

The Language Industry: A New Industrial Pattern Booming in China

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Abstract

With people's continuous understanding of the economic attribute of language, language has developed rapidly as an important industry content. The language industry is a new industrial pattern that provides professional language services or independent language products to meet the demands of language competence. The language industry is a typical knowledge-based economy with language as its core and it is regarded as a comprehensive industry with environmental-friendliness, sustainability, and stable value. The language industry aims to pursue the economic contribution of language, including language education, language publishing, language translation, language and text information processing, language art, language rehabilitation, language exhibition, language creativity, language ability assessment, and public service. The language industry has its specific industrial content, which does not belong to the subcategory of the cultural industry. However, it penetrates and influences the cultural industry.

Keywords

Language industry; Language economics; Language product; Language service; Cultural industry.

1. Introduction

Language is the most important tool of human communication and thinking, and one of the essential attributes of human beings (Li, 2012). Different perspectives on language will lead to different attitudes towards linguistic values. Language is not only a symbol system combining sound and meaning in which human beings can think and communicate, but also an indispensable part of economic activities and an economic resource (Zhang, 2012). In the past decade, with increasing understanding of the economic attribute of language, the language industry has been fruitfully boomed and has proved to be a significant part of the national economy.

2. The Rise and Development of Language Economics

In 1965, Jacob Marschak first proposed the concept of language economics, discussed the economic value of language, and pointed out that language, as an indispensable tool in human economic activities, also had economic natures such as value, utility, cost and income, which triggered a boom in researches on language economics (Huang & Zhang & Su, 2017). From the 1970s to the 1980s, with the influx of immigrants to the United States, Canada and other developed countries, the contradiction between language and income and assets was highly exposed. People began to study language economics from the angle of human capital and the education economy (Carliner, 1981). Since the 1990s, language policy and planning have also

been included in the research scope of language economics (Reagan, 1983). Afterward, the research field has also been expanded, including the relationship between language and immigration, the connection between language and international trade, financial discourse analysis, etc., which indicates that the research perspective had always been problem-oriented (Liu & Zhang, 2017). At the beginning of this century, researchers tend to use economic methods to analyse related problems. Grin (2003) argued that language economics applied the concepts and tools of economics to study the relationship between representational language variables, especially the relationship between the functions of economic variables. Chiswick (2008, 2014) believed that language economics focused on the determinants and consequences of language competence through economic methods and tools. Thus, foreign scholars tended to centralize on the relationship between language and economy while paid less attention to the contribution of language itself as a product to economy.

The introduction of language economics into China began at the end of the 20th century. Xu (1999) pointed out that language itself was a kind of human capital. Learning a second language (or foreign language) is an economic investment in human capital production; Language has a high or low economic value; The value utility of language depends on many factors. Zhou (2000) analysed the economic value of foreign language education and its significance to the reform of foreign language education. Wang (2001) put forward that foreign language education should take economic construction as the centre, regard market demand as the guide, and make effective use of educational resources. Zhang (2008) discussed the basic theory of language economics from the perspective of human capital, public goods and institutions, and summarized the research scope of it. Huang and Su (2011) believed that language economics studied the formation and evolution of language and its impact on people's behaviour, as well as how language, language behaviour and language policies relate to human capital, employment, wages and income distribution. In 2011, with the support of the State Language Commission and the Ministry of Education, Shandong University established the Research Centre for language economics and launched the "Chinese Language Economics Forum", which promoted the exchange and interaction among scholars in related fields.

In recent years, more and more domestic economists and linguists have shown solicitude for language economics and made fruitful research achievement (Zhang & Liu, 2012; Zhao & Ge, 2017; Huang, 2017; etc.). Zhao and Ge (2017) raised three dimensions of language economics research, namely "economics of language", "linguistics of economy" and "relations of language and economy", and preliminarily outlined eight perspectives, which enriched the research scope and approach of language economics. Huang (2017) systematically explained the basic theories and main research fields of language economics, believing that linguistic economics is a branch of economics science that adopts the theories, methods and tools of economics to study language and speech act as a ubiquitous social and economic phenomenon. His book also focuses on the relationship between the language industry and the language economy, and mentions that "the goal of developing the language industry is to pursue the economic contribution of language". He believed that the language industry had to be formed through the operation of the market, and language products and language services are the core of the industry. The language products and services in the industrial chain should meet the language needs of the country, society and individuals. The formation and development of the language industry can promote economic growth and contribute to national economic development, which is a symbol of the formation of the language industry.

Language economics can provide theoretical and methodological support for the study of the language industry, and it is the source of driving force for the development of the language industry (Li, 2020). Although researchers of language economics are aware of the economic value of language and the importance of the language industry, they do not fully understand the content of the language industry but ignore that language public service is also an important

part of the tertiary industry. The development of language public service can not only better meet the language demands of the country, society and individuals, but also promote the healthy development of the language industry. Next, we will explore the extension and core of the language industry and analyse its characteristics and importance.

3. Language Industry

3.1. Definition of The Language Industry

The language industry research is not only the object and starting point of language economics but also the convergence point of theory and practice of language economics. At present, the study of the language industry remains in its infancy. Researchers have different understandings of the connotation of the language industry and have not formed a relatively unified definition. Li (2011) believed that the language industry took language as its main operating object and mainly utilized language to earn dividends. Huang (2012) held that the language industry referred to a production and service activity, which can fulfil individual economic demands and drive national or regional economic growth. He and Chen (2012) pointed out that the language industry was an industry form that took language as content and material or as processing object to produce various language products or provide various language services. Hu (2013) believed that the language industry is an organization cluster that specialized in the production of language products to cater to consumers' needs and carried out profit-making activities with language services as its content. These researchers have different focuses on the definition of the language industry, which enriches our understanding of the language industry. Chen (2016) put forward a more rigorous and complete definition based on relevant researches and thought that the language industry included professional language services or independent language products provided. The core should be independent language products that meet language needs. We agree with Chen Peng's view, however, we considered that the conceptual core of the language industry should be amplified. Accordingly, the language industry is defined as:

The language industry is an industrial formation that provides specialized language services or independent language products to satisfy the demand for language competence.

In the above definition, the demand for language competence refers to (1) the need of consumers to acquire a certain language ability;(2) the need to convert one language into another;(3) the need for technology and equipment for language processing;(4) the need for naming, language art, font design;(5) the need for the collation and protection of language resources and language research. The language industry serves these needs, not just language content services. Independent language products designate the goods that can be used as commodities to enter the market for trading, such as pure language products, language technology products, comprehensive language products, and public language products. Professional language services include not only language services that provide language products for profit-making purposes, but also public welfare language services, such as the promotion of common language and the integration of language resources, the research and protection of language, the planning of language development, the formulation of language standards and language policies, etc. These public welfare language services are dominated by the government and are an important part of the tertiary industry. On this basis, this paper discusses the content and characteristics of the language industry and analyses the relationship between the language industry and the cultural industry.

3.2. Content of The Language Industry

At present, a clear concept of the language industry has not yet been formed in the world, and people have different understandings of the content of the language industry. The language industry platform (LIND) of European Commission lists activities as translation, subtitle and dubbing, the globalization of software and websites, the development of language technology tools, international conferences, language teaching and language consulting on its website and it releases its annual survey report on the language industry. As a non-profit trade association of the language industry, the Association for Globalization and Localization (GALA) focuses on language translation services and technologies. The Canadian Language Industry Association (AILIA) includes three areas, namely, translation, language training, and language technology. The language industry in the UK mainly covers language education and language services (Li, 2018). At present, there is no such specific term as language industry in the United States, but the market for language-centred industries, such as language translation, has developed rapidly (Gao, 2013). The above analysis demonstrates that the content of the language industry outside China mainly concentrates on language translation, language education, and language technology, and there is no comprehensive understanding of other language products and services in the language industry.

There has been a relatively unified understanding of the content of the language industry in China. In 2010, Beijing Language Commission established the "Beijing Language Industry Research Centre", and roughly divided the language industry into eight sub-industries: language education and language testing, language translation, language publishing, language art, language rehabilitation, language exhibition, language engineering, and language creativity (Li, 2011). Based on this, He and Chen (2012) made adjustments and divided the language industry into nine sub-industries, namely, language training industry, language publishing industry, language translation industry, language information processing industry, language art industry, language rehabilitation industry, language exhibition industry, language creativity industry, and Language ability assessment industry. The subsequent studies on the content of the language industry have different generalizations but have not gone beyond the scope of the nine industries. Huang et al. (2017) believed that the language industry mainly includes seven parts, namely, language training, language publishing, language translation, language service and consumption, language technology, language creativity, and language potential market. Kang (2018) believed that the language industry can be generally summarized as language competence, language content, language communication, and language processing from the perspective of synchronic, according to the characteristics of business forms and service scope. From a diachronic perspective, the language industry can also be divided into traditional and new forms of sub-industries. Traditional sub-industries include language publishing, language translation, language training, language testing, etc., while new sub-industries include language rehabilitation, language exhibition, language informatization, etc.

We agree with Chen's (2016) discussion on the economic contribution of the language industry and hold that language education, language management, and language research belong to the content of the tertiary industry. Based on this, the nine major language industry contents of He and Chen (2012) are adjusted. Firstly, the "language training " is adjusted to "language education"; secondly, the "language public service" is added into the scope ". The language education industry includes not only language training, but also language education institutions, which take language education as the main target. The government and society have invested a lot in language education, where the human capital and fixed assets invested should be counted. Language public service industry is an important part of the tertiary industry, and it is the booster of the development of other language industries. The arrangement, utilization, and protection of language resources by government departments, language planning, and language policy formulation, and language research by public institutions are important contents of the

language service industry and should also be included in the language industry. Therefore, the language industry defined in this paper should include the following ten categories: language education, language publishing, language translation, language and text information processing, language art, language rehabilitation, language exhibition, language creativity, language ability evaluation, and language public service. At present, China's comparably developed language industry mainly includes language education, press and publication, translation, language information processing, language art, language ability assessment, language rehabilitation, etc. (Lu, 2017).

3.3. Characteristics of The Language Industry

As a typical knowledge-based economy, the language industry is green and sustainable, interdisciplinary comprehensive, and highly value-preserving.

The language industry is an economic form with intangible assets as the core of language knowledge. Its language products and services are intensive intellectual activities. Language education, language translation, language information processing, language and language resources protection all contain a large number of intellectual activities, which need long-term knowledge accumulation. The consumption of language products and services can better promote the exchange of knowledge and culture, thus accelerating the renewal of knowledge.

The language industry is green and sustainable. The production, distribution and consumption of language products are pollution-free economic activities. In these economic activities, the core content of language products will not be consumed but will continue to increase value with the escalation of the number of activities.

The language industry is also a kind of cross comprehensive industry. It is closely related to the publishing industry, creative industry, information industry and education industry. Its product types can be tangible, like language publications, language rehabilitation equipment, language testing equipment, etc., but also can be intangible, such as language ability acquisition, language translation, talk show, language information processing technology, etc. The language industry is not only limited to the production of language products itself, but also involves many language-related industries. Language rehabilitation is a kind of medical treatment. There are tens of millions of blind, deaf, stuttering and aphasia patients in China. Accordingly, there is huge and special language consumption market demand for language diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation, braille and sign language related industries (Chen & He, 2013).

The language industry is also a highly value-preserving one. As a resource, languages will not bring any consumption or waste. Language resources are inexhaustible unlike limited resources such as oil, natural gas and gold which values are affected by the market. The language industry will not be easily affected by other external factors such as economy and politics, and its language products and services will increase with the popularity of use. Take language education as an example, since the end of the 20th century, China's language education industry has entered a period of rapid growth, and the market scale has increased by about 20% every year; in 2010, the output value of China's language education industry has reached 30 billion yuan, and by 2016, it has exceeded 80 billion yuan (Chen, 2017). During this period, the global economic crisis in 2008 did not have any impact on the rapid growth of the language industry, which highlighted the stability of the development of the language industry.

3.4. The Importance of The Language Industry in The National Economy

In China, the language industry is one of the important components of the national economy, accounting for 10% of the gross national product (Li, 2018). The outline of the national medium- and long-term reform and development plan of the language industry (2012-2020) and the 13th five-year plan for the development of the national language and writing industry have proposed to strengthen the training of language talents and the supply of language

products and develop the language industry. With the support of national policies, the language industry has a good momentum of development and is steadily rising. Taking the language translation and the language education industry for example, the total output value of language translation industry in 2018 is about 37.2 billion yuan, with an annual growth of 3.6%; there are 9734 enterprises mainly engaged in language translation, mainly in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong, Jiangsu, Shandong and other regions. The total output value of the language education industry in 2018 was about 89 billion yuan, an increase of about 7.6 billion yuan compared with 2017.

The development of the language industry has a close relation to the status of language. As the most common language in the world, English has brought huge income to the language industry in the UK. According to the British government's website, the language education industry will perform strongly in the UK's export industry in 2019, among which English education products and services, English training courses and transnational education bring about a huge income of 5.4 billion pounds. Secondly, the UK is also one of the most popular English training destinations in the world, accounting for about 45% of the global market. In addition, in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and other English-speaking countries, the English training industry has become an important source of income for the language industry.

The development of the language industry is also connected to the diversity of languages. For example, Swiss people generally master several languages, which is of great help to the development of the language industry in Switzerland. "Every year 10% of Switzerland's GDP benefits from linguistic diversity," said Francois Grin (Li, 2012). There are 23 official languages in 27 member states of the European Union, and there are nearly 400 combinations of language translation. According to the report of the EU language industry survey in 2019, among the 55 countries (including EU countries and non-EU countries), language service companies with an annual income of more than one-million-euro account for 43% of the total, compared with 30% and 34% in 2017 and 2018. Besides, in terms of the staff number of translation companies, 56% of translation companies reported less than 10 employees, down from 60% in 2018. These two sets of data indicate that the average size of the companies is increasing. Compared with 2017 and 2018, the expectation of the whole European market for the industry has increased and the investment prospect is highly optimistic.

4. The Relationship between The Language Industry and The Cultural Industry

The language industry is inextricably linked with other industries. Some scholars believe that the language industry is a sub-category of the cultural industry and that the language industry is the foundation and an important part of the cultural industry (Huang, Su & Zhang, 2012; Su, 2014). It is the basic and leading industry of cultural industry (Chen & Huang, 2013); It is the main force in the development of the cultural industry (He, 2017). However, some scholars do not agree with this view, holding that the language industry is a part of the cultural industry with industrial products beyond the cultural industry, such as language software processing products, translation machines, voice equipment, language testing equipment, etc. (Chen, 2012). Therefore, the relationship between the language industry and the cultural industry remains to be further explored. Next, we will briefly analyse the extension and connotation of cultural industry.

According to the newly revised classification of culture and related industries (2018) issued by the National Bureau of Statistics of China, the cultural industry refers to the collection of production activities that provide cultural products and cultural related products to the public, and its core is cultural products. Cultural industry takes culture as the core content and initiates

production activities of cultural products, such as creation, manufacturing, dissemination and display to directly supply people's spiritual demand and presents cultural auxiliary production and intermediary services, cultural equipment production and cultural consumption terminal production. The core areas of the cultural industry include news and information services, content creation and production, creative design services, cultural communication channels, cultural investment and operation, cultural entertainment and leisure services. Cultural related industries mainly consist of cultural auxiliary production and intermediary services, cultural equipment production, and cultural consumption terminal production.

Language is the carrier of culture. Therefore, the language industry overlaps with the content of the cultural industry. The language art industry is included in the art performance of cultural communication of cultural industry. In addition, the language publishing industry belongs to the publication distribution of the cultural industry, and the language creative industry is one part of creative design service of the cultural industry and so on. However, these industries are only a part of category of the existing national cultural industry and cannot be regarded as the basic industry or the main force of the cultural industry. If language content is regarded as the core of the language industry, most of the service industries related to language content, such as news, radio, television, book publishing, cultural entertainment and leisure, will be included in the language industry. This broad language industry will constitute the main body of the cultural industry. In this respect, the language industry is an important part of the cultural industry. However, from the previous research, few scholars believe that these language content industries belong to the language industry.

Most researchers believe that the core of the language industry is language competence products where the language products should fulfil the needs of consumers for language competence. Therefore, the language industry is only a small part of the existing cultural industry, but not the foundation of the cultural industry. In addition, some language sub-industries are not within the scope of the cultural industry but intersect with other industries. For example, language education and language ability testing pertain to the education industry. The language rehabilitation industry is geared to the medical industry; The language processing industry is contained in the information industry or high-tech industry. These language sub-industries continue to boom and can form independent language industry groups with language products and services as the link.

The language industry and the culture industry depend on each other and mutually influence. The language industry promotes the development of the cultural industry. Taking the international promotion of Chinese in the language education industry as an example, in order to promote Chinese to the world and enhance the influence of Chinese language and culture, China has established 548 Confucius Institutes and 1193 Confucius schools in 154 countries and regions around the world by 2018. The promotion of Chinese culture in the field of overseas cultural industry has exceeded the promotion value of the Chinese cultural industry. The international promotion of Chinese language promotes the development of the Chinese cultural industry overseas, and its industrial value has completely exceeded the scope of economic level. Besides, the cultural industry can also promote the development of the language industry. As we all know, Japan's animation industry is highly developed with unique styles and advantages, which has a huge impact on the global market. Moreover, the highly developed animation industry has become a pillar industry in Japan (Zhang Y& Zhang X, 2017). Since it was introduced into China in the 1980s, it has been widely favoured by young people. Animation works such as Doraemon and Chibi Maruko-chan were impressive and popular among people, and people's passion for learning Japanese has gradually warmed up. According to the survey of Japan International Exchange Fund in 2017, there were about 2970 Japanese learning institutions in China in 2015, with more than 1.17 million Japanese learners. From this, it can seemingly conclude that the development of the cultural industry will indirectly promote the

rise of the language industry. In today's social and cultural integration, the rise of the language industry has played an important role in promoting the development of the cultural industry, and the language industry is also more representative of a culture.

5. Conclusion

The development of the language industry can promote the prosperity of other industries, contribute to the growth of the national economy and enhance the comprehensive strength of the country. Taking China's English training for young people as an example, in 2019, the market value of English training for young people aged 3-18 is close to 90 billion yuan, with an annual compound growth rate of about 40%, which indicated that development momentum of China's language industry is promising. However, the language industry is still in the initial stage of development, and there are also some problems, such as the slow promotion of Chinese in the international market, the lagging development of the language information processing industry, the inadequate development and utilization of language resources, and the lack of legal and policy support for the development of the language industry (Su, 2014), though some of them have improved in recent years. All in all, the language industry has great potential in China and local language industry professions should develop and utilize language creatively and actively build a knowledge economy system with language as the core.

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