Article

International Sociology
2014, Vol. 29(1) 56–74

DOI: 10.1177/0268580913519461
iss.sagepub.com

Transnational linguistic capital: Explaining English proficiency in 27 European countries

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Abstract

Foreign language proficiency in general and proficiency in the world's most widely spoken language, English, are central resources to participate in the globalisation process. Drawing on a survey conducted in 27 European countries the article attempts to explain the huge differences in English proficiency that exist between and within countries. The author presents a general explanatory model for foreign language proficiency, creates hypotheses from this model and tests them empirically by using multilevel techniques. The findings show that the prevalence of a respondent's native language, the linguistic difference between one's mother tongue and English, and age affect language acquisition negatively, whereas a country's level of education has a positive influence. Using Bourdieu's theory of social class, the author shows that besides other factors a respondent's social class position and the level of education are important micro-level factors that help to increase a person's transnational linguistic capital.

Keywords

Europe, globalisation, linguistic capital, multilingualism, multilevel analysis, Pierre Bourdieu, transnationalisation

Since the second half of the twentieth century, the extent, frequency and speed of exchange and interconnectedness between different nation-states and different world regions have increased enormously, a process described in the literature as globalisation (cf. Held et al., 1999).[1] Europe has experienced especially extensive changes. The creation of a common market has advanced cross-boundary economic processes and promoted inter-European trade, value-added chains and transnationalisation of financial capital (Fligstein, 2008).

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As the world system consists of different nation-state 'containers' (Taylor, 1994) and as most nation-states have different official languages, participation in globalisation is among other things dependent on people's ability to speak the languages of others. Two forms of what we call transnational linguistic capital can be distinguished (Gerhards, 2012).[2] One can simply count the number of foreign languages a respondent speaks. The more languages one speaks the more transnational linguistic capital one possesses. However, if transnational linguistic capital is taken as a resource to communicate with other people, the utility of a language largely depends on the number of speakers who can be reached with that foreign language. Hence, every language has a communicative value (cf. de Swaan, 2001) and knowledge of a prevalent and widely spoken foreign language is a more important resource than is knowledge of a language only spoken by a few.

We will therefore concentrate on the analysis of foreign language proficiency in the world's most widely spoken foreign language, English (Crystal, 2003).[3] Those who speak the lingua franca English can more easily work abroad, do business and diplomacy in an international context, cooperate academically, organise protests across national boundaries, or enter into romantic relations with people from other countries. In short, they can socialise transnationally in a number of different dimensions (for an empirical overview on the effects of multilingualism see Koehn and Rosenau, 2002; Parey and Waldinger, 2011). And as one can assume that transnational linguistic capital is not distributed equally it therefore might become a new measure of social inequality in today's increasingly globalised world.

The question central to our study is to what degree citizens in 27 European countries possess transnational linguistic capital and how to explain the differences in English proficiency both between and within the countries.

Before we start it might make sense to put our study in the context of the state of the art. There exists a broad literature from other disciplines like linguistics, psychology and social psychology trying to explain foreign and second language acquisition (see overviews by Auer and Wei, 2007; Bhatia and Ritchie, 2006; Gardner, 2005). These approaches differ from our attempt to explain foreign language proficiency. It seems, however, that the different attempts are not contradictory. Instead, they focus on different aspects and variables which impact on foreign language acquisition. Most of the research conducted by linguists and psychologists focus on individual characteristics, the learning situation, classroom features, student-teacher relationship and the level of integration of language learners in a social group. Gardner's famous socio-educational model, for example, distinguishes between three dimensions which influence language acquisition (Gardner, 2006): integrativeness, attitudes towards the learning situation and motivation. Although Gardner mentions that external factors like socio-economic milieu or cultural background are important factors which influence the probability of language learning, in his empirical work he focuses on the three dimension of the core model only. In contrast, our research takes these neglected, external factors into consideration ignoring, however, personal characteristics and features of the specific learning situation and the group a student is integrated in. We analyse, for example, whether the level of education and size of a country, or one's social class position impacts on the likeliness to speak English as a foreign language.

Theoretical framework: Explaining transnational linguistic capital

The communicative value of a language is defined by the number of communication partners which can be reached by a foreign language. It is calculated from the sum of a language's native speakers and the number of persons speaking this language as a foreign language. Based on the Eurobarometer dataset we have analysed which languages are the most widely spoken languages in the 27 countries (either mother tongue or foreign language). As one could have expected English is the most widely spoken language as 45.9% of Europeans are able to communicate with one another in that language, followed by German (28.7%), French (22.4%), Italian (14.9%) and Spanish (12.8%). If one takes into consideration not only the European language constellation, but the number of people who speak English beyond Europe, the communicative value of English is even much higher. Compared to Chinese, which is the language that has the most native speakers, English is more widely spread across different regions of the world than any other language (Crystal, 2003).

The degree to which the citizens of the 27 European countries speak English can be seen in Table 1. The analysis is based on a Eurobarometer survey (Eurobarometer 63.4). Whereas the first column shows the percentage of people who speak English either as their mother tongue or as a foreign language, the second column indicates those who speak English as a foreign language only.

As the results show, there are huge differences between the countries, reaching from countries in which English is the official language (United Kingdom, Ireland, Malta), to small, highly modernised countries like Denmark, Sweden, Luxembourg and Finland, where English is not the official language but nevertheless more than 80% claim to speak English, down to many Eastern European countries, in which 15–26% say that they speak English well enough to have a conversation. In addition, there are high levels of variance within any given country meaning that there are citizens with high levels of transnational linguistic capital as well as people without any in every given European country. In the following we will concentrate only on those people who speak English as a foreign language. How can one explain the differences in English proficiency between and within countries?

Explaining foreign language acquisition by natives – people who did not migrate to another country – is something which social scientists have not really paid attention to.[4] However, there is an extended literature which tries to explain *immigrants'* second-language proficiency (e.g. Braun, 2010; Chiswick, 2007; Chiswick and Miller, 2001; Espenshade and Fu, 1997; Esser, 2006; Lieberson, 1970; Van Tubergen and Kalmijn, 2005). Although immigrant linguistic adaptation occurs under different circumstances than foreign language learning of natives, one can rely on this branch of literature to develop a theoretical model and to deduce a set of hypotheses.

Chiswick and Miller (2001), Chiswick (2007), Van Tubergen and Kalmijn (2005) and especially Esser (2006) have summarised the various concepts (e.g. Espenshade and Fu, 1997; Lieberson, 1970) and have tried to link the explanation of foreign language acquisition with a general theory of social behaviour. According to them, language learning depends on three general conditions: (a) on the opportunities for learning a new lan-

Table 1. English proficiency in 27 countries of the European Union.

	Percentage of people who speak English either as their mother tongue or as foreign language	Percentage of people who speak English as foreign language
EU-27	**45.9**	**33.8**
United Kingdom	99.5	7.4
Ireland	99.5	6.0
Malta	95.2	90.5
Netherlands	87.6	87.3
Sweden	85.0	85.0
Denmark	84.2	83.5
Cyprus	72.2	72.2
Luxembourg	66.7	66.7
Finland	60.4	59.9
Slovenia	56.0	55.6
Austria	54.9	53.3
Belgium	51.8	51.7
Germany	51.1	50.8
Greece	43.9	43.5
Estonia	41.4	41.4
France	34.3	33.8
Latvia	34.1	34.1
Italy	29.3	28.6
Portugal	27.2	26.4
Romania	26.6	26.5
Poland	25.9	25.4
Lithuania	25.7	25.7
Slovakia	24.2	24.2
Czech Republic	23.8	23.7
Spain	20.7	19.8
Hungary	16.2	15.9
Bulgaria	15.4	15.1

Source: Own calculation based on Eurobarometer 63.4.

guage, (b) on the motivation to make an investment in a foreign language and (c) finally on the costs.

(a) The opportunity structure constitutes a central precondition for acquiring a foreign language. If, for example, there exists compulsory schooling in a country and English as first foreign language is obligatory for all students, a more favourable opportunity structure for studying English is available than if there is no obligation to learn a foreign language or if Russian is the first compulsory foreign language. (b) Motivation for learning a foreign language is another factor that influences acquisition and can, in turn, be influenced by a number of features.[5] Some countries and languages are viewed as highly prestigious; some are not. After the Second World War some

Germans, for example, considering British and American troops as an occupying force refused to learn English, the language of their occupiers (Greiner, 1999). (c) Lastly, the lower the costs of learning, the more likely someone is to acquire a foreign language. For example, for highly educated people with previous learning experience, the cost required to learn a foreign language would be less than for people with little education and few study skills.[6] Moreover, the different foreign languages vary in terms of the effort needed to study them. If for example a Swede wants to learn Chinese, he/she would have to learn a new system of characters, but not if he/she decides to learn Spanish. The costs of learning Spanish for a Swede are therefore smaller than the costs of learning Chinese.

The general explanatory model describes the dimensions and mechanisms of learning a foreign language; they must be related to the specific context people are embedded in. The differences in transnational linguistic capital between the 27 countries shown in Table 1 can be traced back to varying societal conditions in each country affecting opportunities, costs and/or motivations to study a foreign language. These conditions can be arranged in macro-level factors on the one hand and individual characteristics on the other hand. We will focus first on macro-level factors that affect transnational linguistic capital and then discuss individual-level factors. Table 2 gives an overview of the conditions and their effect on the three dimensions of our explanatory model. The table refers to a proposition made by Esser (2006: 93ff.).

Country size

We assume that the size of a country affects the level of transnational linguistic capital people possess. The smaller a country is the broader is its international interconnectedness. This is especially true for highly modernised societies with a high level of division of labour. The probability of finding trading and communication partners in one's own

Table 2. Theoretical model explaining transnational linguistic capital.

	Opportunities	Costs	Motivation
Macro-level factors			
Country size	–		–
Level of modernity and educational expenditure	+	–	
Individual-level factors			
Respondent has grown up in an ex-socialist country	–		–
Respondent's age	–	+	–
Respondent's social class	+		+
Respondent's level of education (institutional cultural capital)	+	–	+
Prevalence of respondent's native language			–
Linguistic distance between respondent's native language and English		–	

(linguistically homogeneous) society is much lower in small countries than it is in large countries. The small country size motivates internationalisation. That is why small countries' economies tend to be more internationally linked than larger countries' (cf. Katzenstein, 1985). In turn the exchange with other countries becomes easier when people speak the other country's language and the language most widely spoken in the world (cf. Van Tubergen and Kalmijn, 2005: 1419). There is a second reason why the size of the country probably has an impact on the citizens' command of foreign languages. People do not only learn a foreign language at educational institutions and via direct contact with people speaking that language. People also learn languages through the media. Translation and dubbing of foreign media products is only worth the expense if the audience is of a certain size. If the audience size is small, then foreign media tends to be left in its original language and is distributed with subtitles. The cost for the dubbing of movies is about 11 times higher than the cost of subtitling (Van Parijs, 2004: 128). Accordingly, the share of media products distributed in the original language is considerably higher in small countries compared to that in big countries. People receiving foreign-language media products will thereby improve their foreign language proficiency (cf. Mitterer and McQueen, 2009). The size of a country therefore affects the opportunity structure for foreign language learning in general and learning English specifically. Size is measured by the size of population of a country (for a more detailed description of all variables, see Table 3).

Modernity and educational expenditure

The 27 countries differ in their levels of modernity. One central dimension of modernity is the level of education. The percentage of people included in the educational system is higher and the percentage of those not having attended school is lower in more modernised societies than in less modernised societies. In addition, the length of training is longer and the share of the population attending higher institutions of learning is higher in modernised societies than in less modernised societies. Since foreign language and especially English learning is part of the institutionalised education in all 27 European countries, one can assume that people living in a country with a highly developed educational system will have more and longer opportunities to acquire knowledge in foreign languages than people living in a country with a less developed educational system (Esser, 2006; Van Tubergen and Kalmijn, 2005). In addition, educational levels can impact the costs associated with learning a foreign language. As people become generally better educated, they are more inclined to learn a new subject area (such as a foreign language) and to do so more quickly. The duration and intensity of the education is closely related to a general improvement of study techniques which then reduce the time one has to spend on acquiring a new language. In order to measure a country's development of the educational system we used the measure of 'yearly expenditure on public and private institutions per full-time pupil', as measured in euros PPS.

Bipolar world order

We assume that a country's position during the world order of the Cold War (as either East or West) will influence the degree to which its citizens are proficient in English.

Table 3. Description of variables.

Variable	Values	Description	Data source
English proficiency	0 = no 1 = yes	Ability to have a conversation in English – self-assessment	EB 63.4
Country size	0.399 to 82.5	Population in millions	Eurostat
National educational expenditure	1436 to 8093 < 3700 = low 3700–6299 = middle ≥ 6300 = high	Educational expenditure per year and student in euros PPS; for multivariate analysis in 1000 euros PPS	Eurostat
Ex-socialist country	0 = no 1 = yes	Country classification according to the situation in 1989	
Age	15–97	Age of the person in years	EB 63.4
Class fractions	In each case 0 = no 1 = yes	Dummy variables for (a) professionals, (b) higher and middle management, (c) entrepreneurs, self-employed, (d) skilled workers, white-collar, (e) unskilled workers	EB 63.4
Institutionalised cultural capital	14–25	Age at the end of education in years, max. 25 years.	EB 63.4
Prevalence of respondent's native language	0–100%	Share of EU population speaking respondent's native language as a foreign or native language	EB 63.4
Linguistic distance	0 = very low 1 = low 2 = high 3 = very high	Linguistic distance between native language of respondent and English according to the affiliation to the same family of languages	http://www.ethnologue.com Lewis (2009)

Socialist Eastern and Central European countries were, until 1989, under the influence of the Soviet Union, where the Russian language held hegemonic power. Russian was often a mandatory foreign language. The Russian Empire was meant to protect people from the advance of English (Fodor and Peluau, 2003). Therefore, we assume that people living in a country which belonged to the Soviet sphere of influence speak less English than people living in a country which belonged to the Western sphere of influence. However, this correlation should not apply anymore or at least to a lesser degree for the time after the collapse of the bipolar world order. Central and Eastern European countries quickly oriented and opened themselves westward after 1990, English became in many countries the first foreign language students had to learn (Fodor and Peluau, 2003) and many countries became full members of the EU in 2004 and 2007. Accordingly, we divide the respondents into two age cohorts: those who, in 2005, were under 25 years old and those 25 and over.

Age

'Age' of a respondent is measured at the individual level, although we interpret its impact on transnational linguistic capital dominantly as a macro effect. The 27 countries which are part of our dataset have experienced a dramatic social change since the end of the Second World War. Two aspects of social change are of importance for English proficiency. On the one hand, tying in with what was discussed above, the level of modernity has risen in all societies, especially the population's level of education insofar as the duration of training was extended and the quota of persons with higher educational achievement has gradually increased. However, not only have the duration of study and training extended over time and the level of education risen, European societies have also become more globalised. The number of political, social and economic ties to other societies has risen over time (Mau, 2010). Both changes to the macro-structural context should have an effect on the English proficiency of different age cohorts. On average, older generations have had lower levels of education, less transnational experience and fewer opportunities to learn foreign languages including English than have younger cohorts. Moreover, the increasing processes of globalisation might affect the motivation to acquire a foreign language. Younger generations, in contrast, see both the necessity of and the advantages which learning English brings with it. In addition to this cohort effect, we also assume that there is an age effect on foreign language proficiency. Those who study a foreign language as a student may forget that language during their lifetime, especially if they have no opportunity to use it as they age. Additionally, the expenditure of time (cost) of learning a new language increases with age as the pace of learning, the ability to imitate and memory declines with age. For all these reasons we assume that younger people have a higher level of transnational linguistic capital than older people.

Social class and occupations

The descriptive findings show that English proficiency levels differ not only between the 27 countries, but also within individual countries. This means that there are citizens with high levels of transnational linguistic capital as well as people without any in every given EU member state. As all 27 societies are class societies we assume that the social class position of a person influences his or her level of transnational linguistic capital.

Following Pierre Bourdieu's theory a society's class structure results from the aggregation of capitals owned by persons and the assignment of persons with the same endowment of capital to the same class. As is well known, Bourdieu distinguishes three classes that differ from each other due to the amount of capital (the upper class, the middle class and the lower class). Within these three classes class fractions are placed that are identified by different compositions of cultural and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986). Bourdieu not only names classes and class fractions in an abstract way, but describes them in detail indicating concrete occupations. This is important for our empirical analysis, as the dataset contains the occupations of the respondents. The upper class divides into a class fraction with a lot of cultural capital and a group with little cultural capital. The property owning class composed of *self-employed* possess high economic but a

relatively low cultural capital. This contrasts to the educated class: where the cultural capital dominates the economic. According to Bourdieu, the educated class consists of *academic occupations*. The middle class or the petite bourgeoisie is composed of those in the middle occupational positions, primarily in *middle management*. The petite bourgeoisie is divided further into the declining petite bourgeoisie with little or shrinking economic and cultural capital, while a middle volume of both forms of capital can be held by the executive petite bourgeoisie. The new petite bourgeoisie endowed with middle volumes of capital exists as a complementary class to the new bourgeoisie. The lower class is not further differentiated by Bourdieu but is composed of low skilled and manual workers.

Unfortunately the dataset does not include information on income and property, so that the operationalisation of economic capital is not possible. The interviewees were asked for their occupations, which was also used by Bourdieu in order to describe the classes and class fractions.[7] The following occupational groups were formed from the different categories:

- Professionals (either employed or self-employed) including doctors, architects, lawyers, etc.
- Higher and middle management including directors, managers, department chiefs, engineers, teachers, etc.
- Entrepreneurs, the self-employed including shop and business owners, self-employed craftsmen, etc.
- Skilled white-collar and skilled workers.
- Unskilled white-collar and unskilled workers.

We assume that all occupational groups have a higher level of linguistic capital than the reference group of unskilled white- and blue-collar workers. Second, we assume that the middle class of skilled white-collar and skilled workers have a lower level of linguistic capital than the entrepreneurs, higher and middle management and the professionals. Finally, we act on the assumption that there is a difference between the professionals and the higher and middle managers on the one hand and the entrepreneurs on the other hand. All three groups belong to the upper class, but form two different fractions within this upper class. The entrepreneurs are those with a high level of economic but a relatively low level of cultural capital.[8] The reverse capital structure applies to the other two groups. Accordingly we assume that the entrepreneurs have a lower level of transnational linguistic capital compared to the professionals and managers. While the self-employed have more practical, technical, scientific competences, the educated class have a better humanistic education including foreign languages. The symbolic use of transnational linguistic capital might play an additional role here: multilingual people receive other people's respect due to this competence. Similar to the cultural elites in the countries who celebrate themselves by demonstrating their high cultural lifestyles in public settings, thus separating themselves from lower classes and the class fraction of those who have much material but little cultural capital, a high level of transnational linguistic capital enables one to present oneself as part of an emerging *transnational class* thus achieving a higher level of recognition and distinction.

There is an additional argument why one's social class position impacts on English proficiency. It opens up different opportunities for practising foreign language competence. If unskilled workers and white-collars have learned foreign languages at all, the probability of having the opportunity to use and practise the learned languages is much lower than that of executive managers and professionals. Moreover, we assume that the class fraction of the self-employed have fewer possibilities to use and improve an existing knowledge of foreign languages than educated classes.

Institutionalised cultural capital (education)

According to Bourdieu a society's class structure results from the aggregation of capitals held by people (Bourdieu, 1986). The material and the cultural capital are the central resources for the formation of the class structure. Unfortunately we do not have any information on the respondents' income and property, but we do have some data on their institutionalised cultural capital. This is composed of education or educational qualifications awarded to a person by a society's educational institutions. As English as a foreign language is usually imparted via educational institutions it can be assumed that the institutionalised cultural capital has a positive impact on one's level of transnational linguistic capital.[9] There are three arguments in favour of this assumption. Higher education means a longer period spent in educational institutions. As English teaching is part of school education, one can assume that the longer a respondent attends school, the more exposure she/he has to both a lengthy and demanding English curriculum. Not only does education affect the opportunity structure for learning a foreign language, but also motivation to do so (Esser, 2006; Hans, 2010). Institutes of higher education in particular convey the message that learning a foreign language is culturally valuable in and of itself. Finally, education can also influence the cost of learning a foreign language, in that general study techniques improve with the length of a person's education; this reduces the time investment necessary for learning a new language such as English. The Eurobarometer contains a variable which makes a rough comparison of the educational achievements possible in spite of the different educational systems. The interviewees were asked for their age at the time they finished their education. We assume that the older a respondent was at the end of his/her education, the higher his/her educational achievement, the higher his/her institutionalised cultural capital and the better his/her transnational linguistic capital will be.

Prevalence of a native language

People who speak a language which is spoken by only a small number of other people have less opportunity to communicate than people whose mother tongue is spoken by a large number of people. The first group of people is more likely to learn a foreign language in order to increase their ability to communicate with more people. In other words, the communicational value of a foreign language is lower for people who speak (either as a native or foreign language) a language spoken by many and is higher for people whose mother tongue is spoken by only few people. The prevalence of a language is likely to have an effect on the motivation to learn a foreign language (cf. de

Swaan, 2001). Hence, we consider the prevalence of the respondent's native language measured by the share of the population of all 27 countries speaking that language either as a foreign or native language to have a negative impact on transnational linguistic capital.

Linguistic distance

Comparative linguistics divides individual languages into language families (Lewis, 2009). Within and between language families there are different degrees of proximity measured by the overlap in lexicon, phonetics, grammar, etc. The distance between a native language that one already speaks and a new language one wants to learn affects the effort one has to put into studying the foreign language. The smaller the distance between two individual languages, the easier it is to study the new language (Beenstock et al., 2001). Linguistic distance therefore influences the costs involved in learning a foreign language. And the higher the costs of acquiring a language, the smaller the probability that foreign language acquisition will occur or be successful. This assumed relationship between linguistic distance, the costs and the probability of language acquisition has been proven in several studies which have analysed migrants' language acquisition (cf. Chiswick and Miller, 2001; Roose, 2010; Van Tubergen and Kalmijn, 2005). The distance between the different languages spoken by the EU citizens and English was determined using a classification that has also been used by other scholars (Lewis, 2009; Roose, 2010; Van Tubergen and Kalmijn, 2005).[10] We assume that people speaking a language as native language whose linguistic distance to English is smaller are significantly more often able to speak English than people speaking a native language whose distance to English is greater.

Data and variables

Our analysis is based on a Eurobarometer survey (Eurobarometer 63.4 by European Commission, 2005). The sample size of each country is approximately 500 people over the age of 15 in small countries, and 1000 people in larger countries. By weighting according to age, gender, region, city size and population, the sample can be considered representative of the EU population.[11] Among other questions the interviewees were asked in the Eurobarometer survey: 'Which languages do you speak well enough to have a conversation in?' The answers to this question constitute the central dependent variable of our study.

Multilingualism is manifest in four different abilities that are jointly connected: in understanding, speaking, reading and writing a language. Our empirical analyses refer to the speaking of a foreign language only. Even though there is no empirical information available on the abilities to understand, read and write, one can assume that those speaking a foreign language are also better able to understand, read and write the respective language than those for whom this does not apply.

As can be seen from the wording of the question language ability is not measured by a language test, but rather – as is the case for most large-scale surveys – by respondents' own subjective self-evaluation. The question then arises as to whether self-evaluation is

an adequate tool to measure the respondents' 'actual' linguistic capability. In his study on migrants' foreign language acquisition, Esser (2006) has dedicated a whole subchapter to this methodological question by evaluating all relevant references and data sources. He comes to the conclusion that the subjective self-evaluation of language competence can indeed be used as a replacement indicator for an objective measurement of competence. First, there are several studies available in which both subjective self-evaluation and language tests were conducted for measuring language proficiency at the same time. Although the correlation between the two measures deviates from study to study, the fact that the correlation lies between .58 and .46 (Esser, 2006: 527ff.) shows that there is a robust correlation between factual and perceived linguistic ability. Second, models developed to explain foreign language proficiency and applied to both subjective self-evaluations of foreign language proficiency and the results of language tests show the same causal structure, even though the explained variance slightly varies (Charette and Meng, 1994). Hence, no big mistake is being made in terms of the structure of the causal explanation when one uses self-evaluation of language proficiency to measure real language competence.

Empirical results

The empirical analyses concern variables at the country level and at the individual level. Multilevel regression analysis allows us to investigate effects at different levels of analysis at the same time (Snijders and Bosker, 1999). The dependent variable – the respondent's capability to have a conversation in English, as depicted in Table 1 – is measured at the individual level. The independent variables are measured at the individual and the country level. The multilevel analysis is performed in two steps.

The first model includes the individual variables only (see Table 4). As expected, all occupational groups have higher levels of transnational linguistic capital than do unskilled workers. Also, skilled workers are less likely to speak English as a foreign language compared to the different sections of the upper class. A comparison of the different class sections of the upper class reveals that professionals are more multilingual than the self-employed, which confirms Bourdieu's hypothesis. The self-employed are those with more material but less cultural and transnational linguistic capital.

The first model also includes institutional cultural capital (education) and the age of the respondent. As the coefficients indicate both of our hypotheses are confirmed: younger respondents and better educated people have more transnational linguistic capital at their disposal than respondents with the opposite characteristics. In a separate analysis we can show that education reduces the explanatory strength of occupation on transnational linguistic capital. This conforms to Bourdieu's understanding of education as a determining factor in class position. All in all Bourdieu's assumptions are confirmed by the analyses as English proficiency is essentially determined by the respondents' class position and their endowment with capital, although one must say that the variables which are available in the Eurobarometer allow us to test Bourdieu's theory very approximately only.

The first model also includes the prevalence of the respondent's mother tongue. Again, the hypothesis is supported by our data. Respondents who speak a mother tongue

Table 4. Explaining transnational linguistic capital (English proficiency).

	Model 1	Model 2
Fixed effects		
Professionals, academics	1.581***	1.595***
	(0.047)	(0.047)
Higher and middle management	1.926***	1.936***
	(0.067)	(0.068)
Entrepreneurs, self-employed	1.420***	1.423***
	(0.040)	(0.040)
Skilled-workers	1.266***	1.278***
	(0.034)	(0.035)
Institutional cultural capital	2.383***	2.410***
	(0.065)	(0.066)
Age	0.380***	0.371***
	(0.010)	(0.010)
Age > 25 * Ex-socialist country	0.661***	0.671***
	(0.030)	(0.031)
Prevalence of language		0.499***
		(0.042)
Linguistic distance		0.547***
		(0.030)
Educational expenditures		2.682***
		(0.657)
Country size		0.703
		(0.179)
Constant	0.802	0.648
	(0.256)	(0.153)
Variance		
Constant	2.564	1.367
	(0.747)	(0.415)
Model fit		
Observations (individual level)	18,284	18,284
Log-likelihood	–7551	–7447
Maddala R^2	23.7%	24.6%

Notes: Hierarchical logistic regression model. Level 2: Country. Explanatory variables were standardised before estimation. Odds ratios are reported. Standard errors in parentheses. Reference category for class fractions: unskilled workers. Random-intercept-only model for comparison: var(const) = 1.981; LL = −10028. Overall R^2 based on the method suggested by Maddala.
*** $p < .01$; ** $p < .05$; * $p < .1$.

with a low level of prevalence are more likely to speak English as a foreign language than respondents with the opposite characteristics. In addition, it turns out that people whose native language has a higher linguistic distance to English have a significantly lower chance of speaking English than persons whose native language has a small distance to English. Finally, the results show that those people who have grown up in one of

the former socialist countries are significantly less likely to speak English, which again is in line with our hypothesis, that the former bipolar world order impacts on the likelihood of having learned English as a foreign language.[12]

Model 2 includes in addition to the individual variables the context factors. The effects of the variables from model 1 persist so that almost all of our hypotheses are confirmed even if one controls for the macro context factors. Looking at the context variables, we see that respondents are more likely to speak English if they come from (a) smaller countries and (b) countries that invest highly in education. However, the country size variable is not significant. In a separate analysis (results are not presented) we can show that prevalence of one's language and the size of country are strongly correlated. We have calculated additional models in which the variable for individuals' education is group-centred and which include an additional variable for the mean level of education per country. Regarding the effect of education, these more detailed analyses show that educational expenditures indeed have a separate effect that exceeds between-country differences in individuals' level of education.

All in all, the analysis shows that nearly all of our theoretical assumptions are confirmed. As the R^2 value indicates, the explanation of transnational linguistic capital turns out to be more than satisfactory; the overall R^2 value, taking into account the effect of all independent variables at all levels, is 24.6%. Even though there is hardly an increase in the value of R^2 between model 1 and model 2 due to the addition of the country-level variables, a joint test of significance of the country-level variables (Wald test) yields the result that, together, these variables contribute significantly to the explanation of transnational linguistic capital and English proficiency. It is important to note, however, that part of the country-level variation is due to differences in the distribution of the individual-level variables in the different countries.

Summary

People's participation in the globalisation process is among other things dependent on the ability to communicate across borders in English, the world's most widely spoken foreign language. The question central to our study is to what degree citizens in different countries possess transnational linguistic capital and how to explain the differences in English proficiency both between and within the countries. The descriptive results have shown that scarcely half of the EU citizens are able to communicate in English at a basic level; however huge differences exist within and between the countries. In order to explain these differences we started from the assumption, that the opportunities for acquiring a foreign language, the costs that are connected with studying a foreign language and the motivation to learn a foreign language are the three central elements. The societal conditions people are embedded in impact on these three dimensions and determine who speaks English and who does not. The hypotheses deduced from the explanatory model have then been empirically tested. It was shown that people's ability to speak English can be very well predicted with the help of the different explanatory factors. We find that the prevalence of a respondent's native language, the linguistic difference between one's mother tongue and English, and age affect language acquisition negatively, whereas a country's level of education has a positive influence. Using Bourdieu's

theory of social class, we show that besides other factors a respondent's social class position and the level of education are important micro-level factors that help to increase a person's transnational linguistic capital.

One must put these results in the context of the state of the art. There exists an inestimable number of publications from sociolinguists who have worked on the economic, political and cultural factors explaining why English became a lingua franca and on the multitude of implications the hegemonic position of English has on different aspects of social life and on other languages (see e.g. Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson, 2003). To our knowledge, however, no one until now has tried to explain the enormous differences between and within countries in the command of English as a lingua franca in a systematic way using comparative survey data and statistical methods. We hope that our study will not only contribute to our own discipline but also to the discussion in sociolinguistics. We are aware of the fact that a systematic analysis such as ours develops a rather rough sketch of the differences between countries and the explanatory factors that are at work. Our analysis does not attempt to substitute but rather complement the much more fine-grained analysis one finds in linguistics.

Acknowledgements

I'm very grateful to Silke Hans for conducting the multilevel analysis.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Notes

1. For example, the KOF Index of Globalization (Dreher, 2006), one measurement of globalisation besides many others developed by a working group at the ETH Zurich, indicates that the openness and connectedness of different countries in the world has changed from 34 in 1970 to 58 in 2008 (own calculation based on the dataset which is available online: globalization.kof.ethz.ch/).
2. Our understanding of language as a form of capital is based on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1992; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). However, neither Bourdieu nor other authors have used the concept of *transnational* linguistic capital. Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital refers first and foremost to the elaborate knowledge of the official language of a country and the ability to speak this language, which is usually dependent upon social class (Bourdieu, 1992).
3. Linguists and sociolinguists distinguish between second language, foreign language and lingua franca (Jenkins et al., 2011). (a) In a second language situation language learners live in an environment in which the language they learn is spoken by the majority of the people as a mother tongue. (b) In a foreign language situation learners are not exposed to the target language outside the classroom. (c) Learning a lingua franca like English can be defined as a special case of foreign language learning. The learner lives in an environment in which English is not spoken as a mother tongue. However, the target language he/she learns is usually not identical to English as it is spoken in the UK or the US and the communication partners are primarily non-mother tongue English speakers. Due to globalisation and migration processes English has become a lingua franca and a language in its own right marked by

linguistic characteristics which makes it different from the 'original' English. There is a huge body of work explaining how English became a lingua franca (Blommaert, 2010; Blommaert and Rampton, 2011; Jenkins, 2007). Unfortunately, the data we have analysed do not allow us to conclude which type of English people speak, either English as a foreign language or English as a lingua franca. Therefore, we will use both terms – English as a foreign language and English as a lingua franca – synonymously.

4. An exception is Neil Fligstein's seminal work *Euroclash* (2008), in which he has analysed in one chapter foreign language proficiency of European citizens in 15 countries. However, we go beyond Fligstein's study insofar as we present a more general explanatory model (a), which also takes macro contexts into account in addition to individual characteristics (b) and extends the number of countries which are analysed (c).
5. Gardner and Lambert (1957) divide the motivation to learn a language into two types, instrumental motivation and integrative motivation. While instrumental motivation refers to learning a language for practical reasons such as getting a job, integrative motivation is driven by a positive attitude towards the group and culture of speakers of the language one learns. Unfortunately, the dataset we have analysed does not allow us to measure respondents' motivation directly.
6. Of course, the respondent's education does not only affect the costs of acquiring a foreign language, but is above all connected with the opportunity structure as the foreign language training is part of the academic curriculum. The more educated someone is, the more time he or she has spent in educational institutions, and the longer he or she has been taught foreign languages.
7. If interviewees were not employed at that time – because they kept house, were retired or unemployed – they were asked for their former occupation. In a first step the answers concerning the current and the former occupation were combined.
8. Due to the fact that the category does not only include entrepreneurs but also 'small' self-employed people like craftsmen, who Bourdieu would assign to the petite bourgeoisie, the operationalisation is rather suboptimal.
9. Foreign language proficiency gained at educational institutions can then again lead to an increase of institutionalised cultural capital in the form of educational certificates.
10. At: www.ethnologue.com (accessed 11 July 2012).
11. The weighting is based on a comparison between the structure of the sample and the structure of the population of the 27 countries. The description of the population was derived from Eurostat population data or from national statistics offices. For further and detailed information see ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb63/eb63_en.pdf (accessed 25 August 2013).
12. We have run the regression analysis by using two different measurements: (a) respondents' residence in one of the former socialist countries as a proxy, and (b) respondents' mother tongue as a proxy. The results for both versions are completely identical.

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Résumé

La maîtrise d'une langue étrangère en général et a fortiori s'il s'agit de la langue la plus parlée dans le monde, l'anglais, constitue un moyen essentiel de participer au processus de mondialisation. À partir d'une enquête réalisée dans 27 pays européens, l'auteur de l'article tente d'apporter une

explication aux différences considérables qui existent, en matière de maîtrise de l'anglais, entre ces pays et à l'intérieur de ces pays. Il présente un modèle explicatif général concernant la maîtrise d'une langue étrangère, propose des hypothèses à partir de ce modèle et les teste empiriquement en utilisant des techniques multiniveau. Les résultats font apparaître que la prévalence de la langue maternelle de la personne interrogée, les différences linguistiques entre sa langue maternelle et l'anglais, ainsi que l'âge, ont un effet négatif sur l'acquisition d'une autre langue, tandis que le niveau d'études des habitants du pays a une influence positive. À partir de la théorie des classes sociales de Bourdieu, l'auteur montre qu'à côté d'autres facteurs, la classe sociale de la personne interrogée, ainsi que son niveau d'instruction, sont des micro-facteurs importants qui contribuent à augmenter son capital linguistique transnational.

Mots-clés

analyse multiniveau, capital linguistique, Europe, mondialisation, multilinguisme, Pierre Bourdieu, transnationalisation

Resumen

El dominio de una lengua extranjera en general y el dominio de la lengua más hablada del mundo, el inglés, son recursos esenciales para participar en el proceso de globalización. Sobre la base de una encuesta realizada en 27 países europeos, este artículo trata de explicar las grandes diferencias en el dominio del inglés que existen entre los países y dentro de los mismos. El autor presenta un modelo explicativo general del dominio de una lengua extranjera, deriva hipótesis a partir de este modelo y las testa empíricamente usando técnicas multinivel. Los resultados muestran que la prevalencia de la lengua nativa del encuestado, la diferencia lingüística entre la lengua materna y el inglés y la edad afectan negativamente al aprendizaje del lenguaje, mientras que el nivel de educación de un país tiene una influencia positiva. Usando la teoría de la clase social de Bourdieu, el autor muestra que, además de otros factores, la posición de clase social del encuestado y el nivel de educación son factores importantes a nivel micro que ayudan a aumentar el capital lingüístico transnacional de una persona.

Palabras clave

análisis multinivel, capital lingüístico, Europa, globalización, multilingüismo, Pierre Bourdieu, transnacionalización