

LANGUAGE AND COMPETITIVENESS: THINKING OUTSIDE THE (ENGLISH ONLY) BOX

Beverly-Anne Carter PhD
Centre for Language Learning
The University of the West Indies
St. Augustine Campus
Trinidad and Tobago



THE UNIVERSITY
OF THE
WEST INDIES

Overview of presentation

- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ Language and Competitiveness Project
- ▶ Initial outcomes of the Spanish, French and Chinese sub-projects
- ▶ Concluding remarks

English as *lingua franca*

- ▶ “There are two disadvantages in global language arrangements: one of them is not knowing English and the other one of them is knowing only English.”

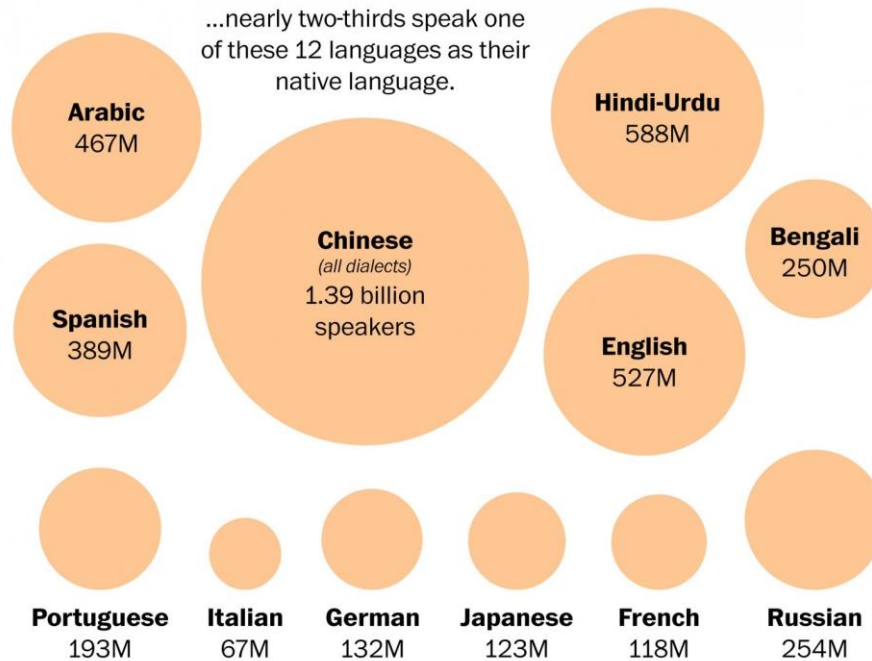
Prof. Joe Lo Bianco, Chair of Language and Literacy Education, University of Melbourne, Australia, cited in Born Global: Summary of interim findings
<http://www.britac.ac.uk/policy/Languages.cfm>

Languages with the most native speakers

Of the **7.2 billion people** on Earth...



...nearly two-thirds speak one of these 12 languages as their native language.



Sources: Ulrich Ammon, University of Düsseldorf, Population Reference Bureau

Note: Totals for languages include bilingual speakers.

THE WASHINGTON POST

CSA 2015 May 25–29...Fences,
Boundaries and Borders..Literal
and Imagined

Work culture in a globalised workforce



What we set out to do

Investigate TT's sociolinguistic profile to determine languages and proficiency needed to meet the economic and social challenges of a globalised environment

Document TT current and future language potential and its impact on country competitiveness, generally, and in certain key sectors

From UWI 2012–2017 Strategic Plan to L & C Project

Strategic Perspective: Research & Innovation



Strategic Theme & Goal: Faculty-led Research & Innovation



Language and Competitiveness: Positioning T&T for Sustainable Development



RDI FUND

THE UWI-TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT IMPACT FUND



LANGUAGE & COMPETITIVENESS

CSA 2015 May 25-29...Fences,
Boundaries and Borders..Literal
and Imagined

Language and Competitiveness project: some details

- ▶ UWI Research theme: Economic diversification and sustainable development
- ▶ Focus on research with impact
- ▶ Duration: 2 years; Funding: TTD0.5 million
- ▶ Multilingual and multidisciplinary and draws on primary data
- ▶ Pilot @ UWI St. Augustine; Fieldwork in T &T
- ▶ Mixed methods

5 Sub-projects (a)

Spanish-English
bilingual children:
Proficiency and
language
attitudes

French language
and cultural
competence in
the workplace

Trading with
China: Linguistic,
cultural and
sociological
factors in doing
business with
China

5 Sub-projects (b)

Language Audit to document foreign language capacity

Developing a Language Management Strategy in selected SMEs

Spanish sub-project (Landa)

- ▶ Investigate the language attitudes and linguistic development of the offspring of Spanish/English bilingual families in order to find ways of maximising their unique contribution to country competitiveness.
- ▶ Make recommendations for the education sector on maintaining and improving the proficiency of Spanish-English bilingual children.

Spanish sub-project: data collection, research methods, research challenges

1st phase:

- ▶ Survey distributed digitally to 120 families with small children with at least one L1 caregiver
- ▶ Low response rate n=43; <40%
- ▶ Lack of response perhaps due to family situation, immigration status etc.

2nd phase:

- ▶ Five families: 5 mothers and 13 children interviewed

Spanish sub-project: initial results (language attitudes)

- ▶ Caregivers self-report paying attention to the heritage language and culture in the home.
- ▶ Child respondents self-report that they value Spanish, but place more value on English as it is the language of schooling.
- ▶ Frequent and lengthier stays contributed to greater confidence in (speaking) the heritage language.

Spanish sub-project: initial results (linguistic proficiency)

- ▶ Elicitations in Spanish reveal a process of simplification, e.g.:
 - non-native phonological features,
 - reduced lexicon (knowledge of vocabulary limited to the field of the house and childhood),
 - erosion of inflexional morphology (errors in gender, number, case marking),
 - overuse of overt subjects in contexts where null subjects pragmatically more appropriate,
 - problems with complex structures, e.g. relative clauses and the use of pronominal reference

Spanish sub-project: some recommendations

- ▶ Saturday language classes
- ▶ Separation of monolingual from heritage learners in Spanish classes e.g. @ISPOS
- ▶ Content and language integrated learning
- ▶ Mandatory dual-language instruction

French language and culture in the workplace (Bukari)

1. How are French language skills valued in the workplace?
2. How is knowledge of French culture valued in the workplace?
3. How do individuals plan to develop their French language skills?
4. Why the need to develop French skills?
5. How can French language skills or cultural knowledge contribute to economic advancement?

French sub-project: profile of respondents

- ▶ N=97 (80% response rate)
- ▶ >80% = F
- ▶ >50% = aged between 18 and 34
- ▶ N =13 say French is the/an L1
- ▶ 65% belong to a professional occupation group (cf. NOCTT 2013)
- ▶ >50% respondents had a Bachelor's degree
- ▶ \approx 40% had a Master's degree

French adds value

- ▶ “My French language skills are viewed as a valuable asset to the work I do... one of the flagship initiatives that my organisation leads at the moment is an Internet-for-Development project in Haiti called Ayitic (www.ayitic.net)...the project relies on an institutionalised cooperation model involving three Haitian entities. My French skills are required to effectively communicate and give a sense of trust and confidence among the partners in the cooperation model as some of them can only communicate (or best communicate) in French.”

French doesn't add value

- ▶ “I honestly hold the view that my French language skills are not valued at my current workplace. I find this ironic and disappointing given that communication is a significant, if not the most crucial aspect of bilateral and multilateral negotiations. The ability to overcome this frontier could lead to favourable, economical and undoubtedly more speedily negotiated agreements. Yet, being someone who possesses this ability, I am yet to see it put to such use in this, or any other meaningful capacity.”

Language and competitiveness: the China example

- ▶ Language competence increases competitiveness in the global economy.
- ▶ The fastest growing languages in terms of economic power are Russian, Arabic and Simplified Chinese.
- ▶ e-GDP = \$pending (on and offline) of speakers of different languages
- ▶ English e-GDP: 48.4 % (2007) ≠ 36.3% (2013)
- ▶ Simplified Chinese: 6th/13 in terms of e-GDP

Trading with China



Trading with China

Engaging with China

1. How often does your company engage in business activity with Chinese companies?

- Very often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

2. Has your company encountered any challenges when conducting business with Chinese companies?

- Yes
- No

Prev

Next

Q3. Challenges of trading with China

- ▶ “In x (named city), communications were hindered due to language barrier between the principal factory owner/CEO and our English speaking team. One member’s level of Chinese was only at a basic level. This both pleased and amused the Chinese but there was insufficient fluency and mastery of Mandarin to communicate at a technical and commercial level.”

Q15. In 5+ years, how will Chinese be used by your company's employees?

- ▶ To entertain Chinese businessmen on trade missions to Trinidad and Tobago
- ▶ To produce promotional material for Chinese consumers
- ▶ To communicate during trade missions to China
- ▶ To respond to correspondence sent in Chinese

Thank you

▶ Gracias

▶ Merci

▶ 脣脣 Xiè xiè



CLL | **Centre for
Language Learning**

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES – ST. AUGUSTINE CAMPUS

