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# Language Market and its Basic Mechanisms

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## 0. INTRODUCTION

This is a paper discussing the basic mechanisms which determine the “market value” of languages. Theoretical issues will be discussed here based on concrete examples of Japanese which were discussed in an earlier paper.

## 1. Global Ranking of Language Market

### 1.1. Foreign Language Instruction

In the former paper (Inoue 1997) existence of market value was advocated, taking examples from linguistic situations in Japan, and intellectual and emotional values of languages were also pointed out. English and other European languages have appeared again and again in many statistics, having higher market values in Japan. Similar studies covering all the languages in the world seem to be possible. In this paper theoretical problems in the methods of calculating market values will be discussed.

The ranking of the market values of languages differs according to areas or Continents of the world. It is, for example, quite natural that the market values of languages in Northern Europe are quite different from those in Japan. Russian is still highly esteemed in the former Soviet Union, and in some African countries, French, Portuguese or German still acquire high value in the language market. The Japanese language seems to have higher value in east Asian countries than in other parts of the world.

The market values of languages are a reflection of international relations of the country and are very often influenced geographically. Geographical proximity and political relations often influence the popularity of languages in respective countries. Neighboring languages often have higher value in many countries of the world.

Thus, it would seem difficult to calculate the market value globally. But it also seems to be possible to calculate the world-wide market values of languages, if some suitable means are found. We can here again use an analogy of actual economical value; currencies of each country can be calculated in comparison with the US dollar and some other hard

currencies. Market values of respective languages can also be calculated in comparison with English and some highly valued languages.

The number of **foreign language learners** is a good and secure cue. The ranking order of languages learned in many countries can constitute a firm basis if gathered globally, and can be analyzed by computation for establishing the global ranking of languages.

Some people argue that language learning should be **reciprocal** in principle, and should be based on the amount of mutual communication between the states in question. In this sense numbers of learners of Japanese in Korea and those of Korean in Japan should be almost equal because the two countries are almost monolingual and use of both languages is mostly restricted to these countries (North Korea has limited international relations with other countries at present). However, actual numbers in both countries are quite discriminative. This case typically shows that language learning is not reciprocal.

Language learning may be governed by economical principles, and is proportional to the amount and direction of international flow of goods or capital, if taken broadly. This hypothesis is still to be proved, but there is a tendency that major languages with large economical powers are mutually learned in major countries of the world, and that minor languages are not taught in any country. In this sense, several thousand languages of the world are divided into two extremes, in being either learned reciprocally among major countries or ignored reciprocally. It is discriminatory if raw numbers of languages are considered because the number of the former languages is only within hundreds and the latter overwhelming bigger in several thousands. (Population-wise, however, the total number of native speakers of the latter languages is comparatively small.)

However, if considered minutely, language learning is often non-reciprocal even among the major languages pointed out above. For example, there are a great amount of learners of English, French and German in many countries, but only a few learners of other major languages (Portuguese, Japanese, Arabic, for example) in English (French and German) speaking countries. As for Japanese, it is taught in many countries, and the languages of those countries are taught in Japan almost reciprocally. However, actual treatment (number of learners) of the languages concerned are quite different.

Recently it has been argued by French and German teachers that less and less students learn those languages even in European countries, giving way to English. Statistics show that learners of French increased in United Kingdom but decreased in other countries, especially in Italy, Spain, Germany and Nigeria, while learners of English is increasing in European Community (European Commission 1995).

These cases suggest that language learning can be a cue for the market value of languages and it can be compared globally. Language education is a typical example of

**language industry**, though language education is often institutionalized by the state ignoring economical factors. Other examples of language industry are language usage in publication and mass media which usually reflect market values more faithfully (Inoue 1997).

## 1.2. Other Cues

Language use in international communication such as scholastic papers also offer good objective cues for comparative status among the major languages. The work by Tsunoda (1993) gives a general idea of transition of more than a century. The other data can be gathered and compared.

Use of languages in mass-media (broadcast, telecommunications, letters, e-mail, internet and so on) is reported in several papers suggesting overwhelming inclination of recent use of English worldwide.

## 2. Factors Which Determine Market Values of Languages

### 2.1. Basic Factors

There are multiple factors which influence this kind of scale of the market value of languages. It is not easy to explain this scale by one factor. Some factors will be enumerated which can possibly explain this kind of scale. Let us begin with factors which are easier to quantify and which seem to be related to the economical power of languages.

(1) The first factor is of course the **population of native speakers**. However, this basic information is not secure enough as Tanomura (1997) shows. This is an attempt to show the difference in the numbers of speakers according to scholars and years of statistics. Here we must ignore the notorious problem of what is one language and what is a dialect of another language. At least the ranking order of the major ten or so languages do not fluctuate so much. According to reliable statistics (Katzner 1995), the ranking order of major languages is: Chinese, English, Spanish, Hindi, Arabic, Bengali, Portuguese, Russian, Japanese and German from the viewpoint of native speakers. Japanese has many speakers ranking between 6th and 9th in recent statistics. But the number of native speakers does not seem to solely explain the present situation of global language market. The following index making use of speakers was thus advocated by a French geographer (Breton 1988).

(1') "**language diffusion index**" is the ratio calculated as

$$S/M$$

or number of second language speakers (foreign learners), divided by total populations of mother tongue (native) speakers. Breton points out on the basis of calculation in several



parts of the world (not globally) that this index seldom exceeds 1. English in Indian Subcontinent in 1961 was 56, but Hindi was 0.07. Russian in the former Soviet Union was 0.3 in 1970 and Ukrainian 0.16.

According to Whiteley (1969), the native speakers of Swahili is less than 1,000,000, while people using it as a second language is more than 10,000,000, making the diffusion index more than 10.

By this calculation, if considered globally, English at present shows a big value, though the diffusion index of English varies according to statistics. According to one calculation (Takeshita 1995), the number of native speakers of English is 300,000,000, and the number of people who use English for communicative use is 2,000,000,000. This suggests that the language diffusion index is nearly 6.7. This is quite a large index.

Japanese is said to be learnt by about two million (2,000,000) people in the world at present. As the total population of the Japanese is about one hundred and twenty million (120,000,000) the diffusion index of Japanese is less than 0.02 (or 2%). Thus Japanese is a medium-sized language situated in the middle position according to this index. The global indices for Hindi, Chinese and Indonesian are small though the sizes of the population of the native speakers are big, while learners are small. This ratio or index is better suited to explain the ranking order of the market value of languages than the simple key of population of native speakers.

However, when the number of native speakers is very small in endangered languages, this index may give a false impression. For example a dying aboriginal language Ainu in northern Japan can be said to be spoken more by scholars than native speakers, thus the diffusion index becomes very big. I have a friend who learned an Australian aboriginal language from the last speaker. After the informant was dead, he became the last second language speaker, and the diffusion index became from 1 to infinity. Dead language such as Latin and artificial language such as Esperanto should be given different diffusion index value other than infinite.

(2) The second factor to explain the market value is the numbers of countries or states using a language as an **official language**. When 163 countries were members of the United Nations, the following languages were used by the following number of countries as (one of) their official languages.

English	38
French	26
Spanish	21
Arabic	17

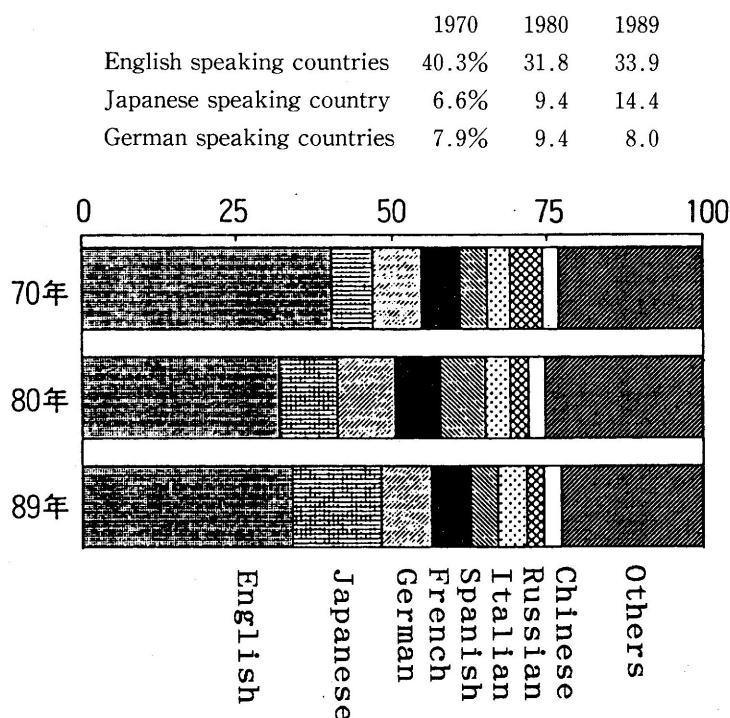
These are **multi-state languages** while Japanese, Thai and Icelandic for example are

**mono-state languages.** If a diplomat wants to speak with a delegation using their native languages, English is the most effective language. If the diplomat can speak the 4 languages above, he can approach nearly 100 countries using the partners' official languages. These languages are useful and profitable languages, and can be said to have high market values. The same reasoning can be applied to any international sales people and travelers.

(3) The third possible factor is the **economical power** of languages concerned. If one calculates Gross National Product of the languages, the following values are acquired as shown in **Fig. 1** (Miyajima 1997). Full GNP of English speaking countries such as the USA, Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand was added and half of the GNP of bilingual Canada was added and so on. In 1989 English value was monopolizing 1/3 of the world economical power, and other Indo-European languages occupy 1/3 in sum, making the total GNP of Indo-European languages about 2/3 of the world. As for non-Indo-European languages, the Japanese language occupy 14%, Chinese 2.7% and other languages have less than 1/4 in all. This order of economical power seem to correspond to popularity of languages or market values of languages, though there are inconsistencies.

The fluctuations of the market value of the Japanese language in the past (Inoue 1997)

Fig. 1. GNP of languages in the world.



shows that the market value of languages is often influenced by the economical growth and decline of the country of the respective languages. The demerit of this index by GNP, however, is that the figure is often influenced and distorted by fluctuations of the exchange rates. To add to this, the factor of economical power is not enough to explain the market value of languages.

(4) The fourth possible factor, **cultural or historical tradition**, is also important to explain the high values of French and German languages for example. It can be explained by splendid cultural assets accumulated in the past several centuries by French and German speaking people. Works in literature, philosophy and science are studied and translated even centuries later. We do not have handy quantitative index to represent the cultural value of the languages at present, but the amount of the translated books into other languages in the past may give a hint at this factor. (The recently nominated "world cultural assets" do not seem to influence this cultural value of languages concerned.) The amount of publication at present can also have explanatory power for the market value of languages.

(5) There are still other factors which influence the market value of languages. **Literacy** of the speakers is important in deciding the total volume of publishing in the respective language. The numeric values of literacy and amount of books and newspapers published for countries are available from UN statistics, showing fairly good correspondence with supposed economical power of languages concerned. However, literacy is not always decisive recently because use of the language in mass media, especially in TV is becoming more influential for flow of information among general public. The phenomenon of spill-over or unintentional leak of broadcast wave beyond the planned service area of satellite TV is now becoming an international issue in Asia. Lay people are beginning to face foreign languages as daily occurrences even in mostly monolingual countries. Popular culture of the young people over the world, especially popular music, is often based on the English language.

Factors which may explain the global market value of languages were discussed above. Demographic (1) (1') (2), economical (3) and cultural (4) (5) factors were found to be influential regarding the market value.

## 2.2. Political Factors: (Non-)Official Languages

In this section, political or sociological status (or treatment) of languages themselves will be discussed.

Languages can be first subdivided into (A) official and (B) nonofficial languages. This is one of the most important factors influencing the market value of languages. (B)

**nonofficial** languages usually have lesser market values. But (A) **official** languages are different in market values, too. As shown in Noro (1995) and Inoue (1997) the languages taught in language schools and universities in Japan are in principle official languages of some countries. Latin, (Greek,) Sanskrit, Esperanto and Cantonese are rare examples.

In India 15 official languages have retained native speakers (and have increased as the population has grown) for several decades of recent national censuses, but other non-official languages are losing speakers though population is growing in the respective areas (Mahapatra 1991).

When correlated with political powers (state), the distinction between the official and non-official languages become more complicated. Many languages (European languages and Arabic) are used in more than one country as will be stated later, while several languages in East Asia are used in only one country. The former type, multi-state languages have more market values because they are sustained by more than one political power. The languages used as an official language in a large state while used also in a smaller state are called **roofed** language (e.g. French in Belgian), while those with no official languages outside are called **roofless** languages (e.g. Basque in France).

### 2.3. Political and Social Factors: Language and State

Languages of the world can be further divided into several groups if we introduce another principle of patterns of social and political usage. Official and non-official languages will thus be each divided into a few groups, as follows.

#### (A) **official** languages.

There is a ranking order (or a continuous scale) even among official languages, and sometimes two extreme groups seem to exist. The distinction (and also a discrimination) between several “**major**” languages and tens of “**minor**” languages (completely ignoring other non-official languages) in Japanese academic circles is a necessary evil reflecting reality. This distinction is connected with political powers.

#### (0) **Monopolizing** language: only one, English.

The first is English. It is now the sole language for air control world-wide. It is also the most popular language for the computer industry. Many bilingual signs and posters are written in English and some other languages in the airports and many other places in the world. It is a common colloquial language of the “Summit” congress of major political powers.

#### (1) **Leading**, Powerful languages: about ten languages.

These are languages of the leading countries in Europe or Asia. 5 or 6 official languages of the United Nations belong to this group: (English,) French, Russian, Spanish, Chinese,

(Arabic). German and Japanese may be said to belong here.

(2) Other Official languages of the order of 100.

114 different languages were official languages when there were 163 states belonging to UN in 1980, according to statistics by Shimomiya (1981). Official languages except those listed above belong to this group. These are languages with armed forces, having national power at the back. This group of languages is mostly used only domestically.

(B) **non-official** languages.

(3) **Powerful** non-official languages, or minor languages of the order of 1000 : Some languages in India, Kurdish, Fukian (Chinese dialect) are good examples. There are very many non-official languages in India (Mahapatra 1991). They sometimes play an important role when national spirit is necessary for independence.

(4) **Powerless** languages (= minor language), again of the order of 1000. These languages have had less and less speakers recently, and young speakers are becoming mostly bilingual. Often they have no written records because there was no tradition of writing.

(5) **Endangered** languages of the order of 1000. These languages have no young speakers now, and they are in a way sentenced to death. Linguists argue that more than one hundred languages will die away, gradually losing bilingual speakers (Robins & Uhlenbeck 1991).

(6) **Dead** languages: these are languages with no living speakers. Many languages are being lost day by day. Recently the last speaker of Sachalin dialect of Ainu language passed away. Hokkaido dialect of Ainu has again been revived, but the future is not bright enough as will be discussed later.

This scale of powers of language is only speculative. Actually the relation between language and political state is not simple. For example, a language with several million speakers is a large language in a small (multilingual) country, but a minority language in a large country such as India and China. They can be called powerful minority languages and they do not belong to the typical "endangered languages", though some of these languages are beginning to lose their speakers because of bilingualism with a larger official language.

Nowadays, languages are dead not because their native speakers pass away, but because their speakers become bilingual and stop speaking the languages which are low in diglossia. In other words **social death** of languages is more influential than **natural death**. We should also take into account the distinction of the so-called **language murder** and **language suicide** (Inoue 1996).

### 3. Inequality of Languages

### 3.1. Inequality of Languages by Domains

**Domains** or social circumstances of language use should also be taken into consideration for classifying languages. Objective calculation has been proposed by Canadian scholars using the concept of “**vitality rate**” of languages (McConnell et al. 1993-).

Here too, many cues are available to measure the market values in various countries. The selection of languages taught at universities is a good index to distinguish the differences, because this kind of statistic is officially open to the public, and easily comparable world-wide, if somebody wants to acquire such information.

Domains or situations can also be classified on a continuous scale from high to low. This scale seem to show some resemblance with the **High - Low** scale among languages advocated in the study of diglossia. Socially High language are used in higher domains such as higher education, mass-media and administration and so on, while socially Low languages are not.

### 3.2. Cultural Factors

The following scales also seem to reflect (have power in explaining) the market value of languages. Scales of ranking should be elongated to the direction of more minor languages.

(a) **Education.** As for the use of language in education, languages can be divided according to the education system. This kind of data has been widely accumulated by Canadian scholars (McConnell et al. 1993-). But exact numeric value world-wide is not clear yet. The distinction below shows not only the social function but also the degree of modernization of lexical system of the languages in question.

1. languages used in university education (or completely suited for any discipline of scientific research). The numbers of this kind of language seem to range between 20 to 30 at first hand, and less than 100 languages at most (there are only 114 official languages as pointed out above).

2. languages used in high school education: ca 100-200 languages ?

3. languages used in primary school education: ca 1000- languages ?

4. languages used in kindergarten education and first years of primary school: 1000-languages ?

5. languages not used in education at all: several thousand languages ?

(b) **Writing, Literature.** In connection with this, languages can be classified in a different way according to use in literature. The above classification is related because language used for instruction is always a language which has a definite written system. Languages with a long and large tradition of literature and scientific works are profitable

in learning, and are highly valued in the language market.

1. rich tradition of literature: tens of languages ?
- 1'. newly written: less than 100 languages ?
2. less tradition (and customs) of writing: several thousand languages ?
3. no tradition of writing: several thousand languages ?
4. no linguistic records: -1000 languages ?

Setting political and economical factors aside for a while, we can also think of a cultural or educational scale of languages in the world. This kind of scale may seem to include only domestic problems, but it also indirectly influences the market value of languages. Highly esteemed and highly performing languages give higher profits in return in language learning.

### 3.3. Scale of Languages: Historical Trends

So far, we have enumerated many factors which will influence the market value of languages. Thus, there are actually many indexes to explain or establish the market value of languages.

All in all, the distinction of languages is quite sharp, and languages are now experiencing a severe trial of survival. Among world languages with the order of several thousands, only a small amount are vigorous enough to have a large number of native speakers, language learners, political background, use in mass-media, stable written system, good literacy rate and so on. Most of the languages lack one or some of these qualifications. Even among the languages which satisfy these qualifications, difference is broadening.

However we should not forget another aspect of language: the pathetic, affective or **emotional factors** (Inoue 1997). Language is often utilized in order to raise feelings of national identity. Language can work as a **symbol of unity** of a nation. A former powerless, small language is given artificial qualifications for survival as stated above. In this case economical principles do not work, and state policy prevails instead. Collapse of the former Soviet Union and Eastern countries and economical unification of Western European countries at the end of the 20th century (or at the end of the second millennium) has provoked many interesting sociolinguistic problems which are worth pursuing for years continuously.

However, things are not so simple, as has been observed so far. To make matters more complicated, historical fluctuations of the market of the languages are also observed. There is a tendency today for the world languages to be separated into two poles or **two extremes**. That is, one tendency towards leading or major languages, and another tendency

towards dead languages, through endangered languages. In other words, languages on the rising waves and languages on the falling waves. For linguists, it is a pity because they are now losing objects of study year by year. But we must honestly admit this reality. We should also point out that many languages are now losing young speakers mostly because the languages are losing their market values. Young speakers are now aware that they cannot earn anything by just speaking the language.

Anyway, it is interesting that the fate of endangered languages is widely discussed at the end of this century. In the middle of this century, people were more concerned with the fate of total human beings owing to fear of nuclear wars. Ironically enough, we became interested in the destiny of minority languages because we do not have to worry about destiny of ourselves. Problem of endangered languages is thus a symbol of world peace.

#### 4. Difficulty of Languages

##### 4.1. Absolute Difficulty

So far the discussion has been around economical, social and cultural factors surrounding language, that is, the external, extra-linguistic factors. However, the internal linguistic factors should also be considered in order to fully explain the market value of languages in the world.

The number of students learning foreign languages is not pure reflection of the market value of languages. It is sometimes rather a reflection of the difficulty of the languages. This point of view was not popular in pure linguistics, as the concept of the market value was not. Secular ideas of language were full of prejudice, so linguists in the past were eager to get rid of prejudicial views of languages. Linguists did not want to bring discrimination into languages. However, we must admit that there are differences of difficulty among languages.

In differentiating languages by difficulty, we should discern two kinds of difficulties: one, relative difficulty and another, absolute difficulty. Relative difficulty is realized in learning other languages and is influenced by one's native or first language. This facet will be discussed later.

**Absolute difficulty** is realized when **acquiring one's native language**. Thus, no one can compare the absolute difficulty of two languages by oneself, except for perhaps ideal bilingual children exposed to two languages at the same time in the same way. Linguists argue that all languages are equal because anyone can acquire a language in one's circumstances. Linguistics students are thus told that there are no differences in difficulty between languages because any speaker can manage to speak his or her native language. But it is



common sense that there are individual differences in ability of managing (native) language. Part of these differences is connected with inherent differences of difficulty of the language. There definitely are differences of difficulty. It can be conveniently discerned by the ages when a native speaker child acquire one's language skill. At a certain age level, some aspects of a certain language can be used in the same way with an adult, while those of other languages may be difficult to use. People are aware of this kind of difficulty and children are often exempt from mistakes or misuses of certain aspects of language until at a certain age level.

Absolute difficulty is a function of **structural complexity** of the language. At present the absolute difficulty can be estimated by considering at what age a child effectively masters his or her native language. Studies of language acquisition will make the quantitative comparison possible in the future.

To take phonetics for example, the Japanese language has only five vowels and about 12 consonants, which is simpler than most European languages. Japanese children can acquire the pronunciation at the age of 5 or 6. But a child brought up with Arabic acquires the most difficult pronunciation of the glottal sound very late in his or her childhood. Adults who have mastered Arabic do not blame the children for not being able to pronounce the difficult consonant properly.

Turning to an example of grammar, Ferguson (1959) points out that the morphological difficulty can be said to be less if there are systematic morphophonemics, less categories of nouns, systematic paradigm (of verbs) and less strict agreement. A similar argument is possible in other facets of grammar. Languages with simpler grammatical rules are easy to learn even for native speaker child.

Degrees of difficulty can also be pointed out in lexical items. The lexicon is more simple and systematic if lexical items are correlated in form and in content, thus the meaning being transparent. Languages which express things with combination of independent words are easier to use. Languages with many synonyms having minute nuances (like Japanese, with words of Japanese, Chinese and European origin coexisting) is more difficult than languages which do not have many synonyms.

Sociolinguistic rules should also be considered. The Japanese honorific system of showing respect for others is grammatically rather complicated, but sociolinguistic rules for application to actual situations are much more complicated. Mistakes are often made in conversation either in the form of overuse or insufficient use of the system. Japanese people are aware of the difficulty, and children and foreigners are permitted even if they talk without honorifics. Foreign students are sometimes recommended to begin conversation with poor Japanese, so that their honorific usage would be treated generously. Even

university students are exempt from correct or proper usage of the honorific system. This custom shows that the Japanese language is absolutely difficult in honorifics.

The writing system is an independent problem which also regulates the difficulty of languages. The Japanese writing system is so complicated and difficult that even the intellectual adult cannot write sentences without sometimes using a dictionary.

The Japanese language is considered medium on the absolute difficulty scale, when honorifics and the writing system are ignored. As children and foreigners are sometimes exempt from correct usage of language, the Japanese language can be said to be easy for beginners, but for native speakers it is a difficult language. Even an intellectual adult cannot read some words, and may make mistakes in honorific usage and in writing.

In other words, languages which can be utilized with **less initial investment** is absolutely easy. This kind of language can be spoken with a shorter period of learning; a small child can acquire language skill quite early. Grammatical complexity mainly determines the initial investment. In this sense the **classical typological classification** of world languages should be reevaluated. Chinese, an isolated language according to the classical typology, is easy to learn if only the grammatical system is considered because it has no grammatical inflections or declensions. In this sense, English is better suited for an international language, because its grammatical structure has been simplified more than other Indo-European languages. The English grammatical system was once as complicated as present day Scandinavian and German languages, but English was simplified because it has been spoken by foreigners for a long time in its history. It is interesting that the English language which was once an inflectional language has developed prepositions and auxiliary verbs and has become a little similar to an agglutinative language like Japanese, which is theoretically simpler than inflectional languages in grammar.

Degrees of linguistic complexity can be measured by numerical values if a trustworthy technique is invented. Recent trends for typology of world language will develop in that direction. However, objective quantitative comparison of the absolute difficulty of languages is still imperfect.

#### 4.2. Relative Difficulty and Language Education

In contrast to the absolute difficulty discussed above, concrete data on **relative difficulty** of languages have been made public recently. Relative difficulty is important for **language education**, and experiences of teachers for years can be utilized for comparison.

**Table 1** shows the relative difficulty of languages for English speaking people, which is a revised table of difficulty published by the Department of States of the USA (cited in Chino 1987). This table shows the total hours necessary for acquiring a foreign language

Table 1. RELATIVE DIFFICULTY OF LANGUAGES FOR AMERICAN DIPLOMATS

Difficulty	Group 1 Easy	Group 2 Medium	Group 3 Difficult	Gr4 most Difficult	
Germanic	*Afrk *Dans *Germ *Norw *Swed *Dutc				6
Indo-European	*Creo *Fren *Hait *Ital *Port *Rumn *Span	Bulg Dali Fals Grek Hind Urdu	Bengl *Czech Nepal *Polis Serbo-Croat Russ Sinhl		20
Others	*Swhl	Indns Mala	Amhal Burm *Finn Hebr *Hungr Khmr Laot *Pilp Thai Tamil *Turk *Vetn	Arab Chin Japn Kore	19
SUM	14	8	19	4	45

\* Alphabetic writing languages

(Chino 1987)

and the degree of achievement according to level of linguistic ability of students. This is based on many years of experience in training young diplomats. Information on historical relationship of languages was added to the table, which showed close correlation. Historically cognate languages, especially all of the Germanic languages, are ranked as the easiest languages for English speakers. Other Indo-European languages (except Germanic languages) are scattered between easier languages of the Group 1 and rather difficult languages of Group 3. Most of the other (non-cognate) languages belong to the Group 3 of rather difficult languages. Japanese, Korean, Chinese and Arabic are considered to be the most difficult languages of Group 4. Information on writing system was added in this table by the sign of \* showing alphabetic writing languages. Languages with the same system of scripts belong to easier groups. These are good examples of the degrees of relative difficulty for English speakers.

Similar data was collected and assessed from the view of Japanese speakers. A language school in Tokyo reported a result of a small survey after some years of actually teaching languages (Japan Times 1997). **Table 2** is redrawn to show the mutual relations of English and Japanese speaking people. The vertical lines show degrees of difficulty for Japanese learners, horizontal columns degrees for English speakers which was shown in

Table 2. RELATIVE DIFFICULTY OF LANGUAGES  
FOR AMERICAN AND JAPANESE LEARNERS

Difficulty for Japanese Learners	Difficulty for American Learners				
	Group 1 Easy	Group 2 Medium	Group 3 Difficult	Gr4 most Difficult	
Group 1 Easy	Swhl	Indn Malay	Turk	Kore	5
Group 2 Medium	# Span # Ital # Port		Viet	Chin	5
Group 3 Difficult	# Fren # Germ	# Greek	# Czch Thai Hungr		6
Group 4 Most Difficult		# Hind # Urdu	# Russ	Arab (# Engl) (Japn)	5
SUM	6	5	6	4	21

# Indo-European languages

table 1. Swahili, which is used as a lingua franca in African countries for commercial interchange, is considered easy for both learners, and Arabic, with different word structure and consonant-representing writing system, is difficult for both learners. However, the overall correlation between English and Japanese learners does not seem to be high. Instead, English and Japanese learners seem to show partly reverse correlation when Indo-European languages are considered. The Indo-European languages which are marked by # in Table 2 are distributed in the lower left-hand side, showing that these languages are generally easy for the American while difficult for the Japanese. In the upper right-hand side are Asian languages, showing that they are easier for Japanese learners. It is especially noteworthy here that Korean is easiest for the Japanese while it is one of the most difficult languages for English speakers. It is well known that Korean is similar to Japanese in grammatical structure (word order, above all) and lexical items.

In this context it is suggestive that Indonesian and Malaysian which are descendants of Malay, that is, another example of lingua franca, are treated as easier groups for both Japanese and English learners in Table 2. Structural simplicity of these languages and Swahili is a topic worth pursuing. These languages may be typical absolutely easier languages.

The results above clearly show that there definitely is relative difficulty of languages independent of absolute difficulty. It has been pointed out that results of International proficiency tests of English (TOEFL for example) show fair correlation with historical relationship between languages, suggesting that structural similarity is important for relative easiness of learning. In other words English is easier to learn for most European (and American) speakers, while it is difficult for East Asian learners. (English is treated as one of the most difficult languages for the Japanese learners in Table 2. We should take note, however, that English has been taught for more than nine years to average learners in Japan, and that requirement level of this language may be higher than the other languages.)

These phenomena reconfirm the theoretical surmise that the relative difficulty is governed by two factors: absolute difficulty of the target language and its similarities with the first language. The latter factor is different for respective languages, but the former factor is universal world-wide.

English has been disseminating recently perhaps because of two factors. One is the extra-linguistic economical background as discussed in the earlier sections. The other is the smaller degree of linguistic difficulty: English has absolute grammatical simplicity if compared with other European languages. It can be added that, in terms of relative difficulty too, English is an easier foreign language for the speakers of most European countries which also have large economical power. Thus English language has strong supporting parties besides its own members.

According to several opinion polls, the average person in Japan often chooses English as the language to be acquired. An opinion poll by a newspaper in the 1980s showed that 35% prefer English while 14% prefer Chinese if they have a chance to learn a foreign language (59% answered, however, that they do not want to learn any foreign language). Chinese is selected perhaps because they are geographically neighboring languages, and also because they are considered to be acquired easily, just because similar writing systems with Chinese characters are used. Also Japanese students sometimes select Spanish as a third language at universities because its pronunciation is easy for Japanese people. They take relative difficulty into consideration.

## 5. Towards Multi-lingual World in the Future

Though one may feel reluctant to admit it, there exists several aspects of **inequalities** among languages in the world, as has been discussed so far. For someone born in an English speaking environment, it is easy to communicate in his native language in many situations. But for those who were born in the countryside in a small country speaking a non-official

language, the first thing they must do in school is to acquire the official language (or medium of instruction) of their country. And still, they must learn another language if they want to be active nationally or internationally in their later life. This is a destiny which most African and Asian (including Japanese) people share at present. It must be pointed out that the existence of differentiated market values of languages is unreasonable, leading to inequalities of basic human rights. From the standpoint of humanity, there should not be differences in the market value of languages. It is discriminating that one person is privileged because s/he can discuss or travel around the world in his or her mother tongue, and another person having the inconvenience of having to learn a foreign language in order to get education, to pursue academic question and to travel abroad.

So-called **English (language) imperialism** seems to be prevalent all over the world at present. Language is said to be the last resource (and industry) of England, as historical change of budget of British Council typically shows (Aono 1998). However, idealistically if all human beings can speak two languages things would be different. If everybody could use a native language and another foreign language, we could communicate more easily.

This logic is similar to the one advocated after the Second World War to propagate "Common Language" among school children in Japan. There is, however, a great difference. Native speakers of English or some other major languages are expected to learn some other foreign language in the ideal language education, while in "Common Language" education for dialect speakers, speakers of Tokyo dialect were not expected to learn any other dialect. In the ideal language education which aim at birth of many quasi-bilingual speakers, speakers of all languages are treated equally. There actually is a movement towards bilingual education in Europe (Bressand 1995). Ironically, however, many European people who are forced to learn a foreign language select English, making discrimination of languages more prominent.

The movement of Esperanto aimed at dissemination of an artificial language world-wide which is nobody's mother tongue. The driving force of Esperanto seems to have diminished partly because English is becoming the *de facto* world standard. In the near future, more and more people will shift to English as the first foreign language, because its market value is rising. India and Japan are good examples. Statistics tell, however, that less students are willing to learn foreign languages in English speaking countries like the USA, Great Britain, and Australia.

It may seem quite contradictory but production of **quasi-bilingual speakers** world-wide will enlarge the speakers of English still more, and the English language may seem to monopolize the world. However, if native speakers of English pay more attention to the other languages, people of non-English languages have more chances to utilize their native

languages in international communication. This phenomenon can now be observed often in Japan, where fluent foreign speakers of Japanese can be seen in the media and on the street. As the language market is in principle free economy (though selection of a foreign language in school education is partly planned economy), demand and supply of language learners will balance in the long run. There are also learners who pay more attention to the pathetic or emotional value of language (discussed in Inoue 1997). Business people agree that use of native language of the respective country is profitable for business contract, and also for personal relations. We can be optimistic for the future of language learning, if language education prospers in the future. There are many reasons to believe that language education will prosper as one of basic industries of the world. Mankind will have more spare time in the future; tools for language education will develop; chances of international communication will increase.

We should realize that the market value of languages exists, and that the market principles work discriminately. And then, through language education for those who need it, this discriminatory situation can be avoided. Knowing a foreign language widens learners' world view. It also enlarges equality of basic human rights. **Language education** is often controlled by discriminatory market economy. However, it is also a sublime activity aiming at equal treatment of human beings.

There is a joke about a skeleton in Japan. A man exhibited a skeleton of a warrior knight Minamoto Yoritomo who was known to have had a big head. A spectator protested, "This skeleton is too small for the famous warrior knight." The man answered, "Oh, this is a skeleton of him as a child." Of course one cannot have two skeletons. But as for language one can have ability to use at least two languages. One can become bilingual. And nowadays many people want to acquire another language.

There is another joke concerned with language use. A teacher asked his students the following questions.

"What is the word for people who speak many languages?"

students answered: "multilingual",

"What, then for people who speak three languages?"

students answered: "trilingual",

"Then, people with two languages?"

students answered: "bilingual",

"Then what is the word for people who speak one language?"

students answered: "monolingual",

the teacher said, "No, it is American".

When I used this joke in England, the listeners did not look very impressed, and one

of them told me afterwards that he had known this joke, but that the last portion was not "American" but "British".

I would like to point out in this paper that this joke may change in the near future. The people with two languages may become "ordinary people", and those with one language exceptional. That is, all human beings will speak his native language and one foreign language. This is the best means to partly achieve equality of native languages of all the speakers of the world.

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## 言語市場と基本的メカニズム

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### 要約

この論文では、言語の市場価値を国際的に計量する手段を論じる。

まず言語の市場価値を知る手段として、世界の外国語教育の趨勢をみる。これは「言語産業」の典型だが、他に出版物や、メディアでの使用状況も手がかりになる。

次に言語の市場価値の説明を試みる。人口(母語話者数、外国語としての学習者数)、経済力(国民総生産)、文化的要因などが指摘される。言語の市場価値に関連して、言語がその国でどんな政治的・社会的位置にあるかについても分類を試みた。公用語として扱われているかが重要であるが、話し手が国内で占める数的優位性も関わる。教育などでの位置(活動範囲)も関係がある。

また、外国語としての学習者数は、言語の難易度に影響されることもある。難易度はまた、絶対的難易度と相対的難易度に分けられる。言語体系の単純さと、相互の類似が手がかりになる。

英語は、市場価値からいっても、難易度からいっても、有利な立場にある。しかし言語の市場価値の違いは、人々に差別をもたらす。その解消のためには、世界の人が2言語を使えることが望ましい。

世界の諸言語には格差があり、そこに経済原則が貫徹するように見える。しかし一方で、言語の感情的・情的側面を見逃してはならない。

キーワード                      言語市場      市場価値      語学プログラム