

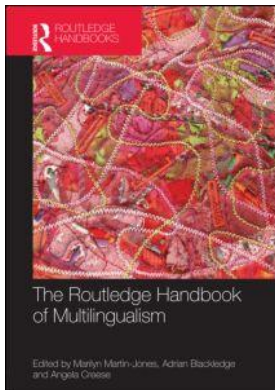
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## **The Routledge Handbook of Multilingualism**

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### **Multilingualism and the new economy**

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## Part IV

# Multilingualism in social and cultural change

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# Multilingualism and the new economy

*Alexandre Duchêne and Monica Heller*

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## Introduction

This chapter examines how multilingualism has become an integral part of the new economy. Our objective is to explore the impact that economic transformations have had on language and multilingual practices, as well as to consider multilingualism as both a product and process of economic activity.

The new economy has emerged as fertile ground for linguistic research and derives its significance from the very nature of the social transformations taking place today. At a time when societal changes such as geographical expansion, the circulation of goods, the mobility of individuals and the spread of new technology occupy an ever-growing place in economics, politics and education, questions arise as to how such changes affect linguistic practices, thus creating new challenges in the field of sociolinguistics. The continuous increase of mobility among people and a heightened circulation of goods in a globalized marketplace have resulted in new language needs and practices. The shift from an economy based mainly on extracting and transforming primary resources to a knowledge and service economy puts language and multilingual practices in the critical role of both process and product. New realities arise from present-day contact between forms of language and culture; this exchange is closely related to migration and trade as well as to computer-generated communication practices. Finally, the economic market and geographical transformations reveal multiple forms of multilingual practices that are geared towards commercial goals.

In this chapter we deal with the fact that societal changes are mainly linked to the emergence of the new economy, as the new economy has reorganized the market along with reconfiguring labour processes in our globalized world. The new economy concerns the circulation of people, goods and resources (Appadurai 1996). It relates to selling products within a globalized network society. It is relevant to labour and to the distribution of resources.

Consequently, multilingual practices and ideologies observed today must be understood in relation to the logic and interests of the new economy. Indeed, the new economy has generated a framework in which multilingualism attains a particular status. At the same time, we believe that examining multilingual issues also opens a window to understand the structuration, challenges and contradictions within the new economy itself.

In this chapter we focus on two central issues related to multilingualism in the new economy. The first deals with the role of language with regard to the globalized market. Here we examine how the choice of language operates within the globalized market and how niche marketing uses language varieties and specific features as distinctive selling tools for products, services or places. The second point is that the multilingual marketplace is dependent on labour activities and the management of linguistic resources. To illustrate this, we will highlight some key findings regarding the links between the new economy and multilingualism in the academic literature and from our own research. However, before moving on, a brief description of the new economy will help to critically examine its impact on multilingualism and language ideologies.

### What is the 'new' in the 'new' economy?

The term 'new economy' must be understood in relation to its counterpart 'the old economy'. The 'old' economy was mainly based on extracting and transforming primary resources and was characterized by strong government participation, as well as by predominantly local and national production and organization. The crisis of national economies, the slowdown in primary manufacturing production and the emergence of new technology are all associated with the increased relevance of a knowledge and service economy, and provided the basis for economic transformation. The markets initially controlled by the state became deregulated, whereas the private sectors gained more economic and political power. New technology enables new economic transactions and creates new labour markets. Labour processes are no longer characterized by locally bound production mechanisms. Physical distances are overcome by the new technologies themselves and by advances in means of transportation. Castells (2000) identifies three distinctive features on which the new economy is based: (1) the generation of *information*; (2) the organization of its activity on a *global* scale; and (3) the competition over production within a *global network*. The new economy thus takes place within a space of flux, and can be understood as a significant and repetitive series of exchanges and interactions between different geographical locations occupied by various social actors (*ibid.*). These series and the process of circulating information are made possible by advances in new technologies; these series also determine the place and the structuring of work in terms of centres – more likely to be occupied by the more-qualified employees – and peripheries – such as the back offices occupied by less-qualified employees.

The consequences of this economic shift are numerous. Labour processes change. Workers are subject to institutional constraints regarding productivity and flexibility, such as an irregular work schedule or lack of job stability. Flexibility becomes the motto for employees in the new economy; they are engaged in multiple activities and practices that hinge on the performance of the employing company (Korczynski 2002; Sennet 2000). Deregulation of the market gives birth to increased competition on a large scale and alters the role of the government in winning and managing resources. Goods and knowledge circulate around the world, as do people. Migration flows also reorganize according to economic shifts, and transnational areas emerge as an integral component of the new globalized economy.

The social processes related to the new economy constitute a central phenomenon that invites us to rethink the role of language in our societies. In fact, the components of the new economy presented earlier and their corollaries – productivity, flexibility and flux – form the general framework in which language practices operate, but also lay the groundwork for new language possibilities. The dialectic between constraining frame and realm of possibilities

manifests itself in various forms of control and interests within the global economy in matters concerning language and the use of individuals' language skills with an eye to productivity. It also lends language and multilingualism a certain significance.

We believe this significance mainly concerns language as a commodity. The term itself invites some explanation: besides the classical definitions provided by dictionaries, which mainly equate commodities with value-added products, we wish to go back to Marx in order to understand the complexity of this notion. He defines commodities as follows:

A commodity is, in the first place, an object outside of us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another. The nature of such wants, whether, for instance, they spring from the stomach or from fancy, makes no difference. Neither are we here concerned to know how the object satisfies these wants, whether directly as means of subsistence, or indirectly as means of production.

(Marx 1887, *Band I, chapter 1, online version*)

Commodities are in fact *things* that have a value. Marx identifies two types of value: (1) *use-value*, i.e. things only become commodities if they are linked to consumption and are used; and (2) *exchange-value*, i.e. the value of things is measured in regard and in comparison to a specific market and then linked to other *things*. The concept of commodity in Marx's works clearly aims to provide an understanding of consumer society and of capitalism per se. More precisely, it is a critique of labour processes and of the social consequences that arise from viewing commodities as a major structural and organizational strategy of labour activities. Marx pinpoints the fact that, in the end, the structure of work is determined by the market and by the interplay between useful and exchangeable products, both of which are linked to time, availability of labour and the consumption of goods.

This (too) short digression on the Marxist view of commodities provides us with a working definition for what we consider to be a commodity, and helps to clarify how we can understand language as a commodity. In this chapter we postulate – with the logic of our capitalist society – that languages are *things* that become useful in order to both produce resources and enter the globalized market. Furthermore, we set forth the idea that language and languages entail values with regard to the targeted market and can be linked to the workforce available within a specific geographic area.

This consideration of language as commodity and the importance of multilingualism in the new economy must be placed in the context of the specific time we live in. This leads to questions about the social and economic transformations that have both reproduced classical forms of inequalities and created new ones on the basis of language.

### The multilingual market: language for sale

Bourdieu argues that linguistic expressions can be understood as the product of the relationship between a linguistic market and the linguistic habitus. When individuals use language in particular ways, they employ their linguistic resources and adapt their words to the demands of a particular social class or audience.

There is a linguistic market whenever someone produces an utterance for receivers capable of assessing it, evaluating it and setting a price on it [ ... ] Concretely, it's a particular social situation, more or less official and ritualised, a particular set of interlocutors, situated at a particular level in the social hierarchy – all properties that are

perceived and appreciated in an infra-conscious way and unconsciously orient linguistic production.

*(Bourdieu 1993: 79–80)*

We consider this notion of a linguistic market, associated with two other Bourdieuan concepts (linguistic habitus and linguistic capital), as central in order to understand how multilingualism functions in the new economy. Bourdieu's view of the linguistic market does not refer to the situation of late capitalism. On the contrary, his notion is rather ahistorical; it refers to a process, a mechanism of interpretation of how language practices are embedded in social and historical hierarchies. It is an invitation to constantly question a system of values that makes a certain social and linguistic practice legitimate and valuable or that makes it illegitimate and worthless.

This challenge has been taken on in recent years in the field of sociolinguistics. Research on multilingual advertisements and marketing tools provides us with significant insight into the relationship between the linguistic market and the globalized economy. Piller (2000) argues that through globalization, advertising discourse increasingly utilizes multilingual features in order to generate a certain quality for the product to be sold, thus heightening its distinctiveness. For instance, Kelly-Holmes (2000) reveals that the use of French in European advertising is often linked to fashion and gastronomy and that German connotes precision and technology. By investigating bilingual advertisements in Germany, Piller (2001) shows that the use of two languages constructs the narrator (the product and the producer) as well as the narratee (the recipient) as international, successful and fun. Marketing research has also pointed out the fact that branding and presenting products (over the Internet for instance) has also become more and more multilingual. By examining commercial language practices on websites, Kelly-Holmes (2006: 514) finds that although English operates as a hypercentral language in commercial Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), 'it is certainly not to the exclusion of all other languages'. Taking up the notion of supercentral languages (languages used in politics, administration, business, education) proposed by de Swaan (2001), Kelly-Holmes maintains that those languages play an important role in this setting. In fact, such languages are mainly used in order to target countries where they are already widely spoken. Finally, she demonstrates the importance of local languages in websites that target a specific country. She states, 'For the vast majority of these global brands, the central languages seem to have been chosen – in preference to English – as suitable for the domains of country-specific websites' (2000: 517).

These findings show that the market and market strategies appear to be increasingly multilingual and that within the process of internationalization there are also processes involving local languages.

What all these findings have in common is that they focus mainly on products and specifically on marketing discourse as it appears to the consumers. Subsequently, we would argue that it is important to investigate how and when makers of marketing discourse decide to use multilingualism, taking various components into account. First, it is vital to look at how decision making concerning languages is linked to the expansion strategy of a specific enterprise. Second, the link between the product or service to be sold and the resulting language choice must be understood. Finally, the underlying principles of language choice within the globalized market must be questioned in terms of the correlation between costs and benefits. These three elements constitute the basis necessary for understanding the underlying multilingual discourse within the new economy.

Data collected from our fieldwork will illustrate these points. We will draw both on a research project financed by the Swiss National Research Foundation (principal investigators

Alexandre Duchêne and Ingrid Piller) on multilingual practices in the Swiss tourism industry, and on research funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, conducted by Monica Heller and collaborators.

### ***Language choice and the targeted market***

Examining language choice in relation to globalization of the market requires locating the language used to sell a product, a place or a service. Language choice does not occur in a vacuum; it is a highly strategic choice that is contingent upon the desire to target a specific market. Our aim in this chapter is to examine the way language choice is part of the implicit and explicit internationalization process of businesses in the new economy. Within the Swiss project mentioned above, the research team has concluded conducting an ethnography of an institution in charge of marketing Switzerland nationally and internationally. During fieldwork we encountered the key issue of which languages tourism brochures should be translated into. Various considerations came into play when the organization had to make these decisions.

Because marketing materials should be useful for Swiss tourists, translation into German, French and Italian (the three major national languages) was a must, and, as these three languages are also languages of foreign countries (Belgium, Canada and France for French; Germany and Austria for German; Italy for Italian), these translations also served to internationalize the product. English was chosen as a *de facto* language for all English-speaking countries, as well as for all other language groups for which no translation into local languages was undertaken.

Beside the four languages mentioned, the agency considered further translation in relation to two central criteria. Statistics were examined to determine both the number of tourists coming to Switzerland and their national origin. In addition, the number of Internet hits from various countries was counted. Both criteria were decisive with respect to translating the website and with respect to the amount of money and time that would be invested in providing information in other languages. This was, for instance, the case with regard to Spanish: the translation of a city tourist brochure was decided on due to the dramatic increase of Spanish (from Spain) tourists to Switzerland as a result of low-cost air transport. Similarly, the number of Russians travelling to Switzerland increased, but not by as much as in the case of Spanish tourists. As a consequence, it was decided to only partially translate the aforementioned brochure into Russian (see Duchêne and Piller 2011).

Numbers were, however, not the only criteria. The National Tourism Board was very much interested in diversifying its targeted countries and in actively stimulating the growth of potential markets. This was particularly the case with Poland, and developing the Polish market formed the general strategy for a year in the National Tourism Board. As a result, many products were translated into Polish and a local office was created. A final criterion taken into consideration for language was the product itself. City brochures, for instance, were not translated into Dutch because Dutch tourists have been found to be less interested in city tourism. However, the hiking brochure was translated into Dutch because the residents of this country were considered to have an active interest in these particular areas.

If multilingualism and language choices increasingly become an object of attention in the marketing process in the new economy, locating the appropriate varieties of language will also be carefully considered. In the case of the brochure mentioned earlier, our fieldwork illustrated the particular concern with the correct language variety. This was particularly the case for French (Swiss-French variety or France-French variety) and Spanish (Spain-Spanish variety or

Latin-American variety). A representative of the Swiss National Tourism Board located in Barcelona but who had previously been posted in Paris mentions this struggle:

DIR: nous on a par exemple le problème que certains traducteurs en Suisse seront plutôt de souche erm sud américaine et l'espagnol le castillan en Espagne n'est pas tout à fait pareil, donc il y des nuances, c'est comme entre un français et un suisse

AD: uhmhu

DIR: à la limite, même si ces nuances sont faibles, on a le même problème. donc y faut vraiment quelqu'un ici qui est ici quoi, qui fasse ces textes ouais

### *Translation*

DIR: We have, for example, the problem that some translators in Switzerland would be more of a Latin American background and Castilian Spanish in Spain is not really the same, so there is a nuance, it's like between a French and a Swiss

AD: mmm ...

DIR: at the end of the day, even if these nuances are weak, we have the same problem, so we have to have someone here who does these texts, yes

DIR (the interviewee) presents a well-known discourse that has existed for decades on the relationship between language and culture. It also highlights the struggle over the legitimacy of language varieties. The concern with the quality of language in localization and internationalization processes also collides with concerns about efficiency. Indeed, multiple translations of the same brochure in multiple varieties of the same language were not an issue. This would clearly have gone too far. Therefore, the identification of the appropriate varieties was mainly made on the basis of the perceived market. For French, all translations were sent to France and were corrected by the Paris office. For Spanish, the translations were done in Spain. Implicitly, this language choice recreates and reproduces language hierarchies, and it was the market that defined the correct varieties. This was particularly true for written documents and for some languages. German or English were, however, not the object of this specific concern – and in a Swiss-based tourism call centre a local Swiss German accent was seen as an asset (Duchêne 2009a).

These various examples show how the market becomes multilingual due to strategic decisions based on 'rational' economic choices. Language contributes to successfully entering a market. However, besides the instrumental role language plays in internationalization, it also acquires a symbolic importance in providing products and goods to be sold with an added value in terms of authenticity, exoticism or 'uniqueness'. This aspect of the multilingual market is the focus of the next section.

### ***Niche marketing: multilingualism, authenticity and commodity***

Nowadays products, goods, ideas and services compete in the globalized market. The competition concerns the prices of products and services as well as product uniqueness and its local character. With regard to the second aspect, authenticity becomes one of the main selling points in the global network in that it creates a niche market. And language plays a central role in creating an air of authenticity. Discourse is one medium with which authenticity is produced and created (Coupland *et al.* 2005). In many tourist areas, an air of authenticity is achieved by quoting historical 'facts'. Artefacts, for example, are discursively marketed as authentic goods. Yet, there is also the fact that languages (usually local varieties) intervene as a central



selling tool in light of a specific product. In their analysis of Chinatown's linguistic landscape in Washington DC, Leemann and Modan (2009) highlight the role the use of Chinese plays in displaying commercial ethnic identity as a commodity.

This is particularly true with regard to promoting and marketing local products. In the Canadian research project mentioned earlier, particular attention was paid to the circulation of Canadian artefacts and products between Canada and Europe. In 2006, a city located in the east of France nominated Canada as the guest country at their *Marché de Noël* (Christmas Fair). The market was 'decorated' in a presumably Canadian fashion – including penguins! Various stands proffered so-called typical Canadian products, such as maple syrup and buffalo meat. One of the stands sold Canadian soap made of goats' milk. The interview conducted<sup>1</sup> with one of the employees at this stand offers an insight into the role language plays as a means of authenticating a commodity and – very pragmatically – as a way of attracting clients:

MD: les magasins comme les grandes surfaces ont déjà ça c'est on n'aurait pas envie déjà de faire ça dedans parce qu'une grande surface c'est une grande surface c'est impersonnel c'est un c'est pas l'étagère qui va vous expliquer en quoi ils font les savons et nous on cherche quand même le contact euh le contact humain et euh surtout en France parce que les Français adorent le Québec et adorent nous entendre parler québécois et euh la plupart des gens qui qui viennent à mon stand ils viennent d'abord pour écouter mon accent pis moi j'arrive doucement à les diriger vers euh vers mes savons et à leur parler de ça et euh ils voient bien que je suis quelqu'un de de passionnée [ ... ]

#### *Translation*

MD: shops like supermarkets have already it is we wouldn't like to do it inside it because a supermarket is a supermarket, it is impersonal, it is a it isn't the shelf that will explain what the soaps are made of and we are still looking for the contact, er, the human contact and, er, in France because the French adore Quebec and adore to hear us speak Québécois and, er, most of the people who who come to our stand, they come first to listen to my accent and I slowly succeed in directing them to my soaps and to talk about that and, er, they see that I'm passionate [ ... ]

Interestingly enough, MD only lived in Quebec at an early age. She moved to France with her mother at the age of 3. However, during the whole interview she spoke with some kind of French-Canadian accent, as she did – in a more accentuated way – at her stand. How MD thinks of her accent is definitely linked to a marketing strategy associated with the idea that a product is 'special' because it is made in Canada. The geographic origin of a product is a competitive factor, but, at the same time, its authenticity and exoticism need to be accentuated. Thus, the seller's accent takes on new significance. It serves as an attraction (people first come to the stand because of her accent!) and confers a special touch to the product, and – with it – an added value.

In this specific case, local language varieties function as an instrument for selling products, but in some cases it is the multilingualism of a place itself that confers its uniqueness. This is what we have observed when considering marketing tools in Swiss tourism. The official multilingualism of Switzerland is often an object of attention and an object of discourse when Swiss tourism providers develop their marketing strategy. Indeed, in our data, Swiss multilingualism has emerged recurrently as a selling point in promotional tourism campaigns for Switzerland. To be exact, multilingualism is regarded as a Swiss particularity that enables and enhances the construction of Switzerland as a 'special' place. A representative of the National Tourism Board located in Toronto mentioned this aspect during an interview with Alexandre

Duchêne (AD). In the following excerpt she enumerates the various characteristics that make Switzerland attractive to Canadians:

RTO: yeah, it's erm Switzerland is attractive, it's erm a lot of different experience on a very small area you know compared to Canada

AD: mmm ...

RTO: then ah the four languages, the different food, the accessibility of our mountains like the Canadians have a lot of nature but you really have to walk to access it, in Switzerland even an elderly person or somebody who's handicapped can go up to the Jungfrauoch or something like that so I believe as the population is even aging, like Switzerland is actually even more attractive down the road. Ah ... they like the history ah they find us very friendly unlike the Swiss who always feel you know

This inventory underlines prototypical marketing arguments that can widely be found in promotional materials (the diversity, the four languages, the food, the nature, the history, the organization, etc.). Multilingualism is part of the uniqueness of Switzerland and constitutes part of its attractiveness. However, RTO points to another element regarding multilingualism that well illustrates some of the tensions regarding this marketing argument.

RTO: because it's-you can experience so much diversity in a very small ah area

AD: mmm ...

RTO: you know and then everybody speaks English so I mean they say oh I've been to the French speaking the Italian speaking part but everybody spoke English anyway, but they still see and feel that it's something different. It's always compared with the gro-with this big country where you have to go very far to see something very different you know

As RTO states, national multilingualism, on the one hand, is considered as an element of exoticism, making Switzerland attractive. On the other hand, multilingualism can be seen as problematic if English is not among the national languages. In order to gauge the risks of the negative component of multilingualism, RTO points out the fact that tourists are amazed that Swiss people have mastered the English language, thus allowing tourists to experience exoticism without getting lost. For RTO, although people in every region of Switzerland speak English, the cultural distinctions are not erased. Cultural exoticism is maintained. Of course this example cannot be generalized to all multilingual countries. Analyses of national marketing materials show a rather contrastive picture of the use of multilingualism as a strategic argument. Gaelic in Scotland, languages of the Incas in Peru or Singlish in Singapore, for instance, are similar examples of some kind of exotic features that serves the construction of place as unique. In other cases, like India for instance, languages are practically absent from the general narratives in tourism brochures. On the other hand, the linguistic diversity argument might also be associated with a particular group of tourists and might be considered as irrelevant to other groups. Further research on these issues definitely needs to be done. However, what seems to be clear is that linguistic diversity – if it appears as marketing arguments – is constantly linked to cultural diversity and constructed as a harmonious and conflict-free phenomenon.

We have argued that the new economy offers us a window through which we can better understand the role languages play in a global market. We have demonstrated that the linguistic market is not homogeneous in terms of language. The market is in fact multilingual. Language choice operates on the ground of strategic decisions based on the audiences that a business group in the new economy wishes to reach. Furthermore, we have shown that local

language varieties as well as national multilingualism can serve as a distinctive marketing tool to construct the authenticity and uniqueness of a product or a place. We believe these findings encourage a sustained examination of the role multilingualism plays in transnational processes relevant to the new economy, processes that promote understanding and explaining language hierarchies and values associated with a particular language. Interestingly enough, despite the increase of multilingual practices, we still find ideologies that arose in the modern age. Languages – as well as products and goods – are still very much linked to nations and territories. However, their values are more dependent on local and global economic interests that are not stable, but rather constantly changing in deference to strategic market expansion.

These considerations lead us to another central issue. All the processes described earlier are predicated upon labour processes. Be it the translation and the drafting of texts (see also Pym 2004), the interaction with the client in his/her language, or the sale of authentic products, all are mainly linguistic activities. In our view, when examining the role of the new economy we must grasp how multilingualism becomes a particular instrument of work and how business in the new economy manages this intrinsic linguistic diversity. In doing so we would like to pay specific attention to the agents who make multilingualism possible, to those who produce these linguistic resources.

### The 'new' management of multilingual resources

The inter-relationship between labour structure and language practices was the centre of interest for a group of researchers in France in the late 1980s. The Réseau Langage et Travail was a pioneer in this area in that they interrogated the role of language in traditional industrial workplaces from a critical perspective, but also in that they examined the shifting character of labour guidelines with regard to economic and social transformations at the workplace within the new economy. In the following we would like to highlight some of the central arguments produced by this group of researchers and add further considerations on the same issue from the standpoint of the English-language tradition.

Boutet (2008) analyses documents on work regulations from various factories, shops and mills at the end of the nineteenth century. She observes that many workplaces formulated various kinds of legal injunctions in written form and directed them at the worker who was to be regulated and controlled. Within these regulations, language appears systematically in the sense of an injunction to keep quiet.

Article 6, L'ordre et le plus grand silence doivent toujours régner dans les ateliers. Il est strictement défendu, sous peine d'amende, de chanter, lire, coudre et de s'occuper de tout autre chose que du travail qui a été confié à l'ouvrier (Filature de Lille 1866).

#### *Translation*

Order and complete silence should always reign in the workshops. It is strictly forbidden to sing, read, sew or otherwise attend to anything other than the work assigned.

(Boutet 2008: 29)

ART.15 Il est défendu aux ouvriers d'abandonner leur travail pour causer avec leurs camarades, ainsi que de chanter ou de siffler sous peine d'une amende de 50 centimes (Ateliers Charles Fiechter, Mulhouse 1866).

*Translation*

ART.15 Workers are forbidden to leave their work to talk with others, or to sing or whistle, subject to a fine of 50 centimes.

(*ibid.*)

Through these two examples we can see that language becomes at times part of the regulations of the workplace. In addition, language is clearly considered to be an obstacle to productivity as well as to the welfare of the employees. This view of work is derived directly from the highly influential work of Taylor, published in 1911, in which the key principles of work management were expounded on and largely adopted in the industrial sector. According to Taylor, the main goal was to achieve maximal efficiency in the production chain by means of segmentation, constantly controlling time needed for work, as well as strict and 'objective' (based on scientific calculation) management of the activities of the worker. In this theory of work, speaking was seen as a waste of time, a loss of productivity and, as a consequence, as Boutet states in the following excerpt, an illegitimate practice:

Taylor s'inscrit ainsi dans la conception que la Révolution industrielle a instaurée d'une parole ouvrière inutile et dénuée de pertinence: il a généralisé, rationalisé cette conception et lui a donné un support scientifique et non plus strictement disciplinaire, moral et coercitif. La parole ouvrière, ou salariée plus généralement, voit son illégitimité et son improductivité, clairement raisonnées.

*Translation*

Taylor subscribes to the idea originating in the Industrial Revolution that speaking among the workers is fruitless and without relevance: he generalized, rationalized this idea and gave it a scientific basis and not only a strictly disciplinary, moral and coercive one. Speaking among workers or among employees in general, sees its illegitimacy and unproductivity scientifically demonstrated.

(*Boutet 2008: 69*)

The general history of industrialization and its link to the emergence of capitalism is mirrored by regulatory measures for work processes in which language is clearly identified as both an object of regulation and an unprofitable resource at the workplace.

Within the new economy, the role of language has changed. In predominant sectors of the new economy (like the service industry), speaking is no longer forbidden at the workplace; on the contrary, it has become one of the most important tools. The new economy embraces language in the sense that language is informational and technological, and that commercial components are contingent on language (Gee *et al.* 1996). The previous section demonstrated that the globalized market employs multilingual practices involving language work. As a matter of fact, in various sectors of the economy the prohibition of speech has transformed into an invitation to speak. This represents a clear discrepancy between the old and the new economy. However, we do agree with Cameron (2000a), Boutet (2001, 2008) and Heller (2003, 2005) that this disparity in terms of what counts as a production resource (hand vs speech) also represents a continuity. In fact, within the new economy, the Taylorist approach, in terms of rationalization of labour and worker management, seems to be maintained.

This is particularly the case with regard to what we shall call the globalized industrialization of services, in such forms as call centres, localization and translation companies or domestic work. In these three exemplary sectors of the new economy, language is subject to heavy regulatory processes. Scripts, language and communication training, as well as regular control of the quality and time of commercial interactions, characterize work regulations at call centres

(Cameron 2000a, 2000b; Boutet 2008; Cowie 2007; Duchêne 2009a). The speed of translation and its automation emerge as a key issue in localization companies (Cronin 2003; Venuti 1992). Teaching appropriate communication and cultural skills, and testing language skills – as part of what Lorente (2010) calls the ‘script of servitude’ – is legion in the domestic worker industry. Productivity here is the number of phone calls answered, the number of successful transactions fulfilled, the number of words translated or the number of seconds needed to understand instructions. Taylorization looms and control over (linguistic) production operates within the strict dictates of rationalization and profitability.

These three areas also involve major economic issues in terms of managing multilingualism and, more precisely, the workforce: where can cost-efficient workers be found? In call centres, different answers were given: outsourcing to India (Sonntag 2006) or the Philippines (Friginal 2007) for English; to Senegal and Morocco for French, where workers have English or French language skills as part of their inheritance from colonialism and where labour is cheap; the location of call centres in poor bi- or multilingual areas such as in the Maritimes in Canada (Dubois *et al.* 2006) where the call centres provide services for Canada, including franco-phone Quebec, and the US, or in Biel/Bienne, a bilingual industrial city in Switzerland for the Swiss national market; the ‘importation’ of specific migrant workers for specific languages, for example, call centres in Ireland that advertise positions for call centres jobs at immigration facilities; finally, the positioning of multilingual call centres in big cities where a pool of multilingual yet low-qualified employees is available, for instance, in Zurich (Duchêne 2009a) or in Montreal (Roy 2003).

Similar questions arise in the case of localization companies: should a translation be outsourced to workers living in the country where the product will be used or should native speakers located in the country where the product is produced perform the translation? Both choices are contingent on cost-efficiency issues – it might be cheaper to employ workers in the target country, depending on the cost of local labour; however, they might have less training. The decision also hinges on the importance given to cultural adaptation – translators in the country where the product originates might be more familiar with the product, whereas local translators might be more aware of local ‘culture’ and thus more able to use appropriate language to describe the product.

In the case of domestic workers, the labour pool is also an issue (Lan 2003). Importing nannies from the Philippines, Latin America or from Africa as cheap labour is a booming business. Their language skills (English, Spanish and French) lend them an added value. Either the employers choose to hire someone who speaks the family language, or they decide to hire a nanny who can ‘teach’ their children another language, preferably a highly valorized one. Language skills and cheap labour accentuate the benefits on the part of the customer (Piller and Pavlenko 2009; Piller and Takahashi 2010).

This strategic decision making clearly indicates the status multilingual workers have in the organization of work itself. In these examples, language practices are highly standardized and controlled. Workers’ multilingualism also contributes to managerial decisions in terms of geographic location, that is in turn linked to the cost of the workforce and their linguistic skills. Managing language and workers explicitly places attention and action on the language of workers and can be considered as a neo-liberal institutionalization of multilingual practices.

This is actually feasible if the market is predictable and can be clearly targeted. However, this is not always the case. Not all languages of the world can be industrialized in the manner described earlier; however, with an increased circulation of people, an increased number of languages circulate as well, thus inducing situations in which a wide range of languages might become important to fulfil work duties. In the travel industry, for instance, it is not unusual

that passengers or hotel clients do not possess the language skills that were identified by businesses as the central ones. Problematic situations can occur involving language, for instance, a Mandarin-speaking passenger with no language skills in either French, English and German holding an invalid ticket at the airport in Zurich. In this case, the explicit management and regulation of target languages is of no help; for employees of the transit area in Zurich, English, German and French are the target languages regulated by evaluation processes at the recruitment stage.

However – and this is another way of managing multilingual resources – this problem could be solved by exploiting the existing multilingual repertoire of the workers, who are generally migrants working in marginalized places at the institutions, for instance the baggage worker or the cleaning woman. In this case, the management relies on a reduced inventory of people who happen to speak some kind of ‘exotic’ languages. At the airport, a long list is available online with all languages spoken by employees, who can then be called in to help. This list constitutes the key tool for managing unpredictable multilingual needs. There is no real concern on the part of the company for the quality of their language skills – a significant difference from institutionalized multilingualism – and this task is regarded as a natural service that workers provide to both the company and the customers. (The worker is often portrayed by the managers as a ‘colleague’ of the workers who serves as a translator.) For employees, the language service provided is often construed as rewarding, albeit in symbolic not financial terms – they are not paid. Becoming visible for a couple of minutes is regarded as a temporary promotion. For a brief instance their language competence is important for the company (see Duchêne 2011 for a detailed analysis of these issues).

In this example, Taylorization does not seem to be at issue. Multilingualism is not the object of control and standardization but rather the subject of soft management processes, such as a list. At the same time, these differences can be explained in the context of the value they hold for various tasks. Languages that are considered to be central for production and that pertain to a predictable market tend to be the object of specific attention of business and as such must be trained, controlled and managed in order to meet the Taylorist expectations. They are regarded as a commodity, and thus have to be carefully scrutinized. Languages outside an identified multilingual market, but that might serve the interest of the institution in a more unpredictable way, are constructed as natural and evident. Turning to workers who possess the unpredictable language skills actually constitutes a cost-efficient method of dealing with the diverse multilingual situations that emerge in businesses within the new economy.

These examples of the global internationalization of services highlight the role the management of workers plays with regard to multilingualism and how economic considerations and strategic decisions intersect with the resources available, the value of the services and the principle of cost-efficiency.

However different these movements are, they all indicate that multilingualism constitutes a commodity, a resource that has a specific value for business and that it wants to be managed in the most efficient way. However, if the ‘new’ management is new with regard to importance of language, it is not radically ‘new’ with regard to the work ideology behind it. The logic of cost-efficient productivity is in fact very similar to Taylorism. The methods of organization presented here obey the same logic as those of the classical industry (chain of production, accountability, flexibility, job insecurity). What is also not new is the reproduction of social inequalities with regard to social class, gender and ethnicity. The workers of the new economy – those who are exposed and who are the most vulnerable in terms of work stability – experience very much the same inequalities as did the factory workers of old. *Work* force is now *word* force (Heller 2010), *main d'oeuvre* is becoming *parole d'oeuvre* (Duchêne 2009a, 2009b); this

language labour can either be accidental or temporary, and constructed as evident and natural, or it can be industrialized and subject to regulation. In both cases, multilingualism is a commodity for the institution in power that wants to capitalize on the linguistic skills of its employees. However, in both cases workers do not profit materially from the added value of their multilingual repertoires.

### **The new economy: a threat or an opportunity for multilingualism?**

In this chapter we have attempted to sketch the ways in which the new economy capitalizes on multilingualism in order to access a multilingual market. We have also demonstrated that multilingualism is part of the new work order, and can be considered as both a process and a product in the new economy. We have given an overview of the globalized new economy, which seems to be much more multilingual than what we might commonly think.

One of the most debated topics today in sociolinguistics relates to whether or not the social and economic transformations we are experiencing constitute a threat to multilingualism (Duchêne and Heller 2007) and to what extent the new economy contributes to the homogenization of the linguistic market. Many researchers believe globalization processes correlate closely with the hegemony of English (e.g. Phillipson 1992, 2003).

We do not at all deny the fact that English often operates within the globalized new economy as a lingua franca and occupies a central place within the new political economy. However, we would argue that the phenomenon we observe today is rather more complex than simply the proliferation of English and its linguistic imperialism. In fact, and some of the findings presented earlier illustrate this, within every process of internationalization there is simultaneously a genuine concern about localization issues. The aforementioned research in fact stipulates that multilingualism can be regarded as both a practical necessity in terms of profitability and productivity and as a marketing strategy.

Having said this, it is important to stress that if multilingualism is held to be an important and enriching phenomenon, this does not mean at all that multilingual speakers receive the same benefits. First, not every language of the world – or every speaker – is equal in terms of economic relevance. Multilingualism is not an abstract thing; there are types of multilingualism that attain value or that can be turned into commodities. Second, language choice within the new economy – and thus the hierarchy of language – corresponds closely to market interests. As the globalized trade market is highly fluid and flexible – and in some ways difficult to predict – the multilingual word-force is a precarious thing, and depends on the transformation of the market itself. Third, multilingualism as a source of profit does not imply that the beneficiaries of this added value are the ones who produce it, i.e. the workers. Multilingualism, indeed, is a benefit mainly for the enterprises of the new economy.

We believe it is imperative to examine multilingualism and social change by constantly questioning the underlying principles of institutional, historical and economic conditions in which language practices are embedded (Duchêne 2008; Heller 2007). Many aspects remain to be understood and we do not believe we have reached the point where we can maintain that we know precisely what multilingualism signifies for the new economy. We have simply presented some ideas and thoughts. We do, however, believe that in order to further our appreciation of how multilingualism operates in the new economy, we must take key aspects into account. These include: (1) strategies of market expansion, i.e. which languages and which varieties for which market; (2) principles pertaining to services and products, i.e. how to best serve the client in which language, and how performing linguistically reflects identity and place, working toward eliminating accent or, on the contrary, viewing accent as proof of authenticity; (3) the

cost-efficiency principle, i.e. how to increase employee productivity, examining the links between qualification and language competences; and (4) the workforce available, i.e. how to exploit linguistic resources. By looking at these key aspects and asking these and other questions, we might be able to achieve a better understanding of the complexities of multilingualism in the new economy.

## Related topics

Multilingual workplaces; multilingualism and social exclusion; multilingualism and the media; disinventing multilingualism.

## Note

- 1 This interview was conducted by Mary Richards, a collaborator on the Canadian project, along with Alexander Duchêne.

## Further reading

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- Cameron, D. (2000) *Good to Talk? Living and Working in a Communication Culture*, London: Sage. (A fascinating account on the increasing stylization and standardization of talk in contemporary societies.)
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