

# THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF LANGUAGE(S): A COMPARISON ACROSS DIFFERENT EUROPEAN CONTEXTS

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In today's global economy, language(s) can be considered a form of economic capital in a market of supply and demand (Grin 2003). The knowledge of more than one language constitutes therefore a skill that can be valorized economically just as any other competence in the business world. Similarly, the lack of multilingual competences of staff members can generate costs and a financial or competitive loss.

In this presentation, we compare the results of various studies exploring the economic value of language(s) in a number of different European contexts. Special attention will be dedicated to the influence of various macro variables on language use and language needs within private companies at a micro level. It is argued that (linguistic) parameters which operate on a societal level such as official language(s) of the region, geographic situation, market orientation and language educational policy generate different linguistic needs for businesses and thereby influence language power relationships.

Our starting point is recent research carried out in Brussels (Mettewie, Van Mensel & Belang 2006), the officially bilingual (French-Dutch) capital of Belgium that hosts a large number of international companies and institutions. For this study, two types of data were collected: survey data obtained by a web questionnaire (n = 350) and a qualitative analysis of structured interviews with human resource managers and recruitment experts of some 45 private companies and recruitment centers. The data from Brussels will be confronted with results from Switzerland (Grin & Ströbel 2001), the Netherlands, Denmark, Catalonia (Hagen 1992) and Scotland (Hall 2000). The comparison highlights the interdependence of business, market orientation and language education in providing - or not - linguistically competitive staff.

## References:

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