the Korean information (*Nihon Keizai Shimbun* 2000, January 12, p. 3).

In commenting on this, a Japanese correspondent working at the Hong Kong Branch of *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* Inc. was quoted as saying that (*Nihon Keizai Shimbun* 2000)

The improvement of the Korean service to foreign media was under the supervision of [Korean] President Dae-Jung Kim. It was based on his judgment that the power of communication is the power of the nation . . . [In this regard] I keenly felt Korea's efforts and Japan's inattention.

If Japan is to be an economic power in the modern global society and a real leader in Asia, it is apparent that the Japanese government and Japanese business leaders must bear in mind the sentiment expressed by the Korean president's office: "The power of communication is the power of the nation". In particular, Japan must enhance the effectiveness and power of its international communications.

Economic behavior and communication

Economic behavior of nations and companies

In planning projects and achieving their goals, nations and companies evaluate the benefits and the costs of various alternatives and then choose from among those alternatives. If the data for such analysis can be measured by a monetary criterion, such an evaluation is commonly known as 'cost/benefit analysis'. This sort of analysis is applied to the best use of resources. Both a nation and a company consider how it can best utilize its limited national resources (people, products, money, information, know-how, culture, etc.) to maximize the economic benefits. In both cases, the aim is to achieve optimum utility with minimum costs.

In the modern global economy, such cost/benefit analysis is complicated by the fact that the data to be analyzed now extend far beyond international borders. The innovations of infor-

mation technology have shortened the distance between production and output. As Shinohara (2004, p. 7) has noted, modern IT has made it possible for services

. . . to be freed from geographical limitations and to become trading assets. For example, aside from the legal and regulation issues . . . it is technically possible for Japanese living abroad to see doctors in Tokyo using a monitor and the Internet. When the service has been turned into a trading asset, the factor price will follow equalization theory. This situation will threaten the local doctors who have charged much higher fees only because they can speak Japanese.

In the modern global society, contact with foreign governments and foreign companies has been significantly expedited. In these circumstances, governments and companies alike have to think seriously about enhancing the quality of their communications with foreigners. As Coulmas (1993, p. 176) has pointed out :

For a modern economy—a market economy which is the opposite of a self-sufficiency economy—language is as important as money. Language is crucial because most economic behavior lies in communication, and the core of economic communication is language.

Indeed, communication is integral to economic behavior. To make a global business successful, it is important for both nation and company to communicate well with overseas business partners and to build (and maintain) good relationships with superiors, co-workers, and subordinates across nations and cultures.

Language and communication

The term ‘communication’ has various definitions ; however, they all share common roots from the Latin words *communicare* (meaning ‘to share’ or ‘to impart’) and *communis* (‘shared in common’). That is to say, communication refers to something that is shared in common. According to Goto (1999, p. 15) :

Multiple individuals are connected by common attributes. The situation of special, connected, and complex relationships is needed for the definition of communication.

However, it should be noted in passing that Goto (1999) has also expressed the opinion that the Japanese term, *dentatsu* (which is often cited as being the Japanese equivalent of the English word ‘communication’), actually has a different meaning. According to Goto (1999), a better literal translation of *dentatsu* would render this Japanese word as ‘transmission’.

Be that as it may, the central concept of ‘commonality’ in the definition of communication was also captured by Ikegami (1992, p. 37), who defined communication as

. . . the activity of creating something common—the behavior of creating a copy of the contents of your broad sense of thinking in other people’s minds.

Communication can thus have a variety of meanings, depending on which of the various viewpoints noted above is adopted. Communication is clearly a complicated process (Kume

1997). However, whichever perspective is adopted, it is apparent that communication is not simply the transmission of language (as the Japanese term *dentatsu* implies). Rather, businesspeople who wish to communicate effectively with foreigners must appreciate that learning (and speaking) a foreign language is not sufficient. There is a clear distinction between the simple transmission of language and real communication.

Because English has become increasingly prominent as the global language, it is commonly believed that the ability to speak English is sufficient for effective communication with people around the world. In Japan, English-language schools and English-testing institutions are encouraging this erroneous belief by relentless advertising of the importance of English-language skills. However, as noted above, language and communication are different things, and it is an illusion to believe that speaking English is, in itself, sufficient for effective communication with English-speaking foreigners.

In modern global society, businesspersons require more than the ability to speak and write fluently in 'British English' or 'American English'. In addition to basic linguistic skills, they must be able to speak and write English in a manner that takes account of other cultural factors that are essential for effective communication. International business relationships are often regarded as being issues of simple communication, but it is a mistake to believe that communication issues are all related to language transmission. It is necessary to understand and empathize with those from other cultural backgrounds.

Empathetic communication

In communicating empathetically across cultures, the speaker should assume that the receiver of the message might have different images of the facts being communicated. The speaker should therefore empathetically 'expand' the message by providing additional information to ensure that the speaker's view is empathetically shared by the listener.

The following three sentences are examples of cross-cultural messages that might not convey to the receiver what the sender of the message intended to convey (Kameda 2005, p. 55):

- 'He has 165 square meters of land in Ginza.'
- 'He stands six feet three.'
- 'She earns fifty thousand dollars annually.'

The intended meanings of these three messages are as follows :

- 'He is extremely rich.'
- 'He is very tall.'

- ‘She earns a large income each year.’

These intended messages might not be conveyed to the receiver if he or she lives in a different cultural environment in which people use different measuring systems for land, height, or monetary value. There is no guarantee that the receiver knows that a piece of land in Tokyo’s Ginza district is one of the most expensive pieces of real estate in Japan (*The Japan Times* 2004, August 3, p. 10). And there is no certainty that a man who is ‘six feet three’ is necessarily considered ‘very tall’ in all societies. Nor is it certain that all societies would consider a woman who earns ‘fifty thousand dollars annually’ to be earning a ‘large income’.

A speaker should therefore allow for the fact that the listener might not share the same judgment criteria. An empathetic speaker would therefore provide sufficient additional information and comment to ensure that the *intended* message is conveyed. The messages would then be delivered as follows :

- ‘He has 165 square meters of land in Ginza. A few square meters of land in that district can cost half a million US dollars. He really is a very wealthy man.’
- ‘He stands six feet three. A man’s average height in our society is less than six feet. He is very tall in our society.’
- ‘She earns fifty thousand dollars annually. Very few women of her age earn that amount of money. She earns a large income.’

Here is a sentence in an English newspaper in Japan, which the author thought “this is empathetic English” some years ago.

- . . . the high school textbooks are scheduled to go into use next April, when the *school year begins*.

According to a news report (*Asahi Shimbun* 1992, April 1, p. 1), the new *school year begins* in September in the US. In addition, ninety two countries in or influenced by the West had the same system, according to statistics compiled by UNESCO at that time. Students were enrolled in October in twenty nine countries. April enrollment was practiced only in nine countries, including Japan.

So, for many of the readers of the English newspaper in Japan, who might be travellers or businesspeople, such an equation as “April equals to a new semester and a new school year” doesn’t make sense. The foreign readers might wonder why the new textbooks have to

go into use in the fourth month in a year. The author thinks the attitude of the reporter of this article is nothing but *empathy*—which literally means ‘feeling in the other’. He stands on the same spot and looks together in the same direction with his possible readers. ‘Love does not consist in gazing at each other but in looking together in the same direction.’ So wrote Saint-Exupéry (Daintith, J. & A. Stibbs 1992). To share a perspective on things, it is necessary for partners to stand next to one another and look in the same direction. If businesspeople are empathetic *with* their foreign counterparts, the messages of both will become easier to understand.

Nation and communication in the global society

Co-existence and co-prosperity

According to the Japan Foreign Trade Council (JFTC 2007), Japan’s trade, both export and import, increased in 2006. In fact, exports had increased for five consecutive years, and imports had reached record levels for the past five consecutive years. The overall value of external trade reached 142.4 trillion yen.

The trade boom has not been limited to Japan. Total world trade in 2005 amounted to USD \$10,239.8 billion (JFTC 2007). This number should be compared with the figure for 1955, when the level of world trade was USD \$92.98 billion (Japan’s 100 years in Figures, 2000). Indeed, the level of world trade has been increasing almost every year, and has now reached more than 100 times the 1955 number.

This enormous growth in the world economy has coincided with a huge increase in the contact points and networks among people all over the world. Moreover, there has been a corresponding growth in the world’s English-speaking population. According to Graddol and Meinhof (1999), the number of English-speaking people in the world in 1770 was only about 7 million, but this has now increased to about 340 million native English speakers. When combined with various other categories of English speakers, including those who have English as a second language, Crystal (1997) has estimated that the number of English speakers in the world has reached more than 1.8 billion.

The vast size of contemporary world trade means that it is already impossible for any nation to develop its economy in isolation from that of other nations. The development of any national economy is ultimately dependent on trade with other countries through vast global networks of countries, companies, and individuals that require relationships of mutual co-existence and co-prosperity.

However, communication in such relationships often does not go well. There are various reasons. Sometimes it is a lack of knowledge of local societies and local culture, exacerbated by a lack of effort to learn. In addition, the unique Japanese communication style has an effect in some situations. For example, both British and Chinese leaders have been known to become impatient with their Japanese counterparts and to complain that their introductory remarks are too long and that it is difficult to understand what they want to say.

Language costs

In applying cost/benefit analysis to the question of language use in a nation's policies or a company's management strategy, problems arise in forecasting the potential benefits. As Coulmas (1993) has observed, such an analysis tries to reconcile measurable costs with immeasurable benefits. As an example, Coulmas (1993, pp. 179–80) noted a Canadian Language Association member's speech. The speaker had claimed that

It takes money to develop and ratify language ability. The investment in maintaining the two language policy in Canada has achieved important returns. It [has] assisted in pulling Canada together.

However, as Coulmas (1993, pp. 179–80) observed, the word 'investment' in this speech represents a measurable financial expenditure, whereas the word 'return' has no measurable monetary value.

Nevertheless, communication problems as a result of language differences continue to attract executive attention. It was reported by *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* (evening edition, January 6, 2006, p. 2), that the US president, George Bush, had stated that winning the war on terrorism required an immediate response to the pressing need to improve the foreign language skills of the American people. He had then announced a 'National Security Language Initiative', which had an emphasis on Arabic and Chinese language education for Americans from kindergarten age. To support this, a USD \$114 million budget for fiscal year 2007 had been requested from the Congress.

Apart from education costs, language costs also include interpreting and translation costs. The European Union (EU) is a pre-eminent example. As reported by *Asahi Shimbun* (February 11, 2003, p. 6), the EU increased its official languages from 11 to 20 in response to the accession of ten new states to the union. In applying a form of cost/benefit analysis, the costs associated with this increase in official languages have been regarded as the 'cost of democracy' in treating all participating countries equally—including the huge costs of expanding the number of interpreters and translators employed by the EU to four thousand and the vastly in-

creased publishing costs required to produce EU documents in all official languages. To put this into perspective, it should be noted that, at the time of the establishment of the EEC (the predecessor of the EU) in 1958, the organization employed only 15 interpreters and translators. The increase to the current number of four thousand is a direct result of the EU's policy of according a high priority to a policy of 'language respect'. Whenever a new nation joins the EU, that nation's official language is additionally adopted as one of the official EU languages.

According to that *Asahi Shimbun* report, before the EU was recently expanded there were 950 interpreters and 3000 translators working in EU-related institutions. This represented the world's largest group of interpreters and translators, exceeding even those of the United Nations (UN). In fact, one in every eight staff members of the EU Commission was working in a language-related department. The operating cost for language-related activities in 1999 was about 686 million Euros, which accounted for 0.8% of the EU budget. With the latest EU expansion (in 2004), the additional cost has been estimated at 170 million Euros. It is clear that language is not a cheap business.

In the EU, official documents are translated into all of the 20 official languages. However, at conferences and meetings, French and English are commonly used. In this context it is interesting that the 10 new members from central and eastern European countries are shifting the balance toward English as the 'lingua franca' of the EU. According to the *Asahi Shimbun* (May 13, 2004), among the people sent from these 10 new countries to the European Committee as cabinet members, only four could speak French fluently. Most of the new committee members commonly used English—even during discussions in the European Parliament. In addition, when a survey was conducted within these new member countries of 12,000 applicants for employment with the European Commission, 83% answered that they could speak English, whereas only 24% could speak French and fewer than 34% could speak German. The 'traditional' diplomatic language of French is apparently losing ground to English as an international language.

Successful cases of national language policy

The use of a 'link language' has significance for foreign companies expanding into regions that are composed of various ethnic groups. The official language of a given country is not always the language spoken by the local people with whom the company is dealing in various circumstances. As Imada and Sonoda (1995, p. 88) observed in Malaysia :

In Malaysia, it does not always hold true that it is sufficient to just master the official language

of Malay. If you speak Malay you make Malay people happy, and good communication with them can be assured. But Chinese or Tamil people may get the impression that you are the kind of person [who] only makes friends with the dominant ethnic group. In the situation where there are multiple groups that have strong identities of their own, sometimes you can give the fairest impression by communicating in a language that is not related to any of the local languages. Actually, in Malaysia the old suzerain's 'British language' fulfils this role.

The example of Malaysia is especially instructive in this regard because Malaysia has had a national policy of promoting Bahasa Malaysia (the Malayan language) as the official language of a nation that has a multi-ethnic population of 26 million people comprised of Malays (about 66%), Chinese (about 26%), Indians (about 7.5%) and various indigenous tribes (Japanese Foreign Ministry 2006). The official policy sought to eliminate English from school education and limit the use of English among the people. Among other provisions, the policy encouraged Chinese and Tamil people to use Malay. However, the reality of English as a world 'lingua franca' has forced Malaysia to modify the policy and re-invest in English-language education. In particular, Malaysia has learned from the success of neighboring Singapore, in which the use of English has promoted foreign trade and foreign investment. This reality was captured in the words of a former prime minister of Malaysia, Mahathir, who was quoted by *Malaysian Business* (October 1–15, 1992) as saying :

. . . we should not become fanatical about it [the official language policy] because that will make it difficult for us to acquire knowledge to benefit our race in a competitive world. Whether we like it or not English is an international language.

In a later comment, Mahathir reiterated this view when he was reported as saying that English was necessary “. . . for Malaysians to compete commercially and continue to attract foreign investment” (Ozog 1993). This was followed, in 1994, by the Malaysian government moving to allow the use of English in science and technology education at universities. As Ching (1994) has noted, it is apparent that the principle of a national language has been forced to yield to an economic reality : For Malaysia to succeed in the global business economy, English is a prerequisite.

In contrast to Malaysia, the neighboring country of Singapore has consistently pursued a policy of promoting the use of English—and this policy has paid economic dividends. According to *Singapore Overview* (2006), Singapore is a nation of 4.35 million people, with a mixed ethnic composition consisting of Chinese (75.6%), Malay (13.6%), Indian (8.7%), and others (2.1%). The literacy rate is high (95.0%), as is the bilingual literacy rate (51.8%). Although the national language is Malay, other languages—English, Chinese (Mandarin), and Tamil—have also been recognized as official languages. Indeed, the main language in use in Singa-

pore is English. This is no doubt a result of government policy. Since it separated and gained independence from Malaysia, Singapore has put much effort into the spread of English education. A former prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew, reminisced in his memoirs (Lee 2006) :

When we formed the government in 1959 we decided on Malay as the national language, to prepare the way for merger with Malaya. [But] we realized English had to be the language of the workplace and the common language. As an international trading community, we would not make a living if we used Malay, Chinese or Tamil. With English, no race would have an advantage . . .

These comments reflect two issues raised in the present paper—the economic reality of English as global common language, and the importance of English as a ‘link language’ in multi-ethnic populations. But this does not imply that other languages should be neglected or forgotten. To promote the fusion of its various ethnic groupings, the Singapore government has attempted to standardize the various Chinese dialects into one Chinese language, and has encouraged the use of a standard ‘Chinese’ to represent the various groups of Chinese people in the country. This will stand beside Malay (for the Malay people in Singapore) and Tamil (for those of Indian origin). In addition, the government encourages bilingualism (English and their own language) within each of these groups. English will thus act as the ‘link language’ among the various ethnic groups while letting them preserve their own languages.

After thirty years of this bilingual policy, the results have been, in the words of Pakir (1993) : “receptive bilinguals and the dominance of English”. As Lee Kuan Yew has stated (Lee 2006, p. 181) :

The bilingual policy is certainly a big burden ; it is hard for children to learn both English and a language that is characteristically not related at all to dialects of Malay, Chinese, or Tamil. But if we had employed only the single language policy, economic development would have been impossible . . . English as our working language has prevented conflicts arising between our different races and given us a competitive advantage because it is the international language of business and diplomacy, or science and technology.

In these words, the former prime minister of Singapore has captured the two significant points raised in this paper—that English can be both a ‘link language’ among various ethnic groupings within a nation as well as that nation’s means of entry into the global economic community. Both issues have economic significance for a nation or for an individual company. Indeed, Singapore has become one of the world’s primary business and financial centers, where hundreds of multinational companies and large financial institutions gather.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the complex issues of economic behavior and its relationship to communication. The paper has argued that, at both the national level and the level of the individual company, a language policy is required that can achieve optimal economic outcomes while incurring minimal costs. The enormous growth in world trade in recent decades and the rapid development of global communication (especially through the Internet) have made such policies essential if nations and companies are to compete in the modern global economy.

The paper has also considered the role of a common global language from the perspective of 'language cost'. In particular, the paper has assessed the role of English as a global language from various perspectives—historical, multicultural, and economic. The paper concludes that nations and companies alike must manage the use of language in a realistic and cost-effective manner to provide communication links and to maximise economic returns. In dealing with multiple ethnic groupings, as citizens or as business contacts, it is essential to devote significant resources to effective language management. The contrasting policies of Malaysia and Singapore have been discussed in this context as examples of how such policies can be crucial to national development and economic success.

Finally, there can be no doubt that English has become, and will continue to be, a major global language. Despite misgivings in some quarters about its historical role as a 'colonial language', the reality is that English has become a shared 'lingua franca' that facilitates communication links among different peoples and promotes economic activity. Living in such an era, countries and companies have no choice but to devote resources to language education and training for their citizens and employees if they wish to achieve positive results. It is the contention of this paper that this can be achieved while still preserving the integrity of various cultures and languages. It is not a question of assimilation into a homogeneous whole ; rather it is a question of building links and enhancing communication to the mutual benefit of all.

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