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How Many Languages Do We Need? The Economics of Linguistic Diversity

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Misperceptions of the intersection between race and taste lead to racial discrimination in schools (e.g., Chinese students in New York and Indians in London confronting cultural stereotypes and being perceived as weak) or in public spaces/outside schools, from adults/whites (e.g., Afro-Caribbeans facing race and style stereotypes of dangerousness and delinquency) are also confirmed in Chapter 4. However, in addition to minimal substantiation of discriminatory perceptions that affect academic success or aspirations, the research provides little evidence of peer culture leading to anti-school behaviors. Chapter 5 provides further self-reported peer explanations of conflict management, projecting toughness and physical fights not as forms of oppositional attitudes that are specific to youths living in disadvantaged environments, but as cultural resources for survival and for maintaining self-pride.

The application of the balancing acts theory to school (chap. 6) postulates two simultaneous social fields: school culture/adult culture characterized by mainstream cultural capital and expectations vs. youth cultures relying on non-dominant cultural capital (self-respect maintenance and popular music and style consumption). The fieldwork evidenced both successful balancing acts of maintaining peer status and meeting cultural expectations for school achievement and students' prioritizing one social world over another.

In Chapter 7, Warikoo investigates three main categories—gender, proximate groups, and consumption groups, with the view of tracing the ethnoracial boundaries in multi-ethnic school settings and their role in establishing peer-status hierarchy (the most and least popular ethnic groups). Her findings indicate loose social boundaries between groups, “blurred” boundaries in London teens' social interaction, and stronger racial and ethnic boundaries in the U.S. context, favored by highly anonymous school structures. Chapter 8 draws on another revision of the results obtained in a comparative qualitative research, and proposes four strategies for encouraging “students' balancing acts between their peer social worlds and academic achievement” (171).

This thoroughly documented study is a model of research: it employs complex investigative methods (ethnographic observations,

in-depth interviews and cross-national comparative analyses), and knits together the fieldwork with the author's personal experience. The approach, methodology, and clarity of presentation produce a convincing explanation of the ways in which peer cultures influence behaviors of second-generation urban youth and useful suggestions for improving academic achievement in similar settings.

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How Many Languages Do We Need? The Economics of Linguistic Diversity.

By Victor Ginsburgh and Shlomo Weber (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), ix + 232 pp. \$35.00/£24.95 cloth.

This book asks a deceptively simple question, and its deceptively simple answer is: four, or six, or thereabouts, if and when you are talking about how many official languages the European Union needs right now. The last half of the book is almost exclusively concerned with that question, and for good reason: it is perhaps the only currently vital language-policy debate for which a lot of data is available and in which language economists might have a voice. For that alone, this book should be considered an intelligent and timely contribution, albeit certainly not an offering that will be welcome to all. And beyond Europe, the many variables fed into these models should also stimulate critical reflection on what we mean by multilingualism, official languages, and the mostly forgotten question: who pays?

The key notion here is the concept of “linguistic disenfranchisement,” which is what happens to speakers when their language is not official. Despite the highly politicized and moralistic nature of the term, and notwithstanding a few quite soppy initial pages on the affective importance of languages (“My language is my homeland,” says the first chapter), the economists actually

argue that a certain degree of disenfranchisement is financially necessary, since the costs of absolute linguistic diversity lead to inefficient and potentially corrupt administrations. Once you accept that realist argument (and few moralists in the humanities want to entertain it seriously), once the question becomes how much disenfranchisement is tolerable, the calculations then concern how to wreak the least damage possible. The many factors usefully accounted for here include the structural distance between languages (since disenfranchised speakers will presumably learn to understand an official language close to theirs), how well foreign languages are actually spoken (Germans are thus potentially disenfranchised because they speak such good English), age grading (young people say they understand a lot more English), and translation costs (in fact the costs of maintaining the current 23 official languages of the European Union). In a moment of political elegance, the authors not only propose cutting the twenty-three languages down to six, but they then suggest transferring the savings to the countries whose citizens are thus linguistically disenfranchised. Those countries could then decide if they want to pay for the translation costs, or use the money to learn languages, build bridges, or whatever. Ginsburgh and Weber then calculate that, under the qualified majority voting system, the EU countries should now rationally accept a European Union with just six official languages (they only really need four, but a six-language solution would theoretically get the required votes).

And that is precisely where the question in the book's title becomes interesting in human terms: in an ideal political world, people themselves might eventually decide how many languages they need, as indeed we all do in our private lives. And they might decide with the same rationality that economists use in their models, as if quantities were the only reason available.

Beyond the stimulating polemics, there are many elements missing from these models, and not just in the eyes of humanists who praise priceless values. There is no precision, for example, about what is actually entailed in a language being "official"; there is no projection of the age-graded knowledge of English (the question might well become

"How long will we need to be multilingual?"); there is scant awareness of what happens when free online technologies radically reduce the costs of translation, as they should be doing now, nor of the way the statistical element in those technologies significantly reduces the impact of the structural distances between languages, on which much argumentation is based here.

This is an essential book for all the policymakers, linguists, and language ideologues who will not understand the mathematics of the economists' calculations. If the opacity of the science should connote authority or, alternatively, be parodied from positions of ignorance, those receptions would be misguided. At the end of the day, the economists are empirically fitting their ideas to our quantitative reality. If we don't like the fit, we can produce new ideas. In an age of austerity, though, we cannot ignore the question of who pays for all our languages.

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Thomas Hardy, Sensationalism, and the Melodramatic Mode. By Richard Nemesvari (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), xii + 245 pp. £60.00 cloth.

This is a most welcome addition to Hardy studies by an established scholar who has written on the Wessex Novels with adventurous independence of mind. Richard Nemesvari's book is the first full-length analysis of sensationalist and melodramatic motifs in Hardy's fiction. This project's ambitiously diverse and textured three sections canvass "growing Victorian anxieties about masculinity" (28); versions of female embodiment; and conceptions of modernity through seismic social change, especially class ferment. Nemesvari's opening gambit makes a compelling case for Hardy's conscious and sustained manipulation of the melodramatic mode. For Hardy melodrama becomes an aesthetically daring tool which exposes the staged and stultifying social